



Vickie Reh looks through local produce to use for her restaurant Buck's Fishing and Camping

SAMUEL CORUM/EXAMINER

## Chef Vickie Reh likes to keep it simply delicious

By Alexandra Greeley  
*Special to The Washington Examiner*

It's a hot Friday morning at the McLean farmers market. By one of the vegetable stands, you spot a diminutive blond woman tugging a little red wagon overflowing with fresh produce. That is Vickie Reh, executive chef at D.C.'s almost rugged, nearly outdoorsy restaurant, Buck's Fishing and Camping.

Don't be misled by the restaurant name — you won't find roasted hot dogs or s'mores on its menu. Reh is a very careful chef who comes by the restaurant's simple, superfresh American cooking quite honestly: She selects the best her favorite vendors offer and cooks the ingredients up gently, respectfully and without frills.

"I cook using local ingredients," she said, "and my techniques combine French and Italian styles. I use the freshest ingredients, and I can't see using four ingredients when three will do. It's very Italian or country French ... I am a pretty simple cook."

For a Kansas native and someone honing her wine expertise, cooking here may seem somewhat puzzling. No hearty beef stews? No collection of pricey wines on the menu? Her path to this kitchen is not so extraordinary after all. In high school and college, she studied French and was an exchange student in France, becoming very involved with and passionate about French cooking. While there, she even worked for a Frenchman who preserved heirloom vegetables in jars, selling them alongside his confits and pates.

"I just got so involved with cooking and wine there," she said.

Back in the United States, Reh accepted a job with a local wine

### What's your comfort food?

Chicken and rice soup; it's always in my fridge or freezer. On my days off, it's Asian food, especially Vietnamese. And good fried chicken, mac 'n' cheese and burgers.

### What are your basic kitchen essentials?

At home, two ovens, a set of good knives, pans, good tongs, chef's spoons. I don't need all those gadgets like a garlic press. And I don't need a million knives either.

### What's in your fridge?

I always have eggs in my fridge, usually from Will at Whitmore Farms.

Best eggs in town. Also, currently berries from Westmoreland Berry Farm. Good to snack on when I get home.

### Which chef do you admire most in the world?

Julia Child, Madeleine Kamman. I love Mario Batali, Rick Bayless, Judy Rogers ... they are all about traditional cooking.

### Which are your favorite restaurants?

Huong Viet in Eden Center, Ray's Hell Burger, Restaurant Eve and the Bistro, Comet Ping Pong and Marcel's.

suitcase of salts. ... I spent a week in Rome's Campo dei Fiore so I could shop and cook."

She also described the goals of her latest wine trip to France: She attended a blending tasting in the Aube, the southern part of Champagne. She then continued her trip, following a specific soil type (kimmeridgian) rather than focusing on a region or a particular grape.

But if all this sounds very high-brow, Reh reverts to her Kansas roots in many of her recipes. Take the cottage cheese, for example, a favorite dish her grandmother taught her.

"This isn't her actual recipe," Reh said, "because I can't find it. But like her, I add the chives and heavy cream, then pair the cottage cheese with local vegetables, such as tomatoes and fire-roasted pepper strips." She added that serving the cottage cheese with fresh vegetables "tickles" her.

Does she have a signature dish? Yes, she said. The pork rillettes and the duck confit in winter. But in summer, you'll put your money on the cottage cheese-tomato appetizer, the menu's biggest surprise.

## The Vine Gal » Cindy Greenberg

### Napa Valley is like a theme park for adults

For enthusiastic oenophiles, a trip to Napa Valley is a bit like visiting a theme park for adults, but with more roller coasters — um, wineries — than you have time to ride.

Driving along Highway 29 that bisects the center of the valley can be just as stressful on your neck as a roller coaster when your head swivels from side to side as you pass one well-known winery after another on opposite sides of the road. And just like a theme park, you have the privilege of standing in line and handing over \$15 to \$25 per person per winery for the opportunity to sample wines at some of the more popular tasting rooms.

Wouldn't it be a thrill if there were an all-day pass that applied to the entire valley? A girl can dream. This sounds like a fantastic marketing opportunity for a creative public relations team — hint, hint.

But Napa, as well as Sonoma Valley, has hidden gems where commercial interests take a back seat to sincere hospitality. That was part of the experience that Scott and I were looking for during our four-day trip through the valley. On our second day of our trip, we found a couple of family-owned wineries that made us feel just like part of the, well, family.

It started when we headed over the Myacamas range into Sonoma and up to the Petaluma Gap to meet Kimberly Pfendler and sample her new offerings. Pfendler Vineyards was founded by Kimberly Pfendler in 2007 with the goal of making world-class, elegant pinot noir and chardonnay from her family's mountain property in the Petaluma Gap region of the Sonoma Coast American Viticultural Area.

Kimberly's late husband, Peter, began planting the family's first vineyards in 1992. Today, Kimberly farms 19 acres of pinot noir and chardonnay on four estate vineyards. The vineyards extend from the top of the 1,100-acre mountain ranch to its base, providing a variety of microclimates and producing grapes that offer a spectrum of flavors.

Renowned winemaker Greg Bjornstad is very active in every aspect of the process. He is in the vineyards during the growing season and harvest, making sure that he has the best possible fruit. He uses native yeasts for fermentation and exercises a light hand with oak, using only 50 percent new French oak during the barrel-aging pro-

cess. The pinot noir and chardonnay receive eight months of sur lie aging, and are racked only twice before the wines are bottled unfiltered and unfiltered to preserve their unique characteristics.

Our favorite was the 2008 Pfendler Vineyards Chardonnay, Sonoma Coast (\$38). The rich bouquet is loaded with beautiful scents of ripe apple, pear and subtle hints of vanilla. Sumptuous flavors of pear, nectarine, lychee nut and citrus spread across the palate and onto the long, smooth finish where abundant acidity keeps the wine in harmony.

Following a lovely lunch with Kimberly, we headed back over the range and into Calistoga to meet Randy and Lisa Lynch, the "accidental" owners of Bennett Lane Winery. In 2002, the Lynches were looking to buy a second home on a "gentleman's vineyard" where they could grow and sell grapes while enjoying a vineyard view on the week-

ends. Timing is everything, and 2002 turned out to be the worst time to sell grapes. So the Lynches sought out a winery to custom crush their grapes and bottle the wine for their own consumption. It turned out that the crush facility they were going to use was for sale. One thing led to another and they ended up buying the winery and dubbing it Bennett Lane Winery.

Today, the Lynches produce some of the most well-balanced wines in the valley. With a variety of vineyards that are located throughout the Napa Valley floor, Bennett Lane's winemaker Grant Hermann blends wines like an artist, using a "spice rack" of flavors that represent the best from each location, including the original 12-acre parcel — surrounding their house in Calistoga — that started the whole thing.

Best of all, their tasting room, located on site at the winery, is a warm and inviting place where the knowledgeable staff seems eager to help you fall in love with its wines. There is even a "petting vine" zoo in front of the winery, where rows of various grape varieties are on display so that visitors can get a look at the difference between grapes up close, including our favorite, the cabernet sauvignon. The 2006 Bennett Lane Cabernet Sauvignon (\$55) has just a touch of petite verdot and malbec blended in and produces a wine with rich aromas of dark plum, black raspberry and cocoa. Ripe flavors of dark fruit, dark chocolate and smoky vanilla accents layer the palate with an almost creamy character. Soft tannins support a well-balanced and elegant finish.

Next week: *Elite, sweet and famous families of Napa*

