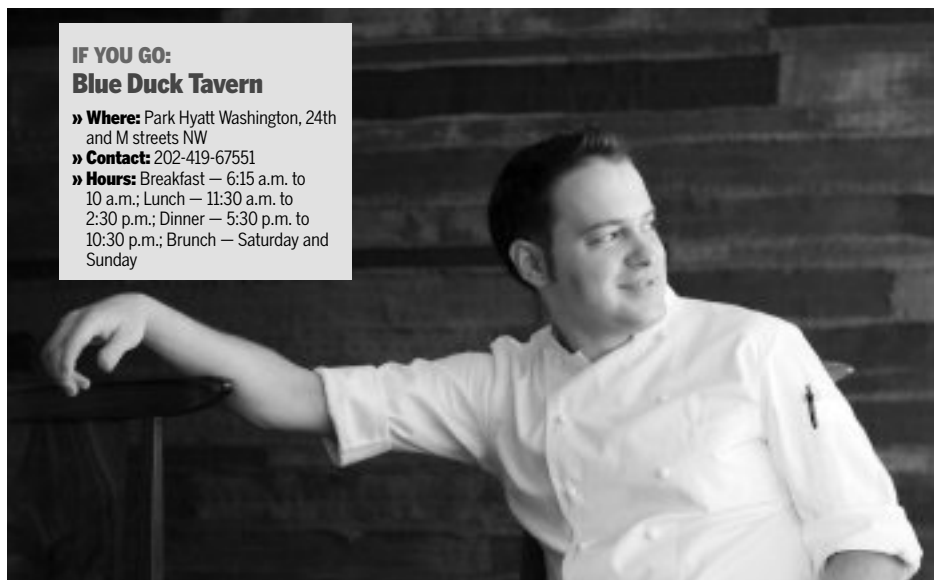


PROFILE

IF YOU GO:
Blue Duck Tavern

» **Where:** Park Hyatt Washington, 24th and M streets NW
 » **Contact:** 202-419-67551
 » **Hours:** Breakfast — 6:15 a.m. to 10 a.m.; Lunch — 11:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m.; Dinner — 5:30 p.m. to 10:30 p.m.; Brunch — Saturday and Sunday



Mark Santoro is the chef de cuisine at the Blue Duck Tavern inside the Park Hyatt Washington.

Chef's skills blend science with tradition

By Alexandra Greeley

Every foodie knows that cooking requires a certain level of chemical knowledge to pull off puffy meringues, succulent brined and roasted turkeys, sturdy pizza crusts, and breads that rise like a sigh and a whisper.

But Michael Santoro, chef de cuisine at the Park Hyatt's very farm-trendy Blue Duck Tavern, has gone a few steps further than just learning cooking formulas and recipes: He graduated with a culinary arts degree from Johnson & Wales with a focus on food science.

After graduation? "I went to Europe and trained in several places, especially at one restaurant, St. John's, with chef Fergus Henderson, that specialized in cooking organ meats," he says. "We have liver, brains, tripe and sweetbreads on the menu here often. These are tasty; I've learned how to make them tasty."

A native of Ohio, Santoro grew up in an Italian family and, of course, ate plenty of Italian home cooking as a kid.

"My mom was a very good cook," he says, "and she cooked seven nights a week. I always loved to eat, and I had the pleasures of eating well."

As a teen, Santoro got his first job at a country club, working as a caddie before he got hired for the kitchen. At the same time, he was studying computer sciences, conceding that he liked the technical and research side of his studies. Whether it was his love of good food or his interest in science and technology that shaped him, the two merged, molding a chef who understands what happens when proteins cook or when fruit is cut too soon.

Pizza dough

About 16 5-ounce pieces of dough

- » 12 ounces warm water
- » 2 tbsp. active dry yeast
- » 2 tbsp. kosher salt
- » 1/4 cup olive oil
- » 3 pounds bread flour

Combine water, yeast, salt and olive oil in a stand mixer and allow the yeast to bloom for 10 minutes. Add the flour all at once, and with a dough hook, knead until a smooth ball is formed. Adjust with a dusting of flour as needed.

Allow to proof in a warm place until doubled in bulk.

Preheat the oven to 450 degrees. Punch the dough down, and form into a large ball. Divide the dough into 16 5-ounce portions and allow to rest on a sheet tray for 20 more minutes. Using a rolling pin, roll each out until 1/2-inch thick; alternatively, toss in the air to stretch. Top with desired toppings.

Bake pizzas until crispy and the cheese has melted and browned.

"People often think that searing meat seals in its juices," he says, "but that is actually wrong. High heat denatures protein so that the meat loses its juice. It's better to start with moderate heat, and keep turning the meat every 15 to 20 seconds."

Skeptical about the value of food science knowledge? Santoro continues, explaining how fresh-cut lemons lose flavor fast — because the cut cells digest themselves — and he debunks the myth that blanching green beans in salted water preserves their bright green color.

"We experimented using the same amount of water and beans, but varied the amounts of salt," he says. "We blanched the beans and tasted them. The beans cooked without salt stayed the brightest green."

It helps, of course, that Santoro has at his disposal new high-tech equipment and gadgets for brining and making sausages. But his food science knowledge is basic to his kitchen success.

"Food science affects how we cook

here," he says. "We understand what's happening in the pan, and we use that knowledge for a better result."

To banish any lingering doubts, Santoro goes on to explain the basics of roasting chicken, a task most home cooks have performed at least once in their kitchen life.

"Roasting chicken is pretty basic," he says, "but the way we do it is different. I soak mine in salted buttermilk, which softens the meat because the salt denatures the protein and allows it to absorb more liquid. Then I cook it at a low temperature, 155 degrees," adding that this gentle way of cooking softens and cooks without a harsh temperature contrast.

Part chef, part scientist, Santoro continues to hone his skills and cook with valor and creativity. But he also is sensible enough to remember this: "Don't tell your mom she's not cooking right."

For more with Chef Michael Santoro visit dceaminer.com.

THE VINE GUY

Taking the Longview of Australia

Nestled in the shadow of the Mount Lofty range of South Australia lies one of the most idyllic places in the Southern Hemisphere: the Adelaide Hills. Located just 30 minutes east of the capital city of South Australia, Adelaide, the region developed its winemaking roots, so to speak, back in the mid 1800s. Rumor has it that a case of wine from the region was sent to Queen Victoria in 1844 and was well received.

The area is blessed with an intricate network of valleys and vales that provide an incredibly diverse range of slopes and soils in which to grow a variety of wine grapes. The cooler climate favors more delicate wines made from grapes such as Riesling, sauvignon blanc and chardonnay. However, heartier varietals planted higher up on the slopes can take advantage of the warm Australian sunshine to produce luscious cabernet sauvignon and shiraz wines.

Situated at the eastern edge of the region, just south of the historic township of Macclesfield, are the picturesque vineyards of Longview. The name Longview is derived directly from the panoramic views of Lake Alexandrina as well as the stunning vistas of the surrounding countryside, referred to as the Coorong.

Originally the land began its life as a dairy farm. In 1995, founder Duncan McGillivray planted the first vines on just over 100 acres. Today, they have expanded to around 220 acres. The predominately northeast-facing slopes and valleys, combined with the cooler climate and state-of-the-art winemaking techniques, produce wines that are consistently well balanced and enjoyable.

In February, Longview Vineyard underwent a change of ownership. The Saturno family, longtime residents of South Australia with a 30-year history in the food, wine and hospitality industry, took over the enterprise. Brothers Mark and Peter left lucrative careers in New York City — Mark was a Broadway actor and Peter was a successful wine distributor — to come home to manage the operation with the help of family friend, Denis Rossetto.

I had the pleasure of sampling several wines from the Longview portfolio recently when Peter Saturno was in Washington sharing samples of his vineyard's most recent releases. Retail prices are approximate and are subject to change. The wines are distributed locally by the Country Vintner (countryvintner.com).

2006 Longview "Iron Knob" Riesling, Adelaide Hills, South Australia (\$16)

Named for the abundant iron stone in the vineyard, the wine has a classic "petrol" nose with hints of grapefruit and lime. The palate exhibits a clean, mineral frame with prominent notes of apricot, nectarine and citrus. The finish is clean and refreshing. This would pair well with steamed Dungeness crab.

2007 Longview "Whippet" Sauvignon Blanc, Adelaide Hills, South Australia (\$19)

A pretty nose of cut grass, passion fruit, honey and lemon, the theme continues on the palate where flavors of melon and grapefruit join in. The finish is bright and balanced and hints of lemon and lime provide a bracing touch. Great with oysters on the half shell.

2006 Longview "Blue Cow" Chardonnay, Adelaide Hills, South Australia (\$20)

If you're someone who drinks "anything but chardonnay," this is the chardonnay for you. The wine only receives 25 percent oak treatment so the natural beauty of the chardonnay fruit shines through with lovely apple fruit filling up the center of the palate. Notes of apricot, nectarine and lime glide in on the beautifully balanced finish with just the right touch of acidity. This wine is just waiting for a poached lobster to sidle up next to.

2006 Longview "Yakka" Shiraz, Adelaide Hills, South Australia (\$20)

Many wine consumers think of shiraz when they think of Australia and this wine gives them reason to keep on doing so. The peppery nose nearly shoots out of the glass, where it's joined by scents of vanilla, tobacco and cocoa. The juicy, full flavors of blackberry, cherry, chocolate and spices are amazingly supple for a wine this big. More black pepper makes an encore on the lush finish. Enjoy it with a roasted rack of lamb.

2006 Longview "Devil's Elbow" Cabernet Sauvignon, Adelaide Hills, South Australia (\$20)

This wine is a fine example that Australia isn't just for shiraz anymore. Scents of black cherry, plum and spice are featured on the aromatic bouquet. Dusty tannins — ala Rutherford Bench — frame flavors of plum, tobacco, leather and dried herbs on the well-balanced frame and provides a finish that is both rich and supple at the same time. This would be a great wine to try with beef short ribs.

2004 Longview "Black Crow" Nebbiolo, Adelaide Hills, South Australia (\$20)

I never would have believed it if I had not tried it: nebbiolo from Australia — and a darned good one too. Fragrant nose of cherry, rose petals, smoke and tar waft gently on the nose. Flavors of cherry, rosemary, toasty cedar and pepper are finely tuned and supple on the tongue. Hints of mineral play on the soft finish and add a touch of complexity. Great with a bowl of pasta.

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