

GREAT CHEFS@HOME



Cesare Lanfranconi, chef/owner of Ristorante Tosca - Greg Whitesell/Examiner

Ristorante Tosca chef brings D.C. a piece of Italy

By Alexandra Greeley
Special to The Examiner

Born and raised in the Lake Como region of Italy, Cesare Lanfranconi, chef/owner of the elegantly upscale Ristorante Tosca on F Street, has a secret: He is working on a children's cookbook. It's about the last project one would expect from a chef who caters to D.C.'s power brokers and its carefully coiffed.

But, as he admits, he spends his time off from the demands of the restaurant's kitchen with his three daughters, ages 5, 9 and 11.

"The book is like cooking with my daughters," he said.

Lanfranconi arrived in D.C. in 1992 to open the then-new restaurant Café Milano in Georgetown.

Inspired by his grandmother's and mother's cooking, Lanfranconi models much of his repertoire on the honesty of home food but gives many of his dishes his own sophisticated renderings. Take his signature dish, the scapinasch, for example.

"These are traditional like my grandmother made," he says.

Consider how he has upgraded the beloved tiramisu: He uses the traditional ingredients, but modifies the texture and temperature and serves it layered in a martini glass and topped with warmed cappuccino zabaglione. It's easy to understand why Lanfranconi's cooking has made Tosca so famous.

CESARE'S TRADITIONAL TIRAMISU

- 16 oz. mascarpone cheese
- 3 eggs, separated
- 4 oz. sugar (6 oz. if you use sponge cake)
- 12 savoiardi cookies or two 20-inch squares of sponge cake
- 1 cup espresso
- 1/2 cup marsala (and/or rum combined)
- Cocoa powder

1. Whip the egg whites with 1/2 the sugar unstill stiff, set aside. Mix the egg yolks with the rest of the sugar until soft and the color becomes a light yellow. Fold the egg yolk into the mascarpone cheese. When the mixture is well mixed add the egg whites very gently.

2. Place the mixture in the refrigerator, make sure to keep the cheese very cold before using.

3. Place a layer of mascarpone on the bottom of the 10-inch mold. Dip the cookies in the coffee and liquor mix and place them on top of the mascarpone. Cover the cookies with the cheese mixture and repeat the operation to top the container. Place in the refrigerator for at least two hours.

4. When ready to serve, sprinkle with cocoa powder.

you are by the cuisine, the more successful you are.

Q When you go out for food, where do you eat?

A We go to Maestro or for a good steak, the Capitol Grille. Sushi? Makoto, Kaz or Sushi-Ko.

I like to check out new places and concepts, but I usually end up where my buddy chefs are: Marcel's, Maestro, Citronelle and many others.

Q&A WITH CESARE LANFRANCONI

Q What is your culinary philosophy?

A I love to be really faithful to the traditional cuisine in general.

Q To what do you attribute your success?

A Cooking for me is the ultimate way of communication. It's like literature; the way you put words together can be very captivating. The same goes for cooking. ... The more obsessed



FRESH FIND

CoolCover is a clear, food-safe, plastic cover that creates a cool convection current around food. The cool air is created by inserting a frozen gel pack into the cover. It's great to use during outdoor and group events. They can be found at www.coolcover.us. (\$34.99)



Ken Brown, left, jokes with Kevin Shin as he samples white wine Thursday at The Oval Room. - Photos by Andrew Harnik/Examiner

Uncork blind wine dating

By Scott Greenberg
VineGuy

My jaw continued to drop lower and lower as I read more and more threads on the wine-based bulletin board I had logged onto. I had recently learned about "offlines" from a fellow wine drinker and my astonishment grew and grew the more I skimmed through the numerous events posted on this popular site. I was simply stunned at the sheer number of "offlines" being arranged, literally, all over the world.

"Offline" is the term used to describe wine events that are organized and planned in online chat rooms or on bulletin boards and then held at either a restaurant or private home — offline. There are enough topics, themes and tastings to suit everyone's palate, just as long as you monitor the board on a regular basis and can reply fast enough to reserve a spot. It turns out Washington is one of the most active cities in the country for offlines so most of these gatherings fill up faster than a metro train at rush hour.

Needless to say, I thought this would make an interesting story — a group of strangers who meet on the Internet, then agree to get together for the sole purpose of sharing and drinking wine. The only problem was, I wasn't quick enough to sign up for any events. So a couple of weeks ago, I logged onto Mark Squire's Wine Bulletin Board (dat.robortparker.com/bboard/) and posted my own offline. I disclosed that I was a wine journalist who wanted to write an article about the offline phenomenon and was looking for willing participants. Complete strangers gobbled up the nine available spots in 15 minutes!



Per the unwritten offline code, everyone brings a bottle (or two or three) of wine based on a theme. As the person who started the offline thread, I had the initial responsibility of selecting the theme (10-year-old wines), the location and keeping track of the participants.

Having held my ground, and my sanity, we met at The Oval Room restaurant in Washington. As the appointed time arrived, the attendees dribbled in with their wines in tow and bemused smiles on their faces. Unbeknownst to me, many of the guests were offliner regulars who knew each other.

Soon the cork was popped on the first champagne of the night (1990 Krug), we were off to a delightful evening.

The offliners came from every background imaginable. There were a couple requisite Washington attorneys, a software developer, a real estate developer/duck call maker, a physician, a wine wholesaler and a relative newbie to the group; a young commercial real estate broker who was just starting

his own wine collection. In a small-world coincidence, both of my elementary school-aged boys go to school with the real estate developer/duck caller's daughters. Only in Washington.

But it was the wines that we came to share and share we did. I was pleasantly surprised by the generosity these strangers displayed in the quality of wines they proffered, from the previously mentioned champagne to the quartet of Bordeaux (1989 Leoville Poyferre, 1989 Leoville Las Cases, 1982 Gruaud Larose and 1978 Canon), the stunning Granache-based beauties (1995 Santa Duc Prestige des Hautes Garrigues, 1995 Pegau Reserve and 1995 Finca Dofi) and the sublime dessert wine (1999 d'Yquem — not 10 years old, but no one complained).

Special thanks to Oval Room owner Ashok Bajaj, chef Matthew Secich and our server, Ed, who went out of their way to provide spectacular wine/food pairings and superb wine service.

If you're an offliner with a story, e-mail me at scott@vineguy.com