



ANDREW HARNIK/EXAMINER

Susan Wallace is the pastry chef at BlackSalt Fish Market and Restaurant, creating glamorous desserts.

# Kitchen life is sweet

By Alexandra Greeley  
Special to *The Washington Examiner*

**D**emure, slender and lady-like, pastry chef Susan Wallace could be pouring tea for a ladies' luncheon. Instead, she's worked hard to glamorize the dessert menu at BlackSalt restaurant, turning desserts into an explosion of delectable calories wrapped up in dough, heavy cream and butter. Think Chocolate Peanut Butter Crunch Cake with Caramelized Bananas or Chocolate Chambord Truffle Cake with Raspberry Compote and Whipped Cream.

It seems she has come by this talent naturally: Her mother, Sally Wallace, once was a food writer for *Ladies' Home Journal*, and like a devoted mother, taught young Susan how to cook.

"There is a picture of me at the age of 3," she said, "with a Suzy Homemaker Easy-Bake Oven that baked cakes with light bulbs."

Hailing from Kennett Square, Pa., Wallace credits both her mother — whose at-home cooking often centered just on baking — and her grandmothers with teaching young Wallace the secrets of the baking kitchen.

"I spent holidays and summers with my grandparents in Massachusetts," Wallace said, "and we always focused on food. One of my favorite childhood memories is smelling the aroma of a danish called a Melt-A-Way. ... I am still trying to perfect the recipe."

While still in high school, Wallace applied to culinary school, eventually attending the International Culinary Arts Institute of Baltimore.

"I didn't realize that the savory and pastry kitchens are two dif-

## What's your comfort food?

Cheddar cheese souffle, which my mother made for me as a child. It is definitely a favorite. And then, Baskin-Robbins ice cream.

## Where's your favorite place?

Cape Cod. I went there as a child and I lived there for four years. I go back once a year.

## What's in your fridge?

Oh, my goodness... leftover lasagna. There's ice cream in

the freezer and Tastykakes.

## What is a baking tip for readers?

Always use parchment paper, especially when baking cookies. It keeps things from burning and over-browning. Items don't stick. I can't live without it.

## Which is your favorite cookbook?

Believe it or not, my grandmother's *Better Homes and Gardens* from the 1960s. I always can find any kind of good recipes there.

ferent worlds," she said. After she graduated with an associate's degree in baking and pastry, Wallace began her career in earnest, working at the Ritz-Carlton in Boston and D.C.

Her culinary career also included stints at the Chatham Bars Inn on Cape Cod, Mass., and the Mandarin Oriental in Washington. Wallace has been a participating chef at the James Beard House in New York, and her personal recipes have been featured in *Chocolatier* and *Pastry Art and Design* magazines.

"My mother doesn't understand how I do so much professionally," she said.

And it's to her mother she still turns, figuratively if not literally, for many of her recipe ideas.

"Her recipes from the *Ladies' Home Journal* are still my favorites," she said. "I update them with a modern twist," noting the almond butter crunch is one of her favorites, and one she often uses as a dessert topping. "The butter crunch is what I love doing."

That, and cookies — loads and loads of cookies.

"My favorite cookie recipe is one

## IF YOU GO

### BlackSalt Fish Market and Restaurant

- » **Where:** 4883 MacArthur Blvd.
- » **Info:** 202-342-9101
- » **Hours:** Lunch, 11:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. Monday-Saturday; Dinner, 5:30 to 9:30 p.m. Monday-Thursday, 5:30 to 11 p.m. Friday, 5 to 11 p.m. Saturday, 5 to 9 p.m. Sunday; Brunch, 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. Sunday

my mother used to make," she said. "It's cream cheese pecan bars."

Beyond her mother's recipes, Wallace finds inspirations when she least expects them.

"My best recipes are done on the spur of the moment," she said, recounting how on Valentine's Day she was asked to create petit fours for the end of the meal.

"I had milk chocolate, pretzels and cranberries, and I topped this with sea salt, raspberry powder and pistachios."

## The Vine Guy » Scott Greenberg Spooktacular wine selections

**H**alloween is just around the corner — and judging from the hype on the morning news shows and party store displays, the annual ghostly celebration appears to be enjoyed as much by the adult crowd as it is by the traditional younger-than-16 gang. And even though my own little goblins are in the almost-too-old/cool-to-go-begging-for-candy phase of their pre-adult life, I know that they still take pleasure in carving pumpkins and checking out the costumes of the neighborhood kids.

But at our house, it appears that as I get older, so do the ghosts and goblins that show up on my doorstep — most notably in the form of adult friends and parents who know that I usually have a bottle or two of wine open and ready to share when the doorbell rings. Plastic wine glasses compete with plastic pumpkins and paper bags, extended at arms length, looking for a liquid goody of the red or white varietal.

It recently crossed my mine that I should simply leave an ice bucket of wine on my porch alongside the bowl of candy with a sign that says, "Take Only One," but liquor laws and common sense dictate that I employ a more realistic approach



— so you'll just have to knock on my door to get the goodies. But remember, you can't judge a trick-or-treater by his or her costume, or a wine by its label, so here are a few tasty wines with fun names that will get you and your ghoulish guests in the mood this All Hallows' Eve. Retail prices are approximate.

Even though the 2007 vintage in Australia was scary, the winemakers at Mount Monster were able to tame their red wine beast. The **2007 Mount Monster Shiraz (\$12)**, from the Padthaway region of Australia, is ghoulishly good. It's dark crimson color is enough to make a vampire drool. The rich, fragrant bouquet is chock-full of black fruits and a touch of licorice while the palate reveals concentrated flavors of dark plum, blackberry jam and mocha. A light touch of oak during aging lends just enough tannins to provide a soft-but-firm finish.

Staying on the monster mash theme, another scarily great value for Halloween — or anytime — comes from renowned winemaker Jeff Booth, the "evil genius" behind the **Big Red Monster (\$12)**. This red wine blend is a nonvintage collection of syrah, zinfandel and petite sirah that has been sourced from various

vineyards throughout California. The eye-popping label on the outside is an homage to the classic B-movie horror genre that is campy and captivating at the same time. The wine inside the bottle is frighteningly delicious as well, with aromas of plum and cocoa on the nose and flavors of dark plum, black cherry and black currant in the mouth. The lingering finish is well-balanced and bright, thanks to the abundant acidity, which really accents the mocha and spice notes on the end.

If you're looking for something to carve a tasty memory into your palate, try the **2008 Aqua Pumpkin Pinot Noir** from Kenneth Volk Vineyards in Santa Maria, Calif. (\$20). As legend has it, former Wild Horse employee Tom Williams fell asleep at the break room table during crush one year. When he awoke, he saw two children's crayons, aqua and pumpkin, in front of him, and thus, the Aqua Pumpkin label was born. The charming nose is full of dark cherry and red plum aromas. Darker flavors of cherry, black raspberry and wild

strawberry glide over the tongue and on to the lovely finish, where bright acidity and soft tannins combine for an elegant finish. Icha-bod Crane never had it so good.

I wrote about this wine last year, but this year's vintage is even better — if that's possible. From brothers Michael and David Phillips comes the new, improved **2007 Michael David Vineyards "Incognito" Viognier** from Lodi, Calif. (\$16). This wine takes its name from a happy mistake when, back in 2000, it was originally bottled as roussanne. DNA testing later showed that it was actually a rare clone of viognier. Evidently, it was growing "incognito." The floral nose is brimming with aromas of honeysuckle and candied ginger. The lush palate features flavors of apricot, pineapple and orange marmalade that sashay over the palate. Just a touch of ginger and more apricot appear on the rich, lengthy finish to provide a "spirited" finish.

Of course, no Halloween column would be complete without a black cat, and from our proverbial backyard comes the **2008 Horton Vineyards "Black Cat" Chardonnay (\$15)**. Blended from select barrels of chardonnay grown in Orange County, Va., this wine sports a wonderfully rich, round mouthfeel, featuring sumptuous flavors of apple, nectarine and guava. The oak-accented finish is lush and long, with a nice touch of vanilla on the back of the tongue.