



Living Gourmet, The Fred Bollaci Way

Crowning Thomas Henkelmann & Homestead Inn as Connecticut's Premier Golden Palate Partners

Written by Cindy Clarke

The last thing you want to do when you are dining at an award-winning French restaurant is think about your diet. After all just the mere thought of a culinary rich dinner, exquisitely prepared by a chef not only schooled by the masters, but trained at a restaurant that was awarded three coveted Michelin stars makes this verboten anyway you look at it. Except, of course, if you are Fred Bollaci, the most inspirational and fabulously fit gourmet food expert to burst on the mind-your-calories scene with a healthy dining message unheard of to date. An attorney, author and self-styled lifestyle expert, Fred Bollaci ate his way to a 150 pound weight loss in just one year while dining at leading gourmet restaurants in the United States and Europe. His nutritional feast took him from Palm Beach to New York City and the Hamptons, up the

New England Coast, across the country to California and on to Italy. He was wined and dined, feted and fed by the best chefs in the world, savoring and sampling the finest food and wines available today...which is why *Venü* was especially eager, mouth wateringly so, to join him for dinner at the newly anointed Golden Palate Partner, Thomas Henkelmann Restaurant at Homestead Inn in Greenwich, Connecticut.

Discerning patrons from all over the world have flocked here for its contemporary French fare and elegant white glove hospitality ever since owners Thomas and Theresa Henkelmann first invited guests to dinner and an overnight stay in 1997. Monkeys from the St. James Club in the Place Vendôme in Paris playfully pose from nooks and crannies watching over patrons enchanted with the setting. Treasures collected from



the Portuguese Spice Route inspire beverages in the handsome wood paneled bar. Sitting rooms with Zebra club chairs are warmed by fireplaces and striking Moroccan and Indian accents. Bed chambers, spacious and soothing, are constantly evolving to tell storied tales that are personally pleasing and historically fascinating.

They come for the food too, of course, where appetizers tease with tastes extraordinaire, entrées are dressed in delicate sauces that are kissed with garden fresh herbs and seasonings flavor full, and desserts promise ecstasy, sinfully

sensual and palate pleasing with every bite. But they are equally enamored with the service and presentation, the beautiful table d'art experience that has earned Chef Henkelmann internationally coveted distinction as Grand Chef, Tradition et Qualite, Les Grandes Tables du Monde by Relais & Châteaux, along with receiving a 4-star rating by The New York Times.

Hailing from Germany's Black Forest region near the Alsatian border of France – steeped in tradition, it's famous for its wines and cuisine – Chef Henkelmann's culinary creations are deeply rooted in the soul of the countries where he first lived and worked. They reflect both his classic training in French haute cuisine

at some of Europe's finest restaurants as well as his German sensibility to pay meticulous attention to every detail. My grandparents were German so I am familiar with the oft-repeated saying "Wenn schon, denn schon." Loosely translated, it means that if something is worth doing, it is worth doing right. Half way will

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never do. Spend an evening at the Inn and these words of wisdom come to life in the impeccable décor of the restaurant, the attentive efficiency of its über-professional, always accommodating wait staff, the outstanding collection of wines, sommelier selected to pair perfectly with its carefully crafted menu choices, and the restaurant's "passionate commitment to exceptional dining quality."

I am borrowing a phrase here, quoting one of the standards by which Fred Bollaci evaluates dining establishments like Thomas Henkelmann for his Signature Golden Palate Partner awards, a well-earned recognition that is poised to turn the tables on the way diners approach healthy eating and dieting – without sacrificing flavor, finesse or fun. Those restaurants that meet Fred's standards only use the freshest, highest quality seasonal ingredients for their menus

In spite of my trepidations – among them the thought of doggedly declining a glass of my favorite French wine, passing on crusty baguettes warm from the oven, ordering salad sans dressing, and eating a simply grilled fish

or chicken breast, skin off – the scene was set for a night of treats that would prove to be eye-opening, palate pleasing, waist-watching and surprisingly doable.

"It's more about eating gourmet food, your way," explained Fred as we sat down for dinner together in a restaurant where even the hand-painted plates, exclusively created by artist Annie-Paul for Thomas Henkelmann, looked delicious. Eating healthy should be part of your lifestyle he told me. And if that includes dining out at fine dining establishments most nights, then you might want to know how to indulge without adding an unwanted bulge. Determined to lose weight the way he did and still savor every wonderful melt-in-your-mouth morsel, I vowed to have what he was having.

Fred got the night rolling by ordering a glass of champagne to toast our dinner, telling me that denial is not part of his healthy gourmet lifestyle. I switched it up a bit by succumbing to a glass of red wine, 125 calories of French fruit of the vine. As a certified sommelier, Fred's healthy gourmet approach naturally incorporates fine wine as a complement to most meals.

While we were sipping and savoring, out came the chef's amuse bouche, a bite-size serving of baby shrimp two ways, sautéed in a red wine sauce infused with shallots and embraced by a blush of lobster sauce, that put a tentative smile on my face. I looked over at my coach for his call. "Enjoy," he said.

After devouring that first tasty tidbit I was already prepared to skip the appetizing appetizers. Fred surprised me again by ordering the soup du jour, a medley of organic vine-ripened tomatoes feathered with basil hand picked from the garden out back – without the semolina dumplings. "Soup, filling and fulfilling, is always a great choice to keep you from overdoing it later," Fred advised. "And you really don't need the dumplings," he added, saying that the best restaurants will accommodate your requests. He noted, "Having consommé or broth before meals decreases your cravings for more food."

The soup sounded good but what about the Yellow Fin Tuna, seared rare and served cold with mango-pineapple chutney, micro greens



and light curry vinaigrette, that caught my eye? “Go for it,” said my dining buddy, who affirmed that a small serving of each of these ingredients was well within reason. I was beginning to fall in love my new healthy gourmet lifestyle at this point, wondering what I had to cut out when it came to ordering the main course. Regrettably but wisely, we passed on the bread. I watched as Fred took a sip of water, then another one, slowly soaking in the elegant ambiance of the Inn’s dining room. “Drinking a lot of water between courses helps you feel fuller sooner, negating the desire to eat things you really don’t need.” Like the bread, I thought.

Throughout our dinner Fred counseled me with advice hard won and faithfully followed. “Make sure you are modifying your behavior for the right reasons. For example, if you go on a diet to impress someone with your weight loss, your plan won’t likely succeed. The best reason for starting something new is to do it for your own wellbeing. Transformation requires meaningful motivation, personal commitment and self-discipline.” Fred’s transformation included learning to enjoy food and wine more, while consuming less and exercising daily. He reminded me that successful pursuits required focusing on what you can do and not what you can’t do. I made a mental note to remember that.

He also said it is important to eat what you like. “Eating healthy gourmet food is not about what you are giving up, but what you are getting that’s important.” Less is more when it comes to gourmet dining so Fred makes it a point to enjoy small portions of the foods he loves, never hesitating to ask the waiters to modify the menu to meet his needs.

“The best chefs, like Thomas Henkelmann, will go out of their way to make sure their guests are satisfied,” said Fred. “Restaurants that will not accommodate special dietary requests are not places where I want to dine.” Or places that receive the coveted nod from Fred Bollaci’s Golden Palate recommendations I learned.

To make Fred Bollaci’s esteemed list, restaurants have to be at the top of their game in every way. Quality is key – organic farm-to-table ingredients as well as vegetarian and gluten-free options top the list – as is gracious, unpretentious hospitality. According to Fred Bollaci, what distinguishes a good restaurant from a great Golden Palate partner is the “staff, chefs, and owners who go the extra mile to personalize the dining experience, who take the time to get to know their clients, and anticipate

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their needs. Restaurants, hotels and destinations that truly understand this distinction and do their very best to create an environment where their guests not only feel welcome, cared for and appreciated, but also are made to feel at home, earn the coveted Golden Palate Partners Certificate of Excellence and membership in an exclusive family.”

Which bring us back to our gourmet, your way, dinner, where we were just about to order the main course. I was feeling happily satisfied at this point in the meal, having delighted in a midway salad of Boston lettuce, topped with tiny lingonberries and shaved parmesan and kissed by a drizzle of black truffle oil, although I wondered if I would be allowed to imbibe in a second glass of wine with my entrée.

I waited for Fred to give me a cue. He ordered a glass of wine with the special striped Sea Bass, a mild white fish, dressed in herbs and finished to melt-in-your-mouth perfection. The menu said it was prepared with jumbo asparagus, leaf spinach and fingerling potato purée; Fred asked our waiter to leave off the potatoes. I mimicked his order, thrilled that I was practicing the mindful dining that Fred espoused.

Nirvana on a plate followed, effectively negating any thought of dessert. Is this how Fred did it? It seemed to me that he allowed himself healthy tastes of his favorite foods, tempered his appetite with wise choices, water and waiting, and savored, slowly, the entire dining experience without rushing food from his plate to his fork.

Would he order dessert? Fresh berries would typically be his dessert of choice but truth be told, our dinner at the Thomas Henkelmann restaurant in the Homestead Inn proved to be one of the most satisfying and gratifying meals

I’ve had in recent memory, and both of us were too full to eat another bite.

As we sat at the table, Chef Henkelmann surprised us with a plate of sweet confections that under different circumstances would be impossible to resist.

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What you need, I learned, is a healthy gourmet lifestyle that is all about quality, not quantity, a credo that Chef Henkelmann also strictly adhered to. “I believe in honest, clean cooking,” he said, authentic in every way and avoiding artificial anything. “I use seasonal vegetables and fruits in my dishes, many from our own garden out back.”

He sources his meat from farms faithful to natural, organic practices. His seafood virtually swims to his kitchen. He always checks out each product before serving it to his guests, then he presents it so that it looks inviting in every way. Think Monet of the culinary world and you’ll get an idea of both the artistic vision and impressive execution with which he plies his craft.

His menus showcase his passion on a plate, perfected over his 18-year reign at this Connecticut gem. What makes dining here even more memorable is the Chef’s genuine love of cooking and conversation, both of which were stimulating, satisfying and an exercise in good taste. Which, I might add, is very similar to Fred’s philosophy on dining out.

I asked Fred where he was headed next, eager to hear about more Golden Palate Partner destinations like the Thomas Henkelmann. He shared an itinerary that sounded like the who’s who of leading restaurants, many of which are spotlighted with recipes in reviews, blogs and videos on his website. His upcoming memoir ~ The Golden Palate Diet and Lifestyle™ Your Life Your Way Gourmet!™ ~ includes healthy gourmet recipes from 80 of the nation’s top restaurants from coast-to-coast, and is currently being reviewed by major publishing houses. His memoir and Michelin-esque Golden Palate Guide to Healthy Gourmet Dining, and both due out in 2015-2016.

He also recently named 70 Golden Palate Italia Partners throughout Italy and is also currently writing a follow-up book on healthy gourmet living and dining in Italy. In his role as the gourmet guru, he covers a lot of ground, literally. Key to his diet transformation is his dedication to exercise, not with personal trainers, but with a personally motivated regimen of walking, jogging, swimming, and cycling, and the occasional marathon.

Some 150 pounds ago, Fred admitted that he had trouble walking into some of his favorite restaurants where he was reluctant to walk away from the table before stuffing himself. “Take that first step,” said Fred, “and keep on going. You’ll be pretty amazed at where it takes you.” □

To learn more about Fred Bollaci Enterprises, LLC, the definitive international authority on healthy gourmet living, visit www.fredbollacienterprises.com. To learn more about Thomas Henkelmann and Homestead Inn, located in Greenwich, Connecticut, visit www.homesteadinn.com