

CELEBRATING THE HOLIDAYS

Local luminaries gather to create a unique Santa Cruz feast

By Ann Parker



Gold Ruffle chargers host Satin Oak Leaf plates and are completed by Thyme Leaves bread plates, all made by Annieglass.

gleamed with handmade Annieglass table settings from Ann Morhauser.

With our dream team's help, we incorporated all the ingredients for a perfect holiday party: a festive setting, delicious food and beverages, interesting guests and lively conversation.

Every day is a holiday in Santa Cruz. We celebrate balmy temperatures, rejoice in ocean views and revel in majestic redwoods, brilliant sunshine and awesome surf. And our produce and seafood are true gifts of nature, wrapped up in the dazzling decorations of the Monterey Bay.

We asked a few of the best-known local names in food, wine and table treasures to help us put together a special Santa Cruz-style holiday meal – and then enjoy it. The result was a celebration fit for a local, a gala event that you can re-create using the rich abundance of products available right at our fingertips.

The Davenport Roadhouse at the Cash Store hosted, cooked and served the dinner, under the direction of co-general manager Erin Wiley-Seligsohn and head chef Matt Perez. Ingredients and decorative touches came from Shopper's Corner, courtesy of owner Jim Beauregard, and from Aptos Farmers Market with the help of manager Catherine Barr. Gayle and Joe Ortiz, owners of Gayle's Bakery, provided bread and a special holiday dessert. Mary Kay and Richard Alfaro supplied three different Alfaro Family Vineyard wines to complement the meal. And the table

All the table's a stage

As any cook knows, parties start long before any guests appear. The weekend prior, chef Perez roamed the Aptos Farmers Market seeking just the right produce. He had 80 vendors to choose from. Operating since 1976, this is the oldest and largest farmers market in Santa Cruz and offers an extensive variety of produce, flowers and other products.

Perez found plenty of organic and local produce, from root vegetables for roasting – carrots, beets, turnips, rutabagas and leeks – to endive, radicchio and watercress for his

PHOTOGRAPHS GEORGE SAKKESTAD



Some of the best-known local names in food, wine and table settings gather to show their best.

THE MENU

Appetizer:

- ◆ Woodfire Roasted Prosciutto-wrapped Mission Figs Stuffed with St. Clemens Bleu Cheese

Wine:

- ◆ 2006 Alfaro Family "Lindsay Paige Vineyard" Estate Chardonnay

Main course:

- ◆ Endive Winter Salad with Caramelized Walnuts and Cranberry Vinaigrette
- ◆ Gayle's Bakery "Spudalicious" Potato Rolls
- ◆ Roasted Winter Root Vegetables
- ◆ August Gold Creamy Mashed Potatoes with Roasted Garlic
- ◆ Brined and Roasted Maple Leaf Farms Peking White Duckling

Wine:

- ◆ 2006 Alfaro Family Vineyard Estate Pinot Noir

Dessert:

- ◆ Gayle's Bakery Bûche de Noël

Wine:

- ◆ 2006 Alfaro Family Vineyard "Billy K" Estate Merlot



Matt Perez shopped at the Aptos Farmers Market the weekend before the dinner.

winter salad. Whole chestnuts, decorative gourds and an armful of flowers completed the shopping list.

Rather than the traditional turkey, the chef chose duck as the dinner's central dish. But not just any duck. Shopper's Corner provided four plump, beautiful, all-natural Maple Leaf Farms ducklings, a White Peking variety particularly known for its tender, mild meat.

Because we wanted an elegantly artistic setting for the meal, Annieglass' handcrafted sculptural glass dinnerware was a natural choice. Spectacularly simple, with a touch of whimsy, the 12.5-inch gold Ruffle chargers featured a wide band of 24-karat gold circling the fluted edge. Salad and dessert plates in Satin Oak Leaf, a new Annieglass design, personified autumn with their shimmering leaf shapes and warm color. The table setting was completed with individual Thyme Leaves bread plates and gold Ruffle stands and centerpiece bowls.

The Roadhouse's extra-long community table and handcrafted fireplace presented a perfect decorating backdrop. We arranged a casual drift of fall flowers and berries, adding chestnuts, miniature pumpkins and gourds, crowning the scene with pinecones and multi-colored leaves gathered nearby.

Kitchen magic, dining room delights

Chef Perez started preparing dinner about three hours in advance, prepping dishes and chopping vegetables. As the guests arrived, he roasted prosciutto-wrapped stuffed fig appetizers in the wood-fired Mugnaini oven, proffering the sumptuous starters before turning to his last-minute duties.

The luscious warm figs went beautifully with the first Alfaro Family Vineyards wine: 2006 "Lindsay Paige Vineyard" Estate Chardonnay, a richly complex, long-finished delight with touches of fruit and spice. Guests

**"We share the holidays with
friends and family members,
and honor loved ones no longer with us."
*Ann Morhauser***

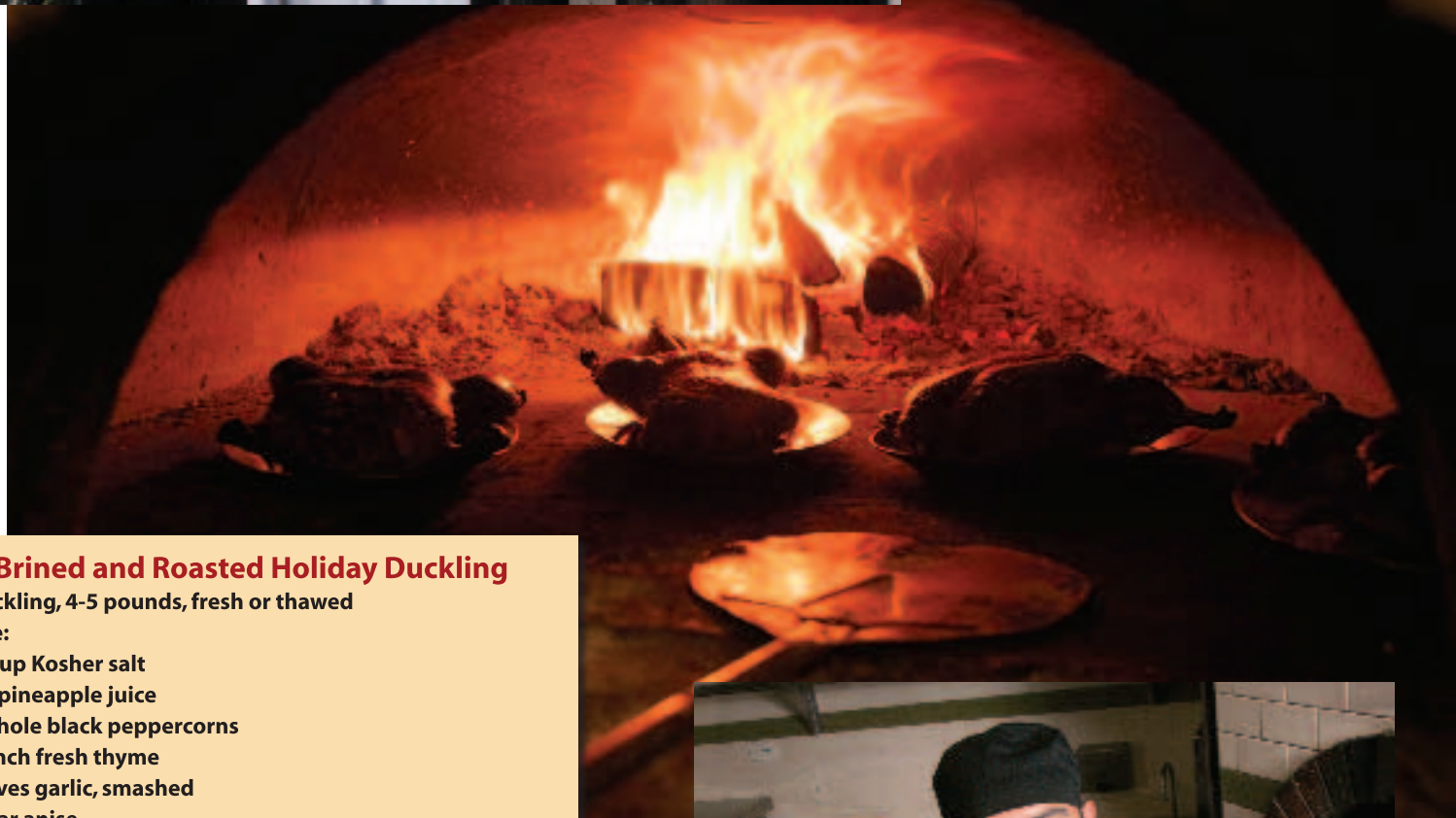




**"Cook what you enjoy.
Follow old traditions –
or create new ones."**

Chef Matt Perez

**The duck gets a finishing
touch by Matt Perez.**



Brined and Roasted Holiday Duckling

1 duckling, 4-5 pounds, fresh or thawed

Brine:

1/2 cup Kosher salt

1 pt. pineapple juice

15 whole black peppercorns

1 bunch fresh thyme

4 cloves garlic, smashed

10 star anise

1 bunch fresh rosemary

Combine all brine ingredients in bowl; whisk to dissolve salt. Place duck in 1-gal. Ziplock bag and add brine; coat well and refrigerate overnight. Prior to cooking, pat dry and steam duck for 45 minutes on top of stove, using steamer or colander. Pat dry and place on pan in preheated 425-degree oven for 1/2 hour. Reduce heat to 275 degrees and cook another hour. Cover with foil and let rest 15 minutes before carving. Serve with fresh sautéed spinach. Heat olive oil in pan on stove; sauté spinach about 15 seconds and toss with salt and pepper to taste and a dash of red pepper flakes.



Mary Kay and Richard Alfaro share a glass of Chardonnay with Catherine Barr.

"My most cherished holiday decorations are definitely the handmade ones my children made in preschool and kindergarten."

Mary Kay Alfaro

{focus}

Winter Harvest Roasted Root Vegetables

- 1 cup turnips, 1-inch diced
- 1 cup rutabagas, 1-inch diced
- 1 cup golden beets, 1-inch diced
- 1 cup celeriac (celery root), 1-inch diced
- 1 large yellow onion, 1-inch diced
- 2 cups leeks, sliced in rings
- 4 fresh garlic cloves, chopped
- 1/4 cup olive oil

Gremolata: Combine zest from one lemon, one bunch chiffonaded basil and 1/2 cup grated or shredded Parmesan cheese. Toss all vegetables and garlic with olive oil. Roast at 375 degrees for one hour. Remove from oven and cool 5 minutes. Toss with gremolata mixture and serve immediately.

Winter Greens Salad with Cranberry Vinaigrette

Caramelized walnuts:

Combine: 3/4 cup walnut pieces, 2/3 cup honey, 1/4 cup butter. Spread in shallow roasting pan, bake at 325 degrees for 12-15 min. Remove with slotted spoon and toss with 1/2 cup sugar; set aside to cool.

Cranberry vinaigrette:

Blend: 1/2 cup fresh cranberries, 1/2 cup balsamic vinegar, 1/4 cup honey, 2 shallots, 1/8 cup Dijon mustard. 1 cup olive oil and dash salt and pepper; set aside.

Greens:

2 heads Belgian endive
2 lg. bunches watercress, coarse stems removed
4 cup finely shredded radicchio, tossed with juice of 1 seedless tangerine
3 seedless tangerines, peeled and sectioned
1 cup fresh mint leaves
Separate endive leaves and cut larger leaves in half; reserve some for presentation. Before serving, toss greens and tangerines with vinaigrette and sprinkle with walnuts. Garnish with 1 cup fresh shredded mint leaves and mint sprigs.

Erin Wiley-Seligsohn places the duck centerstage.

"Loosen up and have fun – what matters most is that everyone is there."

Erin Wiley-Seligsohn

toasted the holidays with the golden liquid as old and new friends mingled.

Once everyone was seated, Roadhouse server Mona McDowell brought out a light and lively winter endive salad and Gayle's pillow-soft potato rolls, soon followed by buttery roasted-garlic mashed potatoes, seasonal roasted vegetables and a tangy apple compote. After displaying the whole ducklings, handsomely bronzed and tantalizingly aromatic, Mona returned them to the kitchen for carving.

Guests shifted to Alfaro Family Vineyards' 2006 Estate Pinot Noir, its deep red hue contrasting elegantly with the white linens and luminous candlelight. Lush and deeply fruit-tinged, the wine's slight spice and acidity made it a perfect companion for duck, which is considered a red meat when wine-matching. The duckling's crisp skin and tender, melt-in-the-mouth meat met a friend in this equally rich vintage.

ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL

Gayle's Bakery supplied our artistically delectable dessert: Bûche de Noël is a traditional French "Yule log" made to look like a snow-dusted piece of wood, complete with meringue mushrooms. The bakery starts taking orders Dec. 1 and sells about 200 annually. Underneath the chocolate-Nutella icing, French sponge cake rolled with chocolate ganache and whipped cream created an extravagant celebratory treat. It paired well with Alfaro Family Vineyards' 2006 Billy K Estate Merlot, named for Mary Kay Alfaro's late father. The wine's black cherry, mocha and warm spice notes not only complemented the dessert but also ended dinner on a festive yet mellow note.

There's no place like our Central Coast home for the holidays. 🍷

"We're all avid readers and exchange books as presents, but we also give gifts and food to a needy family."

Catherine Barr

Catherine Barr enjoys a winter salad fresh from the farmers market.

Creamy Roasted Garlic Mashed Potatoes

About 2 pounds thin-skinned potatoes, such as Yukon Gold, cut in 2-inch pieces

2 tsps. salt

1/2 cup heavy cream

3 Tbsps. unsalted butter

2 Tbsps. roasted garlic clove puree: Submerge whole garlic cloves in olive oil or butter; cook in 350-degree oven till soft, at least 30 minutes; check often to avoid burning. Squeeze out paste.

1/4 cup. milk, any type from whole to 1 percent

2 Tbsps. finely chopped chives

Freshly ground pepper

In pot on top of stove, combine potatoes, cold water and 2 tsps. salt; bring to boil and reduce to simmer. Cook to taste, depending on size of pieces, about 15-20 min.; the potato should fall off an inserted knife. Drain immediately (do not rinse). In another pot, combine cream and butter and bring to boil; whisk in garlic puree. Pour mixture onto potatoes and mash with potato masher. Mix in pepper and 1/4 cup milk. Fold in chives before serving.



Gayle Ortiz puts the finishing touches on her Yule log dessert.



“Preparing the meal with the help of family and friends makes a truly special holiday.”

Gayle Ortiz

Appletime Compote

(A lively alternative to cranberry sauce)

3 firm apples, cut into 1/2-inch cubes

1/4 cup dried cranberries

1 bunch dried thyme

2 cups pulp-free orange juice

Bring orange juice to boil; lower to medium heat and reduce by two-thirds. Add thyme and cranberries; simmer 2 more minutes. Stir in apples until coated. Spread on baking sheet and roast 10 minutes at 375 degrees. Immediately transfer to bowl to prevent sticking. Serve at any temperature.

“When guests come to our house, we make them feel like they’re at home.”

Amie Beauregard

