

## Frasca owners nominated for James Beard awards

By Cindy Sutter Camera Food Editor  
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In March, Frasca Food and Wine Chef and Co-owner Lachlan Mackinnon-Patterson sat in the airport in New York, continually refreshing the Web connection on his cell phone.

His location -- he had been in the city to tape an episode on "The Martha Stewart Show" that aired last week -- was a bit ironic, because the information he sought was being released in New York. The James Beard Foundation was announcing the nominees for its prestigious restaurant awards, and Mackinnon-Patterson knew that both he and his partner, Bobby Stuckey, were on the foundation's long list. Would they make the final cut?

That day, he and Stuckey found out they were both nominees, Mackinnon-Patterson for Best Chef: Southwest, which includes Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Texas and Utah; and Stuckey for a distinguished national award, Outstanding Wine and Spirits Professional.

Is it common for two people from the same restaurant to be nominated for James Beard Foundation awards?

"It happens," says Yvon Moller, director of sponsorship and special events at James Beard, a nonprofit devoted to celebrating and preserving culinary excellence. "Obviously that means that they have all their ducks in a row, so speak. It happens that they have wonderful wine service and a great chef. It just goes to say that it's a great restaurant."

The awards are considered the Oscars of the food world. Moller explains how the process works: "We have an open call for entries. Anybody can suggest a name. ... This year we had over 9,000 suggestions. The restaurant committee goes through all the entries and discusses them. They place 20 candidates in each of the categories. The semifinalists go out to 400 judges around the country, (including) 250 restaurant critics and previous winners. Five people get nominated (in each category)."

The awards will be announced at a gala June 8 in New York.

Stuckey is a previous James Beard winner, having won in the wine service category when he worked at Little Nell in Aspen. Mackinnon-Patterson was nominated as a rising chef two years ago.

"I'm honored for sure," Stuckey says. "I have been around doing different parts of the beverage industry long enough that by accident or dumb luck I have impacted some things or people think I have."

Stuckey says he's amazed to find himself in the company of the other nominees, who include David Lett of The Eyrie Vineyards, who first planted pinot noir grapes in Oregon.

But Stuckey's appearance in such rarefied company is perhaps not such a big surprise. Frasca has a national reputation on the wine scene, not least because the restaurant currently has two master sommeliers, Stuckey and Jesse Becker. There are only 87 master sommeliers in North America and 158 in the world. Under Stuckey's direction, the restaurant has served as a sort of school for master sommeliers, with about 20 people having served in a wine apprenticeship called a stage (rhymes with massage).

Becker passed his exam this year, after having come to Frasca from the Park Hyatt in Chicago.

"Bobby is certainly one of the great service sommeliers out there," he says. "That was the part of the master sommelier exam I struggled with most. (Coming to Frasca) was certainly appealing to me. There's an emphasis on education. We're constantly learning more about wine and how to please our guests."

Stuckey says having people around him studying wine helps him, as well.

"One thing is it just keeps me so sharp," he says. "These guys keep me on my toes all the time. They are reading all the time. They are studying all the time, challenging each other all the time. To keep up with them, I've got to keep studying myself."

Mackinnon-Patterson says he is very proud of his partner.

"The people he's up against are legends in our industry. Not only is he significantly younger than the other nominees, but he's the general manager, owner and master sommelier in a 14-table restaurant in

Boulder, Colo. What he's done is mentoring all these people. This place is like a (sommelier) factory sometimes."

Mackinnon-Patterson says Beard nominations can help build a restaurant.

Of his own previous nomination, he says, "That tapped us into a whole different pool of employees. Lots of cooks in San Francisco and New York, if they relocate, they don't often relocate to Boulder. When we first opened, that never happened. After the nomination and since then, we have that."

Stuckey says the experience at Frasca is different from many better-known restaurants, because he and Mackinnon-Patterson are dedicated to putting all their energy into the food, wine and service at one restaurant, rather than opening several.

"I think of myself as retro, older-school in the sense that I want to be there every night working on this craft of being the front-of-the-house person," Stuckey says. "I like the hard work. I like the intensity. People like myself just want to be on the floor. I just like that energy."

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