

San Diego Dining

StarChefs Honors Local Rising Stars

Three San Diegans recognized by respected culinary magazine

By **Brandon Hernandez**

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In this day and age, the term "star chef" can mean many things. It could refer to a chef with a TV show, a chef who cooks for celebrities or even a chef who develops recipes for NASA. It's also the name of one of the culinary industry's most respected online magazines, *StarChefs.com*. The organization recently awarded its exclusive and highly coveted Rising Star distinction to chefs around the country and, for the first time in the seven years since they started doing so, members of San Diego's restaurant community were recognized. Our region's trio of Rising Stars includes Jason Knibb, executive chef at NINE-TEN in La Jolla, executive chef William Bradley from Addison at The Grand Del Mar and his partner in crime, the resort's wine director, Jesse Rodriguez, who won in the sommelier category.



Jesse Rodriguez.
Courtesy photo

StarChefs defines Rising Star recipients as up-and-coming chefs and culinary professionals under the age of 40 with less than a decade of experience who represent the vanguard of the contemporary American dining scene. They have compelling culinary philosophies and are extremely creative, ambitious and, most importantly, develop exceptional menus made up of delicious, forward-thinking dishes. Rising Stars are nominated by the StarChefs Advisory Board (a consortium of top chefs and industry insiders), previous award winners, local food media and diners. That list is then narrowed to a field of 60 to 100 individuals who are subsequently interviewed and scrutinized before final decisions are made on a handful of winners.

"StarChefs is a leading resource for our industry worldwide and has been at the forefront of the online culinary community," says Bradley. "This has been a goal of mine, and to reach it has made me feel completely honored and humbled." Bradley is a native San Diegan who first learned he wanted to be a chef at the age of 16 while working at a small Italian restaurant in

Bonita. From there, he moved on to Loews Coronado Bay Resort before taking off for Scottsdale, Arizona, where he made a name for himself by achieving Mobil Five-Star and AAA Five-Diamond status for The Phoenician, a feat he duplicated for his current restaurant in 2008 and 2009.

"I'm proud to be part of the new excitement and continued interest in San Diego as a culinary destination," says Bradley. "San Diego will be known for a lot more than fish tacos!"

If his colleague, Rodriguez, has anything to say about it, one of those things will be wine. Like Bradley, the launch pad for his culinary career was in a small eatery—his grandparent's Mexican restaurant in Beaumont, California—and included a stint at The Phoenician. He also worked at The Hyatt Regency Resort and Spa at Gainey Ranch, a beverage distribution company and a winery before moving into one of the most esteemed positions in the country, head sommelier for Thomas Keller's famed restaurant, The French Laundry. He also helped open Keller's Per Se in New York City and Bouchon in Las Vegas before heading south to take the reigns at The Grand Del Mar, where he has instituted one of the most impressive wine programs in the country.

"There are some legendary sommeliers in the Southern California area, and to be recognized by them and amongst them is pretty phenomenal," says Rodriguez.

Knibb echoes that sentiment, saying, "There a lot of talented chefs and other industry people involved with the StarChefs organization, so it is extremely gratifying to be recognized by such an accredited group."

A self-taught chef who fell into the business as a busser and went on to work for the Wolfgang Puck empire and under great chefs like Roy Yamaguchi, Hans Rockenwagner and Trey Foshee (George's California Modern), who took him under their wing and showed him the ropes, Knibb followed the latter's footsteps to La Jolla in 2003 where he instantly made a splash with his fresh, seasonally driven cuisine at The Grande Colonial's fine dining venue, NINE-TEN. When considering the value and significance of the Rising Star award, he sees beyond himself and appreciates what it can do for all of his contemporaries throughout the county. "This kind of recognition only furthers the exposure and credibility San Diego's culinary scene has achieved, and continues to achieve, on a national basis."

Adds Rodriguez, "I have had the opportunity to meet with many noted chefs and sommeliers from all over and when they say, 'San Diego is coming up,' that makes me feel great."

Type Other



Brandon Hernandez

About the author: *Brandon Hernandez is a San Diego-based food writer with a fervent and defined passion for craft beer, particularly the variety produced by the artisans in his brew-centric hometown. He has been featured numerous times on The Food Network hit program Emeril Live, contributed to various national and local magazines, newspapers and online outlets including Beer Magazine, The Beer Connoisseur, Edible San Diego, Pacific San Diego, La Jolla Light, North County Times and Tasting Table and welcomes questions, comments and general conversation at deepcrimson2008@gmail.com. You can also follow and friend him via twitter.com/offdutyfoodie and facebook.com/offdutyfoodie. More by this author*

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