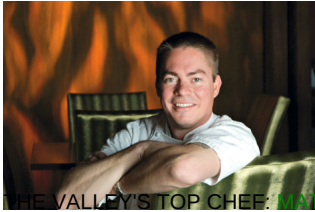


# The Valley's Seven Top Chefs

Written by Written by Melissa Larsen\Photographed by Jackie Mercandetti  
Tuesday, 03 May 2011 10:02 - Last Updated Tuesday, 03 May 2011 11:12

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Who is better equipped to name the Valley's most distinguished chefs than, well, the Valley's most distinguished chefs? We asked local culinary luminaries to weigh in on who they consider to be the best in the biz, and here's who their votes revealed to be the Valley's Top Chefs.



THE VALLEY'S TOP CHEF: **MATT CARTER** of Zinc Bistro, The Mission and Bonfire Grill

For 10 years, Matt Carter has been one of the Valley's most outstanding culinary talents as the chef at Scottsdale's French-inspired Zinc Bistro. When Old Town's The Mission opened nearly three years ago, Carter showed that his gourmet genius also included Latin cuisine. Now, with the spring debut of Bonfire Grill, where Carter is a consulting chef, he is dishing out casual wood-fired eats. What keeps him coming back for more? "I have always enjoyed the service, camaraderie and intensity of the business," he says. Before becoming the busy chef he is today, the former Scottsdale Culinary Institute student (Carter graduated in 1989) pursued classical training in Paris to hone his skills in French fare. "I took courses at Le Cordon Bleu, refined my skills at various restaurants and gained exposure to what I believe is the world's finest cuisine," he says. Since then, Carter has worked as a poissonnier (fishmonger) at Thomas Keller's famed French Laundry as well as with the Valley's own Christopher Gross and Michael DeMaria.

#### Chef Carter's Favorite...

**Type of cuisine:** French **Thing to cook:** Fish **Foodie movie:** "The Cook, the Thief, His Wife and Her Lover" **Cookbook:** "Ducasse Flavors of France" **Beer:** Bud in a can, Stella on tap and Guinness for dinner

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#### FIRST RUNNER-UP: **KEVIN BINKLEY** of Binkley's Restaurant and Café Bink

Who knew that one of the state's most celebrated chefs started out his career with one simple question: Cup or cone? Kevin Binkley's, chef of Cave Creek's Binkley's Restaurant and Café Bink, first job in the food industry was scooping frozen yogurt and making crepes at TCBY at the age of 14. After struggling to declare a major at East Carolina University, Binkley decided to turn his passion into his work path. "[I] couldn't decide on anything I felt like I could commit the rest of my life to," he says. "That's when it dawned on me to go to culinary school and pursue the job I already had enjoyed."

With that, Binkley attended and graduated from Scottsdale Culinary Institute. He opened the highly successful Binkley's in 2004; he followed that up with the more casual eatery, Café Bink, a few years later. While his start might have been in frozen yogurt, the star chef now dishes up decidedly more decadent menu items (think foie gras and red wine-poached filet mignon). "[I have] the ability to create, taste and produce food that I am proud of," Binkley says.

#### Chef Binkley's Favorite...

**Local dish:** Ecuadorian tamales at Mi Cocina Mi Pais **Foodie movie:** "Babette's Feast" **Beer:** Trappistes Rochefort 10 **Bottle of wine:** 2004 Domaine Jamet, Côte-Rôtie. It smells like bacon; I cannot get enough.

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#### SECOND RUNNER-UP: **BEAU MacMILLAN** of elements

New York has Bobby Flay. California has Tyler Florence. And the Valley has Beau MacMillan. With appearances on Food Network's "Iron Chef: America" (in which MacMillan took down Flay in the Kobe beef battle) and "Worst Cooks in America," the local culinary pro has solidified himself as a celebrity chef. However, Valley residents can enjoy the chef's deliciousness anytime as he heads up the kitchen at elements restaurant at Sanctuary Camelback Mountain Resort & Spa and has since 1998.

MacMillan's culinary career started at the age of 16 at the Crane Brook Restaurant & Tea Room in his home state of Massachusetts. "Originally, cooking wasn't a career goal; it just kept me out of trouble," the chef says. Working for Francois De Melogue at Crane Brook, though, inspired MacMillan to consider taking a food-focused career path. "[His] passion for food and cooking philosophies caught on with me,"

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says MacMillan, who is a father of two. "That was when I first became inspired to pursue a culinary career."

## Chef MacMillan's Favorite...

**Local dish:** Lee Hillson's peanut butter-and-banana Elvis dessert was one of the best things I ever ate. **Type of cuisine:** I miss my fried New England clams. I also love Chinese food. **Foodie movie:** "Tampopo." Chuck Wiley leant me his copy. I think this movie is great for two reasons: It is an entertaining movie with great food, and it also sums up my relationship with Chuck, who is my greatest mentor. **Cookbook:** "Happy in the Kitchen" by Michel Richard. Brilliant. **Beer:** Hitachino Nest White Ale **Bottle of wine:** Huge Wattle Creek fan. Chris Williams and family make some good juice.

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Clockwise: Vincent Guerithault, Sean Currid, Lee Hillson, Eddie Matney.  
Photographed at the Royal Palms Resort and Spa

## VINCENT GUERITHAULT of Vincent on Camelback

### Chef Guerithault's Favorite...

**Local dish:** Not one particular favorite, but I like Mexican food. **Type of cuisine:** I like a lot of different cuisines but am partial to French. **Thing to cook:** Desserts **Foodie movie:** "Babette's Feast" **Cookbook:** Don't have one favorite; I have hundreds in my collection. **Bottle of wine:** Château d'Yquem

## SEAN CURRID of Cafe ZuZu

### Chef Currid's Favorite...

**Local dish:** Mahi mahi tacos at The Mission **Type of cuisine:** Mexican **Thing to cook:** Fresh seasonal produce **Foodie movie:** A tie between "Ratatouille" and "Big Night." **Cookbook:** Being nostalgic, I would have to pick the Peter Rabbit cookbook my mom gave me when I was four. I still have it. **Beer:** Shiner Bock

## LEE HILLSON of T. Cook's

### Chef Hillson's Favorite...

**Local dish:** I love the spicy shrimp burrito at Señor Taco, Beau MacMillan's shrimp and grits, pizza (Grazie Pizzeria, Grimaldi's Pizzeria, Tarbell's, Pizzeria Bianco—take your pick). **Thing to cook:** Pasta. I love making pasta from scratch and knocking up raviolis, linguini and the sorts. **Foodie movie:** "Vatel"

## EDDIE MATNEY of Eddie's House

### Chef Matney's Favorite...

**Local dish:** The menudo at La Fonda Mexican Restaurant **Type of cuisine:** Mediterranean **Thing to cook:** I love to cook lamb chops with sumac and mint pesto. **Cookbook:** Anthony Bourdain's "No Reservations" **Beer:** Prescott Liquid Amber Ale **Bottle of wine:** Frog's Leap Sauvignon Blanc

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Where does the AFM staff head to for their sushi fix or a great cocktail? Here are a few of our faves in Valley dining.

## Michael Dee's Favorite Valley...

**Restaurant:** Deseo in the Westin Kierland Resort & Spa has a Cuban flair. You don't feel like you're in Arizona when you're there, and they have a great hidden bar. **Dish:** The famous bowl of pasta at Oregano's. **Dessert:** The Chocolate Tower at Christopher's Restaurant and Crush Lounge. **Cocktail:** A glass of Champagne on the patio at the Four Seasons Resort Scottsdale at Troon North. **Restaurant interior:** J&G Steakhouse has the sophistication factor nailed. **Pizza:** Oregano's. Love the thin crust and ingredients you will not find at other restaurants, like garlic peppercinis. **Mexican:** Jalapeño Inferno. It's family-friendly, and the bar is a great place to watch the game. **Sushi:** I love the L.A. feel inside Sushi Roku, not to mention the surprising rolls on the menu. **Burger:** Indulge Burger has the best veggie burger and an extensive gluten-free menu. **Happy hour:** I don't really go to happy hours. I have happy hours wherever I go. **Lunch spot:** True Food Kitchen. It has the best healthy menu and a happening atmosphere from open to close. **Dining experience:** Sapporo's teppanyaki table. There's nothing cooler than watching someone cook something in flames right in front of you. **Guilty pleasure:** The French fries at Armitage Wine Bistro. **Dining spot for a night out with friends:** Modern Steak. I love the décor, the fun staff and the party atmosphere. **Restaurant for a date night:** Tanzy, followed by a movie at iPic Theater.

## Melissa Larsen's Favorite Valley...

**Restaurant:** NOCA. **Dish:** Any seafood plate at NOCA, from the amazing scallop dishes to the divine lobster roll. **Dessert:** Though I'm a big-time chocoholic, I have to say the simple and scrumptious butterscotch pudding from FnB. **Cocktail:** Any margarita from The Mission. **Restaurant interior:** I adore a pretty bathroom, and the restrooms at Renegade Canteen and Modern Steak are utterly gorgeous. **Pizza:** Grimaldi's Pizzeria. I love Grimaldi's sweet sauce and blistered crust. **Mexican:** The Mission. The pozole, the mahi mahi tacos...everything at the Latin restaurant is divine. **Sushi:** Roka Akor. Even my sushi-opposed husband can't resist Roka Akor's fresh rolls. **Burger:** The melt-in-your-mouth Kobe burger at Zinburger. **Happy hour:** Boa Bistro. I love getting the hand-pulled mozzarella and shrimp adriatico for half-price. **Lunch spot:** The Herb Box. I have a love affair with the sweet potato chips. **Dining experience:** The Farm at South Mountain. On a nice day, nothing beats a sandwich and butternut squash crème brûlée from The Farm Kitchen before walking through the gardens. **Guilty pleasure:** The dangerously good Sweet and Salty toffee from GoodyTos Toffee Company. **Dining spot for a night out with friends:**

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Because a lot of my friends have little ones, we like to order burgers and milkshakes and dine at the picnic tables at Joe's Farm Grill. **Restaurant for a date night:** Dining alfresco at Quiessence is wonderfully romantic—and the food is super fresh and seasonal.

## Claire Perkins' Favorite Valley...

**Restaurant:** El Chorro Lodge. Who can deny the unlikely (but delicious) combo of sticky buns and crudite? **Dish:** The grilled tofu at elements is my favorite by a mile. It comes with edamame puree, sesame-roasted eggplant and Asian barbecue sauce. **Dessert:** Red Velvet Nothing Bundt Cakes in cake, Bundtlet or Buntini form. **Cocktail:** Jade Bar's Sugar Snap Pea Martini is incredible. I don't think I could dream of a better cocktail. **Restaurant interior:** St. Francis is so interesting. I notice a different design element every time I go there, like antique silverware pressed into the concrete walls. **Pizza:** Despite the perpetual wait, Pizzeria Bianco pizzas can't be topped. Just ask Oprah. **Mexican:** Via De Losantos in Central Phoenix has incredible veggie fajitas and bottomless chips. **Sushi:** Hana Japanese Eatery is authentically delicious—no Americanized rolls here. **Burger:** Parc Central's veggie sliders are Thai-infused, so they pack a peanut-y punch. **Happy hour:** Pita Jungle offers delectable items for only \$1. **Lunch spot:** The Herb Box has genius lunch options and adorable home accessories for sale from The French Bee. **Dining experience:** Coup Des Tartes—quaint, delicious tartes and BYOB! **Guilty pleasure:** The devilish combo of truffle fries and Champagne at Zinc Bistro. **Dining spot for a night out with friends:** Sens, an Asian tapas bar in Central Phoenix that has neon lights, a DJ and the most flavorful little bites. **Restaurant for a date night:** I don't think anybody in the world can beat the romantic atmosphere of Sassi.