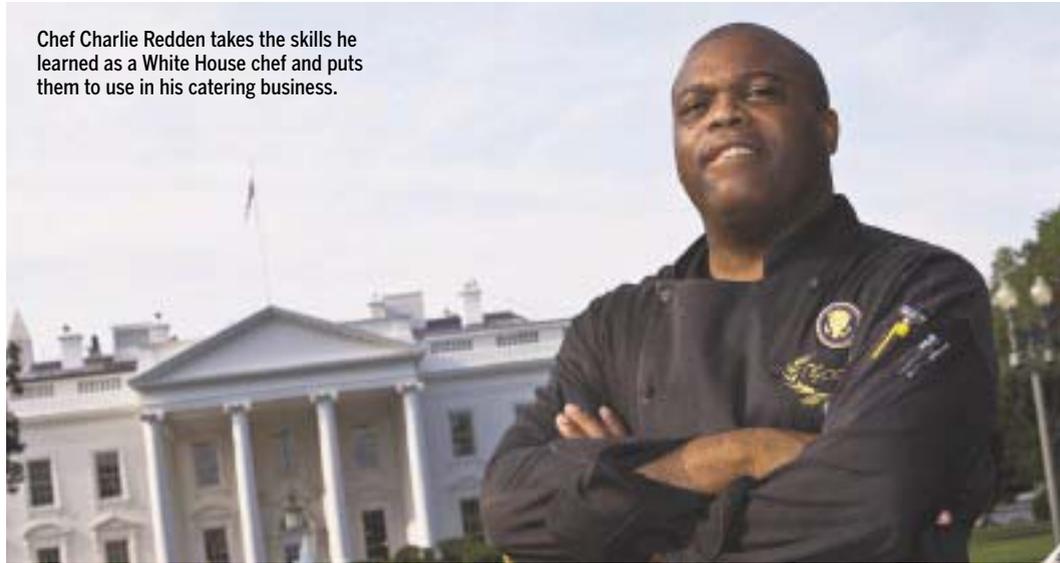


Chef Charlie Redden takes the skills he learned as a White House chef and puts them to use in his catering business.



SAMUEL CORUM/FOR THE EXAMINER

From the White House to yours

By Alexandra Greeley
Special to *The Washington Examiner*

Dressed in his chef's outfit from his days working in the White House mess, Charlie Redden — otherwise known as “Chef Charlie” — sips his water and tells of his rise from the inner city of Wilmington, Del., to walking the halls of celebrity. All through his cooking, he points out.

Like many of his culinary colleagues, Chef Charlie credits his mom and grandma with sparking his love for food. After all, he says, as fervent “country girls,” both ladies spent much of their time cooking. Though as a youngster Redden was not particularly interested in cooking, he loved to eat their home-prepared meals.

In high school, he attended vocational classes in his freshman year in a clothing management program. Tiring of the lackluster school lunches, he asked his teacher to let him join the commercial food-making class where students were creating interesting lunch food. That's when Redden decided, “This is where I want to be,” he said.

“It just took off from there,” he continued. “The teacher discovered I knew how to turn food into animals of different shapes. In the garde manger [preparing and presenting cold food items] section, I was creating many different things with cold food ... I didn't know about recipes, but I could create masterpieces, and people eat with their eyes.”

By the time Redden was a senior, he had advanced enough in the culinary field to be only one of three students sent out as an apprentice to the Hotel Du Pont in Wilmington. Looking back at that turning point, Redden, who initially was reluctant to go, now credits his teacher with encouraging him to use his God-given talents, and thus avoid life in the streets.

Thanks to the mentoring of the

What is your comfort food?

Cashews and peanuts. I would love to cover these with chocolate; they would be even better.

Which is your favorite dessert?

When I dive into a lemon cake, a mean lemon cake. My mom makes these. She gets very excited and still encourages me to use less salt, more of this and that.

What do you do with leisure time?

I like to spend time with my wife and family, two daughters and a

stepdaughter. My older son lives away.

What's in your fridge?

Frozen salmon, popsicles, chicken, juices, eggs, breakfast items and water.

What has been your luckiest moment?

Probably having Emeril Lagasse mention me on his TV program. I met him and talked with him with I was in New Orleans with the Clintons.

hotel's executive chef, Roland Johnson, Redden was well on his way into a culinary career.

“He saw my talent,” Redden said, “and he encouraged me to try it all. ‘If you want to be the best, spread it around,’ he said.”

After 2 1/2 years, Redden joined the Navy, and once again, destiny pulled him to the kitchen: He became a culinary specialist working with the head chef. That meant cooking for the captain in his quarters. Redden recalled the captain nicknamed him “Mr. Gourmet Magazine.”

Then in 1995, when White House personnel were touring naval bases looking to recruit cooks for work in the White House Mess, Redden recalled his admiral asked if he was interested in applying. Despite his initial reluctance, Redden did apply, and his commentary at the interview won him the position.

“I said that there's lots of competition,” he said, “but I'll cook any of your chefs under the table. That was the right answer.”

From then until middle of 2001, Redden worked as the catering supervisor plus earning the certificate as executive chef.

“I was the first certified executive chef of the White House Mess,” he said, recounting how he traveled

IF YOU GO Chef Charlie Catering

» Info: chefcharliecatering.com

extensively with the Clinton retinue, checking out hotels and restaurants in advance of the first family's arrival, and preparing soups, pizzas and spaghetti meals for their personal use.

“Tony Powell and E.J. Farmer, food service coordinators for the White House, became strong mentors and helped me serve the White House better,” he said.

Today, Chef Charlie's day job entails diplomatic security work with top-secret clearance. But in his spare time, he runs his own catering service, Chef Charlie Redden, cooking and serving elaborate two-to-three-course meals in people's homes.

“I go into the house, and set it up like I would have done at the White House,” he said.

And the kind of food he serves? “Anything,” he said. “I just love to cook.”

And his fondest, wildest dream is to serve a poor family from the inner city a white-linen, four-course meal for free.

The Vine Guy » Scott Greenberg The ‘country club’ segment of Napa Valley wines

In the prior two columns, Cindy and I have described Napa Valley as part theme park and part family-supper-table hospitality. But there is also an exclusive side in Napa most visitors never get to experience.

This “country club” segment rarely is written about because the majority of the wines are only sold on an exclusive basis and winery appointments are either uncommon or nonexistent. But the morning of our third day in Napa did, indeed, find us with a rare opportunity to visit the inner sanctum of a world-renowned family-owned winery.

We headed up into the hills west of St. Helena, where a winding mountain road led us past Lake Hennessy and on to a private drive protected by an elaborate gate. A few moments after buzzing the winery, the gates swung open and we were allowed to pass onto the hallowed grounds of Colgin Cellars.

Owner Ann Colgin produces hand-crafted wines from grapes grown on selected hillside vineyards. These exceptional sites, coupled with the highest-quality vineyard management (handled by legendary manager David Abreu) and state-of-the-art winemaking techniques, produces four remarkable wines that are available only through mailing list subscription.

We were met at the winery entrance by head winemaker Allison Tauziet, whose youthful appearance belies her extensive experience. She escorted us around the remarkable IX Vineyard property — including an eye-popping peek at the private cellar where a collection of older vintage Colgin wines are stored — before heading into the main building for our private tasting session.

I am a little reluctant to write about wines that are both expensive and difficult to find, but the experience is worth noting if just to illustrate the spectrum that exists in the world of family-owned wineries. However, if you ever do have the opportunity to try any Colgin wine, I hope it is the 2006 Colgin Cellars IX Estate Vineyard Red Wine. It is simply perfect. A blend of cabernet sauvignon, merlot, cabernet franc and malbec, this wine exudes elegance. From the ethereal nose of black fruit, violets, dried sage and crushed stone to the beautifully layered flavors of blackberry, blueberry compote, black plum

and dried herbs, this wine is simply sublime. Notes of roasted coffee and toffee linger on the tongue for well over a minute on the powerful, flawlessly structured finish.

Back down the mountain and back to Earth, our next stop included the remarkable pleasure of meeting Mary Rocca and her husband, Eric Grigsby, owners of Rocca Family Vineyards, located just outside the city of Napa. Mary, a former dentist, and Eric, still a practicing physician, share a passion for land, community and family. In 1999, Mary, a mother of four, decided to sell her practice in order to focus full time on her work as a vintner. Together with winemaker Paul Colantuoni, Mary makes great wines

using grapes from the 21-acre Grigsby Vineyard in the Yountville AVA, and the 12-acre Collietta Vineyard in Coombsville. Rocca practices both organic and sustainable

farming in order to bring the vines into natural balance with their environment and develop fruit with a sense of place.

Over dinner in their lovely home, we enjoyed a bottle of 2006 Rocca Family Vineyards Syrah (\$45) that exuded scents of dark plum, blackberry, cocoa and black pepper on the fragrant bouquet. Flavors of black fruit and blueberry jam jumped out on the front of the tongue while subtle notes of black pepper filled in the back on the supple finish. Mary also produces a full-bodied cabernet sauvignon (\$65) as well as the Bad Boy Red (\$29), a Bordeaux-style red featuring a picture of Eric on the label.

Our last morning in Napa concluded with a visit to one of the most famous names in family-owned wineries, Chateau Montelena. Bo Barrett and his father, Jim, began making wines at Chateau Montelena in 1972. The winery is probably best known for the extraordinary event that occurred at a competitive wine tasting in Paris in 1976, when the 1973 Chateau Montelena Chardonnay bested famous French wines when it was voted the best white wine by the French judges. History was made — as was a movie — and California wines were given legitimate status on the world stage.

All in all, the trip was a great way to meet the families who continue to shape the many faces of Napa Valley. We look forward to getting to know more families in other regions in the future.

