



ANDREW HARNIK/EXAMINER

Kristen Hutter, executive chef at Cork Market and Tasting Room, tried her hand at other things before settling on a culinary career.

Fine dining and gourmet grazing

By Alexandra Greeley
Special to The Washington Examiner

With so much delicious food at their disposal, Washingtonians can afford to pick and choose where and what they want to eat. Sometimes too many choices confound them. In that case, solve your eating and food-shopping dilemma with a single stop — Cork Market & Tasting Room.

Back in the recesses of the establishment, past the refrigerator cases and the shelves lined with exotic and exclusive edibles, executive chef Kristin Hutter stirs and seasons, slices and samples, day in and day out, much to the delight of her numerous fans.

Who would not love her egg salad made with Trickling Springs Farm eggs and smoked bacon; the vegetable sandwich that is like a salad with grilled eggplant; and the drop-dead delicious fried chicken?

“Try this,” she smiles with the ease of a Washington hostess pleasing her guests. Setting down a crock of hot, bubbly mac and cheese — fragrant with blue cheese and crisped and crumbled Italian bacon — Hutter talks about how, exasperated by her earlier career, she turned to the food world.

Even though she grew up under the tutelage of a mother who loved to cook (“She really influenced me,” she says), native Washingtonian Hutter surprisingly did not immediately join the food world. After a brief stint working in D.C. restaurants, Hutter moved to the West Coast and joined an investment company. Problem was, she spent all her spare time dreaming up recipes, cooking with friends and dining out at local restaurants.

Bored by the office routine, Hutter knew she needed to change focus, and headed back east. After working in local restaurants, she saved up enough money to enroll at the Culinary Insti-

What's your comfort food?

Cheese. Depends on my mood: stinky, mild, sheep, cow, goat, for all over Europe and the United States. And Australia.

Which is your favorite restaurant?

I have favorites for different reasons: Thai Square, Sushi-Ko; 2 Amys, Restaurant Ever, Distrito Federal.

What is your signature dish?

I don't have one, and that's what I like. I do a little of everything, from cookies to salads to nice desserts to sit-down dinners. Most people

love my fried chicken.

What's in your fridge?

Cheese, pickles, chicken liver pate, sparkling water, ratatouille, condiments, mustards, jams, dog biscuits.

Which chef do you admire the most?

I've learned something from every chef I've worked for. ... Michel Richard [Citronelle] was great, amazing. Clio's job was also amazing; I was doing it all. I learned so much from Jeff Black, as he is an amazing chef, leader and manager.

tute of America in Hyde Park, N.Y. While studying toward her culinary degree, Hutter worked at the local Sprout Creek Farm near Poughkeepsie. At the farm, she made cheese six or seven days a week; on weekends, she sold the cheese at local farmers markets.

“Making cheese is hard work,” she says with a little irony. “You have to have everything at the right temperature and follow a lot of sanitary regulations. I had to get certified with a dairy license.”

After graduation and an externship at Clio Restaurant in Boston, Hutter returned once again to D.C., where she worked for such premier D.C. venues as Citronelle, BlackSalt, Restaurant Eve and Black Market Bistro. As she pulls up a chair to chat, she explains how she fits the high-end experience into her present life. Quite easily, as it turns out.

“At the CIA, did I have a vision of the future?” she asks rhetorically. In the long run, Hutter wanted to work in a fine dining establishment, and ironically, she found that planning menus

IF YOU GO Cork Market and Tasting Room

» **Where:** 1805 14th St., NW
» **Info:** 202-265-2674
» **Hours:** Tues.-Sat., 10 a.m. to 9 p.m.; Sun., Mon., 11 a.m. to 7 p.m.

and cooking for an upscale food market made a perfect fit. “Now I get to put it all down here,” she says, gesturing to the plate.

Hutter is responsible for developing the recipes and, along with her staff, experiments with ingredients daily.

“We want the food to be stupendous — great,” she says. “We try things out a lot before we put it out there.”

As for her mother, who still lives in the D.C. area, Hutter says, “She is very proud of me. She comes in often; she loves the vegetable sandwich.”

But what about the fried chicken and the macaroni and cheese?

The Vine Guy » Scott Greenberg

The annual sparkling wine companion for the holidays

I will never understand why so many wine enthusiasts resist popping the corks on bottles of sparkling wines or champagne unless they are celebrating a special occasion or the end of the year.

It's a shame, really, since these wines are incredibly versatile and pair well with a variety of foods as well as being swell on their own. Famed author and bon vivant F. Scott Fitzgerald once proclaimed, “Too much of anything is bad, but too much champagne is just right.”

Even I struggle with reaching for a bit of the bubbly, but I am getting better. (Note: I made a point of opening a bottle of champagne this weekend while watching the plethora of football games from the comfort of my couch).

Now that the holiday season is in full stride, it is a great time to reach for a sparkling wine. Whether you are hosting a holiday soiree, need a well-received hostess gift or just want to start your own tradition of enjoying these wines on their own, go ahead and succumb to the seductive sound of a cork popping from the bottle.

Before diving into specific recommendations, a quick primer on sparkling wines is in order. While just about every wine-growing region on the planet produces some version of sparkling wine, it is helpful to remember that only wines made in the tiny Champagne region in France can be called Champagne (as denoted by the capital “C” in the name). They are produced using the strict “methode champenoise,” where the secondary fermentation, responsible for those wonderful bubbles, occurs in the bottle. All other champagne-style wines are referred to as “sparkling wines.”

For example, prosecco sparkling wines, from the Veneto region of Italy, are some wonderfully crisp, refreshing sparkling wines. These wines are made using the charmat method, where the secondary fermentation occurs in large stainless steel tanks before the wine is bottled. While this may be a less expensive way of getting bubbles in the wine, it actually works quite well with the prosecco grape because it preserves the fresh, delicate flavors that might be otherwise masked using the traditional champagne method.

The most popular designation is brut, a dry style that is usually a blend of chardonnay and pinot noir. Blanc de blancs (white from white) is a wine made solely from chardonnay, while a blanc de noirs (white from black) is made with pinot noir. Roses are usually produced using pinot noir

grapes, whose juice is allowed to stay in contact with the grape skins just long enough to impart a pinkish hue.

So this holiday season, make a new resolution to drink more champagne and sparkling wines next year. To quote wine writer Willie Gluckstern, “In a perfect world, everyone would have a glass of champagne every evening.” Retail prices are approximate.

If you're hosting a party, prosecco is an inexpensive way to enjoy a wonderfully crisp, refreshing sparkling wine that will make your guests feel welcome. The **Non-Vintage NV La Tordera Prosecco di Valdobbiadene from Veneto, Italy (\$18)** is a good value. Scents of lemon and lime fill the bouquet while flavors of apple and nectarine dominate the front of the palate. The crisp, refreshing finish features citrus notes and just a hint of pear and yeast at the very end.

If you want to toast to world peace this holiday season — and who doesn't? — do it with the **2006 Schramsberg Blanc de Blancs from Napa Valley, Calif. (\$30)**. This 100 percent chardonnay wine — made in the methode champenoise style — gained international recognition in 1972 when then-President Nixon served it at the historic “Toast to Peace” in Beijing. This vintage possesses aromas of key lime, freshly cut green apple and honeydew melon, followed by just a hint of pineapple upside-down cake. The palate is layered with flavors of citrus, ripe pear, pineapple and baked apple upfront and end with notes of baked bread on the long, fresh finish.

The best values for authentic champagne will be non-vintage, where wines are blended from several different years in order to maintain a certain consistency — or house style. A wonderful example is the non-vintage **Montaudon Brut from Epernay, France (\$30)**. The tiny, precise bubbles add a certain degree of elegance as they deliver lovely notes of apple, pear, citrus and roasted almonds across the entire palate. Toasted hazelnuts are featured on the crisp, balanced finish.

A very reasonable way to stick your proverbial toe into the pool of expensive vintage Champagnes is the **2002 Bertrand Delespierre Brut Premier Cru (\$60)**, which is equal parts pinot noir, pinot meunier and chardonnay. The fragrant scents of green apple and buttered toast on the nose lead to flavors of baked apple, ripe pear, roasted hazelnuts and candied ginger on the palate. The structure is full-bodied and the finish, featuring notes of toasted almonds, is round and full.

