

The Valley's Top Chefs

Written by Written by Melissa Larsen Photographed by Cassandra Tomei

From James Beard Award winners to nationally recognized restaurants, Arizona is a hotbed of high-end dining destinations. And at the helm of each of these amazing eateries are some of the culinary world's most talented and creative chefs. But who's at the top? To answer that, Arizona Foothills Magazine turned to dozens of local chefs and asked: Who is your favorite chef in the Valley? Here are the five guys who received the most love—and a few recipes straight from their kitchens.



Top Chef: Kevin Binkley of Binkley's Restaurant and Café Bink

At the tender age of 14, Chef Binkley honed his culinary chops while working his first job at TCBY. "I learned some very important jobs here: how to be a dishwasher, to sweep and mop, spin frozen yogurt and make crepes," he says. Since his days of serving fro yo, life has been even sweeter for Chef Binkley; this year, he was named a finalist for the prestigious James Beard Award's Best Chef – Southwest.

Favorite...

Way to satisfy a sweet tooth: Eating 72 percent Valrhona chocolate, straight.

Midnight snack: Microwaving frozen tamales from Mi Cocina Mi Pais. (This restaurant has a new name now, but is the same place.)

Cereal: Shredded wheat.

Fast-food restaurant: In-N-Out Burger.

Bottle of wine: Egly-Ouriet "Ambonnay Rouge."

Sandwich: Muffaletta.

Pizza topping: Pepperoni.

Cut of meat: Rib eye cap.

Kitchen tool: Spoon.

City for dining: San Francisco.

Place to dine in the Valley: Nobuo at Teeter House.

Chef: Patrick O'Connell.



2nd Place: Joshua Hebert of Posh Scottsdale

Chef Hebert shows off his innovative culinary know-how at Posh Scottsdale, a restaurant that has impressed with its improvisational cuisine since 2008. "The thing I love most about what I do is that every day is different—and never boring," says Hebert, who first sharpened his fine dining skills when working at Tarbell's when it opened in the 90's.

Favorite...

Way to satisfy a sweet tooth: Black gumdrops.

Midnight snack: Chicken noodle soup or Ramen.

Cereal: I haven't had a bowl of cereal since I was probably 6 years old.

Fast-food restaurant: Bueno Burger.

Bottle of wine: Older vintages of Domaine Tempier from Bandol.

Sandwich: Braised pork and escarole from Pane Bianco.

Pizza toppings: The combo of pepperoni, bell peppers, mushrooms and olives is my fave.

Cut of meat: New York.

Kitchen tool: My brain.

City for dining: Tokyo—hands down.

Place to dine in the Valley: Four Peaks Brewery. I go there more than anywhere else, but I love many places.

Chef: Eric Ripert.

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3rd Place: (Three-Way Tie) Nobuo Fukuda of Nobuo at Teeter House

Known in the culinary world for his work at the now-closed Restaurant Hapa and Sea Saw (for which he earned a James Beard Award in 2007), Valley taste buds were in a tizzy when Chef Fukuda opened Nobuo at Teeter House in 2010. Though he is celebrated because of his jaw-dropping omakase menu, Japan-born Fukuda proves that being a chef means more than being a good cook. "I love the hospitality aspect—doing my best to make sure when people come to the restaurant they can relax and forget about the outside world," he says.

Favorite...

Way to satisfy a sweet tooth: I like the French macarons from Essence Bakery.

Midnight snack: Ramen noodle soup.

Cereal: I used to eat nothing but Corn Flakes in Japan and when I first came here.

Fast-food restaurant: KFC.

Bottle of wine: For a white, Didier Dagueneau Silex. For a red, Egly Ouriet Ambonay Rouge.

Sandwich: Italian-style hero sandwich.

Pizza toppings: I love a simple margharita pizza.

Cut of meat: Rib eye.

Kitchen tool: My cutting board because it's like a stage.

City for dining: New York is good, but I can't get over Tokyo.

Place to dine in the Valley: Pho 43.

Chef: Akio Saito-san, a Japanese chef with a restaurant called Shichi Jyu Ni Kou, which means "72 seasons." He believes there are 72 seasons a year and his menu reflects that philosophy.



3rd Place: (Three-Way Tie) Matt Carter of Zinc Bistro and The Mission

Valley native and Scottsdale Culinary Institute graduate, Chef Carter has been a bright light on the Scottsdale dining scene since he was in the kitchen at Christopher's, under the direction of Chef Christopher Gross. In 2001 (after a stint at the acclaimed French Laundry), Chef Carter opened Scottsdale's French fare dynamo Zinc Bistro and followed it up with Old Town's The Mission in 2008, which dishes up modern Latin cuisine. Variety is certainly the chef's spice of life. "I love food! I love organized chaos! I love to be creative!"

Favorite...

Way to satisfy a sweet tooth: Reese's Peanut Butter Cups.

Midnight snack: Cheese, pistachios and beef jerky.

Cereal: I don't really eat cereal. My kids love Cinnamon Toast Crunch.

Fast-food restaurant: Tie. In-N-Out Burger and Whataburger.

Bottle of wine: Trimbach Pinot Blanc. It's my Gatorade!

Sandwich: Banh mi.

Pizza toppings: Ricotta, basil, garlic and extra virgin olive oil.

Cut of meat: Heritage Farms pork country rib.

Kitchen tool: Spoons and F. Dick fork.

City for dining: New York City.

Place to dine in the Valley: I don't know if I have a favorite. I like to get around, but I had a great meal at Crudo last week.

Chef: In the world? Pierre Gagnaire. In the Valley? Always Christopher Gross, my mentor and still one of the most relevant guys in the Valley.



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3rd Place: (Three-Way Tie) James Porter of Petite Maison

After closing his amazing Tapino Wine Bar & Kitchen in 2009, Chef Porter rebounded a few months later with the opening of Petite Maison in Old Town. Since then, Petite Maison has thrived as one of the top French restaurants in the Valley, and Chef Porter even showed off a different skill set by opening Big Earl's BBQ. (He left the Old Town barbecue joint earlier this year.) "I love every type of cuisine," he says. "Picking one over the other is like choosing a favorite child."

Favorite...

Way to satisfy a sweet tooth: Cuties when I'm on a diet. Otherwise, Mint Chocolate Chip Klondike Bars.

Midnight snack: Leftover Chinese takeout.

Cereal: Froot Loops. When I'm done, I make a White Russian out of the milk.

Fast-food restaurant: In-N-Out Burger.

Bottle of wine: 2007 La Nerthe Chateauneuf-du-Pap.

Sandwich: My wife's Dagwood. It looks exactly like the cartoon.

Pizza toppings: White Spanish anchovies and fennel pollen.

Cut of meat: Bone-in rib eye.

Kitchen tool: Miniature off-set spat.

City for dining: Wherever I am on vacation.

Place to dine in the Valley: Christopher's Restaurant, Binkley's, The Mission and my house.

Chef: Marco Pierre White.

RECIPES FOR SUCCESS

Chef Fukuda and Chef Binkley share two of their favorite end-of-summer recipes.

Chef Fukuda's Summer Tomatoes with Manilla Clams

28-32 Manilla clams

1 C Lime juice

40 ml Yuzu juice

20 ml Nikiri soy (sake, mirin and soy sauce; directions to follow)

2 tsp. Sugar

2 tsp. Salt

1 T Garlic

1 T Grated ginger

1 Medium red onion, diced, soaked in water, air-dried

½ C Cooking sake for clams

1 Japanese or Persian cucumber, diced

Approximately 1 pint best-quality small tomatoes, cut in half Cilantro leaves for garnish

For Nikiri soy: Combine one-third cup each of sake and mirin in a saucepan. Bring to boil and let boil for two minutes to remove the alcohol.

Add one-third cup soy sauce to finish the nikiri.

For sauce: Combine lime, yuzu juice, nikiri soy, ginger, garlic, sugar, salt and onions in a bowl. Set aside. In a large bowl, wash clams under cold running water. Put clams in a medium-size pot, add half cup sake and half cup water. Bring to a boil and cover for a minute or two. During this time, prepare an ice bath to cool clams after they are cooked. Open lid to check if clams are open. When all the clams are open, remove from heat. Place pot in an ice bath to cool completely. Using a small spoon remove all clams from their shells, keeping shells for plating. Add clams to sauce mixture and allow to marinate for five minutes.

For plating: Use a large plate for each serving. Place clam shells on the plate. Take clams out of the sauce and place back in their shells.

Arrange tomatoes and cucumbers around the plate, drizzle with sauce, and finish with whole cilantro leaves. Yield: Four servings.

Chef Binkley's Date Soup

5 Dates

1 pint White wine

1 qt. Heavy cream

Sugar and salt, to taste

Boil approximately two gallons of water and drop dates in for 30 seconds to soften. Remove pits. In large pot, burn off white wine and add dates. Cover with vegetable stock and simmer for 45 minutes. Puree and pass through a chinoise. Put back in pot and add hot cream. Season with salt and sugar to taste.