

Icon Valley's

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THE WAVE

A G A S S I N E



ICON VALLEY'S

TOP 5 CHEFS

UNDER 35

Special Dining Issue

OVER 60 MENUS INSIDE!

ICON VALLEY'S FINEST ENTERTAINMENT & LIFESTYLE MAGAZINE

TOP

CHEFS

UNDER 35

They're young, they're talented, they're successful, and they eat really, really well. In choosing Silicon Valley's Top Five Chefs Under 35, we relied on our well-refined jealousy radar to locate the cream of the crop. The young guns we rounded up – Philippe Breneman from Paragon Restaurant, Josiah Stone from Restaurant Sent Sovi, Christopher Kostow from Chez TJ, Lewis Rossman from Getrella, and Curtis and Russel Valdez from Seven (we counted the twin brothers as one, since they share identical genetic material) – are part of a new generation of culinary masters bringing loving experimentation to a menu near you.

To test that experimentation, we asked each chef to create the ideal cheeseburger, in what we cleverly titled "The Great Cheeseburger Challenge" (copyright pending). We chose the cheeseburger because it's the ultimate symbol of American food. The chefs rose to the challenge, turning in cheeseburgers made of lamb, foie gras, sweet paprika aoli, and ... 30 percent fat. Yeah, baby. Because you won't be young forever.

CHEF: PHILIPPE BRENEMAN

KITCHEN: Paragon Restaurant AGE: 26

As a 1997 graduate of Bellarmine College Prep high school, Philippe Breneman, executive chef of Paragon Restaurant, is as local as the food he serves. Breneman discovered the restaurant business in college, working toward a degree in finance at Creighton University in Omaha, Nebraska while simultaneously cooking full-time at L'Orient under the direction of chef Doug Case. He hasn't slowed down since. Following a year under chef David McWilliams at A.P. Stump's, he began at Paragon as a sous-chef in 2004. When the executive chef position at Paragon opened in 2005, general manager Marc Quinones offered it to Breneman.

The Wave: Are younger chefs more adventurous in the kitchen?

Philippe Breneman: Absolutely. It's just like every other industry, where youth are the ones to push it, the ones to strive for something more creative. The older crowd tends to get very comfortable and very routine-like, whereas I would go crazy if I were to work in a routine. That's why I don't work in an office.

TW: Define "fine dining."

PB: It doesn't necessarily have to be a monetary thing, or a clout thing. I don't think we strive to be "fine dining" here; we try to be upscale casual, American comfort with a new twist. In the summertime, I like for people to be in here in shorts and short-sleeved button-ups; we try to keep the environment casual. There's a great restaurant in Hollywood called The Gardens of Taxco. It's a little Mexican restaurant. I'd say that's the closest I've been to fine dining. It's not fancy; it's even got a kind of

dark, gloomy feel to it. But when you walk in, you feel like you're family.

TW: What's the most annoying food trend you've seen?

PB: The foofoo-ness of food. Don't get me wrong – we all eat with our eyes first, and presentation is key, but I don't think that means things need to be taken overboard. When I present, I like things to be extremely clean, tight lines.

TW: What do you think of food critics?

PB: They're what bring people into restaurants; they're what take people away from restaurants. If the writers are educated, fine. If not, they have no business writing. Critiques in magazines such as *The Spectator*, *Food & Wine*, *Gourmet* – you've got a pretty good idea that those people know what they're doing; otherwise, these multi-million-dollar companies wouldn't be hiring them. But for people like local newspaper critics and local magazine critics, your only experience to food may be just going out a lot. Does that really mean you have a palate? That you can distinguish between what's good and what's not? Food critics have a lot of power. Especially in the Bay Area – there are so many restaurants to choose from, if you get slammed in one review it's pretty much over.

TW: What's the single most underrated food item?

PB: Mushrooms. I would say the majority of the public, when they think of mushrooms, think of criminis, and portobellos, and little tiny button mushrooms that you can buy at the store. But there's a whole world out there of mushrooms that most people, unless you're a chef or an agriculturalist, don't know



about, that have so many different textures and smells and tastes that complement so many different foods.

TW: Is there a dish that you will always have on your menu?

PB: I'm a huge fan of pot roast. Even at the Asian restaurant I worked for in Carmel, I had pot roast on the menu.

TW: Other than your own, what's your favorite Silicon Valley restaurant?

PB: It depends on what kind of mood I'm in. My favorite Italian restaurant in town is Fratello's on Meridian in Willow Glen. When I want to go to a deli, I go to La Villa. Only. Exclusively. If I've got a really nice date, I'll go to Parcel 104. Bart Hosmer, the chef there, is extremely talented. I think he's doing the best food in town right now.

TW: What is the proper etiquette for sending a dish back?

PB: I'd just say, "You know, I didn't really

care for the dish, can I see the menu and maybe get something better?" When the server comes back to me with a plate and says somebody didn't like it, the first thing I say isn't, "Why?" – it's "What do they want instead?" Because chances are, they're sitting with other people already eating, and now they don't have a meal.

TW: Have customers ever sent a glass of wine to you in the kitchen?

PB: Oh, I love it when people do that. That's the ultimate compliment. Especially if somebody comes in with a '91 William Selham, or an '85 Rothschild, and they send you a glass? You know you're doing something right. It's great when regulars ask permission to poke their heads back in the kitchen and say, "Great dinner, Chef," and that really means a lot, too. Moreso than a glass of wine. **TW**

Paragon is located at 211 S. First St., San Jose (408) 282-8888
www.paragonrestaurant.com

THE GREAT CHEESEBURGER CHALLENGE

"My take on a cheeseburger: Strive to make it taste similar to or better than In-N-Out. Ha!

"This cheeseburger starts with the bun (very important). I use a mild Kaiser roll, grilled to order. The meat – 80/20 ground beef – is pattied by hand, seasoned with salt and pepper, and grilled to temperature. For this burger I added petite Romaine hearts, sliced hot house tomatoes, shaved red onions, garlic aioli (garlic mayo, housemade), Roquefort bleu cheese and applewood smoked bacon. But really, it's your basic bacon cheeseburger. My mother really got me into the notion of bleu cheese burgers about 12 years ago. I chose this style of burger as a tribute to her." – Philippe Breneman

