



ANDREW HARNIK/EXAMINER

Chef Bernard Henry is the executive chef at Open Kitchen, which offers cooking classes in addition to being an eatery.

Long, winding road to the kitchen

By Alexandra Greeley
Special to the Washington Examiner

From his native Alsace-Lorraine, France, to Virginia, Executive Chef Bernard Henry, with his resplendent mustache and French accent, has traveled quite a distance.

And surprisingly, considering his skills and passions, not much of his adult career focused on food. As it turns out, commanding a kitchen has been a late-in-life choice, and where you will find him now: Open Kitchen in Falls Church.

But Henry, even from the age of 12, harbored a desire to be a professional chef.

"I was born and raised on a dairy farm," he said. "To this day, my parents don't have a television. And when I was growing up, we didn't have a freezer, so we fed ourselves from the farm. As far back as I can remember, I was surrounded by quality food, adding that his family had a huge vegetable garden, a fruit orchard, ducks, chickens, rabbits, geese and sheep. When I was a kid, my parents went to a supermarket only once a month."

One of four children who needed to help out with the family farm, Henry chose to help his mother in the kitchen from the very earliest age.

"My brothers didn't want to help cook, so most of the time I did it," he said, "And I was 12. My mother and grandmother knew the basics of quality and food. When I was 14, my parents asked what I wanted to do, and I said, 'I want to be a chef.' They didn't like the idea, saying chefs had no family life and no time to go to church."

Dissuaded by his parents, Henry instead got a degree in accounting and finance, and ended up traveling the world "and sampling countless exotic cuisines" working for a French international construction company. "That was great," he said. "I loved

What's your comfort food?

Beef burgundy, or anything that's stewed.

What's your approach to cooking?

Fresh and simple. Any recipe with more than 10 ingredients is too complicated and taking away from the main ingredient I am trying to star.

Where do you get your inspiration?

My mind is thinking about food most of the time. ... Every Saturday morning, I go to the farmers market. I buy ingredi-

ents and three hours later, put a dish on the table as an experiment. Also, I am very curious ... and I talk to customers so I can pick up hints. How can I tweak? It's a constant dialogue.

What's in your fridge?

Not much, because I am always at Open Kitchen. Fruits, milk. I rarely cook at home.

What's your favorite restaurant?

I have so many, including Volt, Rio Grande for chips, salsa and margarita. Cirtonelle, Proof, Marcel's, Bistro Bis.

traveling and I got to taste a lot of [different] food," he said.

Also, his then-wife was French, but born and raised in Algeria, so Henry became intimately knowledgeable about Mediterranean cooking.

Henry eventually ended up in California as a chief financial officer, and then as the owner, of a winery in Napa Valley. He took a sabbatical from the business world to decide what he wanted to do next.

"I wanted to be a chef," he said. "It was a life-long dream, a life-long itch."

By this time, he was living in the D.C. metro area. He enrolled in L'Academie de Cuisine, earning a culinary degree, after which time he lived and worked in restaurants in St. Tropez, where he really learned about the rigors of the professional kitchen.

When he returned to Washington, Henry worked briefly for chef Yannick Cam at his now-closed Le Paradou.

"I couldn't keep up with the pace, so I became a personal chef," he said. "So I opened a small company, a one-man shop."

Little did he foresee, as he offered graduation parties and romantic dinners, and even worked as a personal chef to Leonardo di Caprio when he

IF YOU GO

Open Kitchen Bistro

» **Where:** 7115 Leesburg Pike, Falls Church

» **Info:** 703-942-8148

» **Hours:** Lunch — 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. Monday-Friday, Dinner — 5 to 10 p.m. Thursday-Friday, Lunch and dinner — 11 a.m. to 10 p.m. Saturday

was filming in Washington, that his life would change once again.

Answering a survey drawn up by Hue-Chan Karels, the owner-operator of the Open Kitchen — a successful bistro plus cooking classes plus catering company plus rentable professional kitchen business — landed him eventually as the executive chef of this new Virginia business.

"That was it," he said. "Having a bistro and a catering business is a unique concept. It allows customers to interact with us."

Fortunately, Henry is a gregarious man, so chatting with customers comes easily, and leading cooking classes and running a bistro kitchen seems like a natural fit, after all.

The Vine Guy » Scott Greenberg Beer is hockey's best friend

Of course, I love my family. That's a given. And most everyone who knows me, knows that tied for a distant second are wine and ice hockey, since every weekend I am either attending a trade tasting or a hockey game at either the youth or professional level. But what many folks are surprised to learn is that beer comes in at a very close third in my personal passion lineup.

I really like beer. As a matter of fact, I used to brew my own beer for several years. However, when Cindy — my spouse — became pregnant with our first son, the smell of the wort (the boiling liquid containing hops, grains and malt) would make her so nauseous that she'd have to vacate the premises for several hours until the smell dissipated. While I made great beer, the beer did not make for pre-natal bliss, so I eventually traded in my brewing equipment for a wine cellar and a much more peaceful marital relationship.

But I do know my beer. And with three boys playing youth hockey as well as being a long-time season ticket holder to the Washington Capitals, I know my way around the ice rink as well. There are two things that are great about beer. First, there is nothing better at cleansing one's palate in between flights at a wine tasting than a cold, crisp beer; and, second, there is nothing better to drink while watching hockey. Nothing.

Now that the NHL playoffs are in full swing, I can be found most evenings surfing the channels, looking for a division playoff game in one conference or another. And lately, I have been doing most of my surfing with one of the many fine offerings from Samuel "Sam" Adams, a domestic brewery that seems to know that quality beer and playoff hockey go together like foie gras and sauternes. Maybe it's because Boston is home to both the Boston Beer Company — that produces Samuel Adams beer — and Caps rivals, the Boston Bruins. Or maybe it's because that Sam Adams' founder and brewer, Jim Koch, started off brewing his now-famous beer in his kitchen (using his great-great-grandfather's recipe), just like me.

Here are a few of my favorite beers from the ever-expanding lineup of specialty beers (currently 21 different styles) from Jim's "hockey town" brewery. Most offerings cost \$8 to \$10 per six-pack.

The original Samuel Adams Boston Lager was first brewed by Jim in his kitchen in 1984 and uses only four classic ingredients; hops, barley, water and yeast. One of the lighter-styled brews, this easy-drinking standard has a smooth body that supports a slightly malty/sweet body with notes of barley and citrus on the finish with a just-right bite of bitterness at the end.

My business partner, Keith, is a light beer aficionado, and the Samuel Adams Light is his "go to" beer of choice. It has a very smooth feel in the mouth with a roasted malt body and citrus notes on the crisp finish with no bitter aftertaste. The refreshing finish is reminiscent of a crisp riesling, where the high acidity keeps the palate clean and ready for the next sip.

The Samuel Adams Boston Ale is brewed, fermented and aged in the stock ale tradition. The amber color and aromas of citrus and hops are intriguing. The flavor profile ranges from earthy and hoppy on the front of the palate to floral and herbal on the finish. This is a beer in search of fish and chips.

I am a big fan of pale ales, and the Samuel Adams Latitude 48 hits the bull's-eye. Brewed in the IPA (Indian pale ale) style, it gets its name from the fact that the blend of hops used are all from growing regions in Germany, England and America that are located along the 48th latitude. These hops create a distinctive, hoppy, base that is filled in nicely with citrus notes and a slightly sweet finish, thanks to the honey malt used in the brewing process.

As a California native, I have to give a shout out for the Samuel Adams Coastal Wheat brew. It's a twist on the German Hefeweizen

style that uses Eureka and Lisbon varieties of lemon from California in the brewing process. The citrus plays off of the character of the wheat malt resulting in a crisp, refreshing beer with lemon and hops on the front of the palate and a touch of sweetness on the finish.

If you're a Caps fan, then "Rock the Red" with the Samuel Adams Irish Red Ale. Earthy, hoppy notes on the palate nicely balance this malty, slightly sweet brew. Pale and caramel malts give the beer its rich, deep red color and noticeable caramel flavor. The hops add just the right amount of bitterness on the smooth, clean finish.

