

7 DATE NIGHT DINING IDEAS WITH A WINE COUNTRY TWIST

By Katherine Fotinos

Everyone has an ideal Valentine's Day. For me, February 14th would begin with a drive with my beau north from the San Francisco Bay Area to beautiful Sonoma in the heart of wine country. The Fairmont Sonoma Mission Inn and Spa would be our humble abode for the weekend, providing a romantic oasis with its magical mesh of modernity and luxury alongside charming nods to the area's rustic aesthetic. While on any other occasion I'd be taking advantage of the Fairmont's long list of activities, from nature hikes to water yoga to zumba, my Valentine's Day is all about relaxation. I'm headed to the 40,000 square foot spa for a full afternoon of pampering amidst the mineral springs. The love-filled evening would, of course, end with a delicious meal. For the love of food, is there any other way to end Valentine's Day?

Speaking of food, Sonoma is the perfect place to indulge. The charming town takes pride in its rich culinary treasures, showcasing many of them at the annual Feast of the Olive dinner in January at the world-renowned Ramekins Culinary School. Each top caliber chef offered his or her talents by creating the food for a portion of the event's menu. Does their expertise get put to good use on Valentine's Day? Being that February 14th is one of the busiest days in the restaurant business, more often than not, chefs end up working. But for the love birds with plans to feast at home, these wine country cooks had some advice to offer. Here's what each had to say about creating the perfect Valentine's Day date meal.





"My wife would be my Valentine date ideally, if I had [the day] off. I'd make something similar to what I serve at the restaurant; something in the wood oven, like a whole roast chicken for two--salt based, and with black truffle. The reason why I opened Glen Ellen Star was to emulate what I do at home. Cooking in a wood oven is especially fun. It's rustic and refined and you let go and have some fun." -Chef Ari Weiswasser of Glen Ellen Star



"I'm actually teaching a class on Valentine's Day and we're making Beef Wellington. It's a very romantic dish. And I would make something chocolate for dessert, like a flourless chocolate cake." -Chef Lisa Lavagetto of Ramekins Culinary School



"For Valentine's Day I'd cook fish because that's what I specialize in. Good sushi is the ticket to a woman's heart--nothing too heavy." -Chef Ed Metcalfe of Shiso Modern Asian Kitchen



"Chefs don't cook at home! Dining out is a very special occasion for me. When you do cook though, it's all about the ex-factor with food. It can be a hamburger. Waffles. Eggs. It's whatever creates that factor of what's special and true for you. For my wife and I it's Paprikash. She's Hungarian and from North Dakota. It's the dish that reminds her of home." -Chef Manuel Azevedo of LaSalette



"For Valentine's Day I like sharing. It's about splitting a plate. Like the paella we make at the restaurant-- it has shrimp, fresh fish, mussels, clam, chorizo, chicken, rice..." -Chef Armando G. Navarro of El Dorado Kitchen



"Something comforting. A citrus based roast chicken with pilaf. Something simple, warm, and erotic, with the warmth of home style cooking. Nothing too fancy." -Chef Moaya Scheiman (pictured with Chef Andrea Koweek) of Crisp Bakeshop