



Chef Brian Stickel, of Clyde's in Tysons Corner, grew up surrounded by cooks at home, and spent a lot of time working in restaurants — both in the front of the house and in the kitchen.

ANDREW HARNIK/EXAMINER

## A stickler for the basics

By Alexandra Greeley  
Special to The Washington Examiner

Connecticut native Brian Stickel, executive chef of Clyde's of Tysons Corner, has a family member who quite possibly played the defining role in his career choice. "My grandmother had a cooking show in West Virginia," he says. "And my mom, who is German, cooks very well."

Surrounded by cooks at home, Stickel naturally worked in restaurants, both in the front of the house and in the kitchen. "I learned about restaurant camaraderie," he says. "It gave me a real rush." But while he was a history student at the University of Connecticut, Stickel heard a comment that changed his life. Watching him cook at home, friends asked, "Why don't you do this professionally?"

When he was accepted at the Culinary Institute of America, he says, all rules and techniques made sense. "I understood why I was taking these classes," he says. And as a further incentive to embrace the culinary life, he externed in Napa Valley at the restaurant Pinot Blanc under chef Joachim Splichal. "It was a cool place to hang out," he says.

Upon returning to the East Coast, Stickel's work landed him in various D.C. area restaurants, including Clyde's of Georgetown, 1789 Restaurant, the Inn at Little Washington, Clyde's at Gallery Place, and finally, out in Tysons.

Confronted with the challenge of attracting business in a congested locale, Stickel has come up

### What is your comfort food?

Pizza. Frank Pepe's coal-oven pizza in New Haven. My mom used to make after Thanksgiving a turkey soup using the carcass and adding spaetzle dough right into the soup. And a bowl of pho from Pho 75 in Arlington.

### Who is your favorite chef?

Thomas Keller [French Laundry] has always done an amazing job. I like chefs who are down to earth. No yelling, not an absolute dictator. John Guatterly [Clyde's corporate chef], who is

cooking locally.

### Which is your favorite restaurant?

2 Amy's back bar. Thai Square, 4 Sisters. The older I get the less impressed I am with super-fancy food.

### What's in your fridge?

Beer, a slab of bacon, noodles, San Marzano tomatoes, fresh mozzarella. Otherwise, I buy the food fresh each day.

### What would you most like to do with a year of leisure?

Go to Italy to cook.

### IF YOU GO

#### Clyde's of Tysons Corner

» **Where:** 8332 Leesburg Pike  
» **Info:** 703-734-1901  
» **Hours:** Lunch, 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday to Saturday; dinner, 4 to 10 p.m. Sunday to Thursday, until 11 p.m. Friday and Saturday; brunch, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Sunday

with some winning ideas. "I plan to make this place fun," he says. "I am opening up its oyster bar, and altering the menu slightly ... oysters are a big deal."

But the restaurant experience must be more than just about the food, he believes. "I see it in the whole experience, like someone coming to your house," he says,

noting that is key to keeping customers happy.

In keeping with the whole Clyde's Restaurant Group's philosophy — Clyde's was among the first restaurant groups to initiate the farm-to-table movement more than 27 years ago — Stickel sources his produce locally and gets his inspiration from what comes in to the kitchen. "I look at the farmer's vegetables, like Tuscarora farm," he says. "If I get 14 cases of asparagus, I need to do something with it."

His professional commitment to incorporating freshly grown vegetables into the menu has influenced his private life as well. "I started my own garden in South Arlington," he says. "Last year we grew more than 100 tomato plants. We ate tomatoes until we had sores in our mouth. ... We are doing this organically. You really hate seeing bugs, so you really appreciate what organic farmers go through."

## The Vine Guy » Scott Greenberg

### Va. wines cure March Madness

As March Madness winds down, sports fans, whose brackets, like mine, have been busted into a thousand little pieces, will tune in this Saturday and watch slack-jawed as the unlikely match-up between 11th-seeded Virginia Commonwealth and eighth-seeded Butler unfolds on a national court-of-thrills in Houston.

What, you may ask, does all of this have to do with wine? Well, nothing actually. I was all set to write a column about the intricate details of how phenolic compounds found in grapes influence the character and flavor of wine, but you'll just have to wait for a week or two to see how that exciting topic unfolds. In the meantime, I have been swept up by the hype surrounding the most unlikely of giant-killers — VCU.

What appropriate wines should you open and enjoy while watching the gentlemen from Richmond make history this weekend? Why, wines from Virginia, of course.

Just like the 11th-seeded teams of past and present, Virginia wines are surprisingly good. And I don't mean "surprisingly" in a negative or mean way. It's just that Virginia wines don't often get the attention and recognition they deserve on the national stage. They are often overshadowed by more aggressively marketed wines from the West Coast. But this weekend, it's Virginia's time to shine. Both VCU and the wines of Virginia are finally getting the attention they so richly deserve. Retail prices are approximate.

If you're looking for a wine to sip, swish and swallow, pick up a bottle of **2006 Prince Michel Barrel Select Chardonnay**, from Leon (\$18). The barrel fermented chardonnay boasts aromas of vanilla, pear and ripe apple. The rich, creamy mouthfeel and luscious flavors of baked apple, pear and peach are due, in part, to the sur lie aging process, so the wine stays in contact with the yeast and other beneficial sediment for a longer period of time. The toasty finish offers up hints of roasted cashews.

Regular readers know that I am a big fan of Virginia wine pioneer Dennis Horton. His eponymous winery, Horton Vineyards in Orange County, produces some of the best Viognier wines in the country. His **2009 Horton Vineyard Viognier** is a steal at \$20. It boasts a striking nose featuring scents of honeysuckle, tropical fruit and white peaches. Flavors of peach, pineapple, papaya and honey-buttered toast have laserlike focus throughout the entire palate and onto the beautifully balanced finish where abundant crisp acidity keeps the wine in perfect balance.



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In December, the prestigious Kluge Estate Winery and Vineyards went into bankruptcy when lenders foreclosed on the property. The silver lining is that the **2005 Kluge New World Red Wine** from Albemarle County (\$22) was purchased by several wine shops at a discount. Even though the wine is selling for less, the Bordeaux-style blend is still rich and delicious in the mouth, featuring flavors of black cherry, cassis and roasted coffee. The subtle finish is pretty and soft, with just a hint of dried herbs and earthiness. At this price, it's a slam dunk.

Down Richmond way, in the shadow of Monticello, is the delightfully charming Barbourville Vineyards. But don't let the stately grounds and pristine vineyards fool you. This is place where serious wine is made, like the **2007 Barbourville Cabernet Sauvignon Reserve** (\$30). Aged for up to 14 months in new and used French oak, this wine offers up a full-court press of flavors for the tongue, including notes of blackberry, dark plum, cassis and roasted coffee. The long, ripe finish is balanced with soft tannins and good acidity, bringing out a telltale hint of mint on the back end.

And if VCU wins, celebrate with a bottle of nonvintage **Thibaut-Janisson Blanc de Chardonnay Sparkling Wine** from Charlottesville (\$26). Made from Chardonnay grapes, it boasts delicate scents of Gala apple and ripe pear while the tiny bubbles deliver flavors of apples, peach and brioche. The finish is balanced, crisp and refreshing.