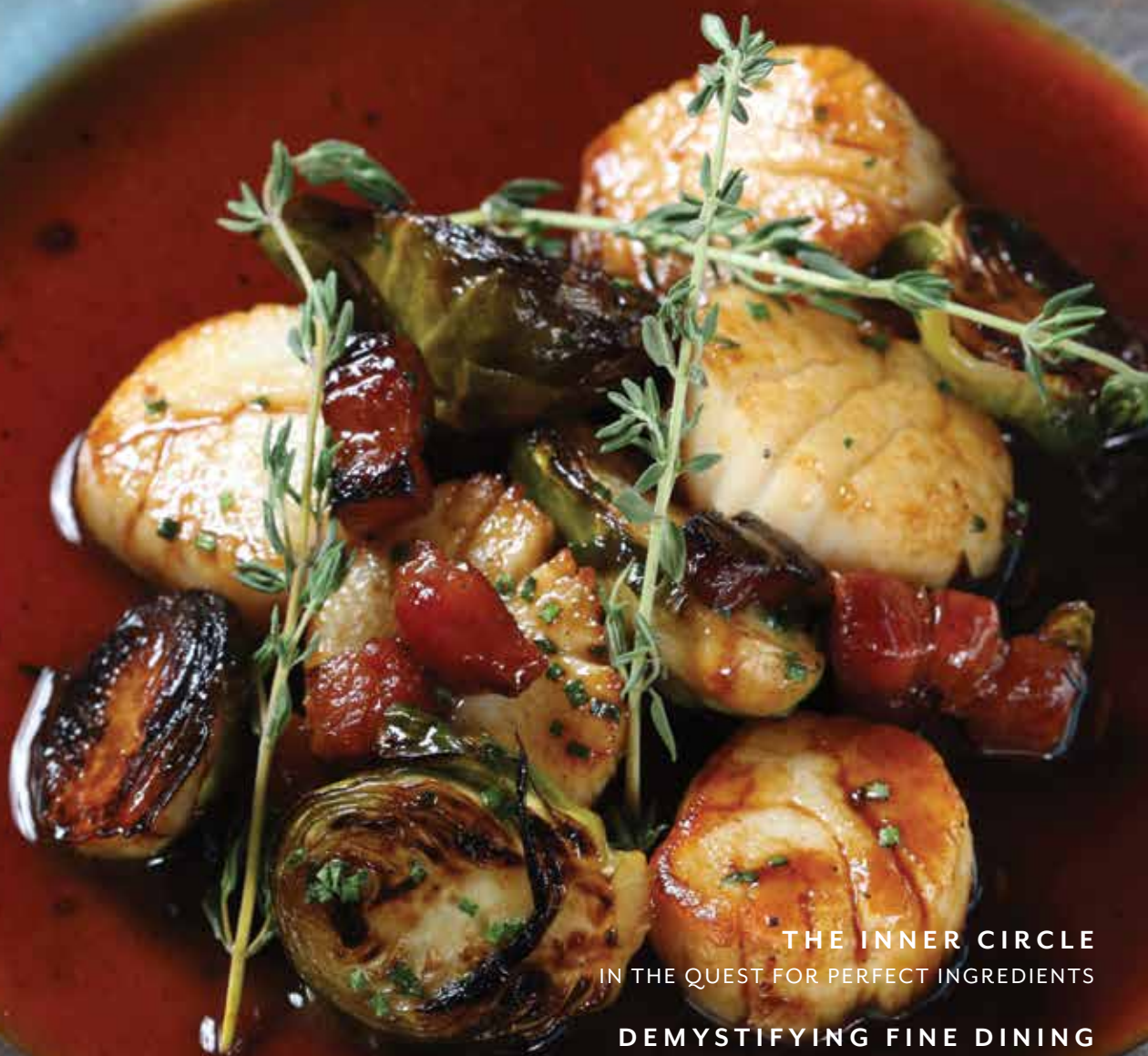


CELEBRATING CRAFT AND FLAVOR

FULL CIRCLE CHEF



THE INNER CIRCLE
IN THE QUEST FOR PERFECT INGREDIENTS

DEMISTIFYING FINE DINING
MARCEL'S PUTS GUESTS AT EASE

RECIPES
CHEF ROBERT WIEDMAIER'S FAVORITE DISHES

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WELCOME



I've been cooking for a long time. And I've worked in some tough kitchens around the world for some incredibly difficult but talented chefs. Each one of my experiences has helped shape the work ethic I have today and the kitchen culture I have come to expect in the back of my house.

When you walk into any one of my restaurants, I want you to have a great experience. And not just because you are coming in for an expression of my cooking. I want you to understand the story behind every ingredient on your plate and know that you are now a part of that chain. You won't find canned goods in my pantry or a freezer in my kitchen. I put a lot of thought behind sourcing each component before actually cooking it. After all, how can I expect my staff to perfect my dishes if I provide them with ingredients I don't believe in. You have

to believe in what you cook with. I believe that by serving Randall Lineback cows, I am not only providing the diner with great-tasting meat but also doing my part to save a breed from extinction. I believe that by offering seafood from sustainable fisheries, I am contributing to the future well-being of the oceans—and now you are too. It starts with that first bite of your amuse-bouche right through to that last cup of coffee—whose beans, incidentally, were handpicked in Central American rainforests.

So welcome to *Full Circle Chef*. This magazine was designed to explain how we work and think behind the scenes in the kitchen and in the dining room to make your night perfect!

Full Circle Chef

My mother was a fantastic cook. She could make *anything* taste good, which is quite a gift. She always knew exactly where to go in the local markets for the best breads, vegetables, and meats. As an adolescent, I spent a lot of time in the kitchen with her. Before you knew it, I was whipping out Gruyère cheese—and-spinach omelets topped with creamed spinach sauce for my dad.

I grew up in a tiny village in Germany, about an hour outside any major city. Almost everyone there were farmers, and so naturally I started working on farms at a young age, doing everything from making hay to milking the cows. My parents would frequent the Thermidor, a Michelin two-star restaurant right at the border between Belgium and Holland. My dad got to know the chef and mentioned he had a son interested in cooking. So I ended up working for him and going to the Hora Culinary School in the Netherlands.

I suppose from the very beginning of my life, I valued good food made with good ingredients. It's just the way I was raised. And it is a concept that has been reinforced in every kitchen I've ever worked. I have always bought directly from farmers. In fact, more often than not, farmers have come to me laden with armfuls of their products, hoping to entice us.

I learned a lot about sourcing during the eight years I spent working for Chef Douglas McNeil of the Four Seasons in Georgetown. He knew every farmer and fisherman within an hour's radius of D.C. It helped me establish early on some amazing relationships with really great producers. I've been buying goat cheese from Brad Parker at Pipe Dreams Fromage for 25 years and shiitakes and specialty herbs from Steve Turnich at Northern Neck Fruits and Vegetables for at least 17.

I'm a big proponent of Alaskan seafood. I've gone up to Alaska several times to secure relationships with fishermen. I was one of the first to bring ivory salmon to the D.C. market. This is a king salmon that looks identical to a red salmon on the outside but is white on the inside because it feeds on only mollusks, not shrimp. They are ferocious fighters, so the only way a seasoned fisherman can tell if he has landed one on his line is if it has put up a really good fight. This is what I want to serve to my diners: something that is truly special.

That's the same reason I buy about 28 to 30 Randall Lineback cows a year. This is a predominantly grass-fed cow, raised the way cows are supposed to be raised,



and it delivers a very clean flavor of meat. Not only is it the right thing to do, but I am supporting a local farmer in the community.

There is a lot of discussion about what is organic and sustainable and what is not—what is grass-fed, free-range, farm-raised, and so on. Ask the chefs who put labels like that on their menus and most of them will not be able to tell you what it means. But a seasoned chef, one who has been cooking for a long time at really great restaurants, knows what the real deal is.

You should always buy from farmers. You want to buy grass-fed. You want to serve fish that hasn't been penned up and shot up with penicillin so it doesn't get infected. You want to buy as wild and as local as you can. Don't settle for a piece of wet meat from a farm lot out of a plastic bag. I realize there are restaurants that have to buy from large industrialized companies in

order to survive. But I believe if you strive for the best and don't bend, that's half the battle. Buying from farmers, buying local, is an old story that has taken on new legs in recent years.

It's much the same with in-house butchering. Yes, you have to have the room to bring in the whole animal, and you have to have the skills and know-how to properly butcher and use it all—or else it's just a waste of your time and money. But it forces the hand of talented chefs to create all these amazing dishes that otherwise wouldn't exist, and it gives young chefs an invaluable education.

It's all part of being a full-circle chef. It's part of my craft, a responsibility to teach my staff about proper sourcing and techniques. A responsibility to the public to serve food that has been properly raised, humanely slaughtered, and is not filled with antibiotics. And to educate cooks and diners alike to think about what you are buying and where it has come from. It's a movement that continues to gain more ground as people continue thinking about what they're eating and cooking. And it's my moral obligation as a chef to do the right thing. That's the way it should be.

The Inner Circle

Chef Robert Wiedmaier travels the globe in the quest for perfect ingredients.

VALDERRAMA

Where Olive Oil's "Extra" is in Everything but Production Time

Follow the gently rolling hills in Toledo, Spain—the country's capital until the mid 1500s—and you will come across the Cotanillo estate, home to 62,000 olive trees set on some 540 acres of land. The thick summer air is punctuated only by the pulsating buzz of cicadas and the occasional gurgle of olive oil in a beaker or flask.



Because housed in the midst of this idyllic provincial scenery is a very modern on-site laboratory that Valderrama built to incorporate a scientific basis to the healthful properties in its extra-virgin olive oil. It is these kinds of lengths to which the company has gone that have quickly ensured its position in the international gastronomic scene.

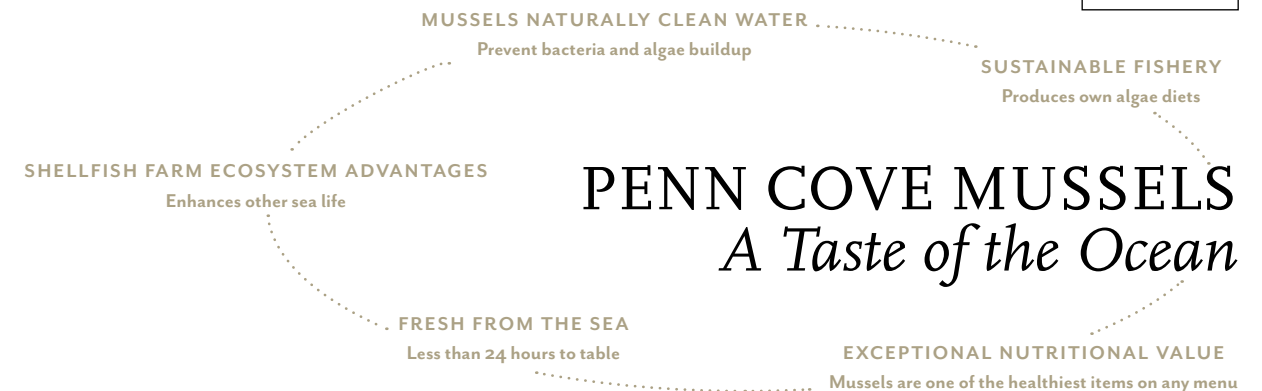
Aceites Valderrama has been producing extra-virgin olive oils for under 10 years, but you will find them in the hands of some of the most renowned chefs around the world. As Chef Wiedmaier remarks: "I did a tasting and fell in love with it. It is so clean on the palate, while a lot of other olive oils can convey a bitterness in them. It changed my way of thinking about olive oils from Spain." In fact, Spain tops world production for olive oil, and the Valderrama estates (they also have one in Cordoba) have elevated its status as producing some of the best. Run by José Ignacio Millán Valderrama, whose family has been cultivating olives since 1853, these two olive plantations are considered among the most innovative in terms of integrated olive oil production.

In addition to cutting-edge cultivation methods—including controlled watering and fertilization systems—the "extra" secret in their olive oils lies in the time it takes from harvest to extraction. With mills located on the property,

fresh olives, harvested at peak, go from tree to mill within 10 minutes. From there, they are gently washed in a custom-designed, integrated cleaning system, another testament to Valderrama's commitment to innovative technology, and immediately cold-pressed in two-phase stainless steel equipment that separates the oil in under 30 minutes. The entire process takes less than 45 minutes!

The cold extraction itself has been subject to meticulous scrutiny in Valderrama's laboratory, where 66°F was deemed the optimal top temperature for retaining the oil's nutritional properties, aromas, and other natural characteristics. Once processed and decanted for 48 hours, the oil is stored in a precise "freshly made" state to prevent oxidation and loss of vitamins and antioxidants until bottled upon demand.

All Valderrama extra-virgin olive oils are monovarietal, allowing the perfect pairing of specific oils to each dish. Flavors are enhanced not only by the olive oil but also by the purity of the story behind it.



When was the last time you held up a seashell to hear the ocean? While we all know these sounds are the product of ambient noises around us resonating in the shell, it's still a magical moment that connects us, however briefly, to the ocean. Now pull apart a Penn Cove mussel and savor its sweet, delicate meat. It's another connection that deliciously resonates with us.



You will find Penn Cove two hours north of Seattle, in Coupeville, Washington, on scenic Whidbey Island. The area's physical beauty masks how perfect it is for growing mussels due to unique hydrological and geographic features. Imagine a basin of water fed by the snowmelt of the Cascades, chock-full of nutrients; that basin basks in glorious sunshine that grows the algae that mussels feed on as they filter and naturally clean the water. In fact, mussels are such efficient filters that without them, the prolific algae growth in Penn Cove could take over and create severe oxygen reductions in the water, leading to bacterial growth and throwing the ecosystem into flux. Penn Cove needs mussels—a lot of them.

Ever vigilant of sustainability issues, Penn Cove Shellfish masterfully grows and harvests about 2 million pounds of mussels each year between this

farm and another located in Quilcene Bay, in the upper Hood Canal. To meet Chef Robert Wiedmaier's strict quality-control standards, the mussels are harvested only after an order is taken—in his case, several times a week. Less than 24 hours after they've been plucked from the waters, the mussels are in his kitchens, ready to be cooked.

"After visiting Penn Cove, seeing their operations, and tasting their mussels, which are just sweeter and cleaner by far, I was sold," says Chef Wiedmaier. "My goal is to always serve the best, so I immediately started buying from them."

While mussels are a national dish in Chef Wiedmaier's native Belgium, consumption stateside is relatively new. Now consider that high levels of essential minerals, omega-3 fatty acids, and protein and low cholesterol and fat compositions make mussels one of the healthiest items on any menu—along with a gentle reminder that the more you eat, the more you support a healthy and sustainable seafood industry. It just might be time to pay attention to not only the sounds but also the tastes of the ocean.

SANTA LUCIA COFFEE

Picture the Origin in Every Cup

Take a sip and close your eyes. You feel a rush of warm air close and damp across your cheeks. You hear the distant howl of a monkey, a rustle in the canopy of trees way up above you. Swirl the liquid in your mouth: you see a flash of color as a toucan takes flight; you shield your eyes from a shaft of sunlight that has made its way down to the dark forest floor. You swallow and savor. You breathe in the lush greenery around you and feel full of life. You raise your cup again.



This is Jinotega in Nicaragua, a lush, mountainous, sustainable rainforest region where 80 percent of the country's coffee is grown. Coffee trees heavy with bright red cherries dot the countryside. And this is where Santa Lucia Coffee seeks out small farmers for their best beans to fulfill the first step of a fully integrated process.

"I turned my heart over to coffee in March of 1995 after listening to a seminar about improving coffee served in restaurants," recalls founder William Gutierrez, who has nurtured a deep passion for the agricultural projects of his native country. "And this was reconfirmed at my first tasting, a month later, of my very own coffee with my first high-end chef and client."

It's easy to take for granted something as simple as a cup of coffee, as we do with many of life's pleasures. But a cup of Santa Lucia coffee is so much more: it is location, it is passion, it is literally the culmination of an incredible amount of manual labor that begins up high in the mountains of Central America and is celebrated in each cup served at Chef Wiedmaier's restaurants.

The beauty of this boutique coffee company is its hands-on approach perfected over the past 18 years. The coffee bean cherries are harvested between November and March, plucked from trees into straw baskets. Since the cherries ripen much like a tomato, a tree might have to be visited as many as four times in order for the fruit to be picked at its peak. The cherries are then washed in large vats to remove the pulp and reveal the beans—two in each piece of fruit. After the parchment is removed from each bean, they are left on patios to dry in the sun. Then they are sorted by size: larger beans typically hold in moisture better and are preferred for roasting and flavor. At that point, Gutierrez or one of his on-site coffee partners selects the best 20 to 25 percent of the beans, which are placed in burlap sacks and brought

down the mountains, sometimes on the backs of donkeys. After arriving in New York, the beans are roasted according to special Santa Lucia formulas and sent to its warehouses in D.C. before delivery to each customer.

It's hard not to be captivated with the process, as Gutierrez reaffirms: "It's not just the coffee product itself that I love, but the whole process of watching and working with small producers as they grow a lovely bean."

This sentiment is echoed by Chef Robert Wiedmaier, who witnessed the harvest firsthand 10 years ago. He still marvels at the memory of being in the heart of it, which he tastes in each cup. "What is most appealing to me is the taste of the coffee, knowing where it was grown, on what soil," says Wiedmaier. "The beans have a great oil content that gives it great flavor, and they are not over-roasted, which is key."

Chef Wiedmaier's restaurants use a Santa Lucia Estate Classic Roast, a medium-bodied coffee with a delicious chocolaty finish. Using a French press, the best of the beans can be extracted as a cup alone or to accompany a dessert, without overpowering it. The Classic Roast's additional notes of raspberry and apricot complement Chef Wiedmaier's desserts, especially those with almonds, lemon, or chocolate. Gutierrez adds: "Because it is not an overbearing coffee, it works well with all of his desserts."

A BREED APART

When Savoring Means Saving

Imagine a colonist adapting to life in the 21st century. Not an easy transition. While there are no 17th-century American colonists wandering the hills of Virginia, you will find rare 17th-century American cattle: the Randall Linebacks. How does this nearly extinct, all-purpose breed for dairy, meat, and oxen find a job in 2013?



Enter Joe Henderson, successful investor turned farmer and, more important, avid conservationist. Believing that America cannot afford to let any more of its heritage breeds go extinct, he has set his goal to find a job for the Randall Linebacks in a world that has taken the flavor and "chew" out of eating meat through the addition of fat, antibiotics, and growth hormones.

Henderson grew up on and around Virginia farms, witnessing what some call "old-fashioned" and others view as "newly discovered" natural farming practices. In 1999, he and his wife purchased Chapel Hill Farm, 600 acres of picture-perfect ancient pastures and limestone springs that allow the animals to live much like they did centuries ago. His convictions are grounded in stewardship, not ownership, of the land: "Living on a farm is one of the greatest pleasures and luxuries in the world. My responsibility is to leave this land in better shape than I found it." And he sees this as his opportunity to save the Randall Linebacks, which, like Chapel Hill itself, were here centuries ago.

In the 19th century, the all-purpose Randalls lost favor to standardized breeds that were skill specific as dairy or beef providers. In the 20th century, America's feedlots and slaughterhouses increasingly required cattle breeds to deliver uniform size and growth and efficient corn conversion to fattened beef. A Randall Lineback will not melt in your mouth; you will have to chew it. But as Chef

Wiedmaier is quick to point out: "Once you have tasted something like this, it's hard to go back." In some sense, you are going back: back to a time when meat tasted like meat. "You are tasting flavor from centuries ago," explains Henderson. Due to the breed's genetics, its meat is lean and best cooked at 220°F or less with an internal temperature of 130°F.

Randall Lineback cows eat well. They enjoy a diet of mother's milk, pasture grass, and clover with just a little grain added at the very end to provide what Henderson calls "21st-century palatability." He adds: "Most meat deemed flavorful these days comes from animals fed on grain. Cattle evolved as grazers; it is unnatural for a cow to eat much grain. But we have become predisposed to like salt, fat, sugar, and soft squishy things, which a commercial steak fulfills. Randall Linebacks keep their fat in the right places, which is not in their muscles."

Today, meat is engineered and each cow is treated as a widget: they are expected to look and weigh the same and yield exactly the same amount of perfectly portioned pieces of meat. A Randall Lineback is not like that. For this reason, Henderson seeks out chefs who know how to use a whole cow and prepare it well.

So what it comes right down to is this: the more we eat, the more Randall Lineback cows Henderson can raise. So you really can eat a cow and save it too.

Chef Wiedmaier and his team of executive chefs waste nothing: from the fat they use in pie dough, to the small pieces ground into spicy meatballs, to the bones for stocks and soups. In fact, total animal utilization has afforded Wiedmaier some invaluable educational tools: up to 30 cooking techniques can be used in cooking a whole animal. Breaking down a Randall Lineback teaches his cooks how to become full-circle chefs, honing their craft and find new ways to effectively use the whole animal. "If chefs don't do this, butchering becomes a lost art," emphasizes Wiedmaier.

CRISPY SARDINES WITH SPRING CAPONATA

Serves 4

INGREDIENTS

baguette bread, sliced paper-thin into 16 slices
8 sardines, scaled and filleted
salt and pepper
2 tbsp + 1 tbsp extra-virgin olive oil
1 cup spring caponata
Espelette

METHOD

Place baguette slices on work surface and place sardine fillets skin-side down on bread. Season with salt and pepper. Place 2 tbsp olive oil in sauté pan and place sardines and bread in pan bread-side down. Brown bread, about 2 minutes, then flip and let cook 30 seconds more. Place sardines on a towel to dry. Place caponata on four plates and top each with 4 sardines. Drizzle with olive oil and Espelette and serve.

SPRING CAPONATA

INGREDIENTS

1/2 red onion, diced fine
1/2 white onion, diced fine
1/2 head fennel, diced fine
2 stalks celery, diced fine, lightly sautéed in olive oil
3 cloves garlic, diced fine
1 tbsp toasted pine nuts
2 tbsp oven-dried tomatoes, chopped
1 red pepper, diced fine
1 yellow pepper, diced fine
1 Japanese eggplant, diced fine, lightly sautéed in olive oil
2 tsp chopped thyme
1 tsp chopped rosemary
1 tsp oregano
4 anchovy fillets, salted and diced fine
1/2 cup olive oil
1 cup red wine vinegar
salt and pepper

METHOD

Combine all ingredients in a large bowl and stir well to combine. Refrigerate for up to 2 weeks.



VEAL-CHEEK MEATBALLS AND PEA SOUP

Serves 4

SOUP

INGREDIENTS

1 small piece smoked applewood bacon
2 tbsp butter
1 onion, chopped
1 clove garlic
1 bunch thyme
1 tsp cumin
2 cups peas
1 peeled potato, diced
2 cups chicken stock
1 cup heavy cream
spinach
salt and pepper

METHOD

Brown bacon on medium heat then turn down heat. Add butter with onion, garlic, thyme, and cumin then cook without color. Add peas and potatoes, then cover with chicken stock and simmer until cooked. When peas and potatoes are cooked through, add cream and blend with a little spinach to add color. Pass through a strainer and season with salt and pepper.

MEATBALLS

INGREDIENTS

1 chopped shallot
1 clove garlic
1 sprig thyme
1/4 cup minced veal cheek
2 tbsp chopped parsley

METHOD

Sweat shallots, garlic, and thyme on low heat until cooked, then cool. Add to minced veal with chopped parsley. Roll mince into small meatballs and cook in a pan until cooked through. When ready to serve, heat up meatballs and place in center of soup bowl. Add hot soup and garnish with a little chopped parsley.



Customize

Our Custom Cut

Fells Point Wholesale Meats offers custom cuts for the entire selection of our quality meats – from whole tenderloins to Frenched pork chops. Your order will be cut and vacuum packed to your exact specifications.

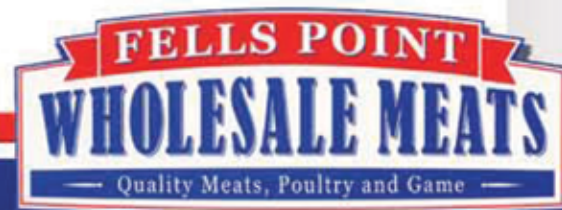


Sustainability

From Local Farms to Your Table

Fells Point Wholesale Meats originated in 1988 and was located in the Broadway Market in historic Fells Point. This retail butcher shop was one of many local vendors offering farm fresh, local products, including organic meats. Continuing that tradition, Fells Point Wholesale Meats has transformed into a full-service wholesale company offering a range of local, quality products from the farm to your table.

At Fells Point Wholesale Meats, we support local farms and cattle growers by offering their high-quality beef and steak to customers. We receive Black Angus beef, located in Monkton, MD, and local hogs from Centerville, MD. In addition, we procure local lamb and rabbits from Hagerstown, MD and bison meat from Monkton, MD. All of these products are delivered to our facility fresh and ready for processing almost every day. We believe that by doing business with local farms, we are helping the local economy, and keeping farmers and ranchers in business.



RECIPES

ALASKAN SALMON EN PAPILLOTE WITH FENNEL, ORANGE, AND BLACK OLIVES

Serves 4



INGREDIENTS

2 tbsp butter, room temperature
Four 6-oz salmon fillets
salt and pepper
1 small bulb fennel, cleaned and shaved thin with a mandoline
4 oz Niçoise olives, pitted
1 tsp orange zest
2 oranges, peeled and segmented
1 cup "pee wee" potatoes, blanched
2 sprigs thyme, chopped
1 tsp coriander seed
1 1/2 cup white wine

METHOD

Preheat oven to 400°F. Fold a piece of parchment paper in half and cut paper into half a heart, discarding the extra paper. Unfold and lay the paper on a work table. Repeat three more times.

Spread butter over the parchment paper from end to end (this is very important). Place salmon on the left side of the paper and season with salt and pepper. Place all the remaining ingredients, except the wine, in a bowl and toss well with salt and pepper. Spoon the fennel mixture evenly over the four salmon. Fold the right side of the paper over the left and starting on the top of the half heart, seal the paper with small folds, working your way to the narrow side, leave the very bottom of the package open. Divide the wine equally into the four packages and seal completely. Place salmon on baking sheets and put in the oven for 12 to 15 minutes, until the paper has puffed and starts to brown. Remove from the oven and serve immediately.

KITCHEN CULTURE

with Chef Robert Wiedmaier

I was raised in pretty tough kitchens, but they taught me some incredible lessons about running the back of the house, especially in the areas of cleanliness and organization.



The culinary school (if you can call it that) I went to in the Netherlands consisted of long days in the kitchen followed by painting the fence around the chicken coop, mowing lawns, or scrubbing pots, with a few cooking books read in between! I cooked all the meals for the chef's family and worked the line every night. My first duty of the morning was to get up early and check the lobster tanks to see which ones were dying and needed to be cooked that night. Then I had to turn on the ovens, which back then were heated by oil and took a while to get hot, and make sure the place was spotless before the rest of the staff got there.

I will never forget the day I thought the oven was lit but when I went to check on it, I realized it had gone out. With the chef living above the kitchen, I knew it was just a matter of time before he found out my mistake. I opened the oven, threw in a match, and the next thing I knew, everything in the kitchen was covered in black soot, including me. It took me three days to scrub that place clean, but it taught me a valuable lesson: always double-check everything!

From there, I went to work for a well-known and demanding chef, Eddie Van Maele, in Brussels. He had a tiny 26-seater two-star Michelin restaurant, and the entire team consisted of three cooks and the chef. There, I did everything from washing the windows to being the garde manger. He was such a perfectionist and awesome chef, but his wife didn't let anything slip. You were expected in at the crack of dawn, got a 45-minute break in the afternoon for lunch, and then worked until two in the morning. And every

evening, before we left, she would inspect the place to make sure it was clean: if she found one fingerprint on a pot, the kitchen was ripped apart and we had to scrub it from head to toe. I have to admit, I run one of the cleanest kitchens in the city to this day. Just last week, I made everyone stay and just clean, clean, clean. It's essential in my kitchens!

Whenever I bring in a new cook, it's very important for them to understand my culture. My kitchen standards set the pace. So you're in or out depending on whether you are prepared to dance my way! If you want to work in one of my restaurants, you first of all have to come in and observe for an entire day. Just stand and watch. Then we sit you down and point-blank ask if this is something you really want to do. If you say yes, we tell you to go think about it for a week and then come back and see us. This weeds out a lot of candidates. If they do come back, they start off at the lowest point in the kitchen: peeling shallots and garlic. I don't care if you went to culinary school, and I don't care where you worked before—that's where you start.

I tell each and every new employee that everyone in my kitchen has to be treated with the same respect. That means everyone: from the pot washer to the sous-chef. We can't run a restaurant without each one of these guys. And

besides, that's where I started: cleaning the glasses and silverware and scrubbing pots and pans.

This is how I know if someone has what it takes to cook for me: I hand him an onion and ask him to simply cut it brunoise and present it to me. If he takes that onion, peels off the skin, and puts it in a little bowl next to him; then perfectly brunaises the rest and puts it in a nice stainless steel bowl; then wipes down his cutting board and cleans his knives and says, "Chef, your onion"—then I know he has worked in some great places. But if he comes in without his apron or hat, cuts the onion, and leaves a mess, then that tells a different story.

If I'm hiring for a chef de partie or a saucier position, candidates have to cook for me. I tell them to go into the walk-in, pull out two to three ingredients, and just cook them. I know this is a daunting task, but I'm looking primarily for proper seasoning, technique, and balance of flavors. You'd be amazed at the amount of "food" I've had to look at and attempt to eat throughout the years!

Seasoning is one of the biggest parts of being a cook. You won't believe how many cooks don't season or taste anything. It's my eternal question to the cooks in my kitchens. You have to taste; you have to season properly.

Because if the flavors aren't right, you either forgot one of those two steps or you have no palate! Salt is a really special thing, if you think about it; it wakes things up. Now salt in the wrong cook's hands can be poison, as much as no salt in any cook's hand is just plain ignorance! If I gave you a steak that had no salt and pepper on it and then that same steak properly seasoned, you would taste the difference. It is that simple! I am always impressed by a chef who can extract incredible flavors out of a protein, whether it is using the bones to make a great sauce or simply by seasoning a dish perfectly. It's my personal approach to cooking.

I drive all of my recipes by taste, which means that unless I have to submit one for an article or magazine, we do not use recipes. Almost everything that I do at Marcel's is through repetition and showing (and showing and showing) somebody how to do it. Because I believe that unless you are making a cake or a soufflé that is precise, cooking doesn't really need to have a recipe. It has to have ingredients, and then everything from there is a path to a great taste. I can't quantify ingredients, because that might change. For example, the carrots might not be as sweet or have enough sugar quality to them this time. So I never just hand over a recipe to a new cook and tell them to follow it. Instead, get all your ingredients mise en place and let me show you how to make it. I've been making the boudin blanc the same way for 14 years. You can't learn that from a recipe, but you can learn it from watching and practice. This also pretty much sums up the recipe for the culture in my kitchen: observe, taste, listen, and respect!

Demystifying Fine Dining

As a young cook, any time I saved up enough money, I went out to a great restaurant. Eating in great places taught me a lot about cooking, as well as about running a restaurant. And so when I meet guests, as I often do, who are excited about sharing with me their experiences at great restaurants, they are kindred spirits.

I appreciate not only their stories but also the fact that they understand what goes into creating that kind of a dining experience. They are aware that the chef has been working all morning with his staff in the kitchen to source the perfect ingredients and make great stocks for the sauces. They are interested in where the food is coming from and how it is prepared. And so it is these people who are a true testament to the fact that fine dining is alive and well.

I will admit, very few people know how to do fine dining and do it well—which can be attributed to a lot of the apprehensions that encircle it. Fine dining is not just about cooking; it's about impeccable service and attitude. Creating a sensation for guests the moment they walk through the door that they are about to have a unique and memorable experience. Because if you expect someone to be sitting in your dining room for two to three hours, you had better make it worth their while.

In 1998, an opportunity came up to buy an existing restaurant. I named it “Marcel’s” after my father and my son. Initially the concept was upscale fine dining but in a very provincial ambiance. The original space had slate floors and old wooden provincial doors on the walls. Throughout the years, Marcel’s evolved into more of a fine-dining restaurant. Carpets went in, chairs were changed. To be honest, it is always evolving. And later this year, it again will be remodeled to update its look and feel.

Of course, I am proud of what we have achieved at Marcel’s. Zagat has rated Marcel’s the top restaurant for the whole Washington, D.C., metropolitan area, and we have many more accolades to back that up. But more than that, it is a theater every night; a new show. We never assume we have it all figured out; we just go in and try to do it right. We want each of our guests to walk out thinking that he or she just had an unbelievable dinner and can’t wait to come back.

While Marcel’s is one of the premier restaurants in the nation’s capital, once you are on top of the mountain,

you have to stay there. And that’s the tough part: sustaining that push, keeping that cutting edge, hiring the right people and making sure that everybody goes one step beyond what other normal restaurants do. It can be in the details: changing the captains’ ties, buying a new serving dish, or changing the amuse-bouche daily. But it constantly has to be changing to stay current. In that respect, too, Marcel’s is always evolving.

So the name of the game becomes not only who can do it the best but also who can do it consistently. Let’s start with the food. As with any restaurant pushing the envelope, we are constantly looking to presentation. But the bottom line is: while you can make a dish look impressively cool and fancy, you have to follow through with every bite. Make it taste unbelievable. Our menus move with the seasons, and those menus are lengthy in that they are all tasting menus, so you can really personalize the experience. I find most guests order five to seven courses, which I think really captures the restaurant experience.

You can’t go out for an expensive dinner and have mediocre service; it has to go beyond what you would wildly imagine good service to be. When you get up from a table at Marcel’s, you aren’t going to be pointed to the bathroom—you are going to be escorted there. If you walk out to smoke a cigarette, someone is going to open the door for you and ask if you need anything. And when you get your check, you will be asked if you have used the valet parking, so that your car can be waiting for you the moment you leave. We want you to have a grand experience without any attitude.

Wine lists are intimidating, no question about it. *What do I order, and how do I pronounce it?* It’s our job to guide you through that list and help you make the right choice. And as for price point, never feel apprehensive about ordering the least expensive bottle. No matter the price, each bottle is on that list because it deserves to be there. I always tell my captains and sommeliers to make each guest feel great about their wine choice. You might hear them tell you that you made a great choice, that it’s one of the chef’s favorite wines. Because it just might be!

I believe a lot of fine-dining restaurants fall short by failing to dissolve the tension guests feel when they arrive. Think of the investment the diner has already made: obtaining a hard-to-get reservation, dressing up for the evening, perhaps impressing a date or a client with the choice to dine there. Do you really want to prolong their agony with a haughty, uninviting stare from the maître d’? No, you need to dispel any apprehensions the moment they walk through the door. And let them know they are going to have a great time, even if they do pick up the wrong fork!

— Chef Robert Wiedmaier



A LIST WITH RANGE *at Marcel's*

Price does not determine quality when it comes to the wines at Marcel's—because if it's on the list, it's there for a good reason.

“If you arranged our wine list according to price, you'd find bottles ranging from \$35 to \$5,000,” explains Marcel's Wine Director Moez Ben Achour. “Expensive wine does not automatically mean good wine; often there are other factors related to the price. It might be expensive because of small production, high demand, or really exorbitant real estate that the vineyard sits on.” But no matter the price, Achour's approach to every bottle is that it be a great value: “Every wine we sell is a great wine from a different perspective, which we enjoy sharing with our guests tableside.”

Achour has been running the wine program at Marcel's for more than six years, but he has worked there for much longer. His philosophy is grounded in service and arming his staff with confidence through knowledge. “We all taste the wines we are generally not exposed to. It's important for everyone on the staff to understand the character of the wine, it's history, why it's made a certain way, and why it goes with specific dishes.” And then they take that knowledge and educate the guests in an easy, self-satisfying way. “We want to take the pressure off the guest,” he says. “I always ask the guest what wine would make them happy tonight, and then ask myself: What more can I do?”

At Marcel's, the food and wine go hand in hand. “I taste every dish on the menu and pair them according to the flavor components, from the ingredients to the sauces.” To complement the spring and summer menus at Marcel's, he recommends sauvignon blancs, especially from the Loire Valley, and Sancerres from Napa Valley. “These are elegant wines that go well with the dishes and balance each other without outshining the other.”

Although a French restaurant, Marcel's wine list reflects a world of choices, earning a Best of Award of Excellence from *Wine Spectator*. Well traveled, Achour enjoys visiting vineyards to educate himself and strengthen his bonds with winemakers. The more he knows, the more he can pass along at the table.



PATRICIA GREEN CELLARS “CUVÉE RW” WILLAMETTE VALLEY, OREGON

The Cuvée RW is in its second year of production. The first, a 2010 pinot noir, had a small yield of 25 cases. This year's 2011 vintage exhibits the same characteristics that make it a match for Marcel's. “We are well-known as a Burgundy house, and this wine was designed especially for our menu,” explains Achour. A medium- to full-bodied wine, it is low in tannins and acidity, with a not-too-dry mouthfeel and a silky finish. It pairs perfectly with the boudin blanc and the duck breast.

UPPING THE CELLAR *at Brasserie Beck*

The reason for any wine program is to complement not only the food but also the guests' needs—which, for Brasserie Beck, can change over time.



Ramon Narvaez, Brasserie Beck's food and beverage director, knows his way around a bottle or two. He wrote the original wine list at Marcel's and has now reshaped the one at Brasserie Beck. “When I started working with Chef Wiedmaier at Marcel's over 12 years ago, we did not have a sommelier,” says Narvaez. “Given the quality of our cuisine, we needed one, and Chef Robert presented me with not only the opportunity but also the means to put me in that spot. He sent me to vineyards all over Europe to learn and taste, and then to wine classes here to qualify as a sommelier. I was extremely fortunate to have had that kind of training.”

At Marcel's, Narvaez had to reorganize the list from the ground up. “Initially, Marcel's was heavy on expensive French wines, and we needed balance. We cut the list down from 700 to 350 bottles and made sure everything was well represented in terms of regions and price.”

When Beck opened in 2007, Narvaez was brought in to do the opening list, which today has been recognized with a *Wine Spectator* Best of Award of Excellence. “In the beginning, we showcased 50 wines under \$50 and focused heavily on beer, given that we are a Belgian brasserie.” But soon the guests started wanting more: a broader variety in regions and price. “Given our wine reputation at Marcel's, and the demographic we were attracting, our clientele demanded better wines.” The list grew slowly, hailing from all regions and price points. “Today, we fluctuate between 350 to 400 bottles, from \$38 up.”

LAST MEAL by Chef Robert Wiedmaier

At Le Grand Véfour in Paris, it is around 5:30 p.m. and snowing. The dining room brings back old-world classic dining in the grand feeling of gastronomie, as if Brillat-Savarin could be sitting right next to you.



The music is the movement of the show in the dining room (or should I say the stage): the chatter of the diners, the pop of a Champagne cork, the squeakiness of a corkscrew, the removing of a cloche, and the captain's "voilà!"—that is music to me.

The sommelier opens a bottle of 1982 Krug Rosé. While he pours the bubbles, the captain brings over the amuse-bouche: a warm buckwheat blini, golden brown, topped with crème fraîche and a heaping mound of Golden Osetra caviar dusted with finely chopped chives and red onion. After all, this is my last meal. Another bottle of Champagne, Gosset Brut excellence, with a gratin of Belon oysters, Champagne glaçage, topped with a Parmesan crust. The Champagne has crisp, cold, tight bubbles to complement the flavor of the cheese and oyster brine of the North Sea.

FIRST COURSE: Whole roasted turbot on the bone, served with pomme fourchette. The fish is a perfect medium rare with the essence of brown butter and thyme perfectly lathered by the poissonier at the last second, placed upon crushed potatoes and drizzled in Valderrama olive oil with just a dash of Maldon salt. The wine: a 2000 Chablis Grand Cru "Clos" Domaine François Raveneau.

SECOND COURSE: Roasted chestnut soup with venison sausage and sautéed girolle mushrooms in a quenelle celery root puree. The captain brings out the soup plate and his assistant follows with a tête de Lyon, ladling the soup around the garnish. Of course, the entremetier had just blended the soup at the last minute, so it's aerated and smooth and infused with roasted foie gras and black truffle juice. Sitting next to me is my already decanted bottle of Romanée-St. Vivant Domaine Leroy.

THIRD COURSE: My next course of gluttony is the purest, whitest, cleanest roasted sweetbreads, like clouds yet crisp and golden on the outside. This is nestled on top of baby spinach, sautéed in shallot butter and sauced with a veal jus infused with Ghent mustard from Belgium. The wine: Châteauneuf-du-Pape Domaine du Vieux Télégraphe.

FOURTH COURSE: Whole squab from Bresse that is roasted and stuffed with thyme and garlic, served with caramelized salsify and root vegetable puree, and sauced with a pigeon reduction of shallots, thyme, and truffle butter whipped in at the very end. At the last moment, a dash of fleur de sel. The wine: Bonnes-Mares Grand Cru Remoissenet Père et Fils.

Cheese brings this last meal to a close. Two cow's milk—Époisses de Bourgogne and Vacherin du Mont D'or—and one ewe cheese, like a Tomme Corse from Corsica (as this is my last meal, and I want to try something new). With this, I would have grilled baguettes drizzled in walnut honey and a beautiful bottle of Côtes de Rhône.

And for the very end to a grand meal, a Grand Cognac and a Montecristo #5.



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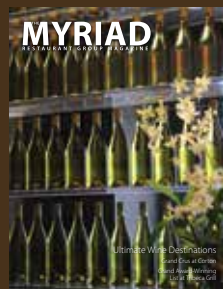
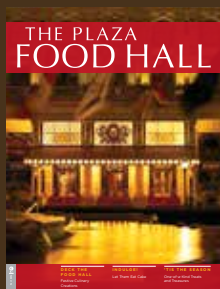
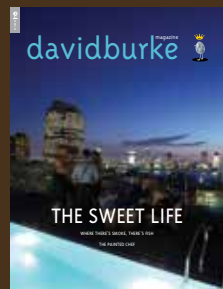
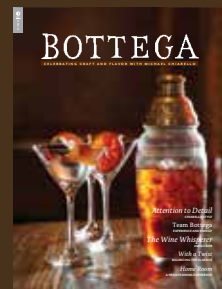
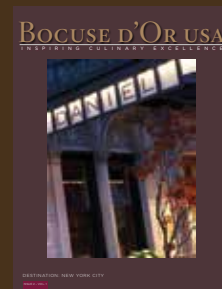
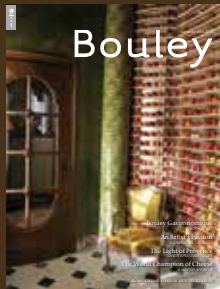
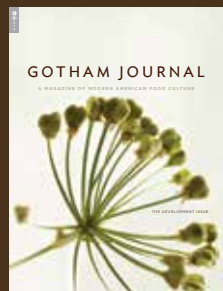
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