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AT THE RESTAURANT AND HOTEL FOREFRONT

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Standard-BEARERS

FOOD BIZ IT'S NOT ALWAYS AN EASY PATH TO THE TOP, BUT FOR THESE FIVE NEWLY NAMED GRANDS CHEFS RELAIS & CHÂTEAUX, IT'S A GREAT PLACE TO BE. THERESE LAHLOUH REPORTS.

"Last night we had a gentleman come into Addison for the first time. He told us he was in because he had been in Zurich reading Relais & Châteaux's magazine *L'Ame & L'Esprit*, and saw that there was a Grand Chef in his hometown. The gentleman has been splitting his time between Zurich and San Diego for 16 years, and the restaurant has been open for four years," said Addison's general manager, **Will Costello**, when asked to shed light on the impact of chef **William Bradley's** receipt of Relais & Châteaux's Grand Chef title.

Boasting a collection of over 500 independent hotels and restaurants in 60 countries, Relais & Châteaux is known for its rigorous application process, detailing specifications for everything from room size to signage to floral arrangements. There are two membership statuses that can be held singularly or in tandem—Hotelier-Restaurateur and Chef-Restaurateur "Grand Chef." A Grand Chef may be either an independent operator of a restaurant (**Thomas Keller** of **Per Se** and **The French Laundry**) or a chef in a hotel member property of Relais & Châteaux (**Joseph Lenn** at **Blackberry Farm**).

As of January 2011 there are 156 Grand Chefs in 22 countries worldwide, and North America is home to 21 of them. After reviewing the chefs' applications and completing anonymous evaluations of the restaurants, Relais & Châteaux's membership board has determined that these chefs and their cuisine have been recognized throughout the world as some of the best. Judging by the increased revenue and notoriety across the board at these five properties, Relais & Châteaux was right on the mark. All under the age of 40, the five all-star Grand Chefs named in North America in 2010 and 2011 spoke to *Food Arts* about what the title means for them and their restaurants. ➤



Clockwise from top: Stéphane Mazières plating red tuna tartare rolled in beetroot with lemon confit at Restaurant Le Gaïac at Hôtel Le Toiny. William Bradley's coddled farm egg with lobster *crème fouettée* and cinnamon at Addison. Crispy pillow with fromage blanc mousse from Meadowood Napa Valley's Christopher Kostow. Blackberry Farm's wood-grilled squab with butternut squash, faro, and cippolini onions by Joseph Lenn.



Stéphane Mazières Hôtel Le Toiny Saint-Barthélemy, French West Indies

Stéphane Mazières, 35, was the only Grand Chef named in North America in 2010. At **Restaurant Le Gaïac** at Hôtel Le Toiny his cuisine is decidedly French—90 percent of his ingredients come from France and Guadeloupe—but with a Creole accent. Mazières also uses organic herbs and vegetables grown in the three greenhouses on the property—an amazing feat given that there is virtually no agriculture on this rocky island. “I try to use no more than three ingredients, to keep the real flavors of the ingredients,” says Mazières.

For him, the title has bolstered business and set the restaurant apart from the nearly five dozen other mostly French restaurants in this tiny gastronomic paradise. “It’s a great honor for me to be a part of such a respected group of chefs around the world—**Daniel Boulud**, Thomas Keller, **Michel Troisgros**, just to name a few. The title helps to dispel the notion that it’s difficult to get the highest quality ingredients in Caribbean gastronomy. We know that it’s possible, and we can create the very highest caliber of cuisine.”

General manager **Guy Lombard** couldn’t be more thrilled. “We’re the first property outside of a continent to be given this distinction,” he explains. “Since the Michelin Guide and Gault Millau do not award stars or points outside of the continents, the Grand Chef title is a way to demonstrate our standard and elevate the position of our restaurant. In the last two years our revenue has steadily increased by 10 percent a year.”



William Bradley Addison San Diego, California

William Bradley, also 35, has been at Addison from the word “go.” He began planning and development five years ago, working closely with owner **Douglas Manchester** to open after one year. Bradley felt that Manchester’s vision, coupled with San Diego’s culture and climate, would be a perfect fit for his joie de vivre style. And how right he was. “I think what sets the restaurant apart is that we believe in what we believe in, and we dare to be different. We don’t follow trends, we follow genuine hospitality,” says Bradley. “That’s what I really admire and respect about Relais & Châteaux. Every property has so many different touches and they’re so unique. We’re very excited, honored, and humbled to be a part of such an amazing group of people.” The exposure given to Addison by partaking in Relais & Châteaux events worldwide has Costello excited for new clientele. “All of these outlets are adding not only worldwide notoriety, but again we see more and more people from the international sphere coming in.”



Joseph Lenn Blackberry Farm Walland, Tennessee

Joseph Lenn, 34, became executive chef at Blackberry Farm just this past August, but his splash is leaving ripples far and wide. When Lenn first came to Blackberry Farm, it was 10 years ago for a three month *stage* doing breakfast and lunch; four years later, he was back and he’s been spinning his garden-focused cuisine ever since. “It’s very simple southeastern regional cuisine that’s garden driven. I don’t look at the calendar because I like to let whatever is coming from the ground dictate when we need to change the

Top: Meringue/lemon tart sits atop fresh raspberries, with grenadine/sugar-coated spaghetti by Stéphane Mazières (center, left). Bottom: Dover sole with kumquat confit and watercress by William Bradley (center, right).



menu,” says Lenn. Take, for instance, his poached trout with buttermilk consommé and watercress. The trout and watercress come from the creek on the premises, and the buttermilk comes from a local dairy. Or grits, made from an heirloom corn variety grown on-site and hand-ground by the gardener. “Location sets us apart, but the cuisine itself, which is very, very regional, is our biggest allure,” boasts Lenn. “The Grand Chef title is the biggest honor of my cooking career. I’m very humbled to be with a group of the most distinguished chefs in the world. I’ve seen a lot of these guys and what they do, and ours is so different. I didn’t think it would ever happen, but I couldn’t be more thrilled.”

Christopher Kostow Meadowood Napa Valley St. Helena, California

Christopher Kostow, 34, hit the ground running when he joined Meadowood Napa Valley in February 2008. With the resort already in possession of two Michelin stars, Kostow not only upheld Meadowood’s standing, but was awarded a third star last year. “We’re kind of relentless in the pursuit of what we want to do, sometimes to a fault. Our biggest fear is to be stagnant. We’re constantly trying to improve. This isn’t a neighborhood restaurant. Clients come here once a year, or maybe once a lifetime. We have one chance to communicate who we are,” states Kostow. He is driven by the Napa Valley—they grow much of their own produce on the premises—and strives to create an experience that he describes as “evocative, not provocative.” “Trying to approach food from a cerebral point of view, you tend to muddle flavors and products. We try to take something familiar and make it bigger than the sum of its parts.” Having also won the Grand Chefs Trophy 2011 (presented by Relais & Châteaux and Taittinger), Kostow is surrounded by a plethora of accolades that is sure to increase Meadowood’s audience. “It’s been really amazing,” exclaims Kostow. “It’s just an honor to be in such esteemed company.”

Jérôme Ferrer Restaurant Europea Montreal

Jérôme Ferrer, 37, created Restaurant Europea in May 2002 with two of his friends only two months after their arrival in Canada. Ferrer, a playful chef, defines his cuisine as “techno-emotional.” He combines a wide repertoire of French and Spanish techniques with the scientific food movement, while playing with the client’s emotions and trying to elicit food memories. “I like to amuse the client by offering something like cotton candy that is sure to reawaken childhood memories,” says Ferrer. He is deeply dedicated to sustainability and sources almost all of his ingredients from the area. “My cuisine is created from local products because I believe it’s a chef’s duty to be an ambassador for local producers and craftsmen.” According to general manager Cécile Kilidjian, Restaurant Europea has already seen an increase in business and notoriety, particularly from visitors outside of Quebec and Canada. “The Relais & Châteaux Grand Chef title means joining a big and beautiful family of great professionals worldwide. In a few months we have noticed new faithful patronage—tourists and locals alike—because the sign is a pledge of quality everywhere, and it’s unique in the world.” ■

From top: Sumac-dusted bison with chanterelle mushrooms, beets, spinach, and hazelnuts by Joseph Lenn (right). Christopher Kostow (left) dishes up smoked Spanish mackerel with ashen potato, *escabèche*, and frozen *crème fraîche*. Jérôme Ferrer’s signature amuse bouche, lobster cappuccino, at Restaurant Europea.