



## **Cindy Pawlcyn Biography**

Cindy Pawlcyn is a pioneer in the development of wine country cuisine and a top chef at the helm of her own rapidly growing culinary group. Pawlcyn is the owner of three of Napa Valley's beloved restaurants: the legendary Mustards Grill, the eclectic Cindy's Backstreet Kitchen and the newly launched Brassica—a pan-Mediterranean restaurant in the former Go Fish space just south of St. Helena. The restaurant's name is Latin for the plant family of crucifers and mustards native to the Mediterranean and grown in Napa, bridging the two regions and linking Brassica to Mustards Grill.

She is also a partner and chef at the Monterey Bay Aquarium and an advocate of sustainability in all aspects of her profession. Since Mustards opened in 1983, Pawlcyn has been involved in the creation of over a dozen new restaurants in the Bay Area including, Fog City Diner, Bix, Roti, Betelnut, Buckeye Roadhouse and Tra Vigne. Born in Minneapolis, Minnesota, Pawlcyn grew up in an accomplished culinary family where fresh, seasonal ingredients were an integral part of every meal and supper-time was always family time. "My parents raised me to appreciate good cooking," she fondly says of culinary memories such as when they would take the salt shaker in the back yard and eat the tomatoes hot off the vine.

At 13, Pawlcyn was working at a local cooking school and equipment store and helping in her mother's kitchen. She ran a catering business through high school, and went on to earn a degree in hotel and restaurant management from the University of Wisconsin-Stout. She further augmented her formal training by taking courses at Le Cordon Bleu and La Varenne in Paris.

Pawlcyn began her career in the kitchen of the Pump Room in Chicago. She went on to cook in various other esteemed restaurants in both the Windy City and Minneapolis before moving to California in 1980 to take a job at McArthur Park. In her first experience in a Northern Californian kitchen, Pawlcyn gained valuable insights into the region's unique food culture.

Pawlcyn entered Napa Valley's burgeoning restaurant culture as the opening chef at Meadowood in St. Helena and from there joined Bruce LeFavour at his acclaimed Rose et LeFavour. Armed with extensive kitchen leadership and regional culinary expertise, she successfully launched Mustards Grill in 1983, her now landmark and legendary restaurant. In 2003 Pawlcyn opened the eclectic Cindy's Backstreet Kitchen in St. Helena, and in 2008 followed it up with Napa's very first sushi restaurant Go Fish.

She considers herself lucky to reside and work in what she calls the "Chef Heaven of the Napa Valley." She continues to focus on staff education as a key component of her restaurants' service program. The food, and abundant wine offerings, at all her restaurants continue to draw both locals and tourists.

Never one to rest on her laurels, Pawlcyn has continued to both take risks and grow her group of restaurants. In 2009, Pawlcyn appeared in the first season of Bravo's "Top Chef: Masters." In September of 2010 she struck up a partnership with ARAMARK, to manage the food services of the renowned [Monterey Bay Aquarium](#). The culinary collaboration of Cindy Pawlcyn, her partner Sean Knight and ARAMARK, a leader in providing food services to a variety of destinations, will elevate the dining experience of aquarium visitors and guests.

With over 25 years of experience working and living in the Napa Valley, Pawlcyn remains firmly involved in the kitchen operations of her flagship Mustards Grill, which along with Brassica, has its own gardens that supplement the other locally sourced produce used in her dishes. A visit to Pawlcyn's own one and a half acre organic garden at her St. Helena home reveals the culinary spitfire's solid commitment to seasonal inspiration and the use of the region's bountiful harvests as the fresh ingredients for brilliantly delectable creations.

"My father had a good green thumb and he taught me a lot about fresh produce and instilled a love for those flavors," she says. "Everywhere I've lived, I've had a garden, whether it was a window box of herbs when I lived in Chicago or the large garden at my house. I feel it's important for freshness and flavor and it brings people closer to their food."

An avid book collector, Pawlcyn draws inspiration from her vast personal culinary library. Her collection of over 2,000 tomes fills three rooms in her home along with a separate tent bungalow for the literary overflow. Her collection includes international and regional cookbooks by subject (from cheese making and fish to rhubarb and bread) written by luminaries like M.F.K. Fisher as well as some rarities, including a cookbook written by surrealist artist Salvador Dali. When Pawlcyn creates internationally rooted dishes, she researches her vast collection to ensure the authenticity of technique and flavor combinations that consistently bring a distinct taste of cultural heritage and rich tradition to her diners.

Another aspect of Pawlcyn's dedication to authenticity is her experiential research. Nourishing her insatiable thirst for culinary knowledge, Pawlcyn travels to gastronomic capitols across the globe, trying new restaurants and cuisines while collecting ideas to further translate the authenticity to her own creations.

Pawlcyn's passions and profession are deeply intertwined. When not in the restaurants, she is often found in her garden, cooking for friends and family, or in her ceramics studio, creating beautiful handmade dishes. An avid potter, Pawlcyn's dishes are incorporated into décor of Cindy's Backstreet Kitchen, on display in the custom cupboards throughout the restaurant, and used as serving pieces both there and at Mustards Grill.

A pioneer in her field, Pawlcyn has a devoted local and national following and has been acknowledged by many top culinary organizations and magazines. An inductee of Who's Who of Cooking in America, she has also been twice nominated for the James Beard Foundation award for Best Chef in California. She is the recipient of the Robert Mondavi Award for Culinary Excellence, in addition to the Fine Beverage and Food Federation's Career Achievement Award. She has authored four cookbooks: The James Beard Award winning *Mustards Grill Napa Valley Cookbook*; *Fog City Diner Cookbook*; *Big Small Plates* and her most recent, *Cindy Pawlcyn's Appetizers*. She just completed her fifth cookbook, *Cindy's Supper Club* which is due from Ten Speed Press in April 2012.