

Spring Flavors

Original title in Spanish: "*Sabor de primavera*"

Written by: Carolina Arrigoni-Shea

Published by: VOGUE EN ESPAÑOL (May 2005, pp.166-67)

English translation by: Carolina Arrigoni-Shea

With marked fruity tendencies, a profusion of vegetables, and bold aromatic spices, the season of flowers tastes like glory.

For those of us who were born and raised in South America, going out on the street in late March and finding ourselves surrounded by the beauty of the cherry blossoms, the intense presence of the daffodils, and the incessant sound of birds, may be—initially—difficult to comprehend. Where is the fragile golden blanket of fall? Well, in these latitudes we won't feel dry leaves crack under our feet until September. Now it is time to say "goodbye" to the cold weather in the northern hemisphere. It is time to open up our windows so that the sweet, warm air takes over each room, one by one.

In the kitchen, spring's renewal manifests itself with fresh dishes, marked fruity tendencies, a profusion of vegetables, and bold aromatic spices. For this edition, executive chef Alan Kantor, the talent behind the delightful creations that make MacCallum House restaurant a true *haute cuisine* destination, takes us by the hand to share in the spirit of *primavera*.

Our interview with Alan is the perfect excuse to abandon the city and visit Mendocino, probably the most beautiful spot on the California coast, 150 miles north of San Francisco. Soon after leaving, the route itself becomes a spectacle for the senses—first, the Anderson Valley's picturesque vineyards, then the mystery of the redwoods guarding the way to the ocean, and finally, Highway 1, among profound cliffs and the turquoise blue of the Pacific.

The sun is going down when we arrive at MacCallum House. We receive the cordial welcome of Jed Ayres, co-owner of this 1882 historical estate which, almost a hundred years later, became an inn and restaurant. (The house was originally built as a wedding gift for Daisy and Alexander MacCallum, hence the name.) I close my eyes, trying to memorize the details: the Victorian charm intact, a serene breeze running through the porch, infinite flowers and colors in the gardens, the splendid view of the ocean, and that feeling of absolute peace enveloping us... Chef Kantor's voice brings me back to reality. And what a reality! To start, Alan selects a Duck Confit & Belgian Endive Salad with Roasted Golden Beets, Blood Oranges, Humboldt Fog *Chevre*, and Spiced Hazelnuts. As we taste the delicate combination—along with an excellent *Pinot Noir*—the chef tells us about his passion for local ingredients and supporting sustainable agriculture. Each recipe reflects the effort of small regional growers and organic producers, whose recognition is an essential component of the restaurant's printed menu. This philosophy is shared by all at MacCallum House. Thus, Jed and Megan Ayres, their business partner Noah Sheppard and chef Kantor organize each October an annual event open to the public in which their purveyors give talks and offer wine and food tasting.

Gradually, darkness takes a hold of the stage. In our glasses, *Pinot Grigio* and on the table, a classic of the House: Caramelized Day Boat Scallops with Meyer Lemon-Saffron Risotto, Grilled Radicchio, and Asparagus, dressed with parsley oil. "This dish is a tasty complement to the Duck Confit," explains Alan.

Later, a bottle of Navarro Vineyards Late Harvest *Riesling* signals it is time for dessert. Our gifted host delights us with a Raspberry *Chevre* Cheesecake *Souffle* with Warm Chocolate Fudge Sauce, which is simply irresistible. “What’s cool about raspberries is that they herald the spring,” comments Alan. “They’re the first berries of the year.”

Inevitably, his passion for local products gives Alan Kantor’s culinary expression a very particular note, which gracefully enhances his training in Classic French cuisine. This is why the menu at MacCallum House follows a seasonal rhythm, offering innovative alternatives and showcasing always the most harmonious flavors and textures. (For the recipes visit www.maccallumhouse.com.)

Needless to say we did not wish to start the journey home. We wanted to somehow extend that weekend in Mendocino. But I won’t get discouraged, spring has just started and we are only a couple of hours away from this paradise!—**CAROLINA ARRIGONI-SHEA.**

Caption: A DELICIOUS RASPBERRY MOUSSE ANNOUNCES THE ARRIVAL OF SPRING.