



James Claudio is the executive chef at Marvin in Northwest D.C.

ANDREW HARNIK/EXAMINER

Legendary food, restaurant

Marvin's chef brings a little bit of everything to his renowned Southern American-Belgian cuisine

By Alexandra Greeley
Special to The Examiner

Here's a case of "does the chef define the restaurant?" Or is it the other way around? James Claudio, executive chef of D.C.'s eponymous Marvin restaurant, has charted the course of its cuisine. On the other hand, you've got to know that the earthy mix of Southern and Belgian cooking really speaks to the nature of the restaurant's namesake, Marvin Gaye.

You can say plenty about the restaurant, a tribute to D.C.'s native son and one of America's most notable musicians in the R&B/soul/intropective genres. With Bo Diddley as a mentor, and with experience such as working with Smokey Robinson and the Miracles, Gaye forged a musical career that has made him something of a local legend and as someone worthy of his very own restaurant as a memorial.

So that's the restaurant, as buzzy as a beehive in mid-June at almost any hour you drop in. Try a Sunday brunch without reservations and you may just barely snag a perch on a barstool to enjoy your fried chicken and waffle meal. Clearly, besides paying tribute to Gaye himself, folks come for the attitude, the chicness and, of course, the food — and that's where Claudio comes in.

A native son himself, Claudio started cooking while he was in high school.

"I used to play around in the kitchen, and cooking just grabbed hold of me," he says, though he

Do you cook at home?

I try to, but I am here most of the time.

What is your comfort food?

Vietnamese pho and the spring rolls.

What is your favorite cuisine?

Vietnamese, French and Japanese.

What is the key to cooking success?

Experiment with food. That's what I did when I was younger. I learned from my mistakes. Follow a recipe [at first] but once you are on your feet, develop your own recipes.

What's in your fridge?

Roast chicken from last night, carrots, celery, milk, cream, bacon, butter and fresh herbs.

admits cooking was not "a big deal" in his family. But he was so enamored of the craft that he enrolled in the California Culinary Academy, where he was classically trained in the Cordon Bleu program. "We did it all," he says. "All the world cuisines."

Interning in Hawaii, Claudio returned to the Washington area and worked with the mother of his sous chef, Brendan L'Etoile, at her local catering company. He later moved to France, where he worked first in Paris and then in Lyon, where star chef Pierre Orsi hired him for a six-month stint. Later, Claudio moved on to Northern Italy, where he cooked for four months before heading back home to Washington.

Now running the kitchen of this relative newcomer, Claudio, despite his youth, has gained enough culinary experience to shape him and for him to shape Marvin's menu.

"What has shaped my cooking is mainly from the places where I've stayed," he says. "I like to dabble in everything."

That helps with this Southern American-Belgian menu, which Claudio describes simply as a "unique fusion. We keep it simple and delicious," he says, noting that pricing is fair and ingredient quality high. If crowds are any indication of

success, you'd have to say that Marvin is a smash hit.

"People enjoy it and come back ... From Sunday to Wednesday nights, we serve 120 people," he says. "On Thursdays, it's 160, and on Fridays and Saturdays, 200."

Yes, Claudio admits he's pleased with what he has achieved, and hopes his family is proud and happy with this success. But even more, Claudio is really grateful for the people with whom he works.

"It's like a family business," he says. "My stepdad is the owner. The general manager is a family friend. And Brendan [the executive sous chef] is a childhood friend." Indeed, Claudio is one lucky guy.

IF YOU GO Marvin

- **Where:** 2007 14th St NW
- **Info:** 202-797-7171
- **Restaurant hours:** 5:30 to 10:45 p.m. Sunday-Thursday; 5:30 to 11:45 p.m. Friday-Saturday; Sunday brunch — 10:30 a.m. to 3:45 p.m.; call for lounge hours

For more from this chef visit washingtonexaminer.com

Scott Greenberg » The Vine Guy Rothschild and wine royalty

By Scott Greenberg
The Vine Guy

What defines a French wine dynasty? Is it based on the success of its First Growth Bordeaux wine that only well-heeled wine connoisseurs might collect? Or does it involve a wildly successful wine brand that is a household name for value-oriented Bordeaux? Or is it possibly the successful forays made into other wine regions around the world? More than likely, it is the combination of all of these that make Chateau Mouton Rothschild synonymous with wine royalty. That, and the test of time.

As legend has it, Mayer Amschel Bauer, who was the son of a German goldsmith, founded the Rothschild fortune. His father, Moses Amschel Bauer, rented a shop that had a large red shield over the doorway. As Mayer became successful in the banking business, he bought his father's old business and changed his name to Rothschild (German for "red shield") to honor his father's hard work. In 1770, he married and subsequently had five sons and five daughters. He sent his sons to five major capitals across Europe in order to establish a branch of the family banking business. And thus the Rothschild empire was born.

In 1853, Nathaniel de Rothschild, Mayer's London-based son, purchased the well-known Bordeaux vineyard Chateau Brane-Mouton and renamed it Chateau Mouton Rothschild. In addition to making some of the world's greatest wines, Chateau Mouton Rothschild — or simply Mouton — also instituted many groundbreaking practices, including the first estate to bottle at the chateau, utilizing unique artwork from famous painters for labels for each vintage, and the creation of the Museum of Wine and Art, which displays exhibits of fine art as it relates to wine.

But probably the most significant development of all was the creation of Mouton Cadet, an affordable "second" wine made with grapes from the famous estate. It happened in 1930 when the economic crisis of the Great Depression was affecting the consumption of fine wine (sound familiar?), so the Baron Philippe de Rothschild declassified the 1930 vintage and sold it to select customers under the name Mouton Cadet. It was such a hit, and demand was so great, that in subsequent years, grapes from neighboring vineyards had to be purchased by Mouton just to meet the need.

After World War II, Mouton Cadet's popularity began to expand to other countries. By the 1970s, the United States became one of the biggest consumers of the brand, encouraging the creation of Mouton Cadet Blanc, whose softer, more fruit-forward style was well-received in the United Kingdom and domestic markets.

Today, the Baroness Philippine de Rothschild, Nathaniel's great-great-granddaughter, has expanded the empire to include

part ownership of Opus One (a high-end Napa Valley red wine made in a Bordeaux style) in California, Escudo Rojo (Spanish for "red shield"), a venture from Maipo Valley, Chile, and a project closer to home, a brand called Baron Philippe de Rothschild, which make a range of wines from vineyards located in the Languedoc-Roussillon region of Southern France.

I had the wonderful pleasure of sampling through the Mouton portfolio with Adrien Laurent, the director of North American exports for Mouton Rothschild, while I was in Paris last month. Retail prices are approximate.

2007 Mouton Cadet Blanc, Bordeaux, France (\$10)

Made from a blend of Sauvignon Blanc, Semillon and Muscadelle, this white wine is smooth and round in the mouth. Flavors of white peach, nectarine and green apple are dominant on the palate but remain fresh and crisp thanks to the bright acidity. A touch of grapefruit slides in on the lengthy finish.

2007 Mouton Cadet Rouge, Bordeaux, France (\$10)

This red blend is made from classic Bordeaux varietals of Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon and Cabernet Franc. It is surprisingly well-balanced and elegant for a wine at this price, featuring fresh, round fruit — blackberry, cherry and black raspberry — and a supple finish with hints of spice and earthiness at the end. A great value.

2007 Baron Philippe de Rothschild Merlot, Languedoc-Roussillon, France (\$8)

Looking to take advantage of the unique microclimates of Southern France, the Rothschild family expanded in the Languedoc region to create ripe, value-oriented wines. The Merlot has remarkable structure and elegance for the price and displays plum, dark cherry and blackberry flavors on the palate. Notes of spice and chocolate blend in on the supple finish.

2007 Baron Philippe de Rothschild Cabernet Sauvignon, Languedoc-Roussillon, France (\$8)

Another wine from the Southern France collection, this red beauty is steeped with flavors of blackberry, cassis and ripe cherry. The firm-yet-lengthy finish provides balance, and notes of spice add depth.

2007 Baron Philippe de Rothschild Escudo Rojo Red Wine Blend, Maipo Valley, Chile (\$14)

Escudo Rojo means "red shield" and is the first venture in Chile for the Rothschild family. The wine is a unique blend of Cabernet Sauvignon and Carménère from Maipo, Colchagua and Cachapoal Valleys as well as Cabernet Franc and Syrah from the Maipo Valley. The smoky, meaty nose leads to flavors of dark plum, black cherry and spice in the mouth. The well-balanced finish has just a hint of black licorice and cocoa on the backend.