

| dining



the tables or those shining from the ornateness of the gold curtains. Maybe it's the limo lineup ready to transport guests the 70 miles back to the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area, a true world away. So much of the magic is due to the gifted, award-winning chef-owner Patrick O'Connell and his talent to transform mere ingredients into creative plates bursting with flavor. There's a touch of playfulness in his menu items, such as the Oyster Slurpees or the Seven Deadly Sins dessert.

**Meadowood** This luxury oasis with 30 tables and 18 rooms offers an almost unmatched setting for any romantic occasion.

An evening sunset over the Florida Keys enhances the romantic air of the upstairs outdoor dining experience at **Pierre's Restaurant** in Islamorada (81600 Overseas Highway, 305-664-3225). The candlelit beachfront two-story plantation-style house has a wrap-around veranda which sets the mood for a postcard-perfect evening overlooking the Florida Bay. Even if the beach is filled with boisterous music from the more casual next-door sister cafe, nothing interferes with dishes like Oysters Rockefeller with Black Truffles or Mustard-Crusted Rack of Lamb. The two restaurants are part of The Moorings, a luxury property across the street.

Kansas City is synonymous with a great cut of beef. It has also become a haven for chefs looking for an appreciative audience. **bluestem Restaurant and Wine Lounge** (900 Westport Rd., 816-561-1101) fulfills a variety of romantic expectations. Located in the artsy Westport area, husband and wife chefs Megan and Colby Garrelts have crafted a divine dining room filled with fresh flowers and candles that are reflected in over 50 vintage mirrors. They specialize in contemporary American cuisine and feature sustainable seafoods such as North Sea Turbot and Day Boat Mahi Mahi, and introduce diners to new interpretations of American desserts, such as Honey Pear Fritters. bluestem offers multiple-course tasting menus as well as a dessert tasting menu.

Napa wine country has become filled with crowded roads and jam-packed tasting rooms, but off the road in its own little corner of the world is Meadowood Resort with **The Restaurant at Meadowood**. (900 Meadowood Lane, St. Helena, 707-967-1205) The space truly pays homage to its natural setting with an open-beam ceiling and rows of windows. Terrace deck dining with a view of the Valley's mountain range and soft tree lighting define the romantic nature of the experience. The menu marries vineyard culture with the natural bounty of the region. Some of the produce comes from the chef's own garden. You might find Half Moon Bay Petrale Sole or Grass Fed Beef Tartare on the multi-course tasting and chef's menus.



**Sierra Mar**

serve a prix fixe California-style menu with Pacific Rim flavors that changes daily with an emphasis on organic, sustainable foods.

What's not to love?

# Love is in the Air

Book a table and treat your partner to an unforgettable night at one of the country's most romantic restaurants.

By Judy Liberson

Ask someone to suggest a romantic restaurant and you quickly learn that romance and dining come in many flavors. A spectacular view, candlelight, music, and of course, fine food are all part of the brew. Here is a sampling of restaurants that can turn any day into Valentine's Day.

In New York City, one restaurant consistently earns romantic accolades. The West Village's **One if by Land, Two if by Sea** (17 Barrow St., 212-255-8649) offers an 18th century carriage house complete with four fireplaces, exposed brick and a garden. There's even a small mezzanine area for intimate dining. The rooms are filled with fresh roses, flickering candles and live piano music. Almost since they opened 35 years ago, they have been the destination for proposals and average three to five "question poppings" nightly. The menu focuses on seasonal American cuisine with a prix-fixe menu and a chef's tasting menu.



**One if by Land, Two if by Sea**



**The Inn at Little Washington**

If you travel down the Eastern Seaboard and into the country, you'll find one of the country's top dining and hospitality locations. **The Inn at Little Washington** in Washington, Virginia. (Middle and Main Streets, 540-675-3800) spells romance in every way. The mood is integrated into the setting over

a myriad of rooms: Some with rose-colored lampshades hanging over