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# San Diego

MAGAZINE

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...AND ONE RAD COLLABORATION  
We made three beers! pg 110



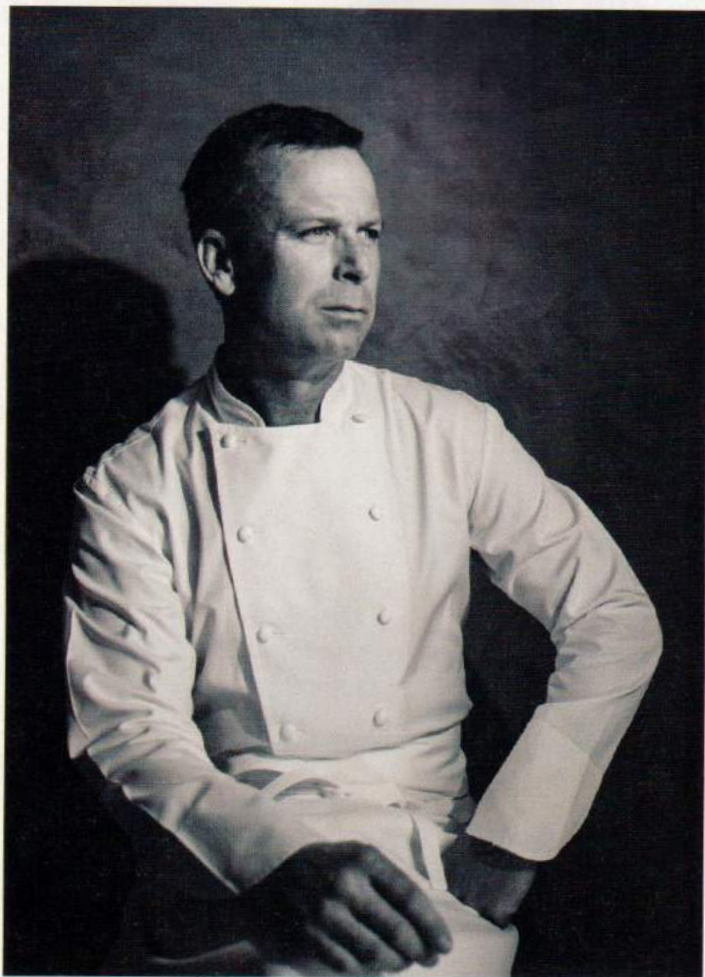
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COMMENTARY

# A Star Is Born

The meticulous standards and practices that helped Addison become San Diego's first Michelin-starred restaurant

by TROY JOHNSON

**A**wards for art are a debatable metric. But people love stars, checkmarks, trophies. To make sense of life's subjective experiences, we try to cram as much objectivity into them as possible. Former *New York Times* food critic Craig Claiborne famously did this by introducing the star-rating system for restaurants.

The storied *Michelin Guide* does the same. Started as an ad campaign by the tire company in 1900, Michelin evolved into the gold standard of restaurant ratings across the globe. It's lost a little luster over the years (partially due, I believe, to the opacity of their process, which leaves their critics' validity up for debate). But a Michelin star is

still an honor, and a hell of a marketing tool.

One Michelin star means "very good in its category but limited in some way." Two stars means "excellent cuisine delivered in a unique way." Three stars means the restaurant walks on water.

San Diego had never boasted a Michelin-starred restaurant. That changed in June when the California Tourism Board paid the tire company \$600,000 to come take stock of the state's dining landscape. The first-ever *Michelin Guide* for San Diego included plenty of "huhs." No acknowledgment of Market Del Mar, Nine-Ten, George's, or Fort Oak? Huh. Juniper & Ivy, along with seven other San Diego restaurants, received the "under-\$40" award called "Bib Gourmand" (though sneezing in J&I will cost you \$50). And they raved about the enchiladas at Puesto (though the gourmet taco spot has never served enchiladas).

But there is very little disagreement that the only restaurant awarded one Michelin star deserved it. In fact, most industry professionals argue that Addison deserved a larger constellation. To be fair, Michelin is new here. Excessive stars dilute each star's power. They're not candy.

I've waxed over the years as to what's so special about Addison's team—executive chef William Bradley, chef de cuisine Stefani de Palma, wine director Rafael Sanchez, cocktail man Ian Ward, and the service staff. It's a Great Gatsbyian ode to the art of fine dining. Diners are provided a team of attendants who provide creature comforts that most creatures didn't know they wanted, or could have. For 13 years, Bradley has focused on every minute detail of fine dining with a radical obsession. If Addison weren't a restaurant, it would be a psychological disorder.

But I, too, feel a need to codify. What specific things does Addison do or have—aside from human talent—that make them stand out? I asked Bradley for a very specific list

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about every aspect of the experience, and he obliged:

**1. Addison's manual includes 145 points of service that must be carried out for every diner.**

Pulling out the chairs for guests and leather stools for their purses. Napkin folding and placement. Using the diner's names at appropriate times. There are explicit steps for serving wine, and for cheese. "You have to know how to cut the cheese perfectly," says Bradley, "understand the flavor profiles from lightest to darkest in terms of richness, and how to arrange them on the plate."

**2. Chefs Bradley and de Palma micromanage the temperature of not only each dish, but also plateware.** Certain dishes are cooked to the exact temperature of the human mouth. Certain plates are frozen in order to preserve cold elements like granitas. "Anything that's piping hot shuts down the palate and tongue," he explains. "Anything super cold, same thing."

**3. Cooks are strongly discouraged from idly chatting about recent concerts or Tinder dates.** Bradley encourages a nearly meditative state

on execution. "We run a very quiet, calm, and chatter-free kitchen. You have to surround yourself with people who are very focused and aware of the rigors of cooking to very high expectations."

**4. While most restaurants are lucky to have one certified sommelier on staff, Addison currently has five—plus two who've earned the rare advanced status. It is a somm farm.**

**5. There are 3,600 unique wines from around the world in over 12,000 bottles, including a Pauillac 1982, a decade of Cristal vintages, two decades of vintage Krug, 43 vintages of the various Domaine de la Romanée, a vertical of d'Yquem by the glass, and 24 vintages of Madeira dating back to 1865. They have been given *Wine Spectator's* highest honor, the Grand Award, every year for 11 years.**

If it sounds excessive or far removed from the roll-up garage door casualization that's sweeping the US dining scene, that's because it is. It's a house of tradition, not trend. Bradley and his team earned their Michelin star years ago, and kept earning it for 13 years until it officially arrived. ■