



COURTESY PHOTO

Chris Smallwood brings Southern food to life at Alexanders at Buckeystown in Buckeystown, Md.

## Chef keeps it simply classic

By Alexandra Greeley  
Special to *The Washington Examiner*

**F**oodies often sample extraordinary meals from chefs whose names have not yet reached celebrity status. Such a chef is Chris Smallwood, who oversees the kitchen in the quaintly old-fashioned Alexanders at Buckeystown in Buckeystown, Md. Why should big cooking talent go unrecognized?

A native son from Urbana, a town just down the road a piece, Smallwood — like many of his contemporaries — got his start washing dishes at a local restaurant before moving up to being a line cook at the Comus Inn in Comus, Md., in its earlier incarnation.

“That was back when it was a very homey place,” he said. “One of the line cooks said to me, ‘Why don’t you go to culinary school?’ And thank the Lord I did, as I stopped burning things as much. Bread still gets burnt on occasion; no joke, but I think hamburger buns and toast points have fallen victim to my darkening powers more than I care to mention.”

While attending culinary school at the prestigious Culinary Institute of America, Smallwood did an externship at a Boca Raton hotel, which he described as a “real eye-opener,” an experience that convinced him he could never work professionally in a setting that required plating up to 600 dishes per meal. With that lesson learned, and with a culinary degree in hand, Smallwood headed back home, almost literally.

He worked at the Catoctin Inn (which today is Alexanders) before heading into Frederick for restaurant work and then downtown to cook with the Passion Food Group’s various restaurants, including Acadiana, TenPenh and DC Coast.

In a distinct course change, Smallwood tossed aside his chef’s apron and tied on a different one for a 2 1/2-

### What is your comfort food?

This food here [at the restaurant] and anything pork. Fried chicken on the dinner menu — I am always tinkering with it, toying with the breading.

### How do you get your inspirations?

From my dad. And our trips down south. Those exposed me to things I didn’t know before. I worked with Eddie Mitchell, who is the master of North Carolina barbecue.

### What’s in your fridge?

A lot of condiments and dif-

ferent hot sauces. Pickles, mustards.

### Which is your favorite cuisine?

Southern, then Thai and Vietnamese.

### Which is your favorite restaurant?

Grapeseed in Bethesda. I have been so many times. It is so consistent, and I want all that’s on the menu. Also Passion Food’s places, especially Acadiana and TenPenh. The saucier there is Thai. She’s great and can outdo any chef I know.

### IF YOU GO Alexanders at Buckeystown

- » **Where:** 3619 Buckeystown Pike, Buckeystown, Md.
- » **Info:** 301-874-1831
- » **Hours:** 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. and 5 to 8 p.m. Wednesday and Thursday, 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. and 5 to 9 p.m. Friday and Saturday, 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Sunday; Sunday brunch 11 a.m. to 2:30 p.m.

year stint as a butcher at Mount Airy Meat Locker in Frederick. Ever since culinary school, he said, he had been interested in learning about identifying meat cuts. As he says, he learned quite a lot in that time span.

“I learned a little about grading meats, which is what 4-H kids learn with the cattle they raise,” he said. “I learned how to break down sides of beef and lots of sausage making. Nothing artisanal, just the links and ropes, but I learned about the proper amount of fat-to-lean in sausage making.” Returning to the restaurant

kitchen, Smallwood has kept his affiliation with the meat locker, sourcing his meat raised by a local cattleman and prepared at the meat locker.

“His beef always grades very nicely,” he said. “It’s choice-plus to prime, and has good characteristics.”

A big proponent of local sourcing — after all, he points out, many of his farmers grow seasonal produce just down the road — Smallwood purchases mainly from Lewis Orchards, Kingsbury Orchard and Mayne’s Farm.

“Mayne’s is less than a mile away,” he said.

Clearly a hometown boy, Smallwood incorporates into his comfort-food meals several cooking tricks and recipes learned from his parents.

“I often turn to home-cooked meals my mother did,” he said. “With the food growing up, there are a few moments that really stick out, and these are the first pig roast my dad took me to; the first time I had brisket my dad fixed; and my mom’s bean casserole.”

Proof: On the Alexanders menu, you’ll find a smoked brisket appetizer and Mom’s Baked Beans as a side.

## The Vine Gal » Cindy Greenberg

# 2010 wine books: A seasonal gift for your wine lover

**M**any people are intimidated about buying wine as a gift for wine lovers in their lives, particularly for a friend or family member who may already have a collection started. Wine-themed books are always a smart choice, since most wine collectors, both novice and advanced, enjoy learning more about their favorite topic.

Here are a few of my favorite books that just might end up on my favorite wine lover’s bookshelf this holiday season. Retail prices are approximate.

Need an affordable stocking stuffer or hostess gift for a wine lover? Try “**Hugh Johnson’s Pocket Wine Book 2011**,” which is organized by country, or **Oz Clarke’s “Pocket Wine Guide 2011” (\$15 each)**, which is an alphabetical listing of wines, producers, grapes and wine regions. These two guides have all the necessary detailed wine facts that oenophiles will appreciate having at their fingertips.

Another possible stocking stuffer option is “**The Wine Journal**” by **Jennifer McCartney (\$13)** — a smart-looking logbook that allows the wine enthusiast to chronicle the details of his or her wine exploits including where, when, with whom, what food pairing, as well as the varietal, vintage, price and region.

I am a big fan of Oz Clarke, so it’s no surprise that I really enjoyed his latest book, “**Let Me Tell You About Wine**” (\$20) — a beginner’s guide to understanding and enjoying wine. Clarke uses a broad stroke to paint a picture of the wine world. It is simplistic in format and the concepts are informative without being overwhelming. About half of the book is devoted to wine basics such as varietals, buying and storing wine, tasting, food pairing, glassware, etc., and the other half covers wine-producing countries by region. Use this book as a springboard into the world of wine and then step up to more detailed, complex tomes to learn about a specific wine topic of choice.

If the wine enthusiast in your life already has a baseline knowledge of wine and her or she is looking to explore new frontiers, pick up a copy of “**Oldman’s Brave New World of Wine**” by **Mark Oldman (\$20)**. Mark — a passionate wine personality — opens the book by stating his mission; to inspire you “to drink bravely.” The book is divided into categories — Whites, Pink, Reds, Bubbly, Dessert Wines, Three for the Road, and Appendi-

ces. Each category consists of short, easy-reading chapters organized by varietal. Readers may find that the appendices are the most useful place to begin, starting on Page 295 with the clever “If You Like This, You May Like That.”

I wish I had thought of this book! “**The Art and Design of Contemporary Wine Labels**” by **Tanya Scholes (\$45)** is part art book, part wine journey. While the wine in the bottle may be good, it’s often the label on the outside that sells the wine. Every winery



wants their label to stand out so you will remember their name among the thousands. If the label is too stuffy, it may dissuade the twenty somethings; if it is too whimsical, the sixty somethings may pass it by. Many winemakers are equal parts scientist and artist, and it is the artist part that frets over the label as much as the scientist part worries about the wine inside. Furthermore, the label is a way to give

the consumer a peek into the winemaker’s personality and the “back story” behind the wine. An excellent example of this is winemaker Manfred Krankl of Sine Qua Non (check out Page 232).

Want to take a trip without leaving the comfort of your favorite chair? Then pick up a copy of **Grands Crus Classes: The Great Wines of Bordeaux** by **Sophie Brissaud (\$65)** with photographs by Cyril Le Tourneur d’Ison and Iris L. Sullivan (\$65). This is a wine-lover (and foodie’s) dream book, offering a virtual trip through Bordeaux, France, without the worries of going through security at the airport. Start on Page 1 and work your way through 87 Chateaux of the Medoc and Sauternes regions. Each section has a brief one-page history of the chateau, along with three to four pictures of the property. Best of all, recipes by 87 world-renowned chefs are paired with a vintage from each chateau. Sounds like an 87-week challenge to me.

A couple others to consider: “**Essential Wines and Wineries of the Pacific Northwest**” by **Cole Danehower (\$25)** introduces each region, describes its challenges, style, terroir and grapes. The wineries are profiled including name, contact information, wine production, and the people behind the wine.

“**The Great Family Wine Estates of France**” by **Solvi Dos Santos and Florence Brutton (\$50)** is a visual feast for the reader, offering a glimpse of the chateau, inside and out, as well as the grounds of family wine estates of France from Champagne to Languedoc-Roussillon.