



Dean Gold, executive chef at Dino Restaurant in D.C., emphasizes fresh ingredients in his menus.

ANDREW HARNIK/EXAMINER

Fresh is by far the best

By Alexandra Greeley
Special to *The Washington Examiner*

If you are on Dean Gold's mailing list, you would have received a recent e-mail that is really a love letter to local farmers markets. Gold, the executive chef/owner of Cleveland Park's very popular Dino Restaurant, ticks off the places where he picks out his succulent greens and even lauds a local farmer for growing and offering young ginger. That about sums up Gold's cooking focus, one that he faithfully practices: Fresh is best.

After following a long, winding, yet food-oriented path, Gold finally realized his lifelong dream: opening his own restaurant. But at the beginning of his career, that opening may have seemed not only a long way away but maybe even unrealizable.

"I am self-taught," he said. "I started cooking when I was 6 years old, and when I was 9, I started to cook Julia Child from cover to cover. At 10, I was cooking a 10-course dinner ... I used to do this for groups of my parents' friends at our house. Friends would get mad at my parents if not invited once they had been to one of the dinners."

As an adult, Gold started his food career more seriously by working in wine shops and finally joining a local restaurant group.

"When I went to work for the Angeli Restaurant Group in Los Angeles," he said, "I worked the front of the house, but the restaurant was small enough so that I had plenty of interaction with the kitchen. It was very hands-on. Evan Kleiman at National Public Radio was the chef and I developed a passion for Italian cooking." (Note: Kleiman is chef-owner of Angeli Caffè in Los Angeles and host of KCRW's NPR) "Good

What is your comfort food?

Hmmmm, Korean in general ... we love Korean food. We lived in Los Angeles in a Korean neighborhood. In D.C., it's the best in general class of food; it's stunningly good ... I eat Tuscan

food all the time; it's my everyday food.

What is your cooking philosophy?

Keep it simple and let the ingredients talk for themselves. Stick to tradition.

Food" radio program.)

At that time, Italian cooking — evolving from the "Rat Pack" days of Frank Sinatra — was then being incorporated into restaurant dishes with a little French touch.

"It was Italian food put through a Frenchified lens," he said, "so tomato sauces, for example, were heavy with butter."

But chef Kleiman — who may well have been his first mentor — took a different, and more authentic, approach to Italian cooking.

"She had two or three different oils for different uses," Gold said, who was putting together the restaurant's wine list with a definite slant towards Italian wines.

Saying tasting and selecting Italian wines was, and is, an intellectual process for him. Gold was ready for the next set of food challenges when he started working for Whole Foods in Los Angeles. Organizing their wine and cheese program, Gold was offered trips to Italy by Italian winemakers. When there, Gold, who helped artisans make Reggiano cheese and tasted authentic 30-year-old balsamico (balsamic vinegar), experienced several life-changing moments: "As soon as I saw the culture and the regionality [of Italian food], my life changed. It was a coming home," he said, adding that when he is back in the U.S., he is away from home.

A transfer to D.C. with Whole

IF YOU GO Dino Restaurant

- » **Where:** 3435 Connecticut Ave. NW
- » **Info:** 202-686-2966
- » **Hours:** 6 to 9:30 p.m. Monday to Thursday, 6 to 10:30 p.m. Friday, 5:30 to 10:30 p.m. Saturday, 5:30 to 9:30 p.m. Sunday

Foods also became a life-changer: a heart attack. Traveling to Italy with his wife to recover, Gold said they found themselves arguing about which was the best gelato.

"We immersed ourselves in food," he said, "and I decided to focus on how to be happy." Food, of course.

Now five years later as a restaurant owner, Gold finds himself creating and perfecting the authentic Italian food for which Dino is renowned.

"I don't cook on the line during service," he said, "but I do the recipe development and all the ordering and sourcing of produce."

And he emphatically underscores his menu's goal: "It's Grandma's cuisine, using high-quality ingredients but also less expensive cuts of meat."

And if one day you dine at Dino and find Gold with his signature ponytail not at the front desk, chances are he is in Italy, eating gelato.

The Vine Guy » Scott Greenberg

The legend of Simi wines

Giuseppe and Pietro Simi found more than gold when they headed to San Francisco in 1876. The brothers had traveled from Tuscany, Italy, to seek their fortune during the Gold Rush, but as fate would have it, what they discovered instead was the fertile soils of Sonoma County.

By 1881, the brothers moved to the bucolic little town of Healdsburg, located in the northern end of Sonoma County. By 1890, they had built their first cellar in the same town using the stone they excavated from the surrounding hillsides.

The winery was very successful, but in 1904, tragedy struck when Giuseppe and Pietro unexpectedly died within four months of each other: Giuseppe's 18-year-old daughter, Isabelle, stepped up to the challenge of running the family business and continued with success until 1920, when Prohibition made it illegal for her to produce or sell wine. She and her husband, Fred, had to sell some of their vineyard property in order to survive. But fortunately, when Prohibition finally ended in December 1933, Isabelle and Fred were ready with a large supply of perfectly cellared wine to sell, sealing their already stellar reputation in the California wine trade. Isabelle continued to own and operate the winery until 1970, when, at the tender age of 84, she sold the enterprise, but continued to stay on and work for several years thereafter.

Many changes have taken place at the winery throughout the years, including the addition of renowned winemaker Zelma Long, who joined Simi in 1979 and is credited with modernizing the winery. In addition, the new owners began to acquire land, including the Landslide Vineyard in Alexander Valley. Last, but not least, Michel Rolland, the world-famous French wine consultant, took Simi on as his first American client. These changes have culminated in a winery that has developed a reputation for quality and consistency, taking the best of a 125-year-old history and blending it with avant-garde innovation.

Today, California native Steve Reeder heads up the winemaking operations, taking full advantage of Simi's progressive viticultural program. Steve has the luxury of producing wonderfully balanced wines from Bordeaux varietals, such as cabernet sauvignon and merlot as well as delicious chardonnay — including their reserve bottling — from the Russian River Valley's Goldfields Vineyard. Tasting Simi is like tasting a little history, one glass at a

time. Retail prices are approximate.

While we are slipping into cooler weather, sauvignon blanc may be slipping back into the cellar, but please don't forget about the **2008 Simi Winery Sauvignon Blanc Sonoma County, Calif. (\$14)**. A tiny bit of semillon is blended in to add richness and depth on the palate, making this a wine to enjoy all year round. Flavors of guava, tropical fruit and apricot attack the front of the tongue while notes of zesty lime and wet stone make their mark on the crisp, clean finish.

One of the challenges with growing chardonnay in California is finding an area that has cool-not-cold nights and warm-not-hot days. The **2008 Simi Winery Chardonnay Sonoma County, Calif. (\$20)** has met this challenge by sourcing top quality fruit from Sonoma's Russian River Valley, Alexander Valley and Carneros growing regions. Through thoughtful blending, Simi is able to produce a white wine with remarkable balance and structure without dousing it with too much oak. Attractive flavors of green apple, nectarine and lemon-lime are accented by just a touch of buttered toast on the elegant finish.

The cooler climates that favor the Simi chardonnay also smile upon the finicky pinot noir grape as well. Winemaker Steve Reeder employed the same philosophy with his **2009 Simi Winery Pinot Noir Sonoma County, Calif. (\$20)** as he does with his chardonnay — by sourcing fruit from different vineyards throughout the county — and is rewarded with a wine that offers up fragrant aromas of dark plum, wild strawberry and black cherry. The generous mouthfeel is chock-full of ripe raspberry, dark plum and cherry cola while notes of spicy cinnamon weigh in on the silky smooth and well-balanced finish.



At the top of the proverbial food chain at Simi are the "vineyard designated" wines that come from the esteemed Landslide Vineyard, located in Alexander Valley, where the various soil compositions and microclimates result in fruit that produces a wide range of flavor profiles. Nowhere is this more obvious than in the **2005 Simi Winery Landslide Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon (\$35)**, made from a blend of cabernet sauvignon, merlot, malbec, cabernet franc, petit verdot and tannat. The warm bouquet is loaded with rich scents of ripe blackberry, cassis, black plum and melted chocolate. In the mouth, flavors fall onto the tongue in waves, starting with blackberry jam, plum and black cherry, then giving way to coffee, mocha and cinnamon notes. The firm-but-supple finish has pitch-perfect balance.