

## Soak up the sun in Aspen

By ANDY WANG

**C**RAZY things happen in Aspen during the week of the Food & Wine Classic, even when you're not at official events. It's Saturday afternoon. We've left the grand tasting tents (where 2012 Best New Chef Mario Carbone and Rich Torrisi served raw fluke American, one of the antipasti from their 20-course Torrisi Italian Specialties tasting menu) and wandered to the weekly farmers market.

There's a booth with two ridiculously cute alpacas — not for eating, just for petting — and a crowd is swarming. The group running the booth is Eden Vardy's Aspen T.R.E.E., which has a camp that teaches children about sustainable living and farming. Adults are also welcome for tours.

Vardy recently purchased a new toy for Aspen T.R.E.E.: a parabolic solar cooker, which looks like a satellite dish, with

### Sizzling steak (and sausages) on the street, thanks to solar power, at a farmers market

a spot in the center for a pan. This contraption, Vardy says, isn't so different from a stove. We have to call his bluff, so we buy a steak from the adjacent Crystal River Meats booth and also grab some onions and heirloom tomatoes.

The steak quickly sizzles in our pan. OK, it works. And this is more fun than cooking on a stove. An even bigger crowd swarms. Many are concerned that we're cooking alpaca meat. They relax when they learn that's not the case. Then one passerby takes a keen interest in our steak.

It's meat master Michael Sullivan, who runs the charcuterie program at Blackberry Farm, a food-focused luxury resort on 4,200 acres in Tennessee's Great Smoky Mountains. One day earlier, Sullivan

and his excellent cured meats, including a 2½-year aged ham, were at an event that introduced three Blackberry Farm small-batch beers.

But today, he's the guy squeezing our steak and telling us that we want it rare but should cook it a little longer. Then he slices it for us, and we share pieces with the crowd, including chef John Fink of San Francisco's The Whole Beast catering company.

The scene is insane — Sullivan's actual nickname is The Reverend of Fat. This is like standing on the street making sushi for the first time and having Masa Takayama show up, give you tips and then start carving raw tuna to show you how it's done. But also, we are grilling premium meats (we got some sausages from Crystal



**A CUT ABOVE:** Michael Sullivan slices our steak.

River, too) on something that looks like a satellite dish.

You can try it yourself at Aspen T.R.E.E., but let's be clear: Although chefs we ran into, including Boston nose-to-tail maven Jamie Bissonette (who's soon opening a New York outpost of his popular tapas joint Toro in the same building as Del Posto) and LA Peruvian food king Ricardo Zarate (who just opened his

new rendition of Mo-Chica), had recipes in mind when they saw the alpacas, Vardy isn't giving them up for consumption.

#### Around the festival

■ Chefs all over the festival went ham all weekend.

At the Casa Dragones party on the Dancing Bear rooftop, which drew a crowd including Thomas Keller, Grant Achatz and Bobby Flay, revelers sipped the \$275-a-bottle tequila while co-hosts George Mendes, Sean Brock and Linton Hopkins took turns slicing a smoked Edwards ham from Virginia.

The luxury ingredient of the festival, though, was clearly ibérico pork.

At Paul Grieco's Summer of Riesling house party, Ricardo Zarate smartly positioned himself in the kitchen next to all the ibérico ham ("This is pata negra!" he said joyfully), while Marcus Samuelsson took pictures of all the wine bottles with his phone and chatted with Geoffrey Zakarian.

At the Chefs Club opening

party at the St. Regis, Mendes sliced pata negra de bellota, what he called "an awesome ibérico ham."

But nobody went as ibérico mad as José Andrés, who took over a mountain mansion (listed for \$26.9 million if you're in the market) for the Cosmopolitan of Las Vegas and Wines of Spain party. There was plenty of cured porky goodness there, of course, but it was the ibérico short ribs that had many waiting patiently for seconds and thirds.

And a couple nights later, Andrés was at the festival's 30th anniversary party and Elvis Costello concert. "It's worth the wait!" Andrés shouted to the people in line for his ibérico ham topped with Spanish sturgeon caviar. Nobody argued.

■ What happens when you're Thomas Keller and show up at the Macallan party? They break out the 64-year scotch just for you. Everybody else seemed fine settling for the 18-year and the 25-year.

■ Three memorable bites at



**THE HEAT IS ON:** Eden Vardy (left) lets us cook.

the grand tasting: Jenn Louis, the 2012 Best New Chef from Portland's Lincoln restaurant, served grilled octopus with fennel, arugula, oil-cured olives and pimenton. Chris Ford, who makes desserts at Michael Mina's Wit & Wisdom in Baltimore and won the 2012 reader's poll for Best New Pastry Chef, served pistachio rocky road pudding in the Godiva Parlour. Edward Lee, the "Top Chef" contestant who runs 610 Magnolia in Louisville, KY, served seafood sausage at the Red Boat Fish Sauce booth. A Viet-

namese anchovy sauce might not seem like an everyday condiment, but Lee's bold flavors and passion for it make a strong case for why it should be.

■ Sarah Gruenberg of Chicago's Spaghetta and "Top Chef" threw what was billed to us as a "pretty chill" house party. Of course, pretty chill on a week like this meant grilled shrimp and salmon, lamb, soft-shell crabs and, not surprisingly, a spectacular pasta: fusillero with dandelion greens, bacon, English peas, tomatoes, goat butter and ricotta salata.



**NEWS NOTES**

#### TOP OF THE STRIP: Paul Qui stars at Luckyrice.

alongside San Francisco's Charles Phan and LA's Sang Yoon, but Qui stood out with his dazzling sunchoke dashi with summer vegetables and bottarga. We also dug the fried honey-sesame chicken served over a donut with jackfruit maple syrup from Colin Fukunaga and Robert Magsalin of Las Vegas' Fukuburger truck. And all the food was paired with Asian-inspired Bombay Sapphire cocktails from ace mixologists including the Cosmopolitan's own Mariena Mercer. But nobody worked harder than Aburiya Raku's Mitsuo Endo, who grilled kurobuta pork cheeks, kobe beef and chicken meatball skewers for a patient line of more than 75 people.

Raku, as you might know, is the robata-yaki/late-night chef's hangout that's part of the ever-growing collection of fab Asian restaurants on Vegas' Spring Mountain Road. Since we first visited Raku in 2008, the strip mall it's in has seen the opening of ramen shop Monta, hawker stand-influenced Big Wong and hidden sushi den Kabuto. Hard to imagine a better collection of Asian eateries anywhere outside of Asia that share the same address.

■ **A.W.**