



Lauren DeSantis, a lawyer by day, stars in the new cooking show "Capital Cooking."

ANDREW HARNIK/EXAMINER

Chef's one 'Capital' idea

By Alexandra Greeley
Special to The Washington Examiner

You've probably seen her food show, and you may even know her by sight on D.C.'s streets. But when you meet the daytime Lauren DeSantis, dressed for her lawyer's business, you'd never guess this young woman has a not-so-secret passion: She loves to cook. And cook she does, very publicly on her own cooking show, "Capital Cooking," and very privately, at home for her husband, herself and her friends.

A native of St. Louis, DeSantis moved to D.C. with her husband, also a lawyer. Surrounded by lawyers and surfeited with talk of law and politics, DeSantis decided she needed another outlet.

"I have always loved to cook and to entertain," she said. "I love that part of it, the 'Let's all eat together.'"

Growing up in a family where both her mother and grandmother were great cooks, DeSantis tells how they served really outstanding Italian dishes.

"They were always in the kitchen," she said. "It's funny because here there are so many caterers. Back home, people make their own food, and share it with friends."

Settled in D.C., DeSantis found she was inspired by a young female lawyer in Texas who was self-taught, started her own catering business and concurrently got her own television show. That formula appealed, and DeSantis decided to pursue her particular dream: She honed her cooking skills by attending Gaithersburg's L'Academie de Cuisine, receiving a chef's certificate. She then studied several production courses so she could handle assembling her own cooking show. Once she was certified, she submitted a cooking show proposal to the area's

What is your comfort food?

I love lasagna, mac and cheese, and chicken pot pie. My go-to one is my mom's chicken tetrazzini. My first show was "Meet Me in St. Louis," a piece of my home. I grew up with that.

How do you get your inspiration?

Well, one thing leads to another. Everyone I meet gives me ideas and I run with them. I am trying to do ethnic foods and I am working with embassies. When I first start, I write every idea down in a notebook. Then I run it by the people [on the show].

Where is your favorite place in the world?

My favorite to visit is Italy. I love the people, wine, food and culture. But there's nothing like home and I really like D.C. I am happy living here.

What's in your fridge?

Homemade jam; my brother-in-law loves it. Leftovers, eggs, butter, coffee cream, beer and wine. Condiments and every one you can think of. Lots of Asian ingredients; I cooked for my Asian roommate in college.

Channel 10 — and, two years later, began airing on the Dish Network in November 2009. Since then, her show is now playing to more than 20 million homes nationally. And elsewhere? It's anyone's guess.

What makes the show somewhat unique is how she has peopled it with a definite D.C. angle, featuring local chefs, artisanal food producers and embassy cooks, and eating lunch out with lobbyists.

"I give the viewers something that is unique to D.C.," she said. "It's what we offer here. We have many ethnic cuisine and regional restaurants from all over the country. ... I would like to get different congressmen to talk about their local foods and give us an inside look at them," adding the D.C. food scene is really taking off.

DeSantis also has angled her show toward people who love food and who love to cook, but who also may be intimidated by complex recipes and may not be familiar with all the ingredients; DeSantis always provides ideas for substitutes. As well, she believes that seeing a dish or ingredient offers the best lesson.

ON TV Lauren DeSantis

- » **What:** 'Capital Cooking'
- » **When:** 4 p.m. Wednesday (Dish Network channels 9396 and 9407)
- » **Info:** Visit capitalcookingshow.com for information about upcoming events, capitalcookingshow.blogspot.com for daily updates.

"I am a very visual person ... on the show, I do the cooking with the guest," she said. "We do one or two recipes, depending on the complexity of the recipe. We have 24 minutes of air time."

Further combating the intimidation factor, DeSantis, on her show and in her cookbook "Capital Cooking," acknowledges a good cook has to plan out meal assembly.

"Then you have the time in the kitchen," she says, "and time for relaxing."

The Vine Guy » Scott Greenberg

The diversity of Chilean wines

Chile's long, narrow geography — bordered by more than 2,500 miles of Pacific coastline on the west, the Andes Mountains (only 315 miles) to the east, the Atacama Desert to the north and Antarctica in the south — has created a natural barrier that has resulted in one of the most pristine ecosystems in the world. And thanks to a fertile mixture of geography and climate, Chile has been blessed with a diverse agricultural environment that is perfect for growing a wide range of produce, including a large variety of wine grapes.

Winemaking in Chile began about 450 years ago when Spanish missionaries introduced grapevines to the region for ceremonial consumption. However, it quickly became apparent that the sunny days, cool nights and the Mediterranean climate were well-suited to producing wines of exceptional quality. During the next century, Chilean wine producers began to search for the most advantageous locations to plant new vineyards. They discovered the diverse topography and rich soil composition of the Central Valley were capable of supporting many of the popular grape varieties.

In the later part of the 18th century, the introduction of traditional European varieties, such as cabernet sauvignon, petite verdot and merlot, resulted in a dramatic increase of wine exports from Chile. The foreign vines quickly adapted to their new home — particularly in the Maipo and Casablanca valleys — and Chilean wines began to rival some of the best wines from Europe, particularly France and Spain. Today, these grapevines are thought to be the only pre-phyloxera (a virulent agricultural pest that destroyed the vast majority of the vineyards in Europe in the late 1800s) vine specimens that exist in the world.

There are now more than 50,000 acres of vines planted in Chile, and the focus of Chilean winemakers is beginning to shift from the fertile Central Valley to more remote regions. They are experimenting with new varieties while exploring new regions, including moving west toward the Pacific Ocean and east into the foothills of the Andes.

At a recent tasting, hosted by the Chilean Embassy, several regions were represented to showcase the diversity of today's Chilean wines. This week, I will cover white varieties and will continue next week with the red wines. Retail prices are approximate.

Starting in the Maipo Valley, the closest wine region to Santiago, comes the **2009 Cousino-Macul Sauvignon Gris (\$15)**, which possesses a fragrant nose

of nectarine, acacia flowers and citrus fruits and rich, layered flavors of tropical fruit and citrus in the mouth. Just a touch of ginger on the balanced finish adds texture and depth. Enjoy it with Caldillo de Congrio Dorado (a white fish dish).

Just north of the Maipo Valley is the east-west-oriented Aconcagua Valley, whose stable climate condition is ideal for the **2009 In Situ Chardonnay, Winemaker's Selection (\$13)**. This charming chardonnay offers up aromas of green apple and nectarine and a whisper of vanilla. In the mouth, the wine is clean, bright and fresh, with flavors of nectarine, pineapple and citrus. There is a nice mineral undertone on the finish, where abundant acidity provides a crisp note at the end. Perfect with avocado and celery soup, topped with king crab.

Heading a bit south of Santiago and toward the ocean, the Colchagua Valley is becoming well-known for its production of French wine varieties. The **2009 Cono Sur Vision Viognier (\$13)** is a cute play on words but a serious wine for the money. The appealing nose of nectarine, banana and floral notes is joined by flavors of pineapple and peaches on the evenly balanced finish. Buttered toast notes on the end make it a great pairing for Pastel de Choclo (a traditional corn and chicken casserole).

Also from the Colchagua Valley comes the delightfully crisp and refreshing **2009 Lurton Hacienda Araucano Sauvignon Blanc Reserva (\$13)**. The grassy nose — with additional scents of citrus and spice — reminded me of a classic sauvignon blanc. The medium-bodied frame features bright notes of peach, nectarine and gooseberry, all buoyed by lively acidity. Hints of citrus keep the finish fresh and clean. Great with seafood.

Located due west of Santiago is the wine region known as Leyda Valley, where the cooler climate accents the citrus aromas on the nose of the **2009 Luis Felipe Edwards Sauvignon Blanc Family Selection (\$9)**. Flavors of apple and nectarine stay crisp on the tongue while additional notes of citrus and tropical fruit add noticeable depth on the finish. Try it with seared scallops in orange dressing.

At the southern end of the country, the Bio Bio Valley is home to the **2009 Cono Sur Riesling (\$9)**. This remarkable value is gaining popularity thanks to its bright flavors of ripe apple and honeyed orange notes that pleasantly coat the tongue. There is just enough sweetness and acidity to keep the wine balanced and focused.

Next week: The diversity of Chile, part two.

