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# CYRUS

ALEXANDER VALLEY

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## **CYRUS**

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It's 2005, and the quaint town of Healdsburg is buzzing: Maître D' Nick Peyton and Chef Douglas Keane have opened Cyrus. The restaurant is a pioneering effort by two luminaries. Skeptics had long been persuaded that Napa was wine country's unrivalled epicurean mecca, but the pair of restaurateurs remained undeterred. Now, the culmination of their ambitious vision off the beaten path is changing everything.

What had been clear to Keane and Peyton, became apparent to cynics as well: Sonoma, with its egalitarian mentality, more food friendly wines and deep agricultural roots is proximal to exceptional product from family farms, a commercial airport and the population of San Francisco. They named their restaurant Cyrus, after Cyrus Alexander, the trapper who first settled Alexander Valley.

For eight years, Keane's contemporary flavors combined with Peyton's focused hospitality dazzled guests and amassed local, national, and global awards. Cyrus electrified the Sonoma County culinary scene, ushering it towards the prized international destination it is today.

Cyrus's illustrious run was interrupted in 2012. Though it came with a favorable settlement, a landlord dispute closed the restaurant's doors, dismaying its fans. Cyrus had struck an emotional chord with guests for its ability to achieve refinement without pretention. Peyton and Keane vowed to reopen and set about finding a pastoral location with direct connection to the vineyards. Locating appropriate commercial zoning in a protected agricultural setting is no easy feat, and the search was a long one. Still,

patrons from Sonoma County and beyond kept faith; they have patiently awaited Cyrus's rebirth for ten years.

The closure afforded Peyton and Keane the time to step back and contemplate the state of fine dining. What they observed was an exhausted business model. An industry based on fostering communion and joy at the table had become dangerously self-obsessed. The entrenched staffing model, dysfunctional and unhealthy, was at a breaking point. Traditional hospitality barometers of style, substance, and originality had been replaced by stars, ratings, and blogs. Luxury restaurants were stupefying diners with extended multi-course meals running for hours at the same table, in the same room.

A fledgling resistance to the stagnant culture was growing, however. Sensing that burgeoning hunger for change, Chef Keane thought back to the traditional kaiseki restaurants of Kyoto. There, he would spend the evening in one beautiful room, only to be told of other more gorgeous, uniquely appointed spaces, which occupied by other patrons, were rendered inaccessible.

The catalyst for Keane's unprecedented approach was borne out of the confining stasis of those nights. What if, instead, a new concept was applied? Eating as *journey*; dining as *journey*. The idea is simple and based on how we welcome friends into our homes: the smooth choreography that goes into a successful evening, the stimulation of new encounters in new rooms, those discrete events building on each other and culminating in a single rare, irreplaceable experience.

On September 9, 2022, Cyrus will reopen at 275 Hwy 128 in Geyserville, Sonoma County, the result of indefatigable vision and unwavering support. The building sits ten feet above the valley floor. Together with panoramic views, the composition proffers the illusion of floating above the vineyards, a giddy and aerial sensation. Unmatched by any other California restaurant, the dramatic backdrop competes with the most prestigious and sought-after wine environs of the world.

For extensive improvements to the existing structure, Cyrus engaged architect Tom Kundig of Olson Kundig. The design, like the gastronomy and service, seamlessly integrates the humble origins of the former prune packing plant with modernity and unobtrusive luxury. Glass, stone, steel, and wood create a strikingly organic setting for diners: a journey both personal and intimate, vibrant and vivid. "It

has been a deep honor to work with Douglas Keane and Nick Peyton,” Kundig commented, “both true artists who are completely committed to their craft. Having worked with Douglas and Nick for three years, I can see their wholehearted commitment to their art, and I appreciate their forward-thinking optimism.”

Updating the existing landscape is Andrea Cochran, of Andrea Cochran Landscape Architecture. “It is rare to find a client with Douglas Keane’s vision and passion,” added Cochran. “At Cyrus, he and Nick Peyton have forged a powerful partnership. Reflected in every aspect of their craft are a sophistication and an attention to detail that result in a highly refined experience. It has been uniquely inspiring to work with Douglas and Nick over the past several years.”

For all the impressive machinery behind the scenes, a meal at Cyrus will still evoke the warmth of homecoming. Guests are ushered into the Bubbles Room for welcoming bites and sips. They choose between a martini or a glass of champagne as a caviar cart, glittering with crushed ice, greets them. In a gesture reminiscent of the first Cyrus, five bites are served, each highlighting one of the five taste categories: sweet, sour, salty, bitter, and umami. Through the floor to ceiling windows, a breathtaking view of gardens, vineyards, and the eastern hills of the Alexander Valley turns gold under the evening sky. The Journey has begun.

Following that decadent reception, the seating of twelve moves to the Kitchen Table, sculpted to recall the luxury sushi counters of Japan. During this leg of the journey, diners engage with the chefs directly and observe as the courses are prepared before them. Sho Sugi Ban blackened paneling and steel tubular pendants spotlighting the guests’ dishes evoke a spiritual reverence for the purity of food.

Glass doors slide open noiselessly, and the group is escorted to a more traditional dining space. Each party has their own table and every seat a breathtaking view. The style and service of the final savory courses is tailored to individual pace and preference.

After the seated dessert courses, guests are accompanied to a room inspired by Chef Keane’s fascination with *Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory*. In the spirit of traditional mignardises, chocolate treats are presented as delectable parting gifts, each echoing the same five tastes as the welcoming canapés. Some

guests return to their tables. Others drift outside the chocolate room where the lounge stretches out invitingly by the starlit vineyards.

Private events at Cyrus are exquisite. Showcasing the meticulous intention of Kundig's architectural intelligence, kinetic partitions seamlessly transform the restaurant into several desired configurations. For larger events, the walls retract entirely, leaving a stunning, open space.

A key feature of Cyrus's mission is its innovative staffing model. The existing system is outdated, fraught with high turnover and inequity. Cyrus reinvents current compensation standards to provide all employees with a true living wage. Evolving equitable pay demands the divisive framework between front and back of house be dismantled entirely. Cyrus team members will train across all areas of cooking and service. This simple, streamlined methodology upends an obsolete and myopic practice to achieve efficiency, reward, and sustainability.

Five nights a week, Cyrus will offer three seatings of twelve with ticketed reservations. The unparalleled experience will show off a harmonious blend of local, seasonal bounty and the world's finest ingredients. Cyrus aims to transcend expectations, to be provocative and energetic without compromising refinement or luxury.