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Culinary stars celebrate the city's top 100 restaurants

By Jody Schmal | September 24, 2014 | Updated: September 25, 2014 10:45am

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start, during which special ticket holders sipped premium wine and enjoyed food by top local chefs before the masses arrived for a tasting extravaganza.

Among the chefs dishing out bites to the hungry crowd: Ana Beaven (Cuchara), Roberto Castre (Latin Bites), Michael Cordua (Americas), Robert Del Grande (RDG + Bar Annie), Kaz Edwards (Uchi), Greg Gatlin (Gatlin's BBQ), Lynette Hawkins (Giacomo's) Ryan Hildebrand (Triniti), Manabu Horiuchi (Kata Robata), Anita Jaisinghani (Indika, Pondicheri) Kris Jakob (Kris Bistro), Ronnie Killen (Killen's Steakhouse), Kaiser Lashkari (Himalaya), Kevin Naderi (Roost), Hugo Ortega (Hugo's), Ryan Pera (Coltivare/Revival Market), Monica Pope (Sparrow Bar + Cookshop), Chris Shepherd (Underbelly), Austin Simmons (Hubbell & Hudson), Danny Trace (Brennan's of Houston) and Ja'Nel Witt (Corner Table).

During the program, Chronicle editor Nancy Barnes introduced Cook, who spoke briefly before the list's top 10 restaurants were announced in descending order. The first spot on the list went for the third year in a row to **Oxheart** (No. 1); **The Pass** took the No. 2 spot for the second year in a row. Newcomers to the top 10 (and the list) are **Killen's Barbecue** (No. 3), **Common Bond Cafe & Bakery** (No. 4), **Caracol** (No. 5), **Coltivare** (No. 9) and **Melange Creperie** (No. 10). Others who made the cut were **Indika** (No. 6), **Underbelly** (No. 7) and **MF Sushi** (No. 8).

Accepting the top honor, Oxheart chef-owner Justin Yu thanked other chefs in the room, including Ryan Pera and Kaiser Lashkari, as well as dedicated his restaurant's award to the late chef **Grant Gordon**, who passed away in August at age 28.

"We put our heart and soul into what we do -- sometimes it sucks, and sometimes it's the best thing ever," said Yu. "We want to be the best culinary professionals we can and give you the best experience we can."

Of Oxheart being named the city's best for the third year in a row, he said: "All it means is that we have to try so hard, all of the time. But even if we were number 89, we would do what we do; we cook because we love cooking."

All guests were the first to receive a copy of Cook's Top 100 book, which can be found in the Houston Chronicle on Thursday. The book will also be for sale at **various locations around Houston**.

Presented by **Food and Vine Time Productions**, Houston Culinary Stars was sponsored by the Hilton, **H-E-B** and **Better Homes and Gardens Gary Greene**, along with beverage partners **Republic National Distributing Company**, **Duchman Winery**, **Constellation Wines**, **The Wine Group**, **Crispin** and **Evamore Natural Artesian Water**.

If you went out to dinner at a high-profile restaurant in Houston tonight, chances are you didn't spot the restaurant's chef in the kitchen, working the line or out hobnobbing with customers in the dining room.

Why? Nearly two dozen of the city's finest were at the **Hilton Americas** hotel in downtown for the **Houston Chronicle Culinary Stars** event, which celebrated the unveiling of Chronicle restaurant critic Alison Cook's Top 100 Restaurants 2014 and feted the chefs who help enrich our dining scene.

A sold-out crowd of more than 600 chefs and foodies came out for the occasion. There was a VIP party to