



WEDNESDAY AUG. 25, 2011 NAPA, CA - Silverado Resort's new chefs. L. Pierce Carson/Register

When golf legend Johnny Miller and fellow investors took title to Silverado Resort and Spa last year, one of the tasks at the top of their to-do list was finding a chef to take charge of the resort's culinary program.

Miller and resort general manager John Evans didn't have to look very far. Like the cream component of fresh milk, the name that rapidly rose to the top was Jeff Jake.

A Vintage High School grad with a great work ethic and respected culinary pedigree, Jake assumed his new role about this time last year and has been quietly assembling a crack team of dedicated cooks to work with him in making Silverado one of the top dining destinations in the Napa Valley.

If a couple of thoroughly enjoyed meals at Silverado's two dining rooms are any indication, Jake is right on track with his plans to satisfy longtime members, valley visitors and locals with meals worth mentioning.

To Jake, it's all about recruiting the right people to work on the team. He asked Chris Johnson, who's worked in the Silverado kitchens for about two decades, to stay on and give him a hand with restaurant and conference programs.

Christophe Gerard worked with Jake at Farm for a few years, was opening chef at Angèle and manned the stoves for a time at Calistoga Ranch. He's serving as the resort's executive sous chef.

A veteran of Cindy Pawlcyn's restaurants, Pablo Jacinto is best known for his fare at Mustards Grill and most recently at C Casa in the Oxbow Public Market. Jacinto is the new chef de cuisine at The Grill at Silverado.

Joseph Hatch worked with Jake at Farm, where he was chef de cuisine. He spent some time traveling in China before taking on his new role as one of the chefs at Royal Oak Steakhouse — one of the valley's top spots for great steak, fish, wine and service.

Newest members of the team are Daniel Gomez and Marisol Munoz, who worked side by side for the past seven years as chef and sous chef at Napa Valley Country Club. Gomez, a former Silverado executive sous chef, and Munoz are also Royal Oak chefs. Jake has asked Gomez to help him develop as well new menus for clubhouse members.

"These are just the key players," Jake said the other evening as his team of chefs prepared to serve a full house of hungry diners lining up to get into the long-standing Royal Oak. "All of these people have been in the business a long time, and I've worked with everyone but Daniel and Pablo previously."

His culinary career dates to the late '70s at Domaine Chandon when he worked with opening chef Udo Nechutnys. "Then I went with Udo when he decided to open Miramonte in St. Helena," Jake adds. "He was my mentor."

Jake was in charge of the culinary program at Sonoma Mission Inn for a few years and spent eight years as executive chef of the Lodge at Pebble Beach. He returned to Napa Valley to work with his sister at St. Helena Olive Oil Company and also spent time cooking at Brannan's and BarVino in Calistoga. He was executive chef at Carneros Inn for three years.

A lovely view

Overlooking the 18th South hole, the Royal Oak Steakhouse has been a Napa Valley dining staple for decades. It's always been a great spot for a special occasion or celebration, or a place to reserve a table when one's in the mood for great beef.

Chef Jake has tweaked the menu a bit so it now features even more seafood options along with selections for those who enjoy lamb, pork and chicken.

The list of starters always includes fresh oysters on the half shell, along with wild Georgia shrimp from the Gulf of Mexico, Dungeness crab fritters and a salad featuring burrata cheese paired with either heirloom tomatoes or roasted beets. Prices range from \$8 for the daily soup (the other evening it was a rich puree of sweet white corn) to \$21 for a foie gras au torchon with rhubarb marmalade. For traditionalists, the Royal Oak Caesar salad (\$11) is still on the menu, though no longer assembled tableside.

It's really all about the steak at Royal Oak, with offerings ranging from 6-ounce Angus filet mignon or 12-ounce New York strip (both \$30) to a 24-ounce prime porterhouse for two (\$76). Additional options include dry aged bone-in strip steak, Kobe flatiron, ribeye and prime beef shortrib. Accompanying sauces include roasted shallot, salsa verde, green peppercorn, béarnaise, soy lime, red wine, plus Point Reyes blue cheese and smoked sea salt butters.

If you're taking the kids along, there's Napa's Stewart Ranch grass-fed ranch burger (\$16), served with caramelized onions, Point Reyes blue cheese and french fries.

Fish lovers should be pleased with the choice of line-caught Pacific swordfish (\$23) or Loch Duart salmon fillet (\$21). One more option — Peruvian-marinated and roasted Fulton Valley chicken (\$24) with zucchini salad and herb fingerling potatoes.

Sides (\$6-\$8) include sautéed Bloomsdale spinach, fully loaded baked potato, potato puree, roasted Thumbelina carrots, truffled french fries, sautéed Blue Lake and Romano beans plus sautéed cremini mushrooms.

When it comes to dessert, the kitchen has some light delights for those with a sweet tooth (\$7.50-\$8.50), including strawberry sabayon with lavender shortbread cookie; warm chocolate cake with chocolate ganache and Three Twins mint confetti ice cream; red velvet cupcakes with cream cheese frosting; and cardamom ice cream profiteroles with caramel sauce.

A hefty wine list contains a number of reds and whites that pair beautifully with chef Jake's menu. There's also a decent by-the-glass list and a number of library offerings that will definitely tempt locals with a penchant for aged Napa Valley reds.

Not only is the new restaurant manager captaining an ingratiating service team — including hospitality industry veteran Samuel Gebru — Cynthia Di Nardo is a wine geek quite eager to make your acquaintance and help with the ideal bottle of wine to complement dinner. If ordering by the glass, try resort member Carl Sciambra's late harvest cabernet sauvignon from nearby Atlas Peak — goes quite well with charbroiled beef. On Thursday nights, the Royal Oak offers complimentary corkage.

At present, Royal Oak Steakhouse is open for dinner from 5:30 to 9:30 p.m. Thursday through Saturday. Jake anticipates opening for another day or two at some point.

Three squares a day

The Grill at Silverado serves breakfast, lunch and dinner daily. Always bustling in the morning, the Grill gives diners a choice of breakfast buffet or an a la carte menu.

Salads, soups and sandwiches are popular at midday, says Jake. “You can’t just cook for yourself,” he adds. “The menu has to address the demographics — the members and the locals who enjoy coming here. Silverado’s always been a fun place, a great environment, to drive out to. Our dinner crowd is growing and I hope it’s because we’re offering dishes that people enjoy. It’s American casual grill (fare), with new items like Pablo’s fish tacos and spaghetti and meatballs, made with veal and pork and cooked in a San Marzano tomato sauce.”

Dinner menu options range from popcorn shrimp (\$14) to grilled Kurobota pork chop (\$30) with garlic mashed potatoes and summer squash. Chef Jacinto also offers a Dungeness crab Louie (\$19), Big Ranch heirloom tomatoes with buffalo mozzarella (\$12), French dip sandwich with horseradish cream (\$15), roasted portobello mushroom sandwich with grilled red onion and mozzarella (\$14), spaghetti and meatballs (\$18), country fried chicken with buttermilk mashed potatoes and cole slaw (\$23), and rotisserie-roasted Fulton Valley chicken with sweet peppers and bread salad (\$21).

Wednesday is Kobe burger night, with burger and fries offered to diners for only \$10. If you stop by the bar for a cold one, order a Kobe chili cheese dog (\$10) or some of Pablo’s guacamole to go with the beer. Buffalo wings and potato skins are also popular bar items.

Silverado Resort and Spa is one of the sponsors of November’s Flavor Napa Valley event. Chef Jake is teaming up with chefs Cindy Pawlcyn, Masaharu Morimoto and Scott Conant for the opening night dinner. One of several winemaker dinners is scheduled at Silverado, with Jake inviting chefs from Dolce International (which manages resort operations) to join him in preparing that meal. In addition to chefs from several North American properties, others helping to prepare dinner that evening will be visiting chefs from Barcelona and Chantilly, France. Silverado will also host the closing brunch featuring Napa Valley chef Todd Humphries, who recently opened Kitchen Door in the Oxbow Public Market.

Peruvian Chicken

Jeff Jake, Silverado Resort - Serves 6.

6 (each 10 oz.) Fulton Valley chicken breasts

Marinade:

1 cup Champagne vinegar

3/4 cups white wine

3/4 cups olive oil

1/2 cup garlic powder

1 cup paprika

1/3 cup cumin

2 1/2 Tbsp. cracked black pepper

1 Tbsp. sea salt

Trim, wash and dry chicken breasts. Mix all ingredients into a paste and rub into the chicken and under the skin. Place in the bag and marinate for 4-5 hours. Grill the chicken. Serve with sauce on the side.

Sauce:

1 cup aioli

1/4 cup Dijon mustard

1/4 cup lime juice

Salt and pepper to taste

Mix aioli and mustard. Still in lime juice and check for seasonings.

Zucchini Salad

Jeff Jake, Silverado Resort

Serves 4.

3 medium zucchini (uncooked)
1/4 cup crushed Marcona almonds
1 tsp. Meyer lemon zest
2 Tbsp. Meyer lemon juice
1/4 cup extra virgin olive oil
1/4 cup grated ricotta salata*
Sea salt
Fresh ground pepper

* Ricotta salata is a variation of ricotta that has been pressed, salted and dried.

Wash and dry zucchini. Grate zucchini on the medium holes of a box grater or run on a mandolin to create spaghetti strands of zucchini. Crush almonds, grate ricotta salata and zest lemon. Toss together with zucchini. Add lemon juice, olive oil and season with salt and pepper. You can adjust ingredients in proportion to your preference.

Hot Chocolate Cake

Jeff Jake, Silverado Resort

12 oz. bittersweet chocolate
12 oz. sweet butter
9 eggs
9 yolks
8 oz. powdered sugar
2 oz. cake flour

Melt chocolate and butter. Whip yolks, eggs and powdered sugar to full volume, doubled in size.
Fold in flour gently. Pour into sprayed pans. Cook at 375 degrees for 10 to 12 minutes.
Unmold; serve warm.