

PROFILE

The grillmaster

Rocklands Barbeque's John Snedden found his passion in the smoke pit

By Alexandra Greeley
Special to The Examiner

Cooks come in many different sizes and shapes, but few among us would guess that John Snedden — who looks more like a prosperous surgeon than a barbecue whiz — is just that, a barbecue whiz. Founder, owner and chief smoke-and-grill guy at D.C. favorite Rocklands Barbeque and Grilling Company, Snedden concedes to a lifelong passion for all things cooked over wood.

"There was no 'Aha' moment," he says, reflecting on his childhood grilling antics.

"I did my first pig roast when I was in the 10th grade," he adds, recounting how he used to shop in the Italian market in Philadelphia

where active slaughterhouses still existed.

"I became fascinated with grilling," he says. "The first pig I roasted I cooked on a window grate."

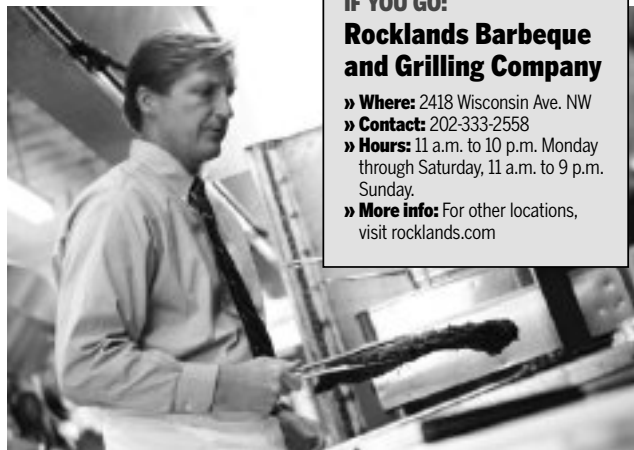
Hailing from a family of good cooks — "My mom and grandmother were good cooks," he says, "they were farmers from Ohio" — Snedden distinguished himself as the only one in his clan who wanted to barbecue, remembering that it was he at family gatherings who got the grill fires blazing.

"No one else in the family had this interest," he says. "I don't know where it came from."

But Snedden's great barbecue adventures began in earnest while he was in college at Washington and Lee University, in Lexington, Va., studying pre-med.

"I rented a farm when I was in college," he says, and as a hobby and a break from his studies, he threw pig roasts.

"I entered pig roast contests here and there," he says. "And I would cook loins and hams as holiday gifts."



ANDREW HARNIK/EXAMINER

John Snedden is founder, owner and chief smoke-and-grill guy of Rocklands Barbeque and Grilling Company on Wisconsin Avenue.

And because he attended a Southern school, Snedden made a point of visiting and eating at local barbecue joints, gaining firsthand understanding of old-fashioned barbecue.

As fate would have it, during his second year in medical school, however, Snedden received an invitation to come to D.C. for an international barbecue cook-off.

"The guy next to me at the event, Brian Watson, told me he was going to open a restaurant in Alexandria [Bugsy's in Old Town] and he offered me a job," he says. "That was so exciting for me. I had always wanted a restaurant job ... I left medical school, which was not a passion in life. Barbecue is what really excited me."

That was in 1984. By 1990, Snedden had opened his first Rocklands, the one on Wisconsin Avenue in Glover Park that sends out such delicious smoky aromas. He concedes

IF YOU GO: Rocklands Barbeque and Grilling Company

- » **Where:** 2418 Wisconsin Ave. NW
- » **Contact:** 202-333-2558
- » **Hours:** 11 a.m. to 10 p.m. Monday through Saturday, 11 a.m. to 9 p.m. Sunday.
- » **More info:** For other locations, visit rocklands.com

Q&A

Do you cook at home? I do. On Sunday nights, it's chicken, beef ribs and pork tenderloins.

What is your comfort food? For me, it's ribs, brisket and pulled pork — great pork sandwich with grilled onions and coleslaw.

What is your cooking philosophy? Really traditional. If you have good ingredients and don't touch them too much, it's hard to beat a great pork butt or brisket when it comes out of the oven.

What's in your fridge? Fresh bacon, pork tenderloins, whole raw chicken, a fresh rack of lamb chops, cream of cauliflower soup, quesadillas from leftover chicken. Green beans. Eggs. No soda.

Where do you eat out? You know, we don't eat out nearly as much as we did two years ago. But we do enjoy Obelisk, 2 Amys, Amsterdam Fafel, Jaleo, Cafe Atlantico, Rio Grande, Joe's Noodle House and Taqueria Poblano.

Texas corn pudding

Serves 10

- » 1 1/4 cups yellow cornmeal
- » 5 eggs, well beaten
- » 1 tbsp. seeded and minced jalapenos
- » 3/4 cup vegetable oil
- » 3/4 tsp. salt
- » 1/4 tsp. ground white pepper
- » 1 1/2 tsp. baking powder

- » 1 cup minced yellow onion
- » 10 oz. cheddar cheese, grated
- » 7 cups creamed corn

Preheat the oven (preferably convection) to 300 degrees. Combine all ingredients except creamed corn, and mix well. Add creamed corn and mix well again. Pour into a 9-by-13 baking dish.

Bake for 45 minutes or until firm.

THE BEER GUY

The perfect beer for turkey bowls comes in many varieties

By Louis Marmon

By now the wines for the Thanksgiving feast have been carefully selected. But what does a self-respecting wine lover drink during the other activities of the day, such as watching football? Cider and eggnog are too unidimensional. Wine is all about aromas, flavors and texture. So it is no surprise that many wine drinkers also enjoy the better-made beers, particularly those produced in Europe.

Both wine and beer speak to their place of origin. Wine expresses this as terroir, the notion that a specific setting imparts unique characteristics on the grapes. There may be vintage variations, but the essence of the location remains unchanged in the wine. Beer, in contrast, strives for consistency. Every day's batch must taste the same as the previous one. A beer's distinctiveness is derived from its recipe, which is invariably intertwined with the local culture and history.

With more than 100 breweries and more than 450 different brands, Belgium takes its beers very seriously.

"Beer is considered a food, not just a beverage," said Master Beer Sommelier Mark Stroobandt. "Great care is taken with every step of the process including the way it is served and how it complements the other flavors of the meal."

Nearly every Belgian beer has its own unique glassware that can only be used for that specific brand. The shape is thought to enhance the flavors, with wide-mouthed chalices used for richly flavored ales and a glass with straighter sides for lighter offerings. One of the more popular brands, Stella Artois, an easy-drinking lager with mild hops and malt flavors and a soft finish, is served in a tulip-shaped stemmed glass as part of a nine-step ritual that forms the basis of an annual competition to identify the world's most technically adept bartender.

The 12th annual World Draught Master competition was

held outside of Brussels last month. Sponsored by Belgium-based InBev (the new owners of Anheuser-Busch), the event drew participants from 32 countries to their headquarters in the university town of Leuven. Each contestant had won the right to represent his country in local competitions and was at the InBev brewery to claim the title as the "World's Best" along with a 2,500 euro prize.

The competitors were evaluated on their ability to clean the glassware, pour the beer from the tap and present a perfectly proportioned beverage to the customer. Each action is considered vital to maintain the beer's flavor and to enhance the drinker's overall experience. Twelve finalists had to follow the nine steps exactly to dispense and serve four beers for a panel of expert judges within seven minutes. This year's winner, Tommy Goukens, was from Belgium and had grown up working at his parent's pub. The U.S. representative, Las Vegas-based Anthony Alba, placed fourth, an excellent showing among a highly competitive field.

During the preliminary round, the contestants had to clean, pour and serve two glasses of Stella Artois within two minutes. The beers served during the finals included another two glasses of Stella Artois that had to be drawn from the tap essentially simultaneously. The next beer poured was Hoegaarden, an unfiltered wheat beer that has a naturally hazy appearance. Made with coriander and dried Curacao orange peel, it has pleasant lemon and spicy citrus flavors that work well with seafood and Asian cuisine. The Hoegaarden brewery was acquired by InBev in 1987 and produces a number of other tasty beers including smooth, barley-based Grand Cru, the raspberry-flavored Rosee, the spicier amber Das and the herbal/fruity Forbidden Fruit.

Belgium is famous for the profoundly flavorful Trappist ales such as Westmalle, Rochefort and Chimay that are produced

within the walls of several abbeys scattered throughout the country. Similar in structure and taste but not brewed within monasteries are the Abbey ales (Saint-Feuillen, Grimbergen and others) that are either named after a local saint, a religious organization, or to indicate a relationship between an abbey and a commercial brewery. The final beer in the competition was one of the Abbey ales produced by InBev; Leffe Brun. Medium-bodied with a bitter sweetness and toasted-coffee notes, it is a perfect complement to cheese, savory stews and Belgian chocolate.

The judging was serious, the event was a raucous affair with waving flags and cheering sections along with loads of free beer. There was even a break in the middle for some waffles, which tasted great with the lighter and fruitier Leffe Blonde.

Even if you don't have the official glassware, consider pouring yourself a Belgian beer while getting the house ready for the influx of friends and family or when sitting on the couch watching a game. Their rich, complex flavors will delight most everyone who appreciates fine wine.

