

## TRAVEL

# Green Stars

Michelin Guide award shines a spotlight on sustainable gastronomy



Grounds of the Harbor House Inn in Elk, Calif.

MATT MORRIS

By Lisa A. Beach

**W**HILE YOU'VE PROBABLY HEARD of the iconic Michelin awards for culinary excellence, you might not be familiar with the fairly new Green Star designation. Since its inception in 2020, this accolade has also become a transformative force, helping to redefine our perception of fine dining as it intertwines with a deep commitment to sustainability. The Michelin Green Star distinction goes beyond celebrating exceptional flavors and honors restaurants shaping a more sustainable future.

"The creation of this distinction was the result of years of observations from our anonymous inspectors in the field," explains Gwendal Poullennec, the international director of the Michelin Guides. "They saw a major shift as professionals in the industry began taking into consideration how they could act for a more sustainable future."

## EARNING A GREEN STAR

Rather than relying on specific benchmarks to evaluate eco-friendly practices, Michelin looks to an establishment's involvement in sustainable gastronomy that impresses and inspires.



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“There’s no checklist of criteria for awarding a Green Star, as every restaurant and its surrounding region has a unique set of conditions,” Poullennec says. “The inspectors are simply looking for those (restaurants) that are the world’s leaders when it comes to sustainable practices and could inspire not only gourmets but also their peers.”

The selection of Green-Starred restaurants — the result of the inspectors’ long-standing fieldwork alongside complementary research — considers factors such as: the sources of the ingredients; the use of seasonal produce; the restaurant’s environmental footprint; food waste systems; general waste disposal and recycling; energy, water and resource management; and communication between restaurants and guests about their sustainable approach.

Moreover, Poullennec points out that any restaurant from the Michelin Guide’s selection — no matter its culinary distinction — can receive a Green Star. And because initiatives can take various forms, no two restaurants will be alike.

SUSTAINABLE SUCCESS STORIES

With nearly 500 global restaurants earning the Green Star designation as of mid-February, each restaurant’s backstory looks a little different.

“We’re really driven by our 24-acre farm and all the produce that we grow there,” explains Kyle Connaughton, the chef and part owner of SingleThread in Healdsburg, Calif.

The menu is dictated by the farm, which his wife and part owner Katina manages using regenerative practices, all by hand. “We also work directly with sustainable fisheries, and I work directly with the Japanese Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries on sustainable initiatives.”

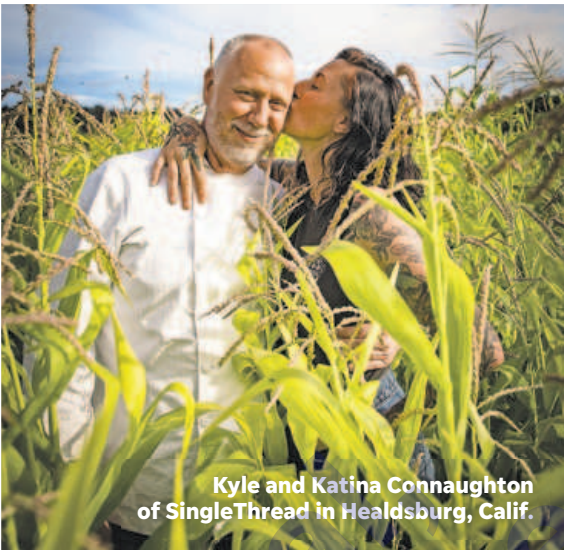
SingleThread also relies on its 100 olive trees to produce all the olive oil used in its kitchen. And 100 percent of the floral material used in its Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design-certified (LEED) dining room is grown on the farm or gathered from the surrounding forest. LEED certification is “the world’s most widely used green building rating system,” according to the U.S. Green Building Council.

Meanwhile, Harbor House Inn in Elk, Calif., applies its own variations on the sustainability ethic.

For instance, the restaurant also grows the majority of its food in an on-site garden, with culinary staff foraging



Harbor House Inn’s vine peach and amazake



Kyle and Katina Connaughton of SingleThread in Healdsburg, Calif.



Table setting at SingleThread



Single Thread restaurant



Sea urchin uni (roe) at Harbor House Inn

and using only local seafood. “We always choose organic ... and select products that are raised in a humanistic natural way,” says Matthew Kammerer, executive chef and director at Harbor House. But the team has adopted other environmentally conscious practices, such as eliminating plastic wrap and aluminum foil, reducing short-term plastic usage (like deli containers), and repurposing grey water from steamers and ice baths for on-site garden irrigation. “If we have 20 guests, we cook 20 portions of everything, so there’s very minimal waste on-site,” Kammerer says. Whatever food waste is left over goes into the on-site composter, which further reduces sending food waste to landfills. Operating exclusively on renewable energy from local solar and geothermal sources, the restaurant collaborates with local artisans for serviceware, recycles wine corks for yoga mats, and utilizes locally sourced, naturally felled resources for mulching, reducing water consumption by 30 percent. Its commitment even extends to using candles crafted from recycled fryer oil and beeswax on its tables.

**TRANSFORMING DINING EXPECTATIONS**

Since its launch in 2020, the Michelin Green Star has reflected and contributed to changing consumer expectations and preferences in the realm of dining experiences. “I think it has to do with trust,” Connaughton says. “They understand that we’re using the best farm practices, sourcing protocols, quality of ingredients and (are) preparing them with the utmost integrity. This extends to how we manage our team and our responsibility as mentors and stewards of both land and people.” Poullennec notes that, for some consumers, sustainability has become an additional factor when choosing where they want to dine. “The younger generation especially is often concerned about where products come from and, more generally, about their impact on the planet,” he says. And Kammerer adds, “Creating a dining experience at the two-star level — while remaining strict on sustainability — shows guests that highest-level experiences can also be local-focused, which inspires them to look closer to home while cooking for themselves.”