



ANDREW HARNIK/EXAMINER

Chef Garret Fleming of Charleston, S.C., takes pride in Southern cuisine, shaping his menu to reflect that.

Southern charm, Southern cooking

By Alexandra Greeley
Special to *The Washington Examiner*

When talking to Garret Fleming, executive chef of D.C.'s Southern eatery, Eatonville, you may first have to learn this: Fleming hales from Charleston, S.C., and his culinary mind-set is all Southern, probably all the time.

You may also learn this: His childhood family life was rather food-centric. "My mom had a dinner bell she rang at mealtime," he says, "and we all ate together. ... Each meal she took two to three days to perfect the recipe." At the kitchen table, all talk focused on different aspects of the meal, what succeeded, what failed. As a result, he always wanted to eat better and better, and was always figuring out what went wrong in a dish. "The Fleming family always cooked together," he says. "That was how I was raised. I was so excited to do this the rest of my life."

Despite these culinary influences, however, Fleming also tells of growing up studying music, philosophy, and French, with law school as his ultimate goal. But after college, Fleming traveled to France, and then throughout Europe, delighting in new and dazzling culinary experiences.

"I can think of a meal I shared with my father at a restaurant, called Poker D'ace in Besancon, France," he says. "It was recommended by several with the guarded caveat 'cuisine bourgeoisie.' I started out with the cerveaux, a dish of calves' brains that were lightly poached and then pan-seared in browned butter and finished with lime juice and parsley." His entree? A very savory stew of wild boar

What is your comfort food?

Southern Italian and fresh pasta of any kind. Or bistro-quality French food.

Which is your favorite cookbook?

I have so many. The book I use more than any other is "Harold McGee's On Food and Cooking."

Which is your favorite restaurant?

I love Jaleo, and its history brings the standards of all restaurant up. And Kom, Bayou

Bakery, 2 Amys, Pizza Paradiso in Dupont.

What's in your fridge?

Fat back. Fabulous beets that are pickled. Jowl bacon, eggs, Cristalino Rose. Not a lot.

Where is your favorite place in the world?

Besides Charleston, Naples, Italy. I was there on a New Year's Eve seven years ago. ... It was crazy, and electric atmosphere.

IF YOU GO Eatonville

» **Where:** 2121 14th St. NW
» **Info:** 202-332-9672
» **Hours:** 11:30 a.m. to 11 p.m. Sunday to Thursday; 11:30 a.m. to midnight Friday and Saturday

and a couple bottles of delicious wine. "It still stands out as one of my most memorable eating experiences in all of Europe," he says.

Ultimately, he realized that he hated everything that pertained to law, and what he really wanted to do was to own a restaurant. After returning home, he spent one year traveling and cooking around the South. "I saw an excitement about Southern cuisine, Lowcountry cooking," he says. "It has its own culture and history. I could never stop learning about it."

Then his sister suggested he attend cooking school. Fleming enrolled in the Culinary Institute

of America, where he says he was blown away by the passion students and staff had for maintaining high culinary standards. Wanting to return to Charleston for his externship, Fleming researched Southern chefs, looking for a local restaurant with the best reputation.

He landed at Peninsula Grill in Charleston, the hub of local cuisine. "Bob Carter opened this up 15 years ago," he says. "He is old school, a big, angry chef who was running around screaming. It was traumatic, but I learned about consistency in cooking. I also learned how to manage a kitchen and to be responsible for quality control. ... I also learned how not to scream at staff."

Now with the shaping and perfecting an all-Southern menu under his directives, Fleming is bringing in the braises, so typical of Southern cooking, and even the old-style ingredients such as stone-milled grits.

But what he is searching for is the ultimate Lady Baltimore cake. "It is from Charleston," he says. "I think the restaurant needs a signature cake."

The Vine Guy » Scott Greenberg Big House a supersized bargain

By Scott Greenberg
The Vine Guy

Georgetta Dane was a bright young woman living in Romania. She had just finished her graduate degree in food sciences from the prestigious Galati University, but her prospects were looking grim. Georgetta had two career choices: Work in a meat factory making sausages, or work in an institutional winery making bulk wine. "There is no romance in making sausage," she thought, so she decided to pursue the more romantic option.

But fate, luck or kismet intervened. On a whim, she and her husband, Corneliu, decided to enter a lottery to come to the United States on a special visa that would allow them to work in America and eventually acquire a green card. Out of millions of applicants, the Danes were lucky winners.

They had a young daughter, no family or job in the U.S., and neither one of them spoke a word of English. But they took a leap of faith, packed up and ended up in Monterey, Calif., just in time to participate in the harvest at Kendall-Jackson's new winery.

Georgetta's talents did not go unnoticed and she quickly moved her way up from the lab to the winemaking front lines. By 2006, she found her way to the Big House Wine Company of California, where she became head winemaker. And what a portfolio it is. With seven different wines, and more on the way, Dane has a lot to do, and she would not have it any other way.

One of the things Georgetta loves about her job is the unusually large selection of wine varietals that she gets to play with during the blending process, which is the where she lovingly applies her artistic talent. Georgetta looks at making wines like perfumes, first building a base scent and then using the nuances of each varietal in harmony in order to maximize the aroma. Then she refines the blending formula around the entire palate, first starting with the attack on the front of the palate and ending with the finish. With more than 40 different Mediterranean varietals, such as tempranillo, valdigue, counoise, ruche and primi-

tivo, and more than a few traditional grapes, Georgetta has a large and eclectic palette at her disposal.

The wines are available in both a traditional 750ml bottle as well as a value-oriented, three-liter wine "cask" that offers four bottles of wine for about half the price. Retail prices are approximate.

Eleven, yes, 11 different varietals contribute to the **2010 Big House White Wine** (\$10/750ml or \$22/3 liters). The aromatic nose really does have a perfume quality, including scents of spring flowers and lychee fruit. Flavors of white peaches, dried apricots and nectarines fill the mouth while bright acidity provides a clean, citrusy finish.

When chardonnay is made without the use of oak, it is referred to in the industry as "naked." The **2010 Big House Unchained Naked Chardonnay** (\$10/750ml or \$22/3 liters) is an excellent example of the pretty flavors unadulterated fruit can provide. Bright green apple, ripe nectarine and lemon/lime flavors zip over the tongue on their way to the clean, crisp finish.

Georgetta's approach to wine is "the more the merrier," and the **2009 Big House Red** (\$10/750ml or \$22/3 liters) certainly lives up to her philosophy. With more than 14 red varietals in the juice, including petite sirah, syrah, montepulciano and barbera to name a few, it delivers oodles of juicy red fruit flavors, including blackberry, red cherry and cranberries. A touch of vanilla adds depth and elegance on the lingering finish.

Zinfandel grapes from old vines produce elegant wines, like the ones used in the **2009 Big House Beastly Old Vines Cardinal Zin** (\$10/750ml or \$22/3 liters). Made from 80 percent old vine zinfandel grapes from vineyards around California, it delivers sumptuous blackberry, cherry and blueberry flavors on the front of tongue. Dried herbs and spicy pepper notes fill out the medium-bodied finish.

A couple other wines in the Big House portfolio, namely the **2010 Big House The Birdman Pinot Grigio** and the **2009 Big House The Usual Suspects Cabernet Sauvignon** (both \$10) also deserve a mention.

