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It's Michael Chiarello's *Big Night*. The renowned California chef (he's also a restaurateur, author, TV star, vintner, and winner of multiple James Beard awards) and his wife, Eileen, are showcasing their deep affection for film, wine, and food with a screening party at their St. Helena home in honor of the coming Napa Valley Film Festival.

The party has been carefully planned: There's popcorn in specially designed bags; plenty of munchies in Michael's signature Italian style; and the table is set with film props. Three short films have been matched to wines, discussion points considered, and ballots are ready for voting.

An Affair to Remember

"LIGHTS! CAMERA! COOK!" WELCOME TO MICHAEL AND EILEEN CHIARELLO'S SCREENING PARTY

WRITTEN AND PRODUCED BY STEPHEN EXEL
PHOTOGRAPHY BY JOHN GRANEN



Salsa di Parmigiano



Appetizer Michael Chiarello serves parmesan dip, a Bottega specialty, at home.
Ballot Guests vote for their favorite film.
Buffet Eileen Chiarello uses vintage film canisters and reels to decorate the table.
Many serving pieces are from Michael's NapaStyle shop. Hosts Michael and Eileen.
Kitchen A wood-burning oven is used for flatbreads and cast-iron cooking.
Cocktail Negronis in stainless martini glasses from NapaStyle evoke Hollywood glamour.



"The filmmaking world is infatuated with what we do," says Michael, who created Tra Vigne restaurant in St. Helena in 1997 and opened Bottega in Yountville in 2008. "We are just as fascinated by what they do. Film is 'motion art.' Food engages a different part of the brain. At the end of the festival, both groups have shared stories."

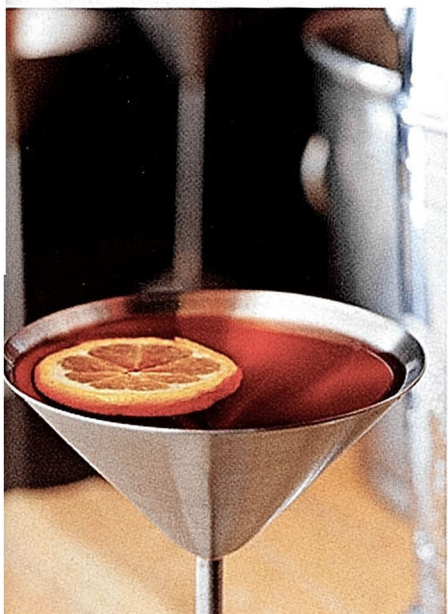
Storytelling is an integral part of Michael's character. His six books (the latest is *Michael Chiarello's Bottega*) don't just contain recipes—they are peppered with personal narratives and family history.

The St. Helena home Michael and Eileen share with their 7-year-old son Aiden is strongly connected to the chef's personal history. The California native, who also has three daughters, looked to his grandfather's Mount Shasta ranch to provide inspiration for the airy floor plan. Stones quarried on the ranch form the house's foundation; the powder rooms are paneled with the ranch's barn siding. Plants from cuttings from Michael's mother's garden dot the property.

It's a fitting setting for celebrating a similar story-based medium—the party is a

tasty combination of *Julie & Julia* meets *Sideways* meets *Babette's Feast*. As Michael puts finishing touches on the food, Eileen tends to the table setting and flowers.

Interaction with guests is essential to the Chiarellos' entertaining style. The kitchen is designed to be the center of the house. Two stoves plus a wood-burning oven make it convenient to divide cooking responsibilities and entice everyone with both aromas and sights. "We let the evening flow pretty freely," Eileen says. "We like to get people engaged with the food."



Prosciutto-Wrapped
Truffle Fries

A consummate restaurateur, Michael always assigns someone to help with the wine. "I hate to see an empty glass," he jokes. There is usually sparkling wine—Eileen is a collector of vintage champagne. "Because it's Napa, people show up with great wines," Michael adds.

Brilliantly combining wine and film "is about finding the gestalt of the film and the wine and understanding their stories," notes Eileen. Matching the food with wines involves the same process, plus adding the element of taste.

If you're hungry for some intellectual nourishment at your party, "invite a group of storytellers," Michael says. "The discussion will quickly get past the small talk of our lives. Movies prompt an individual point of view from everyone. The conversation will be evocative and personal."

Michael chooses movie munchies that can be prepared in advance or finished off quickly during the party. "The food doesn't have to thread together like a menu," he says. "Choose items that are easy to eat, can be enjoyed together, but stand alone."

Make-ahead appetizers start with Pesto Arancini—rice balls stuffed with melty mozzarella and served with garlic-and oregano-laced tomato sauce. "Cooked rice or leftover risotto can be used for this recipe," Michael says. "It's a very old-world dish that speaks to the frugal-mindedness of southern Italians." For an extra layer of flavor, Michael mixes the rice with pesto.

When Michael's daughter Gianna asked for wings for her 16th birthday party, he complied by bringing good technique and adult perspective to a familiar food—

COOKING SCHOOL

Kitchen Glass-backed cabinets allow sunlight to pour in. The space opens to the dining and living rooms, creating a hub for gatherings.

Bar Michael's restaurant Bottega.

Cupcake From Napa bakery Kara's Cupcakes (karascupcakes.com).



The Napa Valley Film Festival

Michael Chiarello serves on the Napa Valley Film Festival advisory board, Eileen on the board of trustees. The festival takes place November 7-11 in the towns of Napa, Yountville, St. Helena, and Calistoga.

Celebrating the fusion of visual storytelling with extraordinary food and wine, the festival screens more than 100 films and offers chances to meet with filmmakers and to attend wine tastings and exclusive dinners—all amid the gorgeous harvest season. Area restaurants, such as Michael's Bottega in Yountville (botteganapavalley.com), offer tie-ins to festivalgoers. Go to napavalleyfilmfest.org for more information.



Chicken Wings Agrodolce (sweet and sour). These tender wings sport both flavors, plus a nice bite of heat from Calabrian chiles.

Eileen inspired Michael to create Prosciutto-Wrapped Truffle Fries, an appetizer she and her girlfriends could enjoy in a few bites. Rich but familiar, the indulgent little bundles can be paired with succulent fresh figs torn apart with your fingers. (Have plenty of napkins on hand!)

After the screenings, guests gather to rate the films and enjoy Forever-Roasted Pork with Toasted Cocoa Rub. Pork should

der surrounded by pears, apples, and lemons has been slow roasting at a low temperature for 6 to 8 hours, filling the house with incredible aromas. The temptation to pull a piece of the fork-tender meat off with your fingers is overwhelming. That's just what Michael has planned, so he hands out small tongs, and everyone digs in.

Eileen puts out a sweet or two, and another glass of wine is poured. It's a Hollywood ending, full of camaraderie and community. You can almost see the credits start to roll across a star-strewn sky. ➤

Prosciutto-Wrapped Truffle Fries

Create these handheld bundles by drizzling fries with truffle oil, then wrapping small bunches in a slice of prosciutto. Serve them standing up in small cocktail or juice glasses.

Wine pairing: A Chiara Bianco manages to balance delicacy with aggressive minerality—fruity enough for prosciutto, structured enough for the truffle and Parmesan. “It’s like an umami fest in your mouth,” Michael says, referring to the balance of savory flavors. Find it at chiarellovineryards.com.

Film: A wry Marilyn Monroe comedy like *Some Like It Hot*.



Pesto Arancini

These deep-fried rice balls stuffed with mozzarella have layers of flavor—pesto, melty cheese, and a rich tomato sauce. Before stuffing the rice balls, chill them in the freezer. The rice balls can also be stuffed with shredded meat or chicken.

Wine pairing: Pair with a blended red from Napa’s Screenplay Wines. “The crisp, bright acidity cuts the fried panko coating while the creamy cheese complements the wine’s structure,” Michael says. Visit screenplaywines.com.

Film: Flicks with cut-to-the-chase stars like Rooney Mara.



Chicken Wings Agrodolce

“The old adage ‘a sauce is done when it coats the back of a wooden spoon’ is true,” Michael says of the sweet and sour sauce that coats these wings and is also served for dipping. It should cook to the consistency of thick maple syrup.

Wine pairing: Serve the wings with Screenplay Wines’ Carneros White. “The wine’s lower alcohol and bright fruit components are light enough to complement the yin-yang flavor of the sauce and the lightly battered chicken without either one being the star,” Michael says.

Film: Romantic comedy pairing Tom Hanks and Meg Ryan. ➤



COOKING SCHOOL



Wine pairing:

"Cabernet Sauvignon is the leading lady of Napa wines," Michael says. "It likes the single attention of one food. Chiarello Family Vineyards' Eileen Cabernet 2009 (named for my wife) has a long, sexy flavor that matches the caramelized pork shoulder."

Film: Anything with the sultry queen of Italian film, Sophia Loren.



Forever-Roasted Pork with Toasted Cocoa Rub

Slow-roasting in a low-temperature oven makes this party main course a fuss-free endeavor. Start the pork shoulder in the morning, then leave it alone. There's nothing to do once you've put the pork shoulder in the oven—just check every once in a while to maintain the water level in the roasting pan.

- 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 2 medium onions, thinly sliced
- Gray sea salt and freshly ground pepper
- 1½ teaspoons finely chopped fresh sage
- ½ cup water
- 4 pounds boneless pork shoulder roast
- ¼ cup Toasted Cocoa Rub (recipe follows)
- 2 apples, cored and quartered
- 2 pears, cored and quartered
- 3 lemons, halved

Preheat oven to 275°F. In large skillet heat olive oil over medium heat. Add onions and pinch of salt and pepper. Reduce heat; cook about 1 minute. Add sage; cook about 3 minutes or until onions are just tender. Add the ½ cup water; bring to boil. Reduce heat; simmer, covered, 10 minutes or until onions are very tender. Uncover; simmer 2 minutes more or until onions are very soft and water has evaporated. Season well with salt and pepper.

Season pork well with Toasted Cocoa Rub. Arrange meat on rack in shallow roasting pan with onions, apples, pears, and lemons. Add 1 cup water to pan.

Roast, uncovered, 6 to 8 hours, or until meat is very tender, adding water (½ cup at a time) if pan is dry. If meat begins to get too dark, tent with foil the last 2 or 3 hours. Roast is ready when meat pulls away easily with fork or tongs. Serve with any pan juices. Makes 12 to 14 (4-ounce) servings.

Toasted Cocoa Rub: Heat medium saucepan over medium heat. Add 1 tablespoon each whole white peppercorns and coriander. Toast until spices begin to pop and smell fragrant, shaking saucepan occasionally. Remove from heat; transfer to spice mill or coffee grinder. Grind to fine powder. In airtight container combine toasted ground spices with 4½ tablespoons cinnamon, ¼ cup sea salt, 3½ tablespoons unsweetened cocoa powder, 2 teaspoons ground nutmeg, and 1 teaspoon ground cloves. Use ¼ cup of mixture for Forever-Roasted Pork; store remainder, covered, in cool dry place up to 3 months. Use to season beef or pork roasts or whole chickens. ■