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By Diana Kapp

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With stark simplicity and a careful balance of flavor and texture, Berkeley's Norikonoko offers traditional Japanese fare like grilled pike with grated daikon.

Roll out the red carpet

Richard Reddington steps into the spotlight with his new Yountville restaurant, **Redd**.

BY JOSH SENS

PHOTOGRAPHS BY MITCH TOBIAS

Washington Street in Yountville is wine country's version of Hollywood's Walk of Fame, a short promenade flanked by vineyards and packed with celebrated restaurant names. Thomas Keller has twin billing here with the blockbuster French Laundry and its smaller, budget sequel Bouchon. Philippe Jeanty's Bistro Jeanty still operates down the block to critical acclaim.

For a food snob strolling amid such star power, the sight of Piatti, which stood for many years on the southwestern stretch of Washington Street, could be disconcerting. A link in a high-end Italian restaurant chain, Piatti was better than the Olive Garden, but it no more belonged on this boulevard of giants than Steven Seagal's footprints would belong in the concrete beside John Wayne's.

Predictably, Piatti went dark, and late last fall Redd moved in. Redd is short for Richard Reddington, a richly skilled chef who appeared in a number of major productions (including *Masa's*, *La Folie*, and *Auberge du Soleil*) while waiting for a vehicle of his own. His patience paid off. Redd is worthy of the street it stands on. Like an A-list actor without an ego, Redd is polished but unpretentious, an impressive but very approachable restaurant, splashy enough to have drawing power but smart enough not to fall too in love with itself.

Whether it's due to personal taste or simply a product of having paid his dues, Reddington seems to know that there's not much to be gained by showing off on paper. His menu is understated almost to the point of duping diners into thinking that they've been there and done it all before. There is French influence, but no French fussiness. There are modern touches, but nothing post-modern or tongue-in-cheek (if you're craving truffled Pop-Tarts, try Keller up the street). As a written document, what the menu does is reveal Reddington's global interests—interests that range from Asia to Alsace,



Richard Reddington takes a global view with influences from Asia, as seen in the hamachi sashimi, and contemporary L.A., as seen in his dining room.



REDD
6480 WASHINGTON ST. (AT OAK CIRCLE), YOUNTVILLE, 707-944-2222. \$\$\$\$ RESERVATIONS RECOMMENDED. WHEELCHAIR ACCESSIBLE. ★★½

from Madrid to Napa—without sounding like anything more exotic than what we've come to know as California cuisine. Among the more modestly described dishes are butternut squash ravioli with winter vegetables and shaved parmesan; avocado and blood orange salad; and roasted chicken with white beans, Meyer lemon, and thyme.

Happily, restaurants are about eating, not reading, and what Reddington delivers far exceeds the simplicity of his brief descriptions. The chef serves risotto with sweet chunks of lobster, enriching its complexion with white truffle oil while leavening its flavors with lemon confit. His potato gnocchi, hearty in taste but evanescent in texture, float like low-lying clouds on an earthy ground cover of chanterelles.

Reddington can do delicate: his hamachi sashimi drapes debonairly over sticky rice, cucumber, and edamame, lightly topped with lime and ginger sauce. And he can do hearty: New York sirloin is a steakhouse dish dressed up with unparalleled class.

Every now and then, he wanders to the brink of the esoteric: monkfish saltimbocca with salsify ragout is wrapped in ribbons of prosciutto, a pairing so delicious you might find yourself wishing all fish would swap their scales for this salty skin.

But what Reddington really does exceptionally well is bring brightness to the most basic dishes. Even roasted chicken, perhaps the most daring of all entrées to order, comes uncommonly tender, its moist meat sharpened with a healthy dose of red pepper flakes.

Diners can order à la carte. But the chef also offers five- and nine-course tasting menus. The latter of those, when paired with a progression of wines from a wide-ranging, French- and California-rich list, ranks as one of the best deals to be had in the valley, unless you bought land here 50 years ago.

Everything is delivered by waiters who know their stuff but aren't stuffy, in a clean, modern setting that looks something like a very pretty modular home. It's an unassuming atmosphere well suited to the restaurant's overall aesthetic, elegant without distracting from the food.

Perhaps more than any other part of the menu, desserts sneak up on you, and then astound. Banana cake, served with coconut ice cream, is dense but not daunting, and it registers at just the right degree of sweetness. Meyer lemon panna cotta shimmers like a beautiful white moon, partially eclipsed by citrus salad and blood orange sorbet.

There are others: ginger apple cake with crème fraîche ice cream, caramel chocolate mousse with espresso cognac sorbet. If there's a better dessert list in the Bay Area, I haven't had the pleasure yet.

For his part, Richard Reddington has had the pleasure of bouncing around some of the Bay Area's best-loved restaurants. Whether by careful planning or cosmic coincidence, he's turned up in a town renowned for its good eating. It's nice to see he's fitting in. ■

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Pea tendrils and green garlic bring a taste of spring to Liberty Farms duck breast (top), while panna cotta gets an acidic boost from a vivid citrus salad and sorbet (bottom).

