

Client: GRACE

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Home is where the haute is

No matter how famous a chef becomes, he's still for hire **By DANA HARRIS**

You'll never play nine holes with Tiger Woods. Frank Gehry won't look over your plans for a new deck. But to get a celebrity chef in your kitchen, all you need to do is ask.

Grace's Neal Fraser faces off on the Food Network's "Iron Chef America" Jan. 22. Sona's David Myers is a Food & Wine chef of the year. And Wolfgang Puck is a brand name unto himself — but, for a price, any of them would be happy to be your personal chef for a night.

"It's a little like a rock star who plays at a bar mitzvah, but they're not supposed to say anything because it damages the exclusivity," says Norman Van Aken of Norman's on Sunset, adding, "I don't think we're there yet."

Today, the most successful chefs acquire global profiles that can extend to TV shows, cookbooks, publicists and agents. However, unlike an author or actor, a chef's acclaim always boils down to intimately serving the public.

Still, no one hires a celebrity chef solely for the sake of being fed. Jeffrey Klarik hired former Bastide chef Alain Giraud for "Friends" producer David Crane's birthday, but eating was only the final act.

"He gave me a day of cooking with Alain," says Crane, one that began with a morning of shopping at the Santa Monica Farmers Market and ended eight hours later after a four-course lunch that included seared scallops with cranberry bean ragout and molten chocolate cake. "It was like watching a painter," he says. "It wasn't cooking. It was art."

Giraud was acknowledged as one of the city's finest chefs when he ended his partnership in Bastide two years ago. (Owner Joe Pytka announced that he would close Bastide later this month and reopen under a new name this spring.) Since then, Giraud has been a private chef, cooking teacher and consultant through his own Four Stars Private Cuisine — and in no particular hurry to return to the public.

"Maybe we'll do (another restaurant)," he says. "I'm waiting to have the right concept, location, people."

In the meantime, "This is more adventurous, for sure. I like it a lot."

"Everyone gets a kick out of it," says Myers, who won't identify his clients but fondly recalls cooking dinner for eight investment bankers in Malibu. "They spent \$60,000 in wine, and it was six courses, right on the ocean. It was awesome."

Chefs also find themselves working in kitchens that are sometimes nicer than the ones in their own



Armed and ready, Grace chef-owner (and Iron Chef America competitor) Neal Fraser

homes, although Myers says he's also been the first person to turn on the oven two years after the owners moved in. And Van Aken remembers panicking when a plastic lid melted on a heretofore hidden griddle, only for a woman to walk in the kitchen and say, "Oh, that's OK. I never use the thing anyway."

However, chefs say all of it would be meaningless without the sense that their clients appreciate the experience as much as the meal.

Fraser remembers cooking a dinner for 10 "and half the people were A-list actors." However, that wasn't what made the evening memorable.

"Everyone was amazingly appreciative of what we were doing," he says. "That's what it really comes down to. I never want to be someone's houseboy. I don't want to hear, 'While you're sautéing, why don't you polish my shoes and walk the dog.' Being a private chef is much more lucrative, (but) I've drawn a line in the sand. I relate to people who really enjoy food."

WANT A CHEF IN THE HOUSE? CHECK OUT PAGE V2

DIAL-A-CHEF: TAKEOUT FROM YOUR KITCHEN

CHEF	RECENT MENU	REQUIREMENTS	DINNER FOR 12 (INCLUDES FOOD AND SERVICE)
David Myers , Sona (310) 659-7708 sonarestaurant.com	Maine lobster with pea wasabi purée; roasted squab with foie gras and figs; and milk chocolate tart with crème fraîche sorbet	Anywhere from 1-30 people	\$3,000
Jared Simons , Violet (310) 453-9113 violetrestaurant.com	House-cured white salmon; Kabocha squash soup with sage croutons; braised short ribs; caramelized pineapple with cinnamon gelato	None, other than making it worth his time	\$2,400
Alain Giraud , Four Stars Private Cuisine alaingiraud.com	Fresh foie gras sautéed with pears; white truffle custard; Maine scallops with lemon and pistachio sauce; and warm chocolate cake with mandarin sorbet	Twelve-person minimum	\$4,800
Norman Van Aken , Norman's on Sunset (310) 657-2400	Crispy yuca shrimp; California Osetra caviar and peeky-toe crab with heirloom tomatoes and vanilla-scented hollandaise; chocolate "Goddess Cake"	Will cook for 2-50, prefers to keep it under 40	\$8,500
Neal Fraser , Grace (323) 934-4400 gracerestaurant.com	Abalone with pasta and sea beans; saddle of hare with forbidden black rice and huckleberry sauce; roasted pheasant with root vegetable ragout; chocolate truffles	Will cook for any number	\$2,200

All prices are approximate minimums and do not include wine. Per-person labor costs decrease with larger groups.