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Cry Me a Fruit Tree

By Cheryl Sternman Rule

DAVID 'Mas' Masumoto is a third-generation organic peach farmer who is also an incredibly poetic writer and passionate speaker. In 2006, I heard him read from one of his books, *Epitaph for a Peach: Four Seasons on My Family Farm*, and his moving delivery reduced many in the crowd of 1,200 to sniffling fools. Given that he was reading about, well, farming peaches, the tidal wave of emotion was wholly unexpected.

Thanks to chef **Jesse Ziff Cool**, you too can emote shamelessly while eating fine food at **Flea Street Cafe**, her Menlo Park restaurant. Masumoto and his family (who work together on their farm in Del Rey) will kick off Cool's monthly dinner series on Feb. 24.

The first dinner will feature seasonally appropriate incarnations of their heirloom peaches, with a tentative menu (\$75 before tax and tip) of chilled peach soup, bitter greens with ricotta peach fritters, grass-fed beef short ribs with red wine peach au jus, and Meyer lemon tartlet with spiced peaches and honey whipped cream. An optional wine pairing with organic Santa Cruz Mountain wines will be available for an extra \$30. Of course, since fresh-picked stone fruit is unavailable this time of year, Masumoto will bring peaches that were dried, preserved and frozen at their peak, as well as peach jams and chutneys.

"This series is a chance to have our kitchen experience and honor the growers, and to bring them to the public," Cool says. "We want to put a face behind the food that we cook."

To this end, Cool has scheduled other meet-and-greet dinners over the next several months, each following the same general format: a presentation by a featured purveyor/grower, a reception for guests to mix and mingle (and snarf passed hors d'oeuvres) and a *prix fixe* meal showcasing the locally grown products being celebrated.

Guest growers for the March 23 event will be Dru Rivers and Paul Miller of **Full Belly Farm**, a certified organic farm north of Sacramento that harvests vegetables, herbs, nuts, flowers and fruits. Then on April 27, Paul Willis of **Niman Ranch** will present on the topic "Local or National: Supporting the Best Product and Politics of Small Family Ranches." Future dinners

will highlight San Francisco's **Boccalone** artisan salume (cured meat) and a seafood-theme meal, where local fishermen and members of the **Monterey Bay Aquarium** will discuss how to choose sustainable seafood. If all the noise about farmed, wild and locally caught fish has your head spinning, this June 29 event sounds especially informative. (The recent drama about mercury-tainted tuna in New York City's restaurants has made this issue even timelier.)

If you hesitate to fork over \$75 for dinner, consider this: it's not just a meal, it's an education. Plus it's nice to support a chef who supports the producers. "She wants to reward the farmers that she knows," says Masumoto. "It's an honor."

For more information, visit www.cooleatz.com/flea-st-cafe/dinseries2008.html.

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