



ANDREW HARNIK/EXAMINER

Swiss-born Silvan Kramer runs the kitchen at Cafe Dupont in D.C., bringing French brasserie food to the table.

Newcomer earning raves

By Alexandra Greeley
Special to the Washington Examiner

A relative newcomer to Washington and its food world, Swiss-born Silvan Kramer runs the kitchen at Cafe Dupont, the recently refurbished former Dupont Grill. Sizing him up with his determination to make a dent in D.C.'s gastronomic world, his patrons will applaud Kramer's French brasserie menu, starring such faves as beef bourguignon, moules and confit de canard.

Like many of his colleagues, cooking and helping his mother in the kitchen shaped Kramer's early days.

"We had a garden, and I had to help out," he said. "Our family was just always eating together, and that was a big part of family life."

At school, children could choose to take certain classes, and when he was 11 years old, he selected cooking.

"It was all very simple but enjoyable," he added.

Influenced by his mother, Kramer enrolled in culinary school at the age of 15 and started cooking in earnest. During his three years of training, he apprenticed at Restaurant Ilge Arnegg, rated with 17 points by Gault Millau.

"That gave me a lot of practical experience," he said. "I worked each station for four to six months, spending one day a week at school."

He also worked as a waiter and watched the unfolding of the delicate balance between the front and the back of the house. At the end of three years, he had achieved his goal.

After passing the exam and graduating, Kramer spent the ensuing years cooking all across Switzerland, finally becoming the cold kitchen and pastry chef at res-

What's your comfort food?

I eat everything, but probably a nice pasta or a Swiss chocolate bar.

What's your approach to cooking?

I prepare simple, honest food with seasonal and local ingredients so that the meals are approachable by our clients.

Where do you get your inspiration?

A lot of it comes from nature and from farmers markets. I am looking at the actual produce

and products and thinking about it. I see fresh peas or asparagus and dishes come into my mind.

What's in your fridge?

Heinekens, milk, yogurt, fresh butter. I'm never at home. If I do eat at home, I use it all up. Maybe some salad stuff for late at night.

What's your luckiest moment?

The day I walked into a kitchen and decided to become a chef.

IF YOU GO Cafe Dupont

» **Where:** 1500 New Hampshire Ave. NW

» **Info:** 202-797-0169

» **Hours:** Breakfast — 6:30 to 11 a.m. daily; brunch — 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. Sunday; Dinner: 5:30 to 10 p.m. Sunday-Thursday, 5:30 to 11 p.m. Friday-Saturday

"People are really willing to see new and wonderful food here," he said. "It's a great evolution, and I'd like to be part of it."

With his vision of an approachable, yet upscale, menu, Kramer likely will win the support of D.C. foodies, and with its casual appeal, the Cafe Dupont itself will become both a favorite destination as well as a learning experience.

"I want people to be able to experience great French food and have a great time in a casual, relaxing environment, and if I can educate them about French food while doing so, then even better," he said.

The Vine Guy » Scott Greenberg Value in Languedoc, France

One of the largest-wine producing areas in France is also one of the most often-overlooked areas for quality wines. Many consumers are unaware that the wines from the Languedoc region in the south of France is blessed with some of the best growing conditions in Europe. A unique combination of soil, sun and influences from the Mediterranean Sea produce naturally healthy vineyards where pesticides and chemicals are rarely employed.

The proximity to the Mediterranean plays an important role in shaping the wines of the region since the maritime influences have a "leveling" effect on the climate in the Languedoc, protecting it from wide swings in weather conditions. This results in near consistent production from vintage to vintage. The temperate climate also allows the wines to be a little more approachable at a younger age.

This also is the area where many of France's new wave of winemakers has been experimenting with various fermentation techniques. The innovations provided by some of these pioneers has resulted in better quality wines — most of which are blends — from such varietals as syrah, grenache and mourvedre and has raised the status of Languedoc wines on the international wine scene.

There are now 22 Appellation d'origine Controlees in Languedoc, including Limoux, Corbieres, Minervois and Saint Chinian. Here are just a few wines from this exceptional region consumers can explore with just a few sips. Retail prices are approximate.

The Limoux is an area known for predominantly white wines — both still and sparkling. As a matter of fact, there is evidence that the art of secondary bottle fermentation (which produces bubbles in the wine) was practiced in the region before it was known in Champagne. The 2007 Antech-Limoux Grande Reserva is a sparkling wine that uses a blend made up predominantly of mauzac and chenin blanc added in. The mouth-filling palate features flavors of apricot, green apple and white fig. The tight bubbles carry additional notes of pear and nectarine across the persistent finish. At \$17, it is a nice value for a sparkling wine.

With the 2007 vintage, the former Coteaux du Languedoc AOC officially became known as simply "AOC Languedoc." This was done to make things simpler for the consumer as well as highlight the diversity of the area's wines. At the center of this appellation is the lovely 2005 Mas Belles Eaux.

This \$20 red wine is mostly syrah based with 20 percent grenache and 10 percent mourvedre blended in. A huge blast of blueberry fruit on the nose leads to warm flavors of black fruit and spice on the palate. The firm tannins and ripe fruit allow the wine to be enjoyed young but also provide aging potential.

Another red wine blend from the Languedoc AOC, the 2007 Chateau Paul Mas Clos des Mures, was my favorite wine of the flight. A syrah-based blend, this complex beauty delivers wonderful blackberry, black currant and baking spices on the front of the palate while notes of cocoa and melted black licorice jump in on the elegantly structured finish. At just \$18, it is drinking like wines twice or three times the price.

The Corbieres appellation is situated between the Pyrenees and Massif Central Mountains, where a diverse geological composition features soils that include shale, limestone, sandstone and marl. This complex terroir is evident in the 2007 Castelmaure Col des Vents — a blend of carignane, grenache and syrah — where aromas of ripe black cherry mix with scents of dried herbs on the fragrant bouquet. The mouth-watering flavors of ripe black fruit, smoked meat and rosemary notes fill out the entire palate while hints of wet stone add a profound touch of elegance on the medium-bodied finish. Hard to believe this wine is only \$10 a bottle.

The 2005 Domaine du Grand Cres is a grenache-based bombshell also from the Corbieres AOC. It is fermented on its skins for a remarkable three weeks and then aged for one year (50 percent of it in wood barrels). It is pretty wine, featuring a soft bouquet of wild flowers and red raspberries that are mimicked on the palate. Additional flavors of wild strawberry and pomegranate fold in on the easy finish. A \$14 value for a wine that drinks well now and for the next two years.

The vineyards of the Minervois appellation are spread across a natural geological amphitheater, bordered by the Canal du Midi to the south and the Montagne Noire to the north. The 2004 L'Ostal Cazes comes from the smaller Minervois la Liviniere

AOC inside the Minervois region. While this remarkable blend of syrah, carignon, grenache and mourvedre produces a powerful-yet-seductive wine, it is the extraordinary balance between the black fruit flavors — blackberry, dark cherry and plum — and the velvety tannins that captivate the palate. The great structure and gorgeous finish justifies the \$35 price tag.

