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**THE 2015
BEST CHEFS
AWARDS**
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BEST CHEFS AWARDS 2015

A gymnast turned fine-dining all-star, a pair of lavishly bearded cocktail savants, a chef who mined his upbringing for culinary gold, a former army sergeant who found the city's sweet spot, and an enterprising empire builder. Chosen by *San Francisco's* Best Chefs Academy, this year's winners have earned the respect of their peers—not to mention the gratitude of the ravenous dining public.

BY ELISE CRAIG PHOTOGRAPHS BY LUKE ABIOL

Rising Star Chef KATIANNA HONG The Restaurant at Meadowood

Katianna Hong found her love for food when she could finally eat it. Her childhood, she says, was spent pursuing a gymnastics career, and she "had to follow a really strict diet." That changed when a tailbone injury in her early teens closed the door to the Olympics but opened the door to the world of food. Suddenly, she recalls, "I had the freedom to eat whatever I wanted."

That appetite led Hong to culinary school and an externship at Los Angeles' *Mélisse*, where she first worked in fine dining, a realm with certain parallels to gymnastics. "I liked the discipline and the intensity," Hong says. "You're always trying to be better, cleaner, and more creative."

Today, Hong is channeling that drive into her position as the Restaurant at Meadowood's chef de cuisine. Working alongside executive chef Christopher Kostow, she collaborates on new dishes and consults with Meadowood's gardener and forager-preservationist to plan menus seasons in advance.

One thing Hong doesn't pay much attention to is her status as the only female chef de cuisine at an American three-Michelin-starred restaurant. "There haven't been many women in the kitchens that I've worked in," she says. "But I like hanging out with the boys."

THE 2015 BEST CHEFS ACADEMY: A roll call of previous winners who voted on this year's inductees. Jessica Boncutter Rising Star Chef, 2008 Stuart Brioza Chef of the Year, 2013 Melissa Chou Pastry Chef, 2010 Brett Cooper Rising Star Chef, 2013 Janet Rikala Dalton Pastry Chef, 2004 Greg Dunmore Rising Star Chef, 2006 Yoon Ha Sommelier, 2012 Laurence Jossel Chef of the Year, 2009 Christopher Kostow Chef of the Year, 2012 Nicole Krasinski Pastry Chef, 2005/Chef of the Year, 2013 Renée-Nicole Kubin Wine Director, 2000 Dennis Leary Empire Builder, 2014 Belinda Leong Pastry Chef, 2012 Shelley Lindgren Wine Director, 2005 Michael Mina Chef of the Year, 2005 Rajat Parr Wine Director, 2009 Daniel Patterson Chef of the Year, 2007 Michelle Polzine Pastry Chef, 2006 Stephanie Prida Pastry Chef, 2013 Evan Rich Chef of the Year, 2014 Sarah Rich Chef of the Year, 2014 Eric Shelton Pastry Chef, 2001 Ceri Smith Booze Curator, 2013 Craig Stoll Rising Star Chef, 2000 Claudio Villani Wine Director, 2003 Thad Vogler Bar Manager, 2008 William Werner Pastry Chef, 2014