



SAMUEL CORUM/FOR THE EXAMINER

Gregg Fortunato is the executive chef at Buddha-Bar, which specializes in Asian fusion cuisine.

A star in fusion cuisine

By Alexandra Greeley
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When you visit one of D.C.'s newer exotic haunts, you'll feel wrapped up in a transforming Asian experience, from decor to food. You get that any inspired decorator can devise the Buddhist trappings, but you may be surprised to learn Buddha-Bar's intrepid chef does not come from Hong Kong or other points East. He's not even Asian, and perhaps that may be the most surprising.

Gregg Fortunato, the restaurant's 31-year-old executive chef, has Italian roots and hails from Las Vegas. How does it happen that he cooks up an Asian storm?

"I've been doing Asian fusion food for a long time," Fortunato said, admitting his first restaurant job in Las Vegas was working in an Italian restaurant. Prior to that, Fortunato worked at Pizza Hut and then made sandwiches and delivered them by scooter.

Hailing from a family that cooked a lot — "I used to cook with my parents when I was a youngster," he said — it's no surprise Fortunato takes to the culinary life so readily. In fact, what is surprising is he is totally self-taught: "I liked reading cookbooks and watching the Food Network," he said. "That's all I've ever done. I never went to culinary school. I did it all on my own. [Cooking] is the only job I've ever had."

After working in the Italian restaurant, where he became adept at making pastries, Fortunato moved

What is your comfort food?

Pizza. I can eat pizza all day every day.

What is your favorite dessert?

I am more of a coffee and donuts person. I love that.

Where is your favorite place in the world?

Disney World. It's a little world, an escape. I need to go back.

Which is your favorite cuisine?

Japanese. I'd love to go to Japan. But my favorite cookbook is not Japanese, it's "El Bulli." I want to play with molecular gastronomy.

Who is your favorite chef?

Thomas Keller. He's great. And [Masaharu] Morimoto. He's probably my favorite for Japanese food.

If you go Buddha-Bar DC

» **Where:** 455 Massachusetts Ave. NW

» **Info:** 202-377-5555

» **Hours:** Lunch — 11:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. daily; Dinner — 5:30 p.m. to midnight Sunday to Thursday, 5:30 p.m. to 1 a.m. Friday and Saturday

porate anything Italian into it. Some chefs do that, but I am not that far yet. I do Japanese cooking with its precise presentation. ... It's foods I like but with an Asian twist."

If you are an Asiophile, you will surely find a menu with some striking Asian-inspired fare, from the obvious sushi and sashimi offerings to a Japanese bento box with lamb curry, or a tasting menu that could star a Thai curry. Very inventive and exuding exotic flavors.

Scott Greenberg » The Vine Guy

A Rose by any other name

I grew up in Central California, where the temperatures during the summer months broke the century mark on a routine basis, so one would think that I'd be used to the heat by now. But somehow, summers in D.C. are more insufferable. When I first moved out here, some 20 years ago, my grad school roommate explained to me that "D.C. was originally built on a swamp. It's more humid here than where you grew up."

So it really isn't the heat, it's the humidity. Great ... I moved across the country and right into nature's sauna.

But a girl, then a career and, eventually, a family kept me firmly anchored to the area, and aside from a couple of miserable weeks in the summer and a few more icy days in winter, this really is a great place to live. And thanks to rose wines, I can cope with the warmer days nature throws at me. Each summer, I am drawn to these pretty pink wines when I need to chill out. Best of all, rose wines are versatile and easy on the wallet. Served well-chilled, they make a great companion for the hammock on their own, or they can keep up with grilled seafood or chicken as well as roasted pork. If you want to add a festive flair to your glass, try a sparkling version.

Rose is not a specific varietal, but is a style of wine that generally ranges in color from soft pink to light purple, depending on which grapes are used and the winemaking technique employed. Traditional red wines get their color from lengthy contact between the juice and the red grape skins. One of the most popular methods for making rose is saignée — literally "bleeding" — by which the grape juices are bled away from the skins soon after the grapes are crushed. The longer the skins are left in contact with the juice, the darker the wine will be. Blending white and red wines together is not a popular method, nor is the use of oak in the aging of rose wines. These wines, for the most part, are meant to be enjoyed young.

Many different wine grapes lend themselves to rose production. The most popular are made from Rhone varieties including carignan, grenache, mourvedre and syrah, although I have had some wonderful rose wines made from sangiovese, malbec and pinot noir. The qualities I look for in a rose wine are fresh red

fruit flavors — running along the lines of strawberry and raspberry — crispness and abundant acidity. Usually produced with little or no oak, these wines are meant to be enjoyed young, usually within one to two years of the vintage date. The abundant acidity keeps the wine crisp and refreshing and the fruit flavors fresh and lively.

The **2009 Chateau Mourgues du Gres Les Galets Roses** from Rhone, France, is a terrific buy at \$13. It is made from a blend of grenache, mourvedre, carignan and syrah. The soft pink wine features luscious strawberry and red currant aromas that lead into clean and bright flavors of ruby-red grapefruit, wild strawberry and pomegranate in the mouth. The wine finishes brisk and dry with hints of tangy citrus for a refreshing touch.



One of my perennial favorites comes from an area a little closer to my original home, the **2009 Etude Rose** from the Carneros region, which straddles the Napa and Sonoma valleys in California. Made exclusively from pinot noir, the salmon pink color offers vibrant aromas of fresh strawberries and red cherries. Flavors of strawberry, watermelon and ripe cherry linger on a creamy frame and finish with a delightful note of minerality and crisp acidity. It runs between \$15 and \$20, so definitely shop around — it's worth it.

Looking for a wine to shout "Hola!" on the tongue? Try the **2009 Bodegas Muga Rosado** from Rioja, Spain. This rose is actually a mix of red and white grapes, including garnacha, viura, and tempranillo. It exudes aromas of strawberry and rhubarb on the nose and flavors of strawberries, peaches and cherries in the mouth. The finish is crisp and dry, so it will pair well with grilled or roasted chicken. It's a lot of wine for only \$13.

One other fun rose to consider is one with bubbles. I like the Non-Vintage Segura Viudas Brut Rose Cava from Spain. This sparkling rose is made using the traditional methode champenoise process and is a blend of traditional Spanish grapes. Delicate and crisp, this rose is fresh and flavorful with aromas of raspberry, strawberry and grenadine on the nose and repeated on the palate. A lingering sweet cherry note on the finish is accented by a touch of sweetness. An ideal aperitif or a terrific pairing with Asian cuisine.