

SATURDAY, APRIL 12, 2014 AT 2:06 PM



Day 1 - Bottega Gran Fondo...Flavor vs. Taste and "Access"

Chef Chiarello spent every speech he gave today (and there were a few ;) describing his intended theme of BGF, and what a wonderful theme it was! He described through story, emotion, and typical hand gestures only an Italian (or those of us who love one) can appreciate, that you can have a meal that "tastes" great...but, when you have an "experience" surrounding that meal...something that creates a fond memory or inspires an intimate story for you personally...that's "flavor"! He even enlisted the help of his daughter Giana, after whom he has named one of his wines, to assist in a demonstration of how he taught her to make cavatelli, much like his grandmother taught him. His first priority of BGF...to provide his participants with Flavor vs. Taste. Success, Chef!

His second priority was "access"...unrivalled and unlimited access to all the incredible "celebrities" in their respective fields who he has been lucky enough to meet and befriend through his esteemed career. While clearly some of his more shy enlistees may have been reluctant in that area, he encouraged attendees to seek out these legends for pictures, questions, hand-shakes, autographs, or otherwise "appropriate" but normally "rude" behavior, as that was what they were there for (I'm not sure anyone warned Dave

Zabriskie about that though...clearly one of the more shy participants ;)

And what a line-up he created! In the cycling world alone (who, if you follow cycling, need no further introduction, but if you don't, suffice to say they are legends of their time): George Hincapie, Christian VandeVelde, Dave Zabriskie, Lucas Euser, Bob Roll, Chris Carmichael, and even a surprise guest rider the next day, Levi Leipheimer. Does it get much better than that? I think there was even a former pro Italian rider enlisted as one of the ride marshals, though we are less familiar with him, but equally as impressed.

Outside of cycling, Chef had Natalie Coughlin on site, 12-time Olympic Medal swimmer, Food Network Chopped and Dancing with the Stars contestant, as one of the cooking demo sous chefs. She was very engaging and seemed like she was having a blast. She and Lucas Euser couldn't stay long though, as they are not retired pros and had to return to their intense training schedules for upcoming events. Lucas (also a Napa native) did stay to ride the next day though and crushed everyone's hopes and dreams for KOM glory ("King of the Mountain", a traditional cycling competition up any worthy climb) before heading back to Europe to ride in one of the Classics events...you know, just a 75 mile "recovery ride" to him!

Beyond professional sports, Chef Chiarello amassed a stellar line-up of incredible chefs and foodies, including Daniel Humm, a multiple Michelin rated restaurateur. There were many other notably acclaimed chefs, winemakers, and industry greats, but we highlight Chef Humm because he was the epitome of "Flavor". During his demo, in which there was very little cooking, but a lot of story telling (as well as some pretty funny poking at Bob Roll, his honorary sous chef), he brought flavor to life. He described how he came to America, particularly Napa, from Europe and aspired to have (and achieved) a Michelin rated restaurant...and then how he completely scrapped every concept he had employed to achieve it, completely overhauled the entire thought process and ultimately improved his standings and ratings. It was a great story, interspersed with funny antidotes, and converted us to fans in less than 45mins. We are now anxious to plan a trip to NYC just to try his restaurant (and of course, my lovely husband believes he will get to meet and spend time with the legend himself while enjoying his meal...not that Chef Humm would have anything else to do, like running his acclaimed restaurant!).

I could probably write a book about the day and I know I have already lost your social-media, ADD-laden, attention span, so will try to stick to highlights. We attended 3 of 4 cooking demos where I took lots of video that will need to be cut and edited before posting after we finish our CTS Camp later this week. While Chiarello's and Humm's demos were our favorites at story telling, Chef Patterson's

(who owns an acclaimed restaurant in Boulder we will have the pleasure of experiencing in June just before our Ride the Rockies event) was fun for us because Dave Zabriskie (retired pro cyclist) reminded us of a close friend/co-worker (Robert Attridge). He was extremely shy and didn't talk much, but when he did, it was filled with quick wit and dry humor...the kind that can have you rolling because someone who barely talks just said some of the funniest \$@%& you've ever heard! For those of you who know Robert and are still reading, you'll know exactly what I mean and it reminded me of many office conversations that make me think fondly of my days working with him.

Did I say I was going to "highlight"? Hmm...I haven't even touched the VIP dinner yet! After cocktails and wine cave tour, we were escorted to our assigned seats...holy crap, I get to sit right next to George Hincapie!! Are you kidding me? And to my right, separated only by the Lexus (event sponsor) representative, Lucas Euser. Needless to say, lovely husband, who was still situated within ear shot and directly across from these legends, was likely jealous. I got to listen in as George and Lexus "talked business" about sponsorship for Hotel Domestique and quiz George about the upcoming release of his new book detailing what has become cycling's greatest scandal. Very, very cool evening! Talk about "access"...again Chef, success! We met and chatted with the Delta (another event sponsor) representative, and talked power meters with Lucas Euser and the Lexus representative, who is himself quite the acclaimed cyclist. I have to say Lucas is one of the coolest people to share dinner with...aside from his self-proclaimed model-worthy hairstyle that instantly makes him stand out as a character, he's just so completely down to earth, engaging, and fun. It was a real pleasure getting to know him over dinner and he even favorited one of our tweets saying so. ;) Also spent some time (both pre-dinner and next day ride) with the In Gamba representative (another event sponsor) who was a lot of fun and easily sold Johnny on what will one day be our vacation of an Italian bike tour with his company. So many great people, so little time. Dinner was of course great and wine pours never ending, the perfect accompaniments to an incredible evening.

Backing up for just a moment, the day is not complete without describing one of the event "characters", who shall remain nameless for obvious reasons. On the bus ride to the VIP dinner, we sat next to a gentleman we ultimately learned was pretty well known (at least locally) who we recognized from one of the earlier cooking demos... yes, he was the drunk heckler in the front row! Well, if he was drunk at 3pm, imagine what he was by 5pm on the bus en route to dinner. He quite animatedly shared fish stories of his cycling prowess and travels, showing us scars and wounds and generally amazing us with his utter lack of filter. An event sponsor representative we later met

and chatted with was equally "impressed" as we shared knowing glances across the bus aisle, assuming he was simply an overindulgent attendee. As we later passed in line to obtain our VIP dinner seat assignments, I laughed and said "the moment of truth" as we contemplated who might be in Nameless' vicinity.

Well, as luck would have it, she was, later passing Johnny in line for the restroom exclaiming "Karma's a bitch!" Very funny! Nameless was subsequently provided a microphone by Chef Chiarello during the dinner's events, which you could tell he knew was unwise, but a train wreck he could not stop nonetheless. All I know is every celebrity at that event knew who Nameless was and could predict the following "30 second" discussion on wine...which included absolutely no mention of wine and most certainly did not last 30 seconds...until an event staff member alas swiftly and politely stole the microphone and simply said "Thank you!" to Nameless, conjuring crowd pleasing laughter. Unbelievably, but predictably based on reputation, Nameless successfully rode 75 miles the next day as if nothing happened...sharing the same cycling war stories and unfiltered antidotes with us in the morning line-up, clearly not remembering our faces from the night before. "Character" is right, and "flavor we found!

So, wow, what a day! A truly amazing event and Chef goals accomplished. We are so happy to have been part of the inaugural Bottega Gran Fondo and its VIP dinner. We anxiously await a repeat next year, but for now, on to the ride...

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