

H-TOWN : EXECUTIVE LIVING

A culinary collaboration for the ages

A high-end Houston benefit dinner later this month pairs rare, exotic vintages with dishes prepared by four global gastronomic gurus. \$2,500 buys a seat at the table.

BY JENNIFER A. JOHNSON
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The last time internationally acclaimed chefs Thomas Keller, Daniel Boulud and Jerome Bocuse of the Bocuse d'Or Foundation came together for a benefit in New Orleans in 2010, the event was dubbed the "Dinner of the Decade" by local food

writers.

Organizers hope their next reunion, in Houston this time, can give that event a run for its money.

The culinary masters are joining forces for a Sept. 29 gourmet event, the World Master Chefs Dinner, hosted at a private Houston residence to benefit the Harris County Sheriff's Office Foundation.

They will be joined by Richard Rosendale, executive chef at The Greenbrier in West Virginia, who will represent the U.S. at the prestigious Bocuse d'Or 2013 global cooking competition in Lyon, France, after winning the Bocuse d'Or USA competition in January.

The World Master Chefs Dinner in Houston will raise awareness for Bocuse d'Or USA, a nonprofit devoted to promoting culinary excellence in young and aspiring American chefs. Boulud, Keller and Bocuse all sit on the board.

The swanky affair will be held in the River Oaks home of Deana and Larry Blackburn. Seating is limited to 150 guests, and individual tickets start at \$2,500. Deana said the limited number of tickets is to ensure the highest food quality. Guests will have the opportunity to watch the chefs working collaboratively on the multicourse dinner during an open-air cocktail hour before the seated dinner.

Houston wine expert and author Denman Moody paired the wines with the dishes being prepared for the event and said oenophiles should be thrilled with the selections.

"You don't just try the wine, you try to get the wines that go together (with the food) to make beautiful, perfect matches," he said.

Guests will get to try the latest offering from three branches of the Rothschild dynasty in a new blend of bubbly grown in France's Champagne region, known as Barons de Rothschild champagne. While each branch of the family has its own wine, this unusual Rothschild family "reunion" represents their first collaborative effort, and their initial foray into high-end champagne.

Moody said the Rothschild brut, a blend of 60 percent chardonnay and 40 percent pinot noir and pinot meunier from the Champagne region's best vineyards, pairs well with a light seafood dish, chicken or a



Houston wine expert Denman Moody (left), holding a bottle of Barons de Rothschild champagne that will be served at the Houston dinner. Inset: Chef Thomas Keller plating one of his mouth-watering masterpieces.

PHOTO COURTESY OF BOCUSE D'OR FOUNDATION

ERIC KAVNE/HBU

"not-too-sweet desert."

Each wine in the blend is aged at least three years, producing a careful balance that can be enjoyed as an aperitif or throughout the whole meal, he said. The Barons de Rothschild champagne has notes of pear, fresh hazelnuts and almonds, combined with very fine bubbles. A bottle runs about \$100 at retail.

Dolce, a rare blend of late harvest semillon and savignon blanc, is on the dinner's wine menu for the dessert course. The 20-acre Napa Valley winery is the only American winery that produces a late-harvest wine, featuring hints of apricot, melon and citrus. It is produced by allowing a mold, known as botrytis cinerea, to attack the grapes, shriveling the fruit in the process and concentrating the sugars and flavor. A bottle of Dolce also costs about \$100 retail.

Moody was coy about revealing the dessert details, but he did give this hint: "Great dessert wines do not go well with desserts that are too sweet," Moody said. "It's very rich and luscious."

He said wine lovers who aren't able to

attend the World Master Chefs Dinner can find limited quantities of high-end California wines at the downtown flagship location of Houston-based Spec's Wines, Spirits & Finer Foods.

Moody said good Bordeaux wines are always fashionable and tasty. While the prices of the best Bordeaux vintages run over \$1,000 a bottle, there are plenty of competitors on the market that can be purchased for \$100 to \$200. Among his recommendations: Clos Fortet, Troplong Mondot, Duhart Milon, Haut-Bailly, Leoville-Poyferre and Lynch-Bages.

If that price tag is still a little high, Moody said wine aficionados can enjoy chardonnays from California with a "kiss of oak" from the Russian River Valley, Sonoma Coast, Carneros, Santa Maria Valley, Rita Hills or Santa Lucia Highlands. Those cost about \$30 to \$40 a bottle and are a more-affordable version of white Burgundies from France.

"The minimalist approach is in," Moody said.

"If you have fabulous grapes, then you

THE WORLD MASTER CHEFS DINNER

FEATURING: Renowned chefs Thomas Keller, Daniel Boulud, Jerome Bocuse and Richard Rosendale

THE CAUSE: Benefiting The Harris County Sheriff's Office Foundation, which provides protective equipment and continued officer training as well as financial support to families of deputies wounded and killed on duty, and also benefiting Bocuse d'Or USA.

WHEN: 7 p.m., Sept. 29

WHERE: The home of Larry and Deana Blackburn
TICKETS: Limited seating remains, \$2,500 per ticket. Online reservations at hcsf.org or call 800-956-8187.



do as little as you can so you don't screw it up." ■

JENNIFER A. JOHNSON is a freelance writer.