

Cindy Pawlcyn

Silver Spoon *Food Arts* presents the April 2010 SILVER SPOON AWARD for sterling performance to **Cindy Pawlcyn**, a Napa Valley original. For 30 years, as either a chef and/or as a restaurateur, Pawlcyn, 54, has been a major player in a number of the restaurants that added an attention-drawing dining layer to the Northern California region's burgeoning wine culture. Pawlcyn was there at the beginning, a claim no other major chef still cooking in the region can make.

Just saying the names of the restaurants where she's whisked and dished (mostly around St. Helena) gives a snapshot history of hospitality in the Valley: **Meadowood** as opening chef in 1980; **Rose et LeFavour**; her flagship **Mustards**, a vibrant 27 year old; **Tra Vigne** (yes, she did that!); **Cindy's Backstreet Kitchen**; and **Go Fish**, still a child at 4. To that, add her impact on the tone and tenor of the Bay Area dining scene with her involvement in such restaurants as **MacArthur Park**, **Bix**, **Roti**, **Buckeye Roadhouse**, and especially the groundbreaking **Fog City Diner** with its small plates, comfort food chic, and bespoke cocktails, a fashion statement before it was fashionable. Call it a career? Not yet. Pawlcyn is working on a fourth cookbook, *Cindy's Global Kitchen*; maintains a very active cooking hand in her three restaurants; throws the ceramic pieces displayed at Backstreet and used as serving pieces there and at Mustards; and keeps a keen eye on the scene to see if she should bag another restaurant.

"I was recently cooking at an event with my niece, who's much younger than me and very athletic, helping me out. Didn't take long for her to get bushed," says Pawlcyn, who warms up daily with yoga and a three-mile jaunt with her two chocolate labs. In baseball parlance, she can still bring it!

Pawlcyn was to the manor born, so to speak. That manor was in Minneapolis, where her father, a potato chip manufacturer, encouraged his youngest child to cook dinners for him, especially when he brought home game from a hunt. "I was catering parties with my mom in the neighborhood 41 years ago," she marvels. "That's crazy!"

A degree in hotel/restaurant management from Wisconsin-Stout and a Paris education at Le Cordon Bleu and La Varenne—all since put to good use—paved her way first at the **Pump Room** in Chicago and then Northern California. A fortuitous combination: Midwest sensibility and Golden State sensitivity backed by food product through the roof. It's led her to distill her global view of food into dishes that are accessible, well done, and addictive.

"I can get people in and out of my restaurants fast, but my food takes a while to cook, with marinades and braising and the like," she says. "I really do get up at three in the morning to make something and have it ready for when we open. I care about how something tastes, and I have to do it right.

"As chefs, I think we're all better in our own restaurants. Being there is in our blood. Watching people eat, going to their tables, that's what I enjoy. I should. I'm a restaurant chef." —JIM PORIS

