



EXECUTIVE CHEF

# Aaron Meneghelli

By Annabelle Marceno Pericin

Photography by Tubay Yabut  
[www.tubayyabut.com](http://www.tubayyabut.com)

For the past seven months, Executive Chef Aaron Meneghelli has overseen the entire culinary program at The Carneros Inn. Over a delightful afternoon at FARM, the Inn's sophisticated wine country restaurant, Chef Meneghelli shares his passion for music, what influences his style of cooking and how he's changing the conversation at FARM.

When the chef joins me on FARM's outdoor patio, the topic of music comes up immediately. For Chef Meneghelli, music and cooking go hand in hand. He's a big fan of hip hop, jazz and the blues. "My dad always had music playing, I have my grandfather's record player from the early 1900's, the kind you wind up to play records. I have a pretty good vinyl collection and there's almost always music on," he explains. Currently, there is so much change in the kitchen the chef will only play music if he's alone. "I don't want the staff to be distracted."

Born and raised in Napa, Chef Meneghelli recalls how music is even tied to his start in the kitchen. When he began working at his friend's parents' restaurant, the person he worked for was passionate about music and an incredible guitar player. "It was an easy and fun environment to work in," he recalls. "It was hard work but I never came home thinking it was terrible," he adds.



**“I am thrilled to be back at The Carneros Inn, the Napa Valley is the best place to cook in America, with an abundance of fresh produce and an audience who is willing to indulge in excellence, we are able to push the envelope on the farm-to-table dining experience” says Meneghelli.**

## Influence & Style

Chef Aaron draws many of his cooking influences from his large Italian family, particularly his mother and his grandmother. “We have a lot of family get-togethers. I love having people at my house and having friends and family socialize over a meal,” he shares. He vividly remembers the phone call from his mother asking him about going to culinary school. While attending community college for an Associate Arts (A.A.) degree, he had earned money cooking at the local country club. “My mom was an elementary school teacher in Napa,” states Chef Meneghelli. Aaron thought he wanted to be a teacher as well and planned to attend college for a Bachelor’s degree. Thus, he put his mom’s culinary query on the back burner. Within a year, however, he found himself questioning what he really wanted to do. He switched to the California Culinary Academy in San Francisco, and made food his occupation, working all through school. “It’s funny; the teaching and training aspects of my job now are directly related to that — being a teacher. I always thought early on in my cooking career that if being a chef doesn’t work out, I’ll go teach at a culinary school,” Aaron laughs. “I’ve been in drive mode ever since. My mentality is ‘what’s next?’ I’m always asking, ‘where is this going to take me?’” He has traveled around the world learning and cooking with elite chefs and worked at Napa’s French restaurant Angéle, where he helped the restaurant earn a Michelin Bib Gourmand.

When it comes to taste, his wife, Shannon’s palate is invaluable. “I test my ideas and dishes on her. I value her opinion because I know it’s honest,” he claims. “She keeps it real and lets me know if a dish is approachable. She reminds me to stay true to my style of cooking as opposed to cooking what people think they want.” Chef Meneghelli goes back to music to describe his approach to cooking. Reflecting, he says, “It’s very free spirited.” He explains how jazz music is multi-layered. “The bass beat is the essence of the song but there is an improvisation that happens as well. The way you react to music and the way you interpret that in how you cook food is close to that,” he philosophizes.

The chef loves how food style is ever changing. That’s what he really adores about what he does. Sometimes, he’ll randomly pick up cookbooks and flip through them. “It’s more about I’m tired of this, let’s move on to that,” he laughs. Currently, he’s into a cookbook one of his sous chefs in Austin sent him out of the blue.

## Changing the conversation at FARM

2016 is all about FARM. “We need to make a lot of noise at FARM,” states Chef Meneghelli. When he got the phone call from The Carneros Inn’s General Manager, Philip Kendall, about an opening for Executive Chef, he was flattered to be called first. This is his third time working for Kendall. He has history with The Carneros Inn as he was the Executive Sous Chef for two and half years prior to his Executive Chef position at Calistoga Ranch. FARM has always had a special occasion atmosphere with a refined menu but Chef Meneghelli wants to change it up. “I like that it’s considered a special occasion place but I don’t want it to be only known for that. I want people to be aware we have a garden on property, and that we have relationships with local gardeners and farmers,” he adds. Recently, FARM’s menu was reintroduced. Aaron describes the philosophy behind the menu makeover. “I’ve elaborated on the a la carte offerings. We now have two offerings instead of one on the tasting menu and the tasting menu is not printed, so there is a level of surprise. I want to have more freedom and say we’re going to change this every two weeks or to reflect whatever is in season,” he continues. Being able to highlight what is coming out of the garden or using smaller, local purveyors who supply fresh sea urchin out of Mendocino or wild caught halibut from the Golden Gate Bay, allows him to be more spontaneous. “When I have less time to plan, I’m stronger and at my most creative.”

The Boon Fly Café, FARM’s sister restaurant and a local favorite has a completely different vibe: lively, vibrant and laid-back. “For someone who grew up here, I don’t see a lot of locals or people I know at FARM. That’s another piece of the conversation I want to change. Most of the locals are at Boon Fly,” adds Chef Meneghelli. The food at Boon Fly Café is rustic, a complete contrast to FARM’s refinement. “Most of the locals know we’re changing things up at FARM. In the summer, we added music on Thursday nights which has become really popular and fun. We’re just elevating what we do at Boon Fly to FARM. It’s a little bit more out of the box and more focused.” With the chef updating and modifying the philosophy of the menu down to the uniforms, and music that plays, things are looking fine at the FARM.



## K&J Farms Stone Fruit Salad

Foie gras mousse, house made granola,  
garden greens, saba

## Ingredients

- 1 peach
- 1 apricot
- 4 cherries
- Granola
- Saba in small squeeze bottle
- Greens cleaned
- Sea Salt
- Extra virgin olive oil

## Foie Gras Mousse

- 8 oz heavy cream
- 4 oz foie gras
- Salt to taste

### + PAIR WITH

2012 DUCKHORN VINEYARDS  
KNIGHT'S VALLEY LATE  
HARVEST SAUVIGNON BLANC

This rare and enticing Late Harvest Sauvignon Blanc was made using fruit from a storied single vineyard in Sonoma County's Knights Valley. Left to patiently ripen for an extra month, these grapes produced a rich, concentrated wine with alluring tropical aromas, pure sweet peach flavors and balancing acidity. To add complexity, it was aged on the lees for ten months in new oak.



## method

● Have the foie gras cleaned and in a blender pitcher, bring the cream up to 118 degrees and pour over the foie gras into the pitcher.

● Blend until smooth, it should have the consistency of a thick milkshake.

● Pour into 2 pint containers and cover with plastic wrap and cool in the refrigerator until completely cold.

● Quenelle to serve and arrange on plate.

**Apricots:** cut in half and remove pits and place in jar to be pickled

● Bring equal art white wine, champagne vinegar, and sugar to a boil and pour over apricots and let stand at room temperature until cooled and refrigerate

**Peaches:** cut in half horizontally around pit. Use an apple core or a small paring knife and cut around the seed. Slice the peaches in rounds, place peaches with a small sprinkle of salt and a tablespoon of simple syrup in a vacuum bag and seal with a food saver machine or cryo-vac machine. Compress and reserve for plating

**Cherries to be cut in half**



## Seared Local Halibut

Yellow corn, baby fennel, morel mushrooms,  
smoked spring onions

## method

● **5 ears of yellow corn** with husk removed. With 4 of the ears of corn, cut away the kernels and reserve in a bowl using the back of your knife scrape the cob to remove any of the milk in the cob and combine with the kernels. Thinly slice 1 yellow onion and 1 fennel bulb and cook on very low heat with olive oil and salt allowing to sweat until completely tender and not allowing any color to form. When tender add the corn and continue to cook on low heat stirring often to ensure the corn is not sticking. Cook until the liquid has reduced and the mixture is thick, about 30 minutes. Blend until completely smooth checking for seasoning. Using a hand torch, blister the remaining ear of corn until well charred on all kernels. Once finished, remove the kernels and lightly season with salt

● **Smoked spring onions:** Trim the top of the spring onions, cut in half lengthwise and place on a seasoning rack with the cut side up. Season with salt. Place the onions in the oven with the temperature set at 275. Line a small sheet tray with aluminum foil and pile dry Applewood chips and light with a hand held torch. Blow out the flame and place in the oven, allow to smoke for 45 minutes checking to be sure you have no flame, just smoking embers. Remove and let cool, once cooled separate the layers of onions.

● **Morel mushrooms:** clean well with a small brush and trim the bottoms of the mushrooms. Cut the large mushrooms in half, set aside a whole garlic clove and some thyme sprigs for cooking.

● **Baby fennel:** trim the tops and outer layer then cut the fennel in half. Use a sauté pan with a lid, braise the fennel with vegetable stock or water with salt and cook on high heat with the lid until the fennel is tender, about 1 or 2 minutes. Remove from heat and let cool. Reserve some of the fennel fronds for garnish

## For the Plate

Heat a sauté pan on high heat with grapeseed oil until it reaches the smoking point. Season the portioned Halibut with salt on both sides and place gently in pan. Adjust heat to medium high heat. Let sear until you have a light brown color on the fish, place into a 400degree oven. Heat corn puree. In a small sauté pan add grapeseed oil on high heat and sauté the mushrooms until it starts to get tender and then add the fennel the garlic clove and some thyme sprigs, season with salt. Once the fennel is hot, remove from pan and discard the garlic and thyme. Remove the fish from the oven, it should be at medium temperature. Arrange on plate with the kernels and onion at room temperature, garnish with fennel fronds.

## + PAIR WITH

2015 PLUMPJACK RESERVE  
CHARDONNAY  
NAPA VALLEY, CALIFORNIA

Their Chardonnay grapes are sourced from two vineyards in the Napa Valley – one in Los Carneros and the other in St. Helena. The cooler Carneros site imparts this wine with fresh green apple, Bosc pear, and lemon zest on the nose, while the warmer St. Helena site lends some tropical and melon notes. The Carneros vineyard also gives this wine a beautiful, bright, lively acidity, which is balanced by the creamy, rich texture of the St. Helena fruit. The touch of oak adds subtle layers to the nose and palate with traces of toasted almonds, vanilla, flint, and spice. By foregoing malolactic fermentation, we are retaining the bright, lively malic acid, which helps to accentuate the fruit on the palate, and gives this wine its balance and drive.







## Duck Breast

White asparagus, caramelized endive, Yukon potatoes, pickled rhubarb

## White Asparagus Puree

- 1 yellow onion
- 1 bunch white asparagus
- 2 T whole butter
- 2 cups heavy cream

Thinly slice yellow onion and place in a sauté pan with the butter, a pinch of salt and cover with a lid. Trim the bottoms of the white asparagus and discard. Cut the remaining asparagus into quarters. Sweat onions on low heat until completely soft. Add the asparagus pieces and another pinch of salt and continue to sweat for an additional 5 minutes with the lid. Remove the lid and add the cream and gently simmer until the asparagus is completely soft. Puree in a blender, reserving some of the liquid so it will not get too thin. Check for seasoning

## Caramelized Endive

- 2 Belgium Endive
- 1/8 cup honey
- 2 T sherry vinegar
- 1/4 cup heavy cream

Start by removing the outer layer of leaves of the endive and cut them in half lengthwise. Place on a seasoning rack cut side up and season generously with salt and let sit for 30 minutes at room temperature. Heat a medium sized sauté pan with grapeseed oil until it reaches the smoking point. Add the endive cut side down and reduce heat to low and cook until you have an even caramel color across the face of the endive. Add the honey and move the heat to medium, let simmer until the honey is showing large bubbles, add the 2 tablespoons of vinegar. Add the cream and simmer until the endive is tender, about 5 minutes

**Yukon potatoes** are peeled and cut into uniform shapes and then simmered in vegetable stock and salt until knife tender, and then allowed to cool completely. For the plate they are pan roasted to gain a small amount of color and finished with chives

## Pickled Rhubarb

- 240 g rhubarb juice
- 15 g ginger juice
- 32 g grenadine
- 30 grams sugar
- 10 g red wine vinegar
- 2 stalks of rhubarb

Cut rhubarb stalks into quarters. Combine remaining ingredients and bring to a simmer, add the rhubarb stalks to the liquid and simmer gently until tender, about 2 minutes. Allow to cool in liquid, store in liquid in the refrigerator

## For the pick up

Sear the duck breast skin side down on a medium heat, discarding the rendered fat as you cook. Sear until golden brown and the fat has become thin and crispy. Once you have reached the rendered state of the duck skin, flip over to the flesh side and allow to rest in the pan off the heat until you have reached a medium rare temperature inside, about 4 minutes. Allow to rest for 5 minutes before slicing in half. Arrange on the plate.

## + PAIR WITH

2014 PLUMPJACK SYRAH  
NAPA VALLEY, CALIFORNIA

Their Syrah grapes are sourced from two incredible vineyards in the Napa Valley – Hudson in Los Carneros and Stagecoach on Atlas Peak. These unique AVAs provide this wine its signature characteristics. On the palate, the Hudson Vineyard brings beautiful, bright raspberries, black pepper, finesse, and a lively acid, whereas the Stagecoach Vineyard adds dark fruit, great concentration and formidable structure. The whole-cluster fermentation adds a deeper level of complexity mixing in a dash of green peppercorn and spice on the nose while the oak imparts a toasty smoke on the nose and a silky bittersweet chocolate to the finish.





**D**esigned by Napa-based firm Shopworks, the new Guest Reception building is relocated near FARM restaurant. Guests will be welcomed with a new porte-cochère, water feature, and modern outdoor seating. The guest reception's interior design will be an extension of the property's charming countryside appeal with white battered walls, a front desk made of walnut with Carrera marble top, oversized mirrors to reflect the surrounding scenery, fresh cut flowers, orange and white furniture, as well as limestone flooring. By June 2016, the former guest reception area near the Hilltop Dining Room will be converted into two 500-square-foot owners' lounge and board meeting space. The Wedding Garden, the property's main outdoor wedding venue, will receive a \$1 million renovation with significant enhancements that include a beautifully planted trellis, an opulent water feature, lavish exterior landscaping, as well as drought tolerant and heel friendly turf, all of which overlook the surrounding Napa Valley vineyards and mountains. On the other end of the 27-acre property, the Family Pool will add an elevated deck with a shade trellis, new luxury padded lounges and furniture, fresh paint, and lush landscaping. Additionally, the property's 86 cottages and 10 suites are undergoing more than \$2.8 million in soft renovations. The first phase to 40 cottages will be completed in 2016, with the remaining cottages completed in 2017. Keeping in line with the existing sun-washed space, the cottages will receive a lighter and crisper neutral color palette, including charcoal grey, white, dark purple, and accents with the Carneros orange. Bathroom renovations will include new heated tile flooring, counter-tops, bathroom fixtures, and soaking tubs. The cottages will also receive contemporary furniture and lighting, as well as soft goods, such as bedding, drapes, and accessories. Lastly, the cottages will install new TVs and media packages. The Hilltop pool will also add stylish lounge seating and eight cabanas, and the onsite gym will receive new flooring later this year.

The sophisticated wine country restaurant FARM is fine dining at its best, and the restaurant features produce from the inn's culinary garden and orchards. For more information, visit [www.thecarnerosinn.com](http://www.thecarnerosinn.com).





*HIP & HAUTE*  
Aaron Meneghelli

# *PLAYING HIS* **OWN TUNE**

**B**eing able to manage his team and influence them is a breath of fresh air for Chef Meneghelli. He wears many different hats and enjoys the convivial team atmosphere. “My position is team captain but I’m not about to pretend I’m doing this by myself.” He feels strongly about giving much of the credit to his sous chefs, cooks and chefs de cuisine. “I’m trying to help them be better and they help me be better too. Day to day, things are always changing and that’s exciting. It’s the same when listening to music” he conveys. “When you haven’t listened to a song in a while, it’s new again when you revisit it. Something new often comes from that. Food is the same way. I need that in my own personal growth and space.”

**Photography by Vincent Gotti**  
[www.vincentgottiphotography.com](http://www.vincentgottiphotography.com)

Grooming by Josette Vigil Jelveh  
Head Stylist Awnalee Visalli  
Executive Producer Kaye Cloutman

Featured Apparel  
Scotch & Soda Santana Row  
Shot entirely at The Carneros Inn | FARM Restaurant



Scotch and Soda Dessin A Floral  
Patchwork sweater \$195 |  
Scotch and Soda Denim  
Blue Ralston - Solar Bright  
Regular Slim jeans \$169.00



Terani Couture Black flirty cocktail dress with ballet neck line, cap sleeves, petite peplum, and finished with an embellished belt by Terani Couture \$297





Terani Couture Blush jersey evening gown with branching embellishments that cover the cap sleeve, bodice, and lead onto the high hip. The dress is finished with a beaded belt and sheerly covered neckline. \$737

