



ANDREW HARNIK/EXAMINER

"I am very curious about food," says Jason Brumm, the executive chef at P.J. Clarke's in Washington. "All cuisines appeal to me."

Low Country comfort in the District

By Alexandra Greeley
Special to The Washington Examiner

Don't know Jason Brumm, the executive chef of the recently opened Manhattan transplant, P.J. Clarke's?

If you still have not dined there, you can get a glimpse of this young chef by Googling him. As always, YouTube captures many images, including Brumm shown cooking at his former Nashville, Tenn., restaurant, Radius10. He prepares an elaborate entree of pan-seared halibut with pesto gnocchi and an olive oil vinaigrette, radiating confidence in his every movement as he cooks, talks and garnishes at the same time.

Now wrestling with D.C.'s hungry crowds, Brumm tells of his past. He grew up in Colorado and faced some difficult career choices after high school: Enter a vocational program, enlist in the Navy, or go to culinary school. He got the necessary culinary cred by working in a kitchen at a Marriott hotel, where the chef wanted to train him as a breakfast cook. After that, he decided to enroll at the Culinary Institute of America.

Brumm had a unique passage into the food world through travel. "I was fortunate," he says, explaining that as a youngster he traveled all over Europe with his family during the late '80s and early '90s. "I always had a good palate," he says. "The first lobster I ate was when I was only 5 years old." Extensive travel did shape Brumm, for to this day he will eat any style or type of cooking. "I am very curious about

What's your comfort food?

Grits and sweet potatoes, but at home I don't do much cooking.

Which chef do you admire most in the world?

As far as influence, it would have to be Charlie Palmer. Now I like any chef who is not turning duck into caviar. I like chefs being able to do farm-to-table cooking.

Which is your favorite restaurant?

I like Chinatown Express in Chinatown. Then Blue Duck Tavern for its high-end cooking: It's

very rich and so perfectly prepared. An amazing experience.

What's in your fridge?

Leftover rotisserie chicken that will be turned into soup. Flank steak, root vegetables, sugar-free Jello pudding. Some wings, and then whatever my son likes.

Where is your favorite place in the world?

From a culinary standpoint, St. Lucia and Sardinia; I lived there for one month — an amazing experience.

IF YOU GO P.J. Clarke's

» **Where:** 1600 K St. NW
» **Info:** 202-463-6610
» **Hours:** Monday to Saturday, 11 a.m. to 1 a.m.; Sunday, 11 a.m. to 11 p.m.

food," he says. "All cuisines appeal to me."

Yet, Brumm says, Western Europe has formed his classical approach to cooking, especially working in the kitchens of France and Italy. "I lived in France and in Italy for one year," he says. "I worked in several Michelin-starred restaurants," unlike many of his young contemporaries who in the early '90s stopped making the pilgrimage to Europe to undergo rigorous kitchen training

in the States.

Back in the U.S., Brumm traveled and cooked everywhere from New York to Florida to Tennessee. Now that he has relocated to the nation's capital, he is finding many challenges and rewards. Among these would be indulging patrons with his signature Low Country cooking. "My specialty," he says, "is Southern coastal cuisine. People there just like to eat. They like good food. All they want is a great lunch. I would travel all around [eating], and that was my culinary experience."

Without overcomplicating his cooking, Brumm turns out such big hits as his Low Country shrimp and grits. "That's my signature dish," he says, adding that people travel far to sample it. Fortunately for locals, he offers a version on the restaurant's menu. That means good food for a great lunch ... or dinner.

The Vine Guy » **Scott Greenberg**

Value and diversity in Argentina's wines

Argentina has been making wine since Spanish missionaries brought vine cuttings to the South American country more than 400 years ago. Through the centuries, the wine industry has steadily evolved to quench the growing demand of both the Argentine people and wine consumers around the world.

However, until the early 1970s, most of the wine produced was rustic in nature and intended mostly for domestic use. The wine landscape changed dramatically during the last decade of the 20th century, when the wine industry turned to an old standby, malbec, a grape varietal of French origin that was brought to the country in the mid-1800s.

The rising popularity of malbec on the international wine stage, combined with a stable government and rebounding economy, was just what the Argentine wine industry needed to jump-start its exports. This permitted wine producers to begin to invest in modern winemaking equipment and bring some of the top winemaking consultants in the world to Argentina. As demand for Argentinian wines began to increase, producers expanded their plantings beyond the traditional torrontes riojano and Pedro Gimenez to include syrah, merlot, cabernet sauvignon, chardonnay, pinot gris, riesling and sauvignon blanc. But it is malbec that continues to be Argentina's wine mascot, particularly in the United States.

Today, Argentina has emerged as one of the most diverse wine-producing countries in the world, making affordable wines based on both Old and New World techniques, with more than 600,000 acres of land planted to vineyards and more than 1,500 wineries producing almost 500 million gallons of wine per year. The Mendoza region, located in the center of the country, is the most prominent wine-growing area, producing more than half of Argentina's wine. Located just to the north of Mendoza are the regions of San Juan and La Rioja, where

hotter, drier weather caters to spicier red wines. As Argentina's wine industry expands, many other fertile areas of the country continue to be explored and developed annually. Retail prices are approximate.

The **2009 La Linda Unoaked Chardonnay** from Mendoza (\$11) is a refreshing break from the over-oaked club. Fermented and aged in stainless steel tanks, this wine features bright scents of green apple and white peach that are repeated on the palate where they are joined by flavors of pear and nectarine.

The **2009 Aymara Torrontes** from Mendoza (\$12) takes its name from the Aymara people who inhabited the Cafayate region of Argentina long before the Inca civilization. This aromatic white wine has a floral bouquet of white peach and acacia on the nose. The mouthwatering acidity keeps the flavors of peach, pear and papaya balanced between fruity and dry. The finish is long and persistent, with just a touch of orange blossom at the end.

Cabernet sauvignon is beginning to find its voice in Argentina and the **2008 Bodega Catena Zapata Cabernet Sauvignon** from Mendoza (\$15) is singing the right song for the money. Remarkably smooth and elegant, it offers a mouthful of flavors toward the blackberry end of the spectrum, with notes of dark plum and cassis in supporting roles.

Of course, malbec is the peg upon which Argentina's wine industry hangs its hat, and a very good example of that varietal is the **2008 Bodega Septima Malbec** from Mendoza (\$12). The bouquet offers up scents of blackberry and dried herbs while the palate features flavors of black plum, dark cherry and cocoa.

For a special treat, try the **2008 Bodega Septima Gran Reserva** from the prominent region of Agrelo, in Mendoza (\$23). This blend of malbec, cabernet sauvignon and tannat is powerful yet elegant with layers of black fruit, raspberry, licorice and warm dark chocolate on the palate. The smooth finish is balanced and lengthy, with just a touch of dark fig at the end.

