



ANDREW HARNIK/THE EXAMINER

David Varley is the executive chef at Bourbon Steak at the Four Seasons Hotel in Georgetown.

IF YOU GO

Bourbon Steak

» **Location:** Four Seasons Hotel, 2800 Pennsylvania Ave. NW
 » **Contact:** 202-944-2026
 » **Hours:** Lunch 11:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m., dinner 5:30 to 10:30 p.m. daily

Scott Greenberg » **The Vine Guy**

Other countries getting in on biodynamic wines

Last week, I wrote about several biodynamic wines from France, including wines from Champagne, Alsace and the Rhone Valley. Needless to say, the wines I reviewed are simply the proverbial tip of the iceberg. There are many more incredible wines from both France and the rest of the wine-producing world that use biodynamic farming techniques in the vineyard.

This week, I cover several wines from producers in other countries. But first, let me recap the main concepts of biodynamic farming.

The biodynamic farming movement began with a series of lectures given by Austrian philosopher Rudolf Steiner in the early 1900s. The philosophy involves looking at agriculture as a “closed system” — the soil (everything growing above it and in it), insects and local flora are all connected to each other. If any one part is damaged, the whole suffers. The process involves promoting the use of natural techniques to keep the soil and crops healthy without the use of artificial pesticides or fertilizers. It may also embrace less conventional — and more “cosmological” — practices such as limiting irrigation or planning harvests according to lunar phases or specific astrological events.

It is a system of agricultural philosophy that incorporates both ecological self-sufficiency and ethical-spiritual considerations to farm crops in a responsible fashion. And while it can apply to any type of agricultural produce, it has really caught on over the last two decades with prominent winegrowers from around the world. Many vineyard managers are now using classic techniques that include the use of indigenous predators — such as chickens and ladybugs for pest control — to less conventional methods, such as planting cow horns stuffed with manure at the end of each vineyard row.

Other examples include planting wildflowers and other native vegetation in between vine rows, which are then plowed into the earth to enrich macrobiotic growth that, in turn, provides nutrients for the soil and — in turn — the vines. Macrobiotic bacterium also plays a big role in providing a sustainable ecosystem. Planting different crops — such as olive trees, apple trees and rosebushes among the vineyards — is also encouraged.

Best of all, the farmland is spared from the environmental effect of fertilizers and pesticides that make their way into the watershed network where they can wreak havoc with sensitive ecosystems. Additionally, biodynamic techniques can save money for farmers since they no longer have to purchase expensive chemicals to promote crop growth or provide protection from pesky pests.

Today, biodynamic farming

— along with “sustainable” agriculture and organic production — has grown into a widely accepted movement in the winemaking industry. Wine producers around the world are either converting their vineyard operations to biodynamic techniques or are contracting grapes from vineyards that embrace the practice. Here are several biodynamic wines to consider the next time you want to “drink green.” Retail prices are approximate.

2007 Cosimo Maria Masini “Annick,” San Miniato, Italy (\$20)

A blend of 60 percent chardonnay and 40 percent sauvignon blanc, this pale yellow wine is full of crisp green apple, nectarine and ripe peach flavors. The mouthfeel is slightly full, but not cloying. The abundant acidity keeps the finish bright and fresh. Hints of citrus make this a great pair with choice shellfish.

2005 Tenuta di Valgiano Palistorti, Tuscany, Italy (\$38)

A lovely red blend made from sangiovese (70 percent), merlot (20 percent) and syrah (10 percent), it exhibits aromas of black and red cherry, raspberry and cloves. Sumptuous flavors of cherry, plum, spice and earthiness are charming as persistent across the palate. The finish is balanced and pleasant, featuring just a touch of mineral and cocoa.

2007 The Milton Vineyard and Winery Riesling, Gisbourne, New Zealand (\$23)

The vineyard, located on the banks of the Arai River, near Manutuke, has been farmed biodynamically since 1984. This Riesling is fresh, bright and full of nectarine, lemon peel and kiwi (no pun intended) flavors. Hints of honey on the medium-bodied finish add a touch of depth and richness that could hold its own with spicier foods.

2004 Compania de vinos Telmo Rodriguez Lanzaga, Rioja, Spain (\$25)

A spicy red blend of tempranillo, graciano and garnacha, the compelling flavors of red plum, cherry and black raspberry are highlighted by notes of espresso and Baker’s chocolate on the well-structured frame. Notes of sweet tannins add a softer edge to round out the lengthy finish.

2005 Tres Sabores Rutherford Perspective Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley, Calif. (\$65)

A classic Rutherford cabernet, it exudes scents of dust and brambly blackberry on the pronounced nose. The palate is well-balanced and features soft tannins and ripe fruit — including blackberry, dark plum and black cherry flavors. A hint of baking spice, toasty oak and mineral characteristics appear on the end of the long, lovely finish.

For the love of the grill

Bourbon Steak’s chef brings the open flame to Georgetown eatery

By **Alexandra Greeley**
Special to The Examiner

When you stroll into the swank interior of Georgetown’s Bourbon Steak restaurant in the Four Seasons Hotel, perhaps the last entity you’d expect to find is a kitchen manned by an executive chef who loves to cook over an open wood fire. Only high-tech gas ranges for him, you’d think. But you’d be amazed to find that executive chef David Varley tends and stokes the kitchen fires of oak and mesquite at Bourbon Steak. Because of their intense heat and smoky flavors, these are the best woods for grilling their meats, he says.

How did he come to gain such respect for man’s earliest cooking technique? Indeed, how did he develop his zeal for working with organic, farm-fresh goods? You might find the answer with his parents, starting with the major inspiration of his mother.

“I got my love for cooking 100 percent from my mother,” says this New Jersey native. “She’s an old-time hippie, and she’s always been serving organic foods. She was like the Alice Waters of the East Coast.”

As it turns out, Varley’s mother tended the family’s organic garden, which yielded enough produce to feed not only her family but also to fill the pots of various local restaurants.

“She also grew 40 to 50 different herb varieties, edible flowers and sour cherries,” he says. “She would have the water boiling and drop in freshly picked corn. My mom loves food, and her legacy: Her love is expressed through food.”

How do you characterize your cooking?

I like adding twists, and I want something that is approachable. The creative process evolves a lot. I used to sit in an office and force it. But the less I try to force it, the better the dishes, with less to hide behind. ... It’s a combination of all that I have learned. It’s based on the moment, the people, the place and the ingredients I am working with.

Where do you eat out?

Michel Richard, both Central and Citronelle, CityZen, and 2

His dad was the family’s grill master, and he also took young Varley along on serious outdoor outings.

“I also grew up hunting and fishing, which helped me understand the cycle of food and production,” he says.

Following along with his parents’ love for cooking, Varley started early with his restaurant career, picking up extra cash at the age of 14 by working at a YMCA summer camp as a dishwasher.

“I learned how to earn money,” he says, adding that he hated scrubbing pots. But by serendipity, his big break came when one of the camp cooks called in sick, and the staff asked Varley to make the day’s biscuits from scratch. That was a turning point, and he made it his mission to be a good cook.

In high school, Varley weighed up his options: Homework made him miserable, but cooking was tremendous fun. And along came another big break: When he was 17, Varley was offered a job as dishwasher in a nearby high-quality, family-owned restaurant. One day the chef handed Varley his own special knife and told him to start prepping foods. Varley calls that one of the best days of his

life. “The opportunity to learn in the kitchen caught [me] on fire,” he says. “All prior hobbies, including my music, fell by the wayside. I even forgot all about playing the trombone, and I was once the best in the state. I have never picked it up since.”

What is your comfort food?

My weakness is all home cooking in any form or fashion. Like my mom’s pot roast.

What’s in your fridge?

A million condiments, organic Heinz ketchup, lot of Champagne, but no food.

Do you cook at home?

Absolutely not. I have never even turned on the stove at home. It is the last thing I want to do.

Amys for pizzas. All the kabob houses in Arlington. I follow the cabs for lunch [to them].

Without a backward glance, Varley’s upward culinary progress includes a degree from the Culinary Institute of America, and his cooking stints include Clio in Boston; the Ryland Inn in White House, N.J.; and the Parcel 104 in Santa Clara, Calif. In 2005, Varley moved to Las Vegas to work as chef de cuisine for Bradley Ogden within the Caesars Palace hotel and casino. At Caesars Palace, Varley led his team to earn back-to-back Mobil Four-Star reviews, Five-Diamond awards, and in 2007, Bradley Ogden’s first Michelin star.

Now in D.C. tending fires, grilling steaks and scouting out the best produce, Varley sums up his career quite simply: “This business captivates me in every way,” he says. “I wake up every day and feel blessed ... to be in D.C., in this hotel, with this staff ... I’ve immersed myself in food ... I love what I do, and it is not work.”