

CRESCENDO

FESTIVAL NAPA VALLEY





SARAH WALZ

FAR NIENTE

Far Niente Executive Chef Sarah Walz joined the Far Niente culinary team in 2011 and took the helm in 2017. At Far Niente she shares her passion for food and wine via the winery's beautifully established organic gardens and world-class portfolio of Napa Valley and Russian River Valley wines.

Festival Napa Valley celebrates some of the best things in life: food, wine, art, and music. Do you have a favorite piece of music that inspires you or that you just plain love?

I like to listen to everything from Tchaikovsky to Pitbull. Music inspires me, not to mention it adds “flavor” and fun to my passion for cooking. It can also help me focus when more precision is needed. My cooking is fueled by some sort of crazy passion, much like the inspiration behind a musical masterpiece.

What is your favorite go-to ingredient? Is there an ingredient you would like to work with more, but don't because the public either isn't ready, or is unaware of it?

I love to cook with morels and ramps, but they only appear in late spring and sometimes it's so hard to wait! Each year, I make sure to pickle a few pounds of ramps, to use in the off-season, along with dried morels. I love sweetbreads and hope to encourage more people to open themselves up to trying them. When properly prepared, they can be so tender they almost melt in the mouth. Still, they have the stigma of being an organ meat, and that can be intimidating.

Napa Cabernets are full bodied and structured and work well with meat – but what else? And what other food and wine pairings inspire you?

Roasted hearty vegetables can stand up to this equally hearty red wine. Mushrooms can complement the savory and earthy notes of a great Napa Valley Cabernet, as can strong flavors like aged Gouda or aged cheddar, especially in rich polentas or risottos. As for other pairings, Dungeness crab with Chardonnay and Russian River Pinot Noir and duck are hands-down favorites. I'll also never say no to caviar and great bubbles.

Some say that cooking is an art, while baking is a science. The truth is probably more complicated. How do you see it in terms of what you do?

For me, cooking is absolutely an art. I've been curious and creative since I was a child, and cooking has been the perfect outlet for my creativity.

With its focus on precision, measurements, exact ratios, and temperatures, I do feel that baking is more of a science. Thankfully, I've worked with some great chefs who showed me the way.

That said, once you master the basic techniques, there's room for plenty of creativity, especially when building a dessert portfolio.

What do you like to eat (and drink) when your workday is over?

That's easy. I like to eat whatever someone else makes. Going out for sushi is a strong runner-up!