

# ARTISTRY AND ALCHEMY

OPEN KITCHEN'S FIRST MEET THE MAKERS WINE DINNER

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Opposite: Chef Hue-Chan Karels and Chef Erica Tai created a tasting to remember. Here, Wild-Caught Alaskan Sablefish with Miso Beurre Blanc, Cauliflower Purée, Crispy Swiss Chard & Squid Ink Tuile. The sablefish is from Beck & Bulow. This page: A crew of friends toasted the chefs with Vivac wines at Open Kitchen.



Open Kitchen is known for cooking up flavorful fun at its catered events, cooking classes, private parties and other edible experiences. A recent gathering of dinner guests, though, took things to new heights, when this collaborative culinary hub served up an artful evening of creativity, camaraderie and sheer delight.

In part, the rejoicing arose from the coming together of friends and strangers after two long years of pandemic isolation. But clearly, much more was at work, for this event marked Open Kitchen's inaugural Meet the Makers Collaborative Wine Dinner pairing Beck & Bulow's premium meats and seafood and Vivac Winery's award-winning New Mexico wines with six courses of Open Kitchen's culinary wizardry. The result was nothing short of alchemy.

"It was such a beautiful night and it really made my heart sing," said Open Kitchen founder/owner and chef Hue-Chan Karels. "There was a wonderful perfect

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the fresh basil oil. Everything we do, I literally spend weeks, sleepless nights, trying to imagine how the flavors will come together. Most often it does really work.”

Open Kitchen was founded as a collaborative culinary center and Karels works closely with her team, which she credits for contributing to

storm, so to speak. During the pandemic there was such a hunger for gathering and people craved the desire for everyone coming together. We had 45 people, packed, it was a sell-out. Everyone was feeling a specialness to be among each other. There was a hunger for connection, a hunger for seeing food created in a very special way.”

Indeed, each and every dish at this Meet the Maker's dinner seemed to spring from a meditation on beauty and melody. With a symphony of flavors, the presentations resembled an exquisitely rendered still life. Take, for instance, the passed hors d'oeuvres: Wild Boar Bacon Mille Feuille with Citrus Mascarpone Cheese and Mini Bao with Gochujang-Hibiscus Candied Salmon Belly, featuring Beck & Bulow's specialty bacon and salmon belly. The colors and composition created an artistry that almost looked too good to eat. Vivac Winery's 2020 Rosé of Sangiovese added light, bright berry notes to the course.

“We're very color-oriented,” Karels said. “We always make a plate like a painting. At Open Kitchen, we do cooking classes and we always want to teach people to honor ingredients, to really look at the beauty of it before you cook it, and how you preserve the beauty despite the cooking.”

Plate after plate was served, including Silky Elk Ravioli with Creamy Purple Potato, Blackened Yellow Tomato Sauce & Basil Oil; Pan-Roasted Wild Caught Alaskan Sablefish with Miso Beurre Blanc, Cauliflower Purée, Crispy Swiss Chard & Squid Ink Tuile; and Wild Cedar Muscovy Duck Breast with Pearl Couscous, Roasted King Oyster Mushroom & Wilted Greens. Vivac's wine flowed, including Chardonnay, Abbot Merlot and a dry Riesling, made in an Alsace France style.

“Everyone's favorite dish, it seemed, was the ravioli,” Karels said. “You can't beat hand-made ravioli. We used spinach and yellow bean, making it by hand. We love the look and the taste of the purple potatoes, and the black and yellow tomato sauce is an inspiration from one of Chef Mark Miller's sauces so we kind of jazzed that in, and



Left: Chef Hue-Chan Karels, Chef Erica Tai, and Darrell Holbrooks, enjoyed the adulation of the diners. This page: Wild Boar Bacon Mille Feuille with Citrus Mascarpone, Mini Bao Buns with Gochujang-Hibiscus Candied Salmon Belly. Both bacon and salmon belly come from fine food purveyors, Beck & Bulow.



*This page:* Elk Ravioli with Creamy Purple Potato, Blackened Yellow Tomato Sauce, & Basil Oil. *Opposite:* Chocolate Pots de Crème with shards of various fruit leathers and edible flower garnishes.



the evening's success. "Erica Tai is my second hand, the chef de cuisine," Karels says. "She was one of Santa Fe Community College's Culinary Program students working with me nonstop during the pandemic, when we were making prepared meals, and now we have the ability to make inspiring food for people. It takes a lot to be a chef these days—it's not just cooking, it's creating what you do in a special way and she has been amazing. We're not like regular restaurants where we have menus that are static for a year. Every menu that we do is new, and creating and executing the vision is a talent that you have to have in your repertoire to make it in this new world of this industry. Erica has that amazing skill to create beautiful food and she's very disciplined."

Naturally this tasting dinner featured the makers themselves, and they were thrilled by the delectable pairings of their products with Open Kitchen's dishes. "It was a knock-it-out-of-the-park evening all around," said Chris Padberg, co-owner, co-founder and winemaker at Vivac Winery in Dixon. "When we're doing a wine dinner with a chef, it's hard to know what to expect. Sometimes

the pairing won't work or the dishes will be awful or the people—you have to win them over and make them love you while you're talking to them. If you can't do that, it can be kind of a dead night. But from the get-go to the end, that crowd was ready to party and be happy."

Beck & Bulow's co-owners, Tony Beck and J.P. Bulow, were impressed by Open Kitchen's imaginative, contemporary creations using their ingredients. "Our heartfelt thanks goes to Open Kitchen for honoring the makers," said Bulow, whose business offers premium wild game, buffalo and seafood online and in an old-style Santa Fe butcher shop. "We want to pass that honor to these amazing, life-changing meats and seafoods that were featured. The best chefs use the best ingredients, so it was great to work with Chef Hue-Chan who highlighted our local bison, elk, and Alaskan wild salmon and sablefish."

[openkitchenevents.com](http://openkitchenevents.com)

[beckandbulow.com](http://beckandbulow.com)

[vivacwinery.com](http://vivacwinery.com)

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