



EXCURSIONS

A Twilight Dinner on Mt. Bachelor

By Mark R. Johnson



PHOTO COURTESY MT. BACHELOR SKI RESORT, MIKE HONSKA/DOUGLES STUDIOS

The "Twilight Dinner" series at Mt. Bachelor's Pine Marten Lodge marks summer's end in high style.

AS WE HEAD UP INTO the mountains, a cool late-summer's breeze stirs the air and the shadows of a departing day move through the surrounding woodlands. My wife and I are on our way to a celebrated dinner held high in Oregon's southern Cascades, and simply getting there is an event in itself.

Our 21-mile drive from Bend winds through the majestic pines of the Deschutes National Forest. Spread out below, the high desert is bronzed by evening light before the road transports us into an alpine environment. At the threshold of the mountain range, immense peaks loom up on all sides.

We park in Mt. Bachelor Ski Resort's West Village parking lot amid a small congregation of vehicles and walk to the base of the chairlift. Approaching the man stationed at the lift, I can't help but feel that

there is something positively secretive to the whole affair; aside from the three of us, there's nobody else around.

Our reservation pass, appropriately in the form of a lift ticket, gains us admittance to the last leg of the journey. Moments later, the chair lift is carrying us high above the terrain. From this elevated viewpoint, we're treated to one of greatest perspectives in the region, a panorama that includes the jutting profiles of the South, Middle, and North Sisters and the craggy visage of Broken Top.

The last segment of the ride delivers us from the cloak of the mountain's shadow into the embrace of the setting sun and our final destination, the Pine Marten Lodge. Perched on a broad ridge below the summit of Mt. Bachelor's 9,065-foot volcanic cone, this day lodge and its Skier's Palate South

Sister Restaurant offer a welcoming haven for summer visitors and winter skiers alike. There is an overwhelming sense of arrival as we stroll the final steps. Inside, we can hear the guests who've preceded us up the mountain to the lodge's annual "Twilight Dinner" series—four nights of gourmet feasting that mark the summer's end with a flourish.

Having arrived a bit early for our seating, we order two glasses of wine and step outside onto the western-facing deck. The sunset casts soft light into the landscape—mountains, lakes, and forest all swept with dusk. There's a festive air as people gather together, stage photos, or simply contemplate the scenery. Diners inside share the same view through full-length windows.

We soon move inside and slide into a cozy booth. The meal begins with an appetizer plate that captures a world of flavor: cucumber cups filled with smoked salmon mousse and topped with flying fish eggs, baby endive sprinkled with soft crumbles of rich Gorgonzola and walnuts, jumbo stuffed mushrooms, and an assortment of fresh fruit. This prelude is accompanied by a wine fit to mark the occasion—a Mt. Bachelor Oregon Chardonnay, its flavors of vanilla, apple, and spice finished with lingering oak.

The event's featured wines—from Covey Run Riesling and Copper Mountain Pinot Gris to Rodney Strong Merlot and Preston Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon—include two private labels from Eola Hills that reflect the alpine theme: the aforementioned 1997 Mt. Bachelor Oregon Chardonnay and a 1997 Mt. Bachelor Oregon Pinot Noir.

Every year the resort selects wines that "suit the flavor profile of the menu," according to Mark Perry, Mt. Bachelor's

food and beverage director. As the resort's executive chef for 12 years, Perry helped bring the annual celebration to life back in 1989. He still participates, along with Cary Stanfill, who serves as hostess of the affair, and a crackerjack cooking and wait staff, for whom the event culminates a summer's worth of occasions: numerous wedding parties, gatherings, and reunions are staged at the lodge.

The menu features four new entrées every year, and we find the selection process nearly as absorbing as the view: a tender breast of chicken stuffed with chanterelle mushrooms and fresh pears, served with a Port-and-Dijon sauce, or a pasta dish of ravioli, filled with Swiss, Parmesan, and mozzarella cheese, with sun-dried tomato pesto and a creamy vodka-dill sauce, topped with shaved Romano. There's also a Pacific halibut fillet, baked with white wine and olive oil and served in a lobster/lime cream sauce with green peppercorns; or the final option, a succulent cut of herb-crusted roast prime

rib, served au jus with creamed horseradish.

My wife orders the chicken, I select the prime rib, and we order a bottle of the Mt. Bachelor Oregon Pinot Noir, a wine redolent of black cherry. The entrées arrive with lightly grilled summer vegetables, pommes d'Henri IV or a pilaf of long-grain rice and orzo, and a choice of soup or mixed green salad, all artfully presented. A dessert tray appears, and a rich tiramisu and an even richer chocolate torte complete the experience.

As we savor the meal, we occasionally catch each other gazing beyond the windows to the dimming horizon. It seems our fellow diners are also drawn to the view; from beginning to end, this farewell to summer is as much about the singular setting as it is about the excellent food.

Later, we step back out into the evening and head for the lift. Viewed from these heights, the night sky takes on a new brilliance. Far from the lights of Bend, the stars seem to puncture the darkness, illuminating patches of lingering snow in the

nearby peaks. On the way down we tuck ourselves into the folds of a blanket—thoughtfully provided at the top of the lift—and ride into a bed of gleaming stars.



Mt. Bachelor's Twilight Dinners draw visitors from all over the Northwest; last year there was a waiting list by early August. This year, the dinners run from September 1-4. Seatings begin at 5pm, continuing at 15-minute intervals until 8:15pm. Cost is \$40 per person, \$20 for ages 12 and under, excluding beverages and gratuity. For reservations, call 800-829-2442 or 541-382-1709 or email info@mtbachelor.com. For lodging ideas, check with the Bend Chamber of Commerce at www.bendchamber.org or call 800-949-6086.



Writer Mark R. Johnson lives in Bend, Oregon, and can often be found in the Southern Cascades—with salad fork or ice ax in hand. This is his first article for Northwest Palate.

Mt. Bachelor Resort's Citrus Chicken Salad

*This dish is a favorite at Skier's Palate South Sister Restaurant, Pine Marten Lodge, Mt. Bachelor Ski Resort.
Serves 6*

LIME CHICKEN MARINADE

6 boneless chicken half-breasts
Juice of 6 limes
1 ¼ cups white wine
¾ cup olive oil
⅓ cup sugar
2 tablespoons dried basil
1 clove chopped garlic

Blend the liquids, sugar, basil, and garlic to make a marinade for the chicken. Marinate overnight in the refrigerator, using only enough marinade to cover the chicken. Extra marinade can be kept in the refrigerator for another time. (Do not reuse marinade that has had raw meat soaked in it.)

SUGARED PECANS

Makes ⅓ cup per serving
½ cup butter
½ cup dark brown sugar

1 tablespoon ground rosemary
1 teaspoon ground sage
2 cups pecans

Melt the butter in a sauté pan. Add the brown sugar and cook over medium to medium-high heat. When the sugar is melted, add the dried herbs. Heat until the sauce has a caramel-like consistency (a splash of rum will aid this process). The mixture should come to a rolling boil; whisk it to prevent scorching. Cool the sauce a bit, then toss the pecans in a bowl with the sauce. Place pecans on a baking sheet and bake 5 to 10 minutes at 350°.

CITRUS VINAIGRETTE

Juice of 2 lemons
Juice of 1 lime
¾ cup orange juice
1 cup red wine vinegar
1 tablespoon dried basil
1 teaspoon fresh ground pepper
2 teaspoons freshly chopped garlic
½ cup olive oil
2 tablespoons honey (or to taste)

Blend the juices, vinegar, basil, pepper, and garlic in a food processor. While the processor runs, add the olive oil slowly. After the oil is incorporated, add honey to taste and blend another minute.

TO ASSEMBLE

12 ounces fresh, tender greens, washed and dried
1 sweet red bell pepper, trimmed and thinly sliced
3 ounces gorgonzola cheese, crumbled

Grill the marinated chicken to an internal temperature of 165°, ideally over charcoal. Toss the greens in a bowl with the citrus vinaigrette; then place on six individual salad plates. Add some sliced sweet red bell pepper, gorgonzola cheese crumbles, and sugared pecans. Slice the freshly grilled chicken breast on the diagonal and place on top of the greens. If you like, garnish with some fresh pear or cherry tomatoes.