

Napa Rose Chef's Table at Disney's Grand Californian Resort: A Disneyland Dining Review

by Tracy Walker, PassPorter Guest Contributor

Savory. Balanced. Nuances. Umami.

□ These are words that I would never have used before meeting my foodie husband in 2004. And to be honest, I NEVER use "umami," to this day. (Some people think umami is the fifth sense of taste-some describe it as a taste of deliciousness, all of the tasting senses wrapped into one.)

You could say that my husband and I were food opposites when we met. I was brought up on canned veggies, TV dinners, and a lot of Kraft Mac and Cheese. My husband (born and bred Napa boy) was raised on organic fruits, veggies, and local farm food. So while Greg brought food to the table (literally and figuratively), I brought my love of Disney. So when we went to Disneyland together, the Napa Rose restaurant was naturally on the menu.

□ Napa Rose combines Disney with culinary expertise. As my husband says, "It's cuisine with a touch of magic." I read somewhere about requesting the "Chef's Table," a special dining experience offered at Napa Rose. The Chef's Table isn't so much a table; it is counter seating overlooking the open kitchen. If you like watching the Food Network, these seats are for you. Even if you don't like watching the Food Network, these seats are pretty incredible. I love watching the cooks make their dishes, prepare the salads, and yell, "Yes, Chef!" There are eight seats available (four on each side of the kitchen) and typically there are two nightly seating times to choose from. Assume that your meal will take about two to three hours. To make the request for the Chef's Table, you have to contact the restaurant directly.

□ Sitting at the "Chef's Counter," is equivalent to a dinner, a show, and a cooking class combined. You are free to ask the kitchen staff any questions about the food they are preparing. I prefer sitting on the left hand side facing the kitchen because you can see more of the inner workings of the kitchen (bread, wood fire oven, vegetable, pasta, sauce, saute stations), while the right hand side is a view of the dessert station and some of the sauce stations. I'm not a chef, nor do I enjoy cooking, but observing a busy working kitchen is really an experience in itself. It has also made me more appreciative about the amount of work that goes into making a fine meal. It truly is an art.

Napa Rose Executive Chef Andrew Sutton has never failed to impress us with his cooking. The menu is seasonal, so it is constantly evolving as different fruits and vegetables ripen. Dining at Napa Rose is a special treat. During our first visit, Chef Sutton chatted amiably with the couple next to us about the Chef's Tasting Menu. Turns out he was willing to do a Tasting Menu to your liking. When the chef came to us, it was an easy, yet somewhat expensive, decision. Not only did we do the five-course tasting menu (which the chef tailored to our likes and dislikes), but we also did a wine pairing for every course. (Note to reader: Drink plenty of water, don't plan for any early morning activities the next day, plan on taking a taxi or walking home, and most definitely, do not go back into the park to ride Space Mountain afterwards.)

□ Napa Rose is known for having servers that are well versed in wine. In fact, every server is a sommelier (expert wine stewards known for choosing wines that complement the food you are eating). Our last server, Dondi, was just recently featured in "Every Role a Starring Role" in the Disney Parks Blog. What a coincidence that I had just watched a video that featured him!

□ My husband is in the wine industry, and even he is always impressed with the sommelier's suggested wine pairing. When ordering the chef's menu with wine, we suggest asking the chef to prepare one thing for me, and one thing for Greg. We also let the sommelier know that we each would like to be served different wines. This way, you get to try ten different courses and ten different wines! I have to admit, there are times that my dish is so good, Greg has difficulty getting a small nibble.

□ One of the most memorable dishes we've experienced was on our first visit together. Both of us love scallops, so I was thrilled to see a plate of scallops set before me. To my delight, my seared scallops accompanied by a lobster, lemon, and vanilla sauce, was such a stand out dish that we still talk about it years later. My husband is very partial to one of Chef Sutton's dishes, a rabbit bratwurst that my husband described as, "The texture and flavor is somewhere between foie gras and pate." Finally, to round out our favorite dishes was the delicious, over the top, Christmas goose that we recently had in December 2011. Chef Sutton only prepares this dish during the Christmas season, and he was so proud of his work, that we were both served the same dish. I can't tell you how glad I am that he did-it was so good, Greg would have had a hard time getting a bite of mine because I wasn't planning on sharing!

□ As I mentioned before, I have never used the word umami. I think I came as close as I will ever get to this elusive food "sense" when I tasted my Christmas goose. It was the closest to food perfection that I had ever tasted! And it was beautifully presented too.

□

□If you are in the Disneyland Resort area, I highly recommend visiting Napa Rose. Make sure to make a reservation at the Chef's Counter, and you won't be disappointed. I can't wait to take my children when they are older and would appreciate the food and the work that is done in the kitchen, however, I wouldn't recommend this restaurant for young children. Instead, find a babysitter (we drag my parents with us to Disneyland), and enjoy a lovely, leisurely meal for two.

About The Author: Tracy is a middle school teacher and a mom to two young children, Lia and Sawyer. Her husband, Greg, is a winemaker in the Napa Valley. Before children, they used to frequent the northern California food scene. Now, they pick and choose their foodie outings carefully.

Article last updated: 01-20-2012

View the latest version online at:

<http://www.passporter.com/articles/napa-rose-chefs-table.html>

Copyright by Tracy Walker. All rights reserved under International and Pan-American Copyright Conventions. No part of this publication may be stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form by any means electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, scanning, or otherwise, except as permitted under sections 107 or 108 of the 1976 United States Copyright Act. Resale of this guide is strictly prohibited without the copyright holder's permission. If you purchased this publication from someone other than PassPorter Travel Press, please call 877-929-3273.

View more PassPorter Articles online at <http://www.passporter.com/articles/>

PassPorter Deluxe: Cut, punch holes, and insert in binder.
PassPorter Spiral: Cut, print at dotted line, and insert in PassPorter.