

MALIBU. & vine

In a vineyard high above the Pacific, a festive gathering celebrates the coming harvest.

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Restaurateur Michael McCarty's premium Pinot Noir starts with grapes grown in the vineyard surrounding his house. For today's meal, he travels a little farther than his yard, but not much: He gathers fresh produce from the Santa Monica Farmers Market.





Michael takes a “more is more” approach to cooking. Thinly sliced mushrooms, cucumber, fennel, and onion add pale highlights to the mixed greens of Kim’s World-famous Salad (left). Wild mushrooms step up the flavor of a traditional succotash served with grilled salmon (right). “Simple preparations let the flavors shine,” Michael says. “The key is to use the best ingredients you can find.”



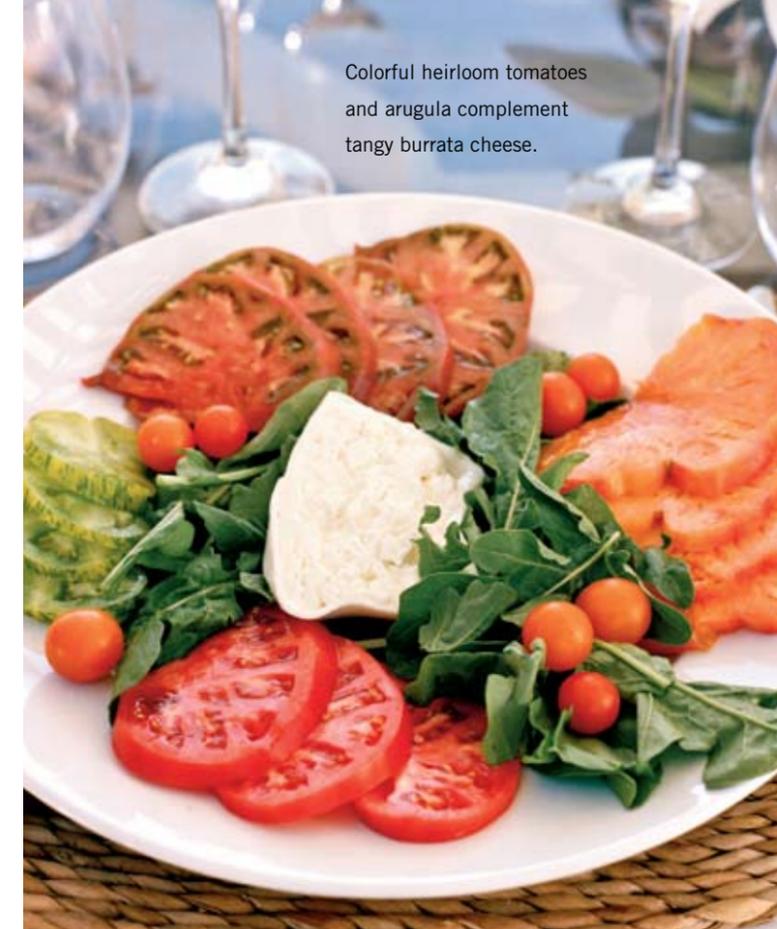
friends and customers consider Michael McCarty a consummate host, exuberant and generous. “I became a restaurateur because I love to show people a good time,” he says. “A restaurant should be like a great party, where the food, the setting, and the people combine into something wonderful.”

On Sundays, when his namesake restaurants in Santa Monica and New York are closed, the party moves to Malibu. There he and his wife, Kim, welcome friends to a house full of light, art, and three decades of memories. After a 1993 wildfire flambéed the property, they rebuilt the tile-roofed structure and replanted the surrounding 2½-acre vineyard. In early fall, clusters of ripe grapes, dark and plump, hang from the vines. Soon they’ll be harvested to make a premium Pinot Noir, the varietal that best suits this coastal microclimate.

For today’s party, Michael gathers ingredients and flowers at the Santa Monica Farmers Market, one of the country’s first and best. “There was nothing like this when I opened my restaurant here in 1979,” he says, pausing to sample a raspberry. “We ordered seeds from France and small growers in the Midwest and got farmers out here to grow them. Today a lot of the stuff we used to bring in from Europe we find closer to home.”

Acting as a Johnny Appleseed of heirloom produce is one way Michael helped pioneer “California cuisine,” the innovative and eclectic cooking that, starting in the 1970s, launched a national shift away from heavy sauces and elaborate preparations. Michael describes it as “modern California food, informed by French traditions—but not fussy, and drawing from more diverse sources.” At this famously diverse market, he bags gorgeous specimens of everything from peppers and potatoes to berries and beets.

On Sunday afternoon, guests drive up twisting canyon roads to the McCartys’ hilltop house with its dazzling views of the Pacific, far below. The big, open kitchen spills into the window-wrapped living/dining room, which flows through sliding glass doors to a spacious deck and outdoor kitchen.



Colorful heirloom tomatoes and arugula complement tangy burrata cheese.

The McCartys entertain with abundance—or, as Michael puts it, “big eats!” A cornucopia of greens and other produce goes into Kim’s World-famous Salad. (“I’ve been immortalized by a salad,” jokes Kim, who’s actually better known for her artwork.) Vibrant heirloom tomatoes and arugula form a luscious trio with milk-white burrata, an Italian cheese that resembles mozzarella but has a creamy, ricotta-like center. Michael fires up the grill for a surf-and-turf extravaganza: sockeye salmon accompanied by a succotash sautéed in the kitchen, and *côtes de boeuf* (thick, bone-in ribeyes) with herb butter. Rounding out the meal is a selection of cheeses, then bowls of homemade vanilla ice cream topped with berries.

Kim and Michael’s Malibu retreat has witnessed countless such gatherings, attended by marathon meals and endless scarlet sunsets. “We have parties that go on for three days,” Michael says. This one will end much sooner. But the guests, longtime friends all, linger as dusk descends. Candid opinions and irreverent humor spice freewheeling talk of art, politics, real estate, and the Lakers’ prospects. And also—naturally—of food.

For recipes, turn to page 124.

More info: page 136