

San Francisco

DEVELOPMENT

Six degrees of Thomas

The leisure destination that Keller wrought has become an emulator's playground.

Subprime-lending meltdown be damned: One wine country hamlet has seen no dip in visitor spending. "Yountville is the only municipality in the Bay Area that has not been affected by the economy," according to mayor Cynthia Saucerman, who cites the town's lack of foreclosures and a steady increase in foot traffic. She may as well also cite **the culinary force known as Thomas Keller**, who has four extremely profitable restaurants in operation in the four-square-mile town. His mother ship, the French Laundry, just celebrated its 14th year; and with Yountville's eight-year moratorium on the construction of new buildings lifted, Keller's fifth venture has been green-lighted. So, too, have projects by entrepreneurs happy to follow in Keller's clogsteps. Here, a play-by-play of noteworthy businesses (both established and in the works) and their connection to the town's patron saint. ■ NATASHA SARKISIAN



Yountville



FL **The French Laundry:** The best restaurant in the world—and one of the most expensive.
Degrees of separation: 0
Opened: 1994

B **Bouchon:** Keller's first ancillary restaurant, a French bistro serving steak frites and oysters. Think Laundry lite.
Degrees of separation: 0
Opened: 1998

BB **Bouchon Bakery:** A posh patisserie. The mayor swears by its cheese danishes, doughnuts, and savory-minted swoon over the jared.
Degrees of separation: 0
Opened: 2003

AH **Ad Hoc:** Keller gives a nod to the common folk with a family-style, four-course, prix fixe menu.
Degrees of separation: 0
Opened: 2006

IFL **Inn at French Laundry:** After being held up by Yountville's meticulous city council (said to be the strictest in Napa Valley), the big guy was given the go-ahead on his 20-room Inn. Yes, there will be a 24-hour Keller room service.
Degrees of separation: 0
Opening: Construction is set to begin in 12 to 18 months

V **Vita:** Until 2006, Laura Cunningham was the director of operations at the French Laundry (and a consultant at Per Se in New York), where some say she invented modern American formal service. Her new casual restaurant, named after her grandmother, will be Bouchon's Italian counterpart.
Degrees of separation: 1/2 (She was her longtime girlfriend)
Opening: Fall 2009

PI **Poetry Inn:** The intimate service in the three guest suites is impeccable. So is the \$60,000 meal Keller has been known to prepare for celebs and their pals. (A three-night stay and an additional meal for all guests at Bouchon or Ad Hoc are included in the elevated Degrees of separation: 1
Opened: 2005

BI **Bardessono Inn and Spa:** Far and away Yountville's largest single facility yet, this sprawling complex will have 62 rooms and an onsite restaurant, cooking school, and epicurean garden—all of which practically reek of Keller's local influence.
Degrees of separation: 2
Opening: February 2009

M **Mar(0)sonny:** Cutesy play on words aside, this high-end tasting room and art gallery from VC turned winery owner Michael Polenske of Blackbird will be the only tasting room in Yountville at which to wind down after hours—or even after a four-hour meal at the Laundry—with a glass of boutique merlot in hand.
Degrees of separation: 2
Opening: October 1

MC **Bottega:** Food Network star and longtime Napa Valley resident Michael Chiarello just opened a new southern Italian restaurant and an accompanying kitchen, NapaStyle, with a demonstrating media presence the two couldn't be more different: Keller maintains a rigid French mindset while Chiarello is associated with flavored oils and quaint salt cellars.
Degrees of separation: 180
Opening: Boutique opened in July; restaurant in September