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SONOMA



Serving Up the World

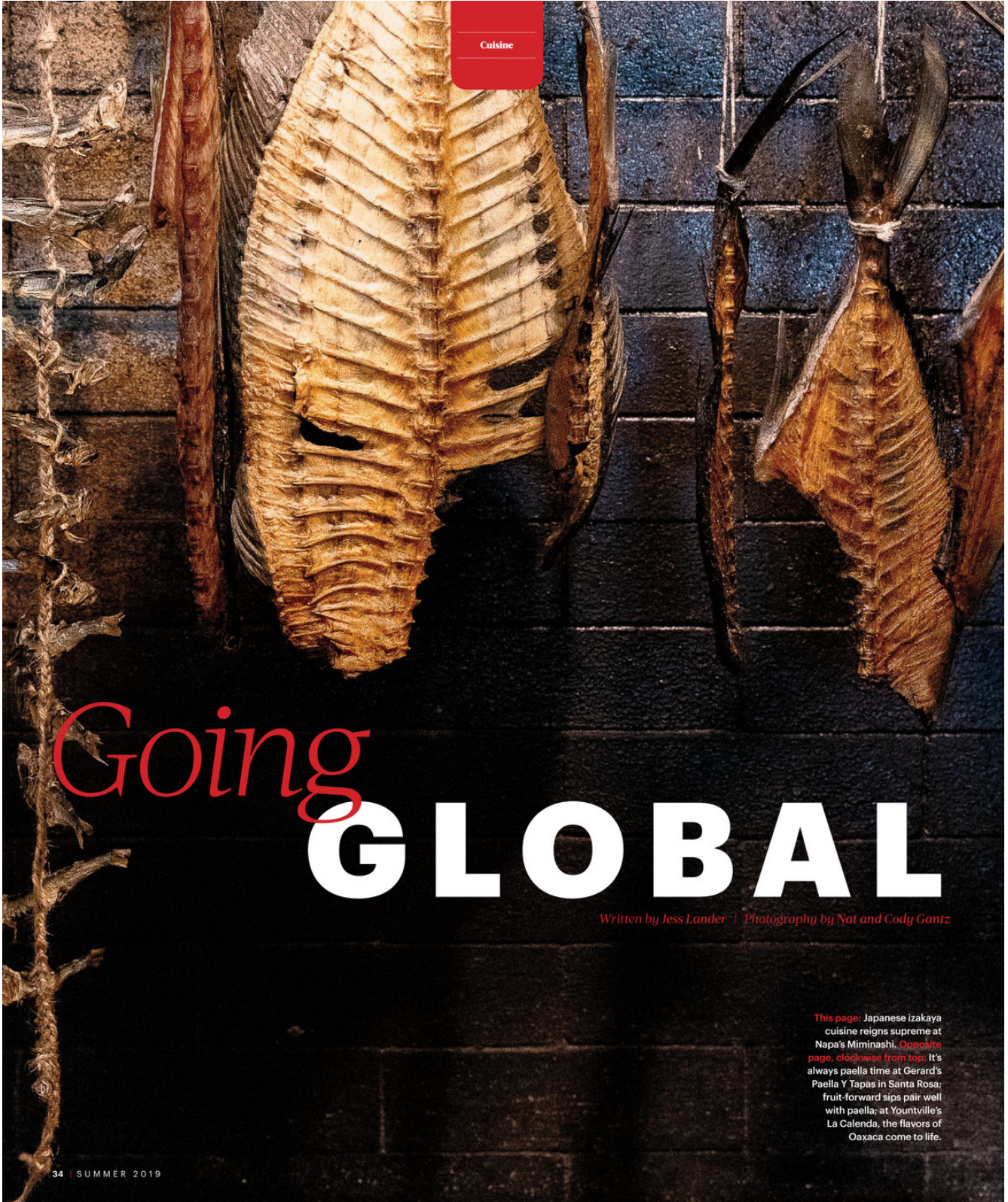
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Cuisine



Going GLOBAL

Written by Jess Lander | Photography by Nat and Cody Gantz

This page: Japanese izakaya cuisine reigns supreme at Napa's Miminashi. Opposite page, clockwise from top: It's always paella time at Gerard's Paella Y Tapas in Santa Rosa; fruit-forward sips pair well with paella; at Yountville's La Calenda, the flavors of Oaxaca come to life.



Move over, farm-to-table. These Napa and Sonoma chefs draw inspiration from Mexico to Japan and everywhere in between. At this point, farm-to-table restaurants are the norm in Wine Country. It's not enough to just focus on local ingredients anymore; lately, more and more Napa and Sonoma chefs are looking to the globe for new tastes. From Thomas Keller's first Mexican restaurant to paella and ramen-focused joints, these new eateries find top chefs serving up flavors from all over the world.





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Miminashi

CURTIS DI FEDE

In 2016, a three-dimensional, three-sided, wood-carved doormysteriously appeared in downtown Napa on quiet Coombs Street. There was no sign, but this one-of-a-kind entrance that once appeared so unexpectedly now leads to Miminashi, a trendy Japanese izakaya concept from longtime Napa chef Curtis Di Fede.

As a former partner in Oenotri, a popular southern Italian restaurant located a few blocks away, Di Fede's radical switch to Japanese cuisine was certainly unexpected. But a journey to Japan changed everything.

"My first trip to Japan was a really eye-opening experience," says Di Fede. "I fell in love with the food, culture, ingredients, hospitality, and scenery, and izakaya cuisine really spoke to me. It's a comfortable cuisine for everyday enjoyment with family and friends; it encourages sharing, community, and warmth. At the time, there was really nothing like it in Napa, so I was excited to bring something different."

Traditionally, izakayas are casual pubs frequented for after-work imbibing, but the elaborate door alone shows that Di Fede's interpretation got the Napa treatment, with an incredible level of thought and detail inserted into every aspect of the restaurant. The dishes, however, are authentically Japanese and made to be shared.

Comfort fare abounds, such as the *chawanmushi*, a savory steamed egg custard made with dashi, and the mushroom miso ramen. Yakitori skewers grilled over the traditional robata grill have been a restaurant staple since opening day. For dessert, the soft serve has been such a hit that Miminashi opened a walk-up window—complete with its own Instagram account—offering seasonal flavors like pineapple whip and passion fruit. And, in true izakaya form, the drinks are a major focus. Miminashi has epic wine and sake lists, plus an actual Rolodex with more than 100 cocktails to choose from. miminashi.com.



IZAKAYA CUISINE REALLY [SPEAKS] TO ME. ... IT ENCOURAGES SHARING, COMMUNITY, AND WARMTH." —Curtis Di Fede



Gerard's

Gerard's Paella Y Tapas

GERARD NEBESKY

If you're a resident of or frequent visitor to Wine Country, chances are you've seen Gerard Nebesky cooking up giant, colorful vats of paella at winery events across Napa and Sonoma—including BottleRock, where he had one of the top-selling food stands in 2018. Later that summer, after 15 years on the road, Nebesky finally opened up his own brick-and-mortar in downtown Santa Rosa.

Hailing from Nevada, Nebesky has been around Sonoma County for decades. In 1990 at the age of 23, he opened Bohemian Cafe in Occidental and later operated a coffee cart in Petaluma. But Sonoma wouldn't lead him to paella.

That inspiration came from the mountains of Spain, where he frequently went on backcountry ski trips with friends. "We would set up snow camps, and after hiking and snowboarding all day, we would prepare fantastic meals at the campsite," says Nebesky. "Paella was such the

perfect performer: nourishing, beautiful, one-pan meals that are perfect when you're hiking and carrying all of your gear."

Gerard's Paella Y Tapas serves up four types of made-to-order paella; ensaladas; bocadillos; and a selection of tapas, like paella croquettes and gambas (fire-roasted prawns). The restaurant has an exhibition-style kitchen, so diners can watch the paella being made, just as patrons do at the events the company caters.

"The social aspect of this dish is my favorite part," says Nebesky, who bested celebrity chef Bobby Flay in a paella-off in 2008. "To me, paella is like when pizza was introduced to the American palate over 100 years ago. It is crowd-pleasing, fun to make and watch being made, offers countless variations, prompts endless opinions about its 'real' ingredients, and—like pizza—evokes plenty of anecdotes while being prepared." *gerardspaella.com*.



THE SOCIAL ASPECT OF [PAELLA] IS MY FAVORITE PART. IT IS CROWD-PLEASING ... AND EVOKES PLENTY OF ANECDOTES." -Gerard Nebesky



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DINING around the WORLD

Here are five other Napa and Sonoma restaurants taking cues from abroad.

THOMAS KELLER & *La Calenda* KAELIN ULRICH TRILLING

Chef Thomas Keller shocked everyone when he announced the opening of a Mexican restaurant on the very same street in Yountville as his French icons The French Laundry, Bouchon Bistro, and Bouchon Bakery. La Calenda opened in the space formerly occupied by Hurley's Restaurant at the start of 2019 and signals a major departure from Keller's typical MO—and not just from a cuisine standpoint.

The taqueria is casual and family-friendly. Loud music pours from the speakers, and servers don T-shirts instead of formal uniforms. Another surprise: chef du cuisine Kaelin Ulrich Trilling (pictured). An exuberant and passionate 27-year-old, Trilling grew up in Oaxaca and began cooking at a young age under the expert guidance of his celebrity-chef mother, Susana Trilling, who founded a famous Oaxacan cooking school.

"[Kaelin's] menu is extraordinary, taking me and our guests on a culinary journey. We've all become his students

as he teaches us about the nuances, history, and depth of Mexican cuisine," says Keller. "His influence and vision extend beyond the kitchen, as he has introduced us to artisans and purveyors throughout Mexico who now supply the restaurant with heirloom corn, recycled glassware, wooden bowls, and more."

Trilling incorporates authentic cooking techniques from his home and has even brought some of his mother's recipes with him, such as her beloved mole negro. The three-day process requires roughly 30 ingredients, five types of chilies, and tireless vigilance. "When I make mole here and taste it, I close my eyes and it brings me back to my childhood every time," he says.

From La Calenda's open kitchen, diners can watch as more than 700 tortillas are hand-pressed daily, accompanied by six kinds of salsa, from avocado to a bright orange habanero. Trilling serves up just as many tacos, including carnitas, barbacoa, and a mushroom option for vegetarians. lacadendamex.com.

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Bollywood Bar and Clay Oven This new addition to Santa Rosa's buzzing culinary scene brings authentic Indian cuisine to a chic, date night-worthy setting. Chef Niven Patel sources his spices directly from his home state of Gujarat and was a James Beard Award finalist in 2018 at his former Florida restaurant, Ghee. For the full experience, bring friends and indulge in the three-course family-style tasting menu—just don't skimp on the Ghost Pepper Cheddar Naan. bollywoodbar.net.

Gran Electrica This eatery brought Napa a taste of modern Mexican cuisine in a hip and playful setting (check out the custom, Napa-themed Day of the Dead wallpaper) before La Calenda. The Brooklyn original is a seven-time Bib Gourmand recipient, and Ignacio Beltran—formerly of the Restaurant at Meadowood—was brought in to head up the Napa kitchen. Our suggestion: the fish tacos with a side of beet margarita. granelectrica.com.

Mateo's Cocina Latina Mateo Granados grew up in Yucatán, where his family owned a popular butcher shop. Over the years, he grew his business from a farmers market stand to his Healdsburg restaurant, which opened in 2011. He created his signature style—elevated twists on traditional Yucatecan dishes—by combining his heritage and French culinary training with the bounty of the region. mateoscocinalatina.com.

Ramen Gaijin Before Napa got Miminashi, Sebastopol boasted its own izakaya. This community noodle shop also came from an unlikely place: Owners Matthew Seven Oaks Williams and Moishe Hahn-Schuman were formerly at Woodfour Brewing. The authentic menu features plenty of small plates, but it's the steamy bowls of house-made ramen noodles that are all the rage. ramengaijin.com.

Tarla Mediterranean Bar and Grill In 2011, Tarla owner Yusuf Topal—who grew up in Turkey cooking and eating Mediterranean food—decided to bring the traditional cuisine to his current home, Napa. Chef Jason Naaman infuses his passion for Lebanese cooking, instilled in him by way of his great-grandparents, in classic dishes like moussaka and kunefe. tarlagrill.com.