

A Destination For Digestifs

CELEBRATED NAPA VALLEY RESTAURANT THE FRENCH LAUNDRY
NOW SERVES SPIRITS—JUST DON'T ASK FOR A COCKTAIL

by Richard Carleton Hacker



Chef Thomas Keller (left) and Richard Carleton Hacker check out the French Laundry's new spirits program in the recently enhanced courtyard and patio, with its thermally heated flooring, which is conducive to enjoying one of the restaurant's pre-embargo Cuban cigars.

Multiple award-winning chef, restaurateur and cookbook author Thomas Keller is a perfectionist, which is why his three-Michelin-starred French Laundry restaurant in Yountville, California has a two month waiting list for reservations. His farm across the road grows vegetables that are artistically prepared and served within 24 hours of harvesting. And under the direction of Head Sommelier Dennis Kelly, MS, the wine list is impeccable. Yet something was missing: Up until a few months ago, the French Laundry had no liquor license.

Now it does, and the French Laundry spirits program is befitting the restaurant's reputation. For bourbons there is the complete range of Pappy Van Winkle's Family Reserve, including the 23 Year Old. Want something older? Try the 1911 Jim Beam specially bottled for the historic Pendennis Club, or a glass of Old Fitzgerald from 1950, at \$1,750 a pour. For tequila it's Casa Dragones, Don Julio Real and San Francisco World Spirits Competition Double Gold winner Asombroso Añejo. Cognacs include a 1946 Hine Grand Champagne and the century-old Hennessy's Queen's Silver Jubilee, bottled in 1977, available for \$1,450 a pour. Other spirits—including armagnacs from 1893, Chartreuse from 1940 and calvados from 1933—help round out the collection of 50 different bottles. Just don't ask for a cocktail made with these rarities.

"The whole purpose of the program is to treat spirits as a digestif," says Keller, "not as an apéritif or a cocktail. Instead, we want to encourage guests to linger after their meal and enjoy whatever they choose from our seven categories of spirits, but making sure on our part that they are very specific spirits, very rare and sometimes even curated spirits. Just to have another bar



where you can get the same thing you could anywhere else doesn't resonate with me. Certainly if you want to have scotch, bourbon or tequila with your meal we'll accommodate that, but we don't do cocktails—there are no mixed drinks served at the French Laundry." ■■