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Judy Foreman: Trattoria Mollie Hosts Dining with the Stars at Special Truffle Showcase

Trio of acclaimed Italian chefs draws a sellout crowd for three-day stop on White Alba Truffle world tour



From left, chefs Eugenio Boer, Mollie Ahlstrand of Trattoria Mollie, Christian Milone and Giuseppe Iannotti put the spotlight on truffles during a recent three-day celebration of the fungal delicacy. (Trattoria Mollie photo)

By Judy Foreman, Noozhawk Columnist | [@noozhawknews](#) | | Published on 01.05.2014 9:30 p.m.

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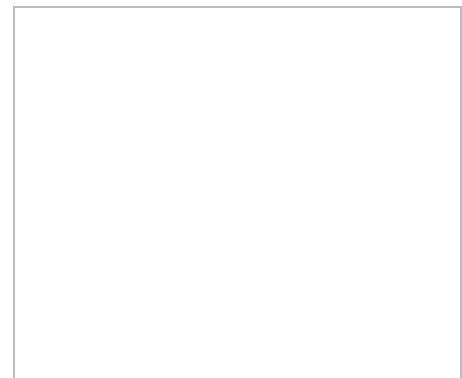
Chef Mollie Ahlstrand, owner of [Trattoria Mollie](#), recently hosted a three-night celebration of the [White Alba Truffle world tour](#) at her Montecito restaurant.

The event was organized by Arai di Alba and her company, Tartuflanghe from Piobesi d'Alba (Piedmont), a leader in the truffle market for the past 45 years. The company is traveling the world, pairing up an impressive team of Italian celebrity chefs with top-tier restaurants wherever they go.

The Friday night opening crowd of 150 people was buzzing as Mollie's sepia-toned, romantic dining room was filled to capacity in anticipation of the "Truffle Event." The Jan. 3-5 celebration was a sellout affair. With video cameras rolling and journalists vying for a shot with the Italian superstar chefs, the buzz was on.

The three-star featured chefs were Eugenio Boer, winner of the Bia Cous Cous & Friends Award and special mention at Premio Birra Moretti Grand Cru 2012; [Michelin](#)-awarded star chef Giuseppe Iannotti; and Christian Milone, a top chef in the 2012 Touring Club Guide.

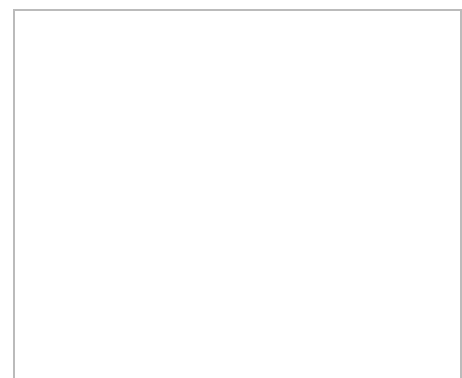
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Ahlstrand travels to Italy each winter to refresh herself in cuisine and fashion after a busy holiday season. Her trips always include networking with local suppliers and unearthing new food trends that she can bring back with her. Born in Ethiopia, Chef Mollie, who is only 5 feet tall, is tough and passionate about learning to cook. She trained with well-known Italian chefs near the Vatican colleges, Bologna and Padova.

After more than two decades in business in Santa Barbara, Ahlstrand's authentic restaurant at 1250 Coast Village Road reflects her approach to life: Keep it simple, eat only fresh foods, and balance your diet with fresh organic vegetables and protein coming mostly from wild-caught fish.

Ahlstrand loves pasta, pizza and bread, and spinach soup, all of which are made by hand daily in her kitchen — but rarely eaten by her as the sole dish in the meal. Her personal choice for an eating style is small portions, fresh foods and simple preparations. Of course, the food must taste good, too.

Similar in climate and hilly terrain to coastal Italy, Santa Barbara has almost daily farmers markets scattered around the community, including a Friday morning one on Coast Village Road, where Ahlstrand purchases fresh produce on a regular basis. Stacks of greens and baskets full of seasonal fruit and fresh-caught fish in ice chests is intoxicating for locals and visitors alike.

On the night of Jan. 3, Trattoria Mollie's full kitchen was the scene of an impressive behind-the-scenes choreography. Synchronized timing by head chefs, sous chefs and Ahlstrand and her staff plating the four-course menu to serve at the right time and temperature is challenging. The selection of courses unearthed the flavors of the truffle through the playful imagination and gastronomic vision of the chefs.

Although Trattoria Mollie has been frequented by celebrities like [Oprah Winfrey](#), the [Douglas](#) family and [President Barack Obama](#), Ahlstrand was beaming from ear to ear at her latest accomplishment.

"The evening's dishes embody the essence of Italian cuisine, a harmony of rustic and heart, made luxurious with the intoxicating white Alba truffle," she said.

Each diner was given a choice of entree and second course. Each dish — from the salad, to Primi Piatti (first course), to ravioli, veal or risotto — included fresh truffles. Only the dessert did not.

Notable locals in attendance included Marlene and Bob Veloz, Nina Terazian, Jimmy and Patty Connors, Randy and Roxy Solakian, Hollye and Jeff Jacobs, Maddy and Peter Jacobson, Robyn and Len Freedman, David and Ruthy Green, Colleen and Ted Friedel and Leila Orzeck, Kum Su Kim and John Perry.

Truffles, a not so attractive deep-in-the-earth delicacy, can be prepared many ways as was demonstrated by the variety of dishes prepared for the evening. Truffles seem to be everywhere the past few years. Gastronomic darlings have latched onto its unusual flavor. Gourmet specialty stores in Santa Barbara — such as [Metropulos](#), [Isabella Gourmet Foods](#), [C'est Cheese](#), [Pierre Lafond](#), [il Fustino](#), [Whole Foods Market](#) and [Williams Sonoma](#), to name just a few — carry truffle-infused products. With the strong flavor and the cost, a little truffle goes a long way.

Trattoria Mollie is open Tuesday through Sunday at 1250 Coast Village Road. [Click here for more information](#), or call 805.565.9381.

— Judy Foreman is a [Noozhawk](#) columnist and longtime local writer and lifestyles observer. She can be contacted at judyforeman@noozhawk.com. [Click here for previous columns](#). The opinions expressed are her own.

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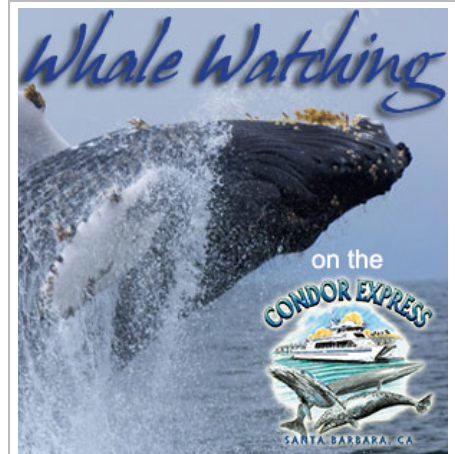
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