

Ritz takes local, seasonal foods to a higher level



Manzanita at the Ritz-Carlton, Lake Tahoe is serving up seasonal cuisine that is locally sourced. Photos/Kathryn Reed

By Kathryn Reed

TRUCKEE – *“I’ll be taking my plate out back and licking it.” “Brown butter is like my crack.” “The pork was out of this world.” “I can’t eat enough apricots right now.” “With the rosemary, it doesn’t make the ice cream too sweet.”*

Those were some of the comments as guests devoured a four-course dinner at Manzanita restaurant at the Ritz-Carlton, Lake Tahoe.

It was a night for Chef Stanley Miller to show off what is in season, what is new and that he has more than filled the shoes of Traci Des Jardins. Des Jardins opened the restaurant in

December 2009. Miller took over executive chef duties a year ago this month.



“I share recipes because if you don’t know how to make it, it doesn’t matter.”
Stanley Miller

Sitting outside at the “long table”, the backdrop is of the slopes at Northstar. The table is exquisitely set – giving it a mountain feel with carved wood, plants in cylinder vases and muted colors. Warding off the cool evening temps are heat lamps, including a long gas fireplace not far from the dining table.

An herb garden on the back patio includes things like purple sage, lemon balm and edible flowers. Chefs are picking them as guests mill about. Soon they will be incorporated into various dishes.

Miller uses 10-year-old starter for his sourdough bread. He had it shipped to California when he moved here. Before being hired he told management he would not buy bread.

His first course is a salad. It has greens from Del Rio Botanical in West Sacramento that were not ordinary. One diner said she had been pulling those same greens from her garden because she thought they were weeds.

Frog Hollows apricots, ricotta and goat cheese stuffed squash blossom, with a pistachio vinaigrette topped the salad. The blend of flavors and earthiness of greens make it so the salad could be a meal unto itself.



The “long table” at Manzanita.

It is complemented with a Viognier from Terre Rouge in Plymouth. The rest of the meal is paired with a delicious Barbera from Nevada City Winery.

A crispy soft shell crab on top of a shaved vegetable salad with Capay Organics potato gnocchi, Riverdog Farms charred onion and spring garlic dressing was the next course.

Miller said tomatoes and berries would be sweeter this summer because of the drought.

He got his start in the food industry as a teenager in Ohio working in his family’s butcher shop. Miller grew up where food was strictly for nourishment. He was one of the first boys to take a home ec class.

“I remember sewing my first apron. Baking was very easy for me,” Miller said. Winning a baking award in high school made him realize maybe he could do something more with his skills.

To this day, he says, “Cooking for me is fun.” Plus, he no longer has to wash dishes.

He started the third dish long before the guests arrived. The pork is slow roasted for three to four hours.

“It’s so good with the richness of corn and peaches,” Miller said.



Fresh herbs grown on site are part of many dishes.

The roasted Salmon Creek natural pork was served with Dwelly Farms bean and white corn succotash, porcini mushrooms, and Twin Peak Orchard peach chimichurri.

“The mushrooms are my favorite. They are like candy. It’s rare for people to use fresh porcini,” Miller said.

Some called the ensemble earthy. Most agreed the pork was incredibly tender and just melted in their mouths.

Dessert was a blueberry brown butter tart with rosemary ice cream and candied lemon.

Had people not been so full, seconds would have been in order.

Other seasonal dishes at the Ritz include grilled Monterey calamari, watermelon salad, Tuscan kale salad, heirloom tomato salad, king salmon, flatbread pizzas with summer vegetables or smoked tomato and mozzarella and more.

“I share recipes because if you don’t know how to make it, it

doesn't matter," Miller said. "Plus, I keep making new ones."

He said he has volumes of recipes, but no book – yet – to show for it.



The blueberry brown butter tart is the perfect finishing touch.

The Ritz this summer is putting on various food and wine events so people can have experiences beyond eating at the hotel's various restaurants.

Winemaker dinners will be on select Thursday evenings at Manzanita. They will feature Northern California wineries and a five-course meal prepared with fresh, local ingredients by chef de cuisine Jeremy Grossman.

A six-week, themed cooking class series hosted by the hotel's culinary team will be offered on Fridays from 3:30-5pm starting July 11 and concluding Aug. 15. Classes include grilling, summer entertaining, super foods and healthy foods, date night cooking, sweets and treats and farm-to-table.

For more info about the Ritz's culinary options, go online.