Harlan scores another hit

28 Oct 2010 by Linda Murphy

The 2010 Michelin Guide San Francisco is out, and it welcomes a new member to its three-star club, the Restaurant at Meadowood in Napa Valley. Yet a Northern California dining icon, Alice Waters' Chez Panisse, lost its one star.

Michelin's critics found just two three-star restaurants in the San Francisco Bay Area, which includes San Francisco, the counties south of the city, the East Bay (Oakland, Berkeley, etc.) and wine country to the north (Napa, Sonoma and Mendocino).

Thus, Napa Valley is swelling with pride, boasting the only three-star Michelin recipients in this broad 'San Francisco' edition. Thomas Keller's French Laundry in Yountville retained its three stars, and the Restaurant at Meadowood in St Helena, owned by vintner Bill Harlan (owner of Harlan Estate winery) and headed by chef Christopher Kostow, rose from two stars to three. Those planning to visit Napa Valley take note: French Laundry and the Restaurant at Meadowood are supreme palaces of exceptional cuisine, service and wine choices, with accordingly high prices and reservations that are difficult to obtain without a long lead time. Plan well ahead, and bring your credit card.

It's somewhat sad that Waters, California's pioneer in the use of ingredients sourced from local growers, ranchers and fishermen (she was a 'locavore' long before anyone else knew what that term meant) lost her Michelin star. Fresh ingredients and simplicity of preparation have long been Chez Panisse's forte, and hordes of restaurants have since copied the Waters mantra. She likely lost her star not because her cuisine changed, but because it didn't change - no longer novel or cutting edge, and copied by many.

The 2010 two-star Michelin restaurants are Coi in San Francisco, Cyrus in Healdsburg and Manresa in Los Gatos.

The list of 39 one-stars - identified by Michelin as 'very good' in its category - include some of my favourites:

San Francisco: Ame, Boulevard, Gary Danko, Quince, Spruce

Sonoma: Applewood, Farmhouse Inn & Restaurant, Madrona Manor, Mirepoix

Napa: Auberge de Soleil, Bouchon, Étoile, La Toque, Solbar, Terra