



ANDREW HARNIK/EXAMINER

Jacob Hunter, executive chef of DC-3, has traveled around the country in search of the best-tasting hot dogs.

Chef revamps traditional hot dogs

By Alexandra Greeley
Special to The Washington Examiner

Jacob Hunter is hot dogging it. As executive chef of Capitol Hill's unique hot dog restaurant, DC-3, Hunter has scoured the nation seeking traditional franks or hot dog recipes. His task: Transform these into contemporary renditions of old-time faves.

And that's where the restaurant's curious name comes in: DC-3 refers to the 1940s Douglass Commercial airplane, which apparently flew to all the destinations referred to on the menu, from Chicago to Maine to Tucson, Ariz., to San Francisco. "It's a map of where the best hot dogs come from," says Hunter, pointing to an illustration covering one of the restaurant walls. "It shows the spirit of American hot dogs."

Except, of course, Korea. The Q's Seoul Bulgogi and Kimchi frank — "We make the bulgogi in-house," says Hunter — ranks on the listing as a nod to one of the owners of DC-3 and its sister restaurants, matchbox and Ted's Bulletin.

Believing that almost everybody loves a good hot dog, Hunter has taken a very serious look at the hot dog concept: How does the half smoke differ from, say, how folks eat dogs from a New York City sidewalk hot dog vendor. "Everybody loves them, even if they won't admit it," says Hunter. "Everyone has a different hot dog favorite, and people live and die by their favorite dogs," adding that his goal is to stay true to the spirit of a region's particular frank favorite.

But that has also led him onto curious offbeat pathways: a Thanks-

What is your favorite ingredient?

I don't think I have one. It changes with what I'm cooking. ... I fall in love with a new ingredients every day.

Which is your favorite restaurant?

I really love Zaytinya, because it is good solid food. Sushi-Ko, Central, because they execute the dishes

so well. Then Bistro du Coin.

Which is your favorite cuisine?

Sushi I could eat every day. Tacos and Vietnamese food, which are also a comfort food.

What's in your fridge?

Sambal, sriracha, pinot noir, yogurt, pickles, lot of condiments.

IF YOU GO DC-3

» **Where:** 423 Eighth St. SE

» **Info:** 202-546-1935

» **Hours:** Mon-Thu, Sun., 11 a.m. to 9 p.m.; Fri.-Sat., 11 a.m. to 10 p.m.

giving turkey dog with mashed potatoes and gravy? A peanut butter and bacon hot dog topped with Cheetos and mac 'n' cheese. "A hot dog is not just a hot dog," he points out.

Like many of his colleagues, Hunter grew up in a food-loving family. "My dad was always cooking and grilling, making gumbo in the kitchen," he says. "My mom was in a wheelchair, so I'd cook, and she would direct me." Then after high school, Atlanta-raised Hunter looked around for what he wanted to do. His solution: Go to culinary school. "When I enrolled in culinary school [Art Institute of Atlanta's culinary arts program], I wasn't sure that cooking was what I wanted to do," he says. "Now it's all I want to do, all I know how to do."

Working first for a restaurant group that had contracts to cater at various ballparks and other entertainment venues, Hunter eventually ended up in D.C. and at the Matchbox Company. "I've done a lot with them, like opening restaurants," he says. "That is really exciting, and I need that adrenalin rush. ... I put things together like a puzzle."

How does a chef trained at a culinary school focus on the frank? Perhaps Hunter's tattoo of a pig copied from Thomas Keller's book, "Ad Hoc," underscores how serious this guy is about cooking, even something as commonplace as the hot dog. "I never thought I'd be helping to open a hot dog restaurant," he says. "I've gained about 20 pounds since I started working here. ... At the tastings, I ate so many hot dogs it was insane, probably 75 hot dogs. I'd wake up with puffy fingers."

Now about 100,000 franks later, Hunter can readily concede that he has come to understand the frank, or hot dog, and is glad when foreign visitors come in and ask about DC-3's hot dogs. "People take them seriously, and feel passionate," he says. "Hot dogs are a childhood food from long ago."

The Vine Guy » Scott Greenberg

An American wine in Italy

It is not uncommon to find the vineyards of California named for the Italian immigrants who settled in the fertile valleys and planted grapevines as far back as the mid-19th century. Names like Sebastiani, Mondavi, Giumarra, Foppiano and Pedroncelli dot the landscape and agricultural history books like spots on a Dalmatian.

But what about an American of Italian heritage going to Italy and starting a vineyard. And not just any vineyard — one of the most pre-eminent vineyards in the most prestigious region in the country. It might surprise you to find out that is exactly what John Mariani Jr. and his brother, Harry, did when they founded Castello Banfi in the Brunello region of Montalcino, Tuscany.

In 1967, John Jr. and Harry, sons of famed wine importer John Mariani Sr., introduced the Italian wine, Lambrusco, to the U.S. market under the Riunite label, and it was an instant success. Within a few years, Riunite became the nation's leading wine import and established their firm as one of the dominant wine import houses in the world. In 1978, the brothers' "impossible dream" was achieved when they returned to their grandparents' homeland to establish the Castello Banfi vineyard estate. The Marianis gathered several of Europe's most well-known winemakers to consult on the project and it was decided to introduce grape varieties such as cabernet sauvignon and merlot in the area to take advantage of the various microclimates on the estate, a unique concept at the time.

They also concentrated on increasing the quality of the area's native sangiovese grape for Brunello, identifying more than 160 clones of the varietal and then narrowing their selection down to just 15 complementary clones that are planted in specific ratios in the field to yield the most consistently outstanding Brunello. The state-of-the-art winery blends both modern and traditional techniques, including cellars with customized oak casks

and barriques that maximize the ratio of wood surface area to volume of wine. Retail prices are approximate.

While Banfi is known mostly for its red wines, don't overlook the **2008 Castello Banfi le Rime Toscana** (\$10) white wine, a blend of pinot grigio and chardonnay. Fermented at low temperatures in stainless steel, the wine possesses a bouquet of tropical fruit and a full complement of green melon, guava and white peach. The crisp finish embraces a citrusy backbone and refreshing acidity.

A wonderful entry-level introduction to the Castello Banfi family is the **2009 Castello Banfi Chianti Classico** (\$10). Made predominately from sangiovese, this wine is fresh and inviting with typical notes of cherry and red plum. The finish is vivid and delicious, with enough depth and finesse to belie its price.

If you want to taste how well the introduction of noble grape varieties works at Banfi, try the **2008 Banfi Centine Rosso** (\$10), a blend of sangiovese, cabernet sauvignon and merlot. The palate is vibrant and young, with flavors of bright red cherry and a touch of raspberry, balanced by good acidity and soft tannins. This is a wine that would feel right at home with either grilled red or white meat as well as pasta.

The **2007 Castello Banfi Belnero** (\$30) is a testament to the art of blending. Predominantly made from sangiovese clones, with bits of cabernet sauvignon and merlot, the nose radiates aromas of dark berry, violets and tobacco. Powerful flavors of black cherry, blackberry and roasted coffee fill the palate and blend in with notes of earthy cocoa on the persistent finish.

The flagship wine of the estate is the **Castello Banfi Brunello di Montalcino DCG** (\$65). Made from 100 percent sangiovese grapes, the 2006 vintage is a commanding-yet-refined wine with aromas of red plum and tobacco and flavors of red cherry, vanilla and spice. The finish has characteristic abundant acidity and excellent concentration.

