

Perfect Weekend: Thomas Keller

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Andrew Barker



Rod McLean

“I’m the kind of person who likes rituals. The older I get, the more physically taxing this job is, so I have a physical trainer most mornings, but on Saturday I have the morning to myself. I always start with fresh pears and mangoes with Greek yoghurt and sunflower seeds while I read the newspapers on my back porch. There are four 75ft Douglas firs, two oaks, two Crape myrtles and a very tall hedge on our property in Yountville, so we get a forest-type feeling of seclusion.

For groceries I head off to Vallerga’s, an organic deli which has been going since 1947, in nearby Napa. Then I’ll get a lunchtime taco fix at La Taquiza, a Mexican restaurant owned by one of our former bakers at Bouchon Bakery. Back in Yountville, which is the perfect small town for walking and browsing, I like to call in at one of my favourite galleries,

Ma(i)sonry. Its owner, Michael Polenske, has put together an amazing art collection in a relaxed space, where you can view the pieces while enjoying a glass or two of boutique wine, including his own from Blackbird Vineyards.

On Saturday afternoon I’ll head down to the Monterey peninsula for 18 holes of golf. It’s a beautiful drive. All week long I’m around a lot of people and then I jump in my white 1970 320 BMW, the first brand-new car I ever bought, and get to be an introvert for 200km.

There are several courses to choose from (Spyglass Hill, Poppy Hills, Spanish Bay) but my favourite is Pebble Beach – not just because it’s one of the most geographically breathtaking places on earth, with the mountains behind you and the ocean in front; it’s also a historic thing. You are walking on a course built in 1918, and everybody from Ben Hogan to Tiger

Woods has played there. Normally, I'll hook up with whoever's around; you already have something in common, so there's lots to talk about. Golf is a great distraction because it's a four-and-a-half-hour commitment, and you can really focus on the moment.

I have a good workout afterwards at the Spanish Bay Club, followed by a steam and a massage. Then I'll head home, make a fire and cook a one-pot roast chicken or throw a piece of salmon on the grill, and watch the 49ers match on TV with my fiancée Laura.

Sunday-morning grocery shopping means going just half a block away to our culinary garden. We have three acres of zucchini, broccoli, squash, broad beans – whatever's in season – that supply all our local restaurants and my kitchen. I'll talk to my culinary gardener, Tucker Taylor, and find out what's ready to pick.

One of the things that first attracted me to opening a restaurant in northern California is the abundance of amazing produce grown by the farmers, ranchers, cheesemakers and foragers; people such as Connie Green at Wine Forest, who gets the best mushrooms, and Soyoung Scanlan, the exceptional cow's and goat's cheesemaker at Andante Dairy. I like to support farmers: I hate to think what would happen if everyone just bought from supermarkets.

San Francisco is the nearest big city so sometimes we'll go to visit Corey Lee, my former chef de cuisine, at his amazing new restaurant, Benu, and then catch the Giants. There's nothing quite like a good hot dog at a ball game.

In the evening, back at home, I will light a cigar. People always bring me cigars – I now have three humidors because I can't smoke them fast enough. I like the time commitment, and it can lead to some wonderful conversations. I recently shared a bottle of single malt and some Fuentes Opus X cigars with Adam Tihany, who designed all our restaurants apart from French Laundry. If it's a clear night, there's nothing like sitting on the porch and watching the stars come out.”

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