

SANDIEGOVILLE .com

Chef Aron Swartz Of Marina Kitchen Crowned "Chef Of The Fest" At 2015 San Diego Bay Wine + Food Festival Grand Tasting

November 21, 2015

This year's San Diego Bay Wine + Food Festival Chef of the Fest title went to Chef Aron Schwartz of Marina Kitchen located in the Marriott Marquis San Diego Marina for his dish, "Bacon Wrapped Pork Tenderloin with Purslane and Aji Chili Vinaigrette." The annual competition brings top San Diego chefs head-to-head in a fierce culinary competition judged by the San Diego Chapter of the American Culinary Federation along with guest judges.

"The Chef of the Fest competition is a true presentation of the outstanding chefs and talent found in San Diego. With the level of culinary artisanship increasing each year, we are continually impressed with the high-caliber of dishes presented at the Grand Tasting," said event organizer Michelle Metter. "The San Diego Bay Wine + Food Festival is made possible by the creativity, innovation and passion of the city's top chefs, tastemakers and epicurean leaders - we congratulate all of this year's competitors on a truly craveworthy showcase."



Chef Aron's winning creation



Chef James Monetjano from La Valencia took 3rd place

Each year, the San Diego Chapter of the American Culinary Federation, a professional organization of chefs and culinarians, judges the Chef of the Fest Competition. The San Diego Chapter Secretary, Chef Katherine Emmenegger, was lead coordinator of the judging process. Seven guest judges joined in responsibilities, Chef of the Fest Judges included Candice Woo (Editor, Eater San Diego), Gary Thompson (Education Chair, ACF Chefs and Culinarians of San Diego), Daryl Bigs (Executive Chef and General Manager, The Curious Fork, San Diego), Suzette Gresham (Executive Chef, Acquerello, San Francisco), Ivan Flowers (Corporate Executive Chef, Striders, San Diego), Kurt Waefler (Instructor and Executive Chef, San Diego Culinary Institute) and Urs Emmenger (Executive Chef at Casa De Manana and President of the ACF Chefs and Culinarian of San Diego).

The 2015 Chef of the Fest Competition was judged using a blind-tasting format. Thirty-one competitors were carefully narrowed down to five finalists and five category winners using a graded point system. Participants were ranked based on cumulative scores considering the dish's presentation, flavor, innovation, quality of product, and preparation in the allotted time.

The top five finishers, category winners were announced by San Diego Magazine Food Critic Troy Johnson and the People's Choice Award was announced by KUSI Meteorologist, Mark Mathis. Awards were presented on Saturday, November 21 at the Lexus Grand Tasting on the Big Green Egg Grill Zone Demonstration Stage.

The 2015 Chef of the Fest Competition results are as follows:

First Place Grand Prize Winner - [Aron Schwartz](#) - [Marina Kitchen](#) - Bacon Wrapped Pork Tenderloin | Purslan | Aji Chili Vinaigrette

Second Place Winner - [Trevor Chappell](#) - [The Barrel Room](#) - Braised Duck "Tostada" | Mole Sauce | House Pickled Radish

Third Place Winner - [James Monetjano](#) - [The MED at La Valencia Hotel](#) - Lacquered Mediterranean Octopus | Muhammara | Trumpet Mushrooms | Oven Roasted Tomato | Fig and Olive Purée

Fourth Place Winner - [Mark Kropczynski](#) - [Grant Grill](#) - Buddha's Hand Citron | Cake | Curd | Marmalade | Hibiscus Ice Cream | Syrup

Fifth Place Winner - [Duvinh Ta](#) - [Jake's Del Mar](#) - Surf and Turf Tartare | Bulgogi Marinated Steak Tartare | Lobster Lightly Dressed | Kewpie | Fresh Lemon Juice | Cracked Black Pepper | Micro Cilantro | Cucumber Sprouts | Kimchee Vinaigrette

Meat Category Winner - [Aron Schwartz](#) - [Marina Kitchen](#) - Bacon Wrapped Pork Tenderloin | Purslan | Aji Chili Vinaigrette

Poultry Category Winner - [Trevor Chappell](#) - [The Barrel Room](#) - Braised Duck "Tostada" | Mole Sauce | House Pickled Radish

Seafood Category Winner - [James Monetjano](#) - [The MED at La Valencia Hotel](#) - Lacquered Mediterranean Octopus | Muhammara | Trumpet Mushrooms | Oven Roasted Tomato | Fig and Olive Purée

Vegetarian / Raw Category Winner - [John Medall](#) - [The Patio Restaurant Group](#) - Roasted Butternut Squash | Toasted Pecans | Caramelized Onion | Sage Brown Butter | Whipped Honey Mascarpone Butter | Purple Kale

Dessert Category Winner - [Mark Kropczynski](#) - [Grant Grill](#) - Buddha's Hand Citron | Cake | Curd | Marmalade | Hibiscus Ice Cream | Syrup

This year's wine and food festival also saw the return of the People's Choice Award Presented by San Diego Home/Garden Lifestyles. In addition to being evaluated by the esteemed panel of judges, Chef of the Fest competitors were also subject to the critiques of Lexus Grand Tasting attendees, who had opportunity to vote for their favorite Chef of the Fest dish. Chef [Brad Hightow](#) of Florent took the "People's Choice Award" title with his deliciously simple Maryland Crab Cake.