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Kai High Fives

Opened in 2002 with the Sheraton Wild Horse Pass Resort & Spa, Kai remains, five years on, Arizona's only AAA Five-Diamond and Forbes Five-Star restaurant.

Story by David M. Brown

FEATURING “NATIVE AMERICAN with Global Influences” cuisine prepared by Chef de Cuisine Joshua Johnson and staff, Chandler-based Kai celebrates local and regional cuisine in an atmosphere that is exceptional, sophisticated and sacred.

On the 372,000-acre Gila River Indian Community, the resort includes 500 themed rooms focusing on the heritage, culture, art and legends of the Pima and Maricopa tribes. Also on the 2,400-acre campus are the Forbes Four-Star Native American Aji Spa; 36 holes of the Troon-managed Whirlwind Golf Club; the 1,000-acre Koli Equestrian Center; and a boat cruise to nearby attractions.

In Zagat 2013 America's Top Restaurants Survey, Kai was awarded the highest rating as the best food-rated restaurant for Phoenix/Scottsdale, and Kai has also received recognition

from OpenTable Diners' Choice Awards as the No. 1 Best Restaurant in the United States for service, ahead of even the famed French Laundry in California. “We are constantly inspired by our chef and service teams who continue to deliver legendary food, service and culture befitting of these honors,” says Bunty Ahamed, the resort's general manager.

Once again this year, Kai will host its wine dinner series in partnership with several acclaimed vineyards the second Tuesday of every month through July. Kai's lead sommelier, Thomas Klafke, and Chef Johnson will pair the award-winning cuisine with wines from equally outstanding Italian vineyards in Tuscany, Piedmont, Sicily and central parts of the country. To celebrate the third year of Kai's wine dinner series, Klafke and Chef Johnson have paired five wines and entrees (not necessarily included in the wine dinners):

2008 DuMOL Russian River Valley Syrah (Grilled Tenderloin of Tribal Buffalo) — “This wine exhibits a broad range of beautiful black fruit flavors, such as blackberry, cassis and fully ripened black cherry. It also has such an amazing aromatic profile boasting generous amounts of blackberry, blueberry, coffee grind and an exotic gaminess. We love the way this wine pairs with the buffalo because it’s a cooler-weather syrah that benefits from a balanced acidity, silky texture and moderate alcohol level. The buffalo tenderloin is very lean, and thus a wine with a soft texture won’t overwhelm the delicate gaminess of the meat.”

2009 Dopff & Irion Gewürztraminer (Sous Vide Roots, Asparagus and Exotic Mushrooms in Their Soil) — “We love this pairing because this wine shows a beautiful floral complexity on the nose and allows one to enjoy these aromas while they also enjoy the wonderful plating arrangement, which also resembles a bouquet of flowers. The wine also demonstrates a fantastic minerality and texture on the palate that allows the different roots, vegetables and mushrooms to exhibit their natural earthiness and spiciness. Perhaps the favorite part of this wine pairing is that the wine is slightly off-dry, and that slight touch of sweetness is a brilliant match for the candied local pecans which are sweet, spicy and bitter.”

2009 Renato Ratti Ochetti Nebbiolo d’Alba (Escargot, Wild Mushrooms and Caramel Goat Cheese) — “The immense richness of the truffle crema and pork belly nuggets which accompany the escargot really call out for a red wine with a beautiful balance of both bright acidity and velvety tannins. The flavors of this wine are very seductive, with stewed bing cherry notes, unsweetened cocoa powder, leather and black plum. This wine seems to really meld and fold into the dish with a

stunning harmony.”

2010 Celler El Masroig “Les Sorts” Rosat (Saffron-Poached Spanish Turbot) — “With this dish, we go somewhat regional, pairing this gorgeous and simple Spanish dry rosé with this delicate white-flesh fish caught just off the coast of Spain. The wine is elegantly built around a soft core of wild strawberry and citrus fruits and contains a mild mineral character reminiscent of the sea. The texture of the wine is somewhat round and waxy on the finish but provides a nice spike of tart grapefruit, which is an amazing match with the illusive but surprising bursts of citrus you get with the Finger Lime ‘caviar’ that chef uses to brighten the dish. The wine is also notably gracious with the asparagus and provides a perfect neutrality with [the vegetable’s] often regnant flavor profile. We serve the wine nice and chilled, too, which helps to balance the spice of the traditionally prepared sauce diavolo the dish is finished with.”

2010 Stonestreet “Upper Barn” Chardonnay (Potpourri of Butter-Basted Lobster, Guaymas Shrimp and Diver Scallops) — “This is rich and creamy chardonnay and ‘California-style’ in every sense of the phrase. It’s a wine not bashful about its succulent and almost over-the-top oak barrel regimen. However, this fat and slightly heavy type of chardonnay is exactly what we’re searching for because of the rich sauce that accompanies the dish. The wine must match the sultry and smooth texture of the sauce but also requires the wine to have sufficient acidity to cut through its richness and cleanse the palate.” ■

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