

A decade of food

Dining opportunities expanded down valley in the past 10 years

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Ten years ago, Greg Cole was the brash guy willing to gamble on opening a fine dining restaurant in Napa. At the close of the decade, he's an established restaurateur who has two thriving eateries, Celadon and Cole's Chop House.

"I opened Celadon in 1996 because the rents were so cheap in Napa, it's where I could afford to open," Cole said.

At the time, Celadon was in the pocket-sized space behind the then-dark old Opera House. Success allowed him to move Celadon down Main Street to the historic Hatt Building (and the former site of Geezer's), and in March 2000 he open the upscale, elegant steakhouse Cole's — a place to find the meat that matches the valley's king of wines, cabernet sauvignon.

These are just two moves in a decade that saw the steady growth of the Napa Valley as a destination for food as well as wine — and an explosion of activity in the once-overlooked city of Napa that promises to continue into the new decade.

Other valley towns added to their repertoire of outstanding restaurants: Calistoga lost Jan Birnbaum's Catahoula, but gained Solbar in the new Solage resort, as well as the restaurant open only to members and guests at the secluded and exclusive Calistoga Ranch. St. Helena added Press, Martini House, Cook, Market and Cindy Pawlcyn's Go Fish and Cindy's Backstreet Kitchen.

In Yountville, Thomas Keller expanded his empire (French Laundry and Bouchon) with Bouchon Bakery and a temporary Ad Hoc (formerly the Diner, briefly Wine Garden), which became permanent when fans flocked to enjoy the one-menu family-style meals. Michael Chiarello returned to his roots to open Bottega, and the posh Bardessono resort opened a restaurant within its luxurious campus. **The hit of the decade in Yountville, however, was Richard Reddington's Redd, opened at the former site of Piatti;** and the loss was the closing of Gordon's, one of the best breakfast places in the valley.

The story of the new decade may be how the surging Napa scene will affect the Upvalley.