

Napa Valley Film Festival

# Napa Valley Film Festival celebrates new culinary talent

Tim Carl | Nov 15, 2017 Updated Nov 15, 2017



Panelists David Arquette and screenwriter/director Brandon Dickerson came to the festival to show their new film, “Amanda and Jack Go Glamping,” but also to enjoy the food and wine of the Napa Valley and the “10 to Taste” event.

TIM CARL PHOTOGRAPHY

Devastating as they are, fires transform and provide an opportunity for new seeds to sprout in areas where they previously might not have had the opportunity to grow and thrive.

This year’s Napa Valley Film Festival, as the first major event held only weeks after the last flames were extinguished, appears determined to push forward to both support and celebrate this metamorphic moment — from highlighting new filmmakers and actors to showcasing up-and-coming local chefs, in their third annual “10 to Taste” event.

“For our seventh annual festival, we are once again thrilled to show off so much talent in one place at one time,” said Brenda Lhormer, co-founder of the festival. “Not only are our guests and panel members eating and drinking exceptionally well, they are also having some fun, which is something that I think we all need right now.”

## Celebrating new chefs

Attending guests included festival-goers and a panel of celebrity chefs, filmmakers and actors, all of whom sampled dishes created by 10 young Bay Area chefs. Each had made a dish inspired by an iconic film with wine provided by Vintage Wine Estates and beer from Stella Artois. After the tasting, led by the panel, guests and chefs discussed their personal favorites, the latest culinary trends and the role of food in film.

“It is really wonderful to be here this year,” said **Caitlin Suarez**, owner of Co’ga culinary consulting in Calistoga. “Both food and film can be a way to share experiences and emotions. Definitely after the fires — all the devastation and hardship — I think it’s great bringing people together, and that’s kind of why I picked the movie I did.”

Suarez’s movie inspiration this year was “Big Night,” about two immigrant brothers from Italy who open their dream restaurant, “Paradise,” in New Jersey in the 1950s. However, their authentic food was too unfamiliar for the local tastes. The restaurant struggled to survive, so the brothers pinned their hopes on creating dinner for an influential actor who ends up never arriving. Instead, they enjoy the magnificently prepared feast with friends and family.

In this case, the actors did show up to the party. And like the movie, according to Suarez, “It was one hell of a party.”

Other presenting chefs included, **Victor Eddleman** from Spelletich Family Wines, whose vegetarian spinach and mushroom frittata was inspired by “Breakfast at Tiffany’s.”

**Mercedes Stahlberg**, co-owner of Lady and the Vine, made her version of Beef Bourguignon from the movie “Julie & Julia.”

**Christian Graze**, owner of Culinary Mercenary, made deviled eggs and smoked caviar on a play from the main character, ‘Egsey,’ from “Kingsmen.”

**Patrick Shannon**’s wildly colorful braised duck-leg dish, which was piled high on a aquafaba corn-polenta cake was dusted with a delicate squash-maple sprinkle and influenced by “The Last of the Mohicans.”

Chef **John Vlandis** grilled Chimmichurri shrimp as homage to “Crocodile Dundee,” and Jeanna DeMarco of Sweetpea Catering created a flavorful shrimp and Dungeness crab ceviche that had been roused by “Tortilla Soup.”

Chef **Aaron LeRoi** crafted Jamaican spiced beef stacked on a corn and coconut “Johnny Cake” inspired by the movie “Mr. Church.”

**Hannah Hedley**, owner of Wildflour Bakehouse, finessed a layered fruit-and-nut “Lane Cake” motivated by “To Kill a Mockingbird,” and Brett Schaublin made a “Pulp Fiction” Martin and Lewis \$5 milkshake that was thick and creamy.

Many young chefs prefer the flexibility of not working or owning a restaurant.

Nearly all of the invited 10 chefs have focused their careers on personalized dining experiences rather than having established brick-and-mortar locations. This includes pop-up style dinners, catering events, cooking for private dinners for homeowners and VRBO guests, and food trucks.



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Rising Star Chefs, Actor Austin Stowell, Chef Melissa King, Variety's Steve Gaydos, Food Network Host Jaymee Sire and Ivy Hill Entertainment's Jules Leyhe at Variety's 10 to Taste, November 9, 2017 at the Napa Valley Film Festival (Photos by XSight Photography for Napa Valley Film Festival).

Chef **Aaron LeRoi**'s movie influence starred Eddie Murphy as a family cook who became a caretaker and father figure to three generations of women. And like the chef in the movie, LeRoi, similar to many in his generation, has little interest in being confined to a brick-and-mortar restaurant, preferring instead the plasticity and nimbleness of being a personal chef.

"I like the flexibility — it allows me to interact with a broader clientele in different venues," LeRoi said. "For example, I prepare meals for some of the athletes on the Oakland Raiders and Golden State Warriors, which is something I could see myself doing more in the future.

"I really am honored to be included today — this is exactly the kind of event I love," he said. "The focus here is on telling our unique interpretation of food and how a movie has influenced our path. It's been a good day."

### Inspiring and inspired film professionals

"I've only been here for a day, but from what I've seen so far, Napa is looking completely normal, including being surrounded by a lot of delicious food, wine and a chill vibe," said actor Austin Stowell, who played Jesse on "The Secret Life of the American Teenager," an ABC television drama. He has also been in numerous feature films, including "Battle of the Sexes" and the upcoming film, "Horse Soldiers." He is one of six actors honored in this year's "Rising Star Showcase."

"It wasn't hard to convince me to come to the Napa Valley," he said. "We have friends up here. It's nice to wake up in a beautiful environment — it feels a little bit mystical and is a nice change of pace from L.A. It's also important to acknowledge the real struggle that many people around here have been going through, and we all can use an excuse to celebrate."

"It has been delightful to see the crowds come out and rally around this year's event," said Steven Gaydos, executive editor of Variety and creator of the "10 to Taste" concept. "It is a real testament to the courage and dedication of everyone in the community and Brenda and Marc Lhomer and their team. A couple weeks ago when I asked them if the event was still on for this year, they told me, 'Yes! We must do the festival this year — it's more important than ever that we do what we can to help recover, rebuild and move on. And I am so glad they did because you can just see the enthusiasm, camaraderie and quality that is on display here.'"

For more than 20 years, Gaydos, through Variety, has celebrated up-and-coming film professionals around the world, but when he came to his first NVFF he was inspired to include food professionals as well.

"Three years ago, we started '10 to Taste' in collaboration with the NVFF and the Food Network, and the concept was truly inspired by my first visit," he said. "When I came I discovered

that there was a festival so deeply connected to one of the great food cultures of the world — I don't think that's an exaggeration — that we thought it only natural, and so that's the roots of this event."

### Focusing on the food

When I entered this year's "10 to Taste" venue in the upstairs balcony space of CIA's Copia in Napa, I was a little surprised. Last year's event was held outside on Napa's waterfront with open skies, shimmering water and vibrant landscaping. This year, the walls were devoid of color and the tablecloths were black and white, the only colors coming from the autumnal scene out the large window, the people and the food. At first, I found this off-putting — "Don't we need some color here?," I thought. But then it dawned on me that the subtle surroundings didn't seem to matter to those in attendance and might have actually provided a much-needed break from too much recent sensory stimuli, focusing attention as a blank wall might highlight a fine painting.

"This event is really about highlighting the food and those that make it," Gaydos said. "And I think the beautiful simplicity and the gentle curves of the space provided the perfect setting to do just that."

### The show must go on

"I literally slept two hours last night," Lhomer said. "We've all been working around the clock to ensure that this is the best event it can be. I've been inspired by the volunteers, participants, sponsors, guests and community who have all stepped up in a big way."

"This is our first NVFF that we've come to, and there was nothing that would have stopped us," said Nancy Garton from the Sacramento area. Garton is one of this year's patron sponsors of the festival. "We are great believers in the arts. We have some friends that lost their homes here and some that didn't, but nothing was going to stop us from coming and being a part of this special event."

"It has been tough, but this is going to be the most memorable festival ever," Lhomer said. "The spirit and energy are really something else. This '10 to Taste' event is about celebrating how food and film interact to bring people together and share experiences that matter. Everyone, be it locals or those from out of town, wants to celebrate the fact that Napa is here and strong, and people want to relax and have a little bit of fun. The filmmakers want to share their stories, and everyone here also has their own stories to share, too. The energy is just so positive and hopeful. I can't wait to see what grows from all this." •