

coast news feast & film

Ode to Tomatoes and Sarah's Key

By Teri Bayus

This job rocks sometimes. I mean, what other profession includes hanging out with your friends in the middle of the day drinking the best wines while sampling a five-course meal created by the area's best chefs? Really, this is the best gig in the world. With a relaxed and blissful heart I get to tell you about the new event "Ode to Tomatoes." Sycamore Mineral Springs Resort has created the tomato/herb garden (with the help of chefs, a consulting gardener and lots of water and love) and it will be the center of this new event. They are cultivating almost 20 varieties of tomatoes such as the scrumptious Brandy Wine, Green Zebra, Striped German, Sweet Loo, Box Car Willie, and Black Sea Man at Sycamore Mineral Springs Resort in Avila Beach. All the chefs have access to this garden and created some amazing dishes to show us all what to expect.

We started in the Garden Retreat at Sycamore sampling a tomato bruschetta while sipping Clayhouse Adobe Pink wine and for some, watermelon mojito's. This picturesque garden is both functional and beautiful, where they will be serving special meals during the event. We moved over to the Gardens of Avila to start our five-course meal with an heirloom Gazpacho. Chef Stephen Walls concocted this sweet, fiery, cold soup. The balances of flavors were impeccable, paired with a Roberts Sinskey 2010 Abraxas.

Our next course was a dish I will dream of and desire. This Pineapple Tomato Napoleon, prepared by the master chef Greg Wangard, was phenomenal. A tower of flavor that included a thick slice of Hippy Stripe Zebra tomato, Texas toast with an over-easy fried egg and white truffle vinaigrette blew our minds. Paired with the Eroica Riesling from Chateau St. Michelle, this dish disregarded conformity. We were all still talking about it the next day. Our Warm Tomato Tart with house-made buffalo mozzarella on a basil puff pastry made by Chef Casey Walcott continued to amaze us on just how versatile this tomato could be. The main course, presented by Chef Pandee Pearson, was a



summer roasted heirloom tomato and short rib Ragout. Served with a Parisian gnocchi and a Parmesan cheese pistou, I was astounded by the textures and flavors. It was paired with a Porter Creek 2009 Old Vine Carignane that was double decanted and tasted like liquid love.

Then came the biggest surprise, an upside-down green tomato caramel pecan pie with Gorgonzola crême anglaise. I was shocked, but this totally worked. It was delicious. This surprising and delicious concoction defied all the rules of dessert that I knew of and I couldn't wait for my husband to try this.

Ode to Tomatoes is Sept. 22 through Oct. 6 and you can try these and other dishes from the chefs from the Marisol Restaurant at the Cliffs Resort, the Sea Venture Resort Restaurant, the Apple Farm Wine Country Inn, and the Gardens of Avila. Each course will be paired perfectly with a selection from the Sunset Western Wine Awards nominee list.

Join the celebration of the incomparable tomato, its intoxicating deliciousness and seductive beauty in its multitude of forms at

this culinary happening. For more information, visit www.thecliffsresort.com.

When I'm in the mood for a moving piece, holocaust films really ground me to how wonderful a life we have today. It is sad, but the stories must be told and make me forgo complaining about my dog eating another book. I had never heard of the event in France that this movie is based on, but it is a gift to experience such a unique story. In 1942, French authorities rounded up thousands of Jewish citizens and confined them inside the Paris Velodrome in appalling conditions for several days. They were then shipped off to transit camps, where women and children were forcibly separated from their families. The film uses a little known event from French history as a starting point for a deeply affecting drama about guilt, redemption, family secrets, the comfort of strangers, and hope in a time of war and madness.

Elle s'appelait Sarah (*Sarah's Key* in English) is a film that alternates between these harrowing scenes and the present day, where Paris-

based American journalist Julia Jarmond (Kristin Scott Thomas) is writing an article on this disturbing and shameful incident. But as she probes into the past, Julia discovers a personal connection between the fate of Sarah's family and her own family. Kristin's intelligent presence, obsessive nature and air of sadness lift this solid and moving drama. Also impressive is Mayance, who brings a feisty quality, resilience and quiet determination to her role as Sarah as she moves through a variety of emotions of fear and terror with great conviction. Niels Arestrup, who was so effectively menacing in *A Prophet*, brings gruff but unexpectedly tender quality to his performance as a farmer who reluctantly shelters Sarah from the authorities.

Director Gilles Paquet-Brenner handles the material with great sensitivity, but avoids descending into melodrama. The harrowing scenes set inside the Velodrome bristle with a palpable sense of outrage. Paquet-Brenner maintains a steady but assured pace as the film builds towards its final, emotionally devastating scene when Julia meets Sarah's son (played by Aidan Quinn), who discovers the truth of his own history. Technical contributions are all excellent, from Francoise Dupertuis' production design, to Eric Perron's costumes, Max Richter's poignant and unobtrusive score, Pascal Ridaou's evocative cinematography, and Herve Schneid's editing that fluidly moves between the different time frames.

Sarah's Key is based on the best-selling novel written by Tatiana De Rosnay, in which the ghosts of the Holocaust continue to haunt the survivors, who are often wracked with guilt. It is a powerful and moving tale that explores one of the darkest and most shameful periods of France's history, but it ultimately proves to be something of an uplifting tale of redemption and forgiveness.

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