Michelin's Bay Area favourites

30 Oct 2008 by Linda Murphy

To the surprise of no one, except perhaps an egotistical chef or two, Thomas Keller's **The French Laundry** in Napa Valley (whose modest Yountville premises are pictured here) is the lone three-star winner in the 2009 edition of the Michelin restaurant guide to San Francisco, Bay Area and Wine Country.

Equal parts creativity, precision, art and theatre, a meal at The French Laundry sets the bar so high that the best of the rest in Northern California are left to grapple for two- and one-star recommendations. Although it would be grand if Northern California had more three-star eateries, Keller's performance lifts the game of every restaurateur serious about fine dining, service and breadth of the wine list, and diners benefit from the gauntlet Keller has thrown down to the competition.

In Napa Valley, the **Restaurant at Meadowood** (the resort owned by Harlan Estate's Bill Harlan) earned two stars, under chef Christopher Kostoff; **Auberge du Soleil, Bistro Jeanty, Bouchon, Martini House, Redd** and **Terra** earned a single star. No longer star-struck is Ken Frank's La Toque, which recently moved from its Rutherford location to the spanking new Westin Verasa hotel in Napa city. Rest assured that Frank is keen on earning back his star, and then some, once he becomes familiar with his new digs next to COPIA and the Oxbow Public Market.

In Sonoma County, **Cyrus** held onto its two-star rating. Its Healdsburg neighbour, **Madrona Manor**, and the **Farmhouse Inn** in Forestville, kept their single stars; K&L Bistro in Sebastopol lost its star.

Besides Meadowood and Cyrus, the only other two-star restaurants in the guide are **Aqua, Coi** and **Michael Mina** in San Francisco, and **Manresa** in Los Gatos (Santa Cruz Mountains).

Returning San Francisco one-stars include **Acquerello, Ame, Boulevard**, the **Dining Room at the Ritz-Carlton, Fifth Floor, Fleur de Lys, Gary Danko, La Folie, Masa's, One Market** and **Range**.

Alice Waters' reverential **Chez Panisse** in Berkeley kept its star. Making the one-star list for the first time were **Murray Circle** in Sausalito, **Plumed Horse** in Saratoga, **Trevese** in Los Gatos and the **Village Pub** in Woodside.