



CHEF FRANCIS MALLMANN'S FIRST L.A. DEMO: A BACKYARD BBQ IN THE HOLLYWOOD HILLS

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A roaring fire lit up the Hollywood Hills the other night, but the fire department didn't respond. Turns out it was a backyard barbecue with Francis Mallmann working the grills, just as he does in South America.

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Renowned for his grilling techniques, which you can read about in his book, *Seven Fires: Grilling the Argentine Way*, Mallmann appeared at a private gathering, and only a select crowd got to meet him.

The party was so low key that Mallmann wasn't introduced but mingled quietly with the guests. Wearing a striped linen apron made in Argentina, white hair streaming below his cap, he checked the grills constantly.

Oak logs blazed wildly on top of one of them, sending out showers of sparks like fireworks. Underneath the grill lay a giant mound of salt, and inside that were two jumbo salmons. Instead of the Andes that hover beyond Mendoza, where two of his restaurants are located, Mallmann worked with a spectacular view of Los Angeles as a backdrop.

When the salmons were done, he lifted off the salt one chunk at a time, then rolled back the skin as if he were opening a sardine can. Onlookers anxious for a taste had to wait. Mallmann decided that the fish needed to rest 10 minutes.

But there was plenty to eat from other grills. Mallmann's team cut up succulent rib eyes, skirt steaks, Argentinian chorizos, blood sausages and sweet breads for tasting along with chimichurri and salsa criolla. For vegetarians, there were grilled vegetables and bread topped with mushrooms, garlic and parsley or eggplant puree with cherry tomatoes.

Guests were handed glasses of Solsticio sparkling wine as they arrived. The wines poured to accompany the food were two versions of Torrontés and two Malbecs from Recuerdo, a line produced in Argentina by Santiago Achával and Pablo Martorell. Talk about low key, the wine table disappeared into the dark after sunset, making it almost impossible to read the labels.

The party wasn't for fun, though. It was to promote a resort and spa to be opened next year in Mendoza's Uco Valley by The Vines of Mendoza. Residences there will be sold with the option of buying an acre of vineyard too and making wine in a custom winery on the premises. Achával, owner of Achával-Ferrer wines, is the consulting winemaker.

Mallmann's role will be to run the resort's restaurant, Siete Fuegos. This will be set up to show off his rustic style and propensity for cooking with lots of heat. The kitchen will have 16 burners. And outside, Mallmann will be able to work over seven fires, which, of course, translates to siete fuegos.