

Truckee chef one of the best in U.S.

By Kathryn Reed

Jacob Burton thought taking a chef's job in the mountains would take him off the grid in terms of mainstream exposure. He didn't care. Growing up in the foothills (Cool in El Dorado County) he knew he wanted pines over cement.

But then the chef at Stella in Truckee got a call last month from *Food + Wine* magazine. He has been nominated as one of the People's Best New Chefs.

"I was surprised to be honest with you. Just the fact that Truckee is on *Food + Wine's* radar was a surprise," Burton told *Lake Tahoe News*. "I cut my teeth in San Francisco, but I love Truckee. I knew I could be sacrificing big time awards that are saved for bigger area restaurants."



Jacob Burton of Stella in Truckee is considered one of the country's top new chefs.
Photo/LTN file

Whether he wins is up to the public. Voting is open online through 2pm March 18. The country is divided into 10 regions, with Burton in the California section.

The California chefs are:

- Matthew Accarrino (SPQR, San Francisco)
- Kim Alter (Haven, Oakland)
- Jacob Burton (Stella, Truckee)
- Justin Cogley (Aubergine, Carmel)
- Jordan Kahn (Red Medicine, Los Angeles)
- Thomas McNaughton (Flour + Water, San Francisco)
- Evan & Sarah Rich (Rich Table, San Francisco)
- Ari Taymor (Alma, Los Angeles)
- Michael Voltaggio (Ink, Los Angeles)
- Kris Yenbamroong (Night+Market at Talésai, Los Angeles).

One of Burton's nominators said, "The young chef is doing some of the most inventive yet simple and delicious food I've had in a long time."

"Food + Wine gathers the list of nominees from our national network of trusted food insiders – other journalists, chefs and local experts around the country – and we're always on the lookout for innovative chefs who are pushing culinary boundaries," magazine spokeswoman Erika Gable told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Burton said he is humbled to be on the list with the other nominees.

"Those two guys in San Francisco are easily two of the hottest chefs on the West Coast," Burton said of Accarrino and McNaughton. He's eaten at both restaurants.

The 29-year-old Burton is a graduate of the California Culinary Academy in San Francisco. For the past three years he

has been cooking at Stella, which is part of the Cedar House Sport Hotel.

His concept is to use as much locally sourced food as possible.

“Gardening is a large part of what we do. It’s great to grab fresh herbs,” Burton said. “You can run a quick special with a squash harvest. But (the garden is) not big enough to grow squash or tomatoes all summer long to sustain the restaurant.”

If Burton wins, he’s well on his way to being a celebrity chef. And those chefs are often featured at the various events the magazine sponsors. Burton isn’t sure he’s ready for that. He doesn’t have a large staff, and every day Stella has been open he has been on the line cooking.

“For me, Stella always comes first. My job is to ensure the ongoing success of Stella,” Burton said. But if he could find a way to balance the restaurant work with promoting Stella and Truckee on the road, he would give it a-go.

The chef with the most votes in each region will be named a finalist and the finalist with the most votes overall will be named The People’s Best New Chef. The People’s Best New Chef finalists and winner will be revealed on March 19 online. The winner will be featured in the July issue of *Food + Wine*.