



Grace Brock of Ole Pioneer's Kitchen turned to cooking after retiring from her job as a software analyst.

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Steaking out some great Argentinian meats

By Alexandra Greeley
Special to The Washington Examiner

When you meet the cheerful Grace Brock of Vienna, you might assume she leads the life of a relaxed, retired woman. But for the owner and chef behind Ole Pioneer's Kitchen, nothing could be further from her reality. She's up early each day to shop for, prep, season, wrap, label and freeze pounds of steaks, sausages, bacon and meatballs. And then she goes to a farmers market.

Why the business? For one, says the native Argentinian, several months after she retired from her job as a software analyst, she became bored with so much time on her hands. "I couldn't stand not having a daily schedule," she said.

She had a collection of traditional sausage recipes garnered from her Argentinian grandfather, a butcher by profession. After throwing a dinner party featuring her homemade sausages, Brock wondered if these products would sell at a farmers market. Her first efforts of a Mexican chorizo and a chimichurri sauce were so successful that Brock started a second career.

She had no formal culinary training, however, particularly one that focused on producing meat items for consumption. So she set out to learn a whole new profession in a 16-week period. Part of her learning curve included how to make meat products that were as appealing to the eye as to the palate.

"You have to look for the beauty in a product," said Brock. "When you buy something, you buy with the eyes. For me, it is not to see too much fat."

Then she wanted to experiment with flavors. "To sell, I wanted to make a couple of different flavors. I thought of the flavors I loved when I was a child," she said. "So I mixed

What is your comfort food?

The food I started missing a long time ago. My mom used to make it. It's polenta blanca. I dug out the recipe from my sister and made [it]. ... I like it because I put it into a dish 1-inch high, let it cool down. Then I cut it into portions, and wrap and freeze them. I eat it all week.

What was the greatest influence on cooking?

When I was a child, I was always watching my mom in the kitchen. My dad was very particular, and he didn't want children to touch the food. ... So my biggest influence was my mom, who cooked all three meals of the day. She made a feast out of a few ingredients.

Which is your favorite ingredient?

Onions and mushrooms. I love them. I like to use onions and garlic a lot. In my meatballs I put onions because I love the flavor.

Which is your favorite restaurant?

I am a beef-and-potato girl, so when my husband takes me out it is to Morton's. I love the beef, because it reminds me of beef in Argentina. That flavor, you recognize it anywhere.

What is in your fridge?

Greens (chard and spinach) because I like to eat greens. Yogurt, milk, real unsweetened butter, lemons, salad mixes, and for snacks, hummus and salsa.

IF YOU GO Ole Pioneer's Kitchen

» **Products available at:**
Kingstowne Farmers Market,
Vienna Farmers Market
(Optimist Club), Reston at
Lake Anne Farmers Market,
Lorton Farmers Market,
Alexandria West End Farm-
ers Market
» **Info:** opkfoods.com

flavors from Argentina. I started to experiment with unusual flavors that my dad did not see in his lifetime. I introduced them to my son and friends."

Because she took this new enterprise seriously — and also found her home kitchen too cramped for mass production — Brock expanded her house to incorporate a separate kitchen and storage room, and had

the extension properly licensed and inspected. "Now I have a place to work with the help of my assistant, Michelle," she said, adding that she makes about 200 packages of meats a week.

"I can now make 50 pounds of sausages at a time," she said, starting with bratwurst Mondays, followed later in the week by bangers, breakfast sausage, meatballs as well as British and shoulder bacon. Brock is fortunate to have a savvy helper in Michelle, who keeps up with the cooking and cleaning of pots and equipment without coaching. "Yesterday, while I was cutting bacon, she put it in trays and packed it," she said. "In the interim, she was trimming the flank steaks because we have to do that today."

What does her family think? "My siblings think I'm crazy," she says. "Had my father still been alive, he probably would have said, 'I knew she could do it.'"

The Vine Guy » Scott Greenberg

Wines to complement a sushi dinner

With Memorial Day behind us, spring is giving way to summer, as evidenced by the departure of cherry blossoms and the arrival of pollen and tourists. But while the passing of the vernal equinox denotes longer days and much warmer weather, it also marks the official beginning of sushi season in the Greenberg house.

I know that you can eat sushi any time of year, but somehow, the approaching summer weather just seems to make the ama-ebi (sweet shrimp) taste just a tad sweeter and the spicy tuna rolls just a little bit zestier.

There was a time in the not-so-distant past when Japanese beer and sake were considered the only acceptable adult beverages to enjoy with traditional servings of maki rolls and nigiri. But all of that has changed, thanks in part to open-minded sushi restaurateurs who now include thoughtful wine selections on their menus.

Here are a few choice selections to look out for at your favorite sushi restaurant or to pick up with your carryout. Retail prices are approximate.

I really like sparkling wines with sushi dishes, particularly roses. The nonvintage **Jave Brut from Cava, Spain (\$18)** is made from pinot noir grapes and offers scents of raspberry, violet and toasted bread. Flavors of strawberry and cherry fruit feel creamy in the mouth but are beautifully balanced by crisp acidity. The bright little bubbles provide a palate-cleansing finish that goes nicely with the rich texture of avocado found in some rolls.

Off-dry wines can be a heavenly match with sushi, like the **2007 Trimbach Gewurztraminer from Alsace, France (\$18)**. This lovely one exhibits a floral bouquet of nectarine, lychee nut and nutmeg. Flavors of mango and passion fruit are built on a slightly sweet frame, but the crisp acidity keeps the flavors focused and clean. Hints of ginger on the finish make this an ideal pairing with sweet shrimp.

Sometimes, I like a wine with bright acidity to clean my palate. The **2009 Matanzas Creek Sauvignon Blanc from Sonoma, Calif. (\$19)** does the trick, with fresh flavors of passion fruit, guava and bright grapefruit. The lemon-lime finish refreshes the palate and makes a great match with brinier offerings on a sushi menu, such as oysters.

The **2009 Stickybeak Semillon/Sauvignon Blanc from Sonoma County, Calif. (\$15)** is a white wine blend that is a bit softer than a traditional sauvignon blanc, with more emphasis on fruit than finish. The fragrant nose features scents of tropical fruit and lemon-lime that also show up

on the palate, where they are joined by flavors of honeydew melon and peach. The wine has a nice balance between acidity and fruit with a slightly softer finish featuring lingering notes of citrus and minerals. I think this would go well with yellowtail.

Pinot noirs go great with richer fish, such as salmon and tuna. The substantial weight of the **2007 Domaine Serene Pinot Noir, Yamhill Cuvée from Willamette Valley, Ore. (\$35)** is a great choice for pairing with toro, with a wonderful nose of strawberry, black plums and graphite. Concentrated flavors of black cherry, wild strawberry, spice and violets are in balance with the firm tannins and abundant acidity.

If spicy tuna hand rolls are how you roll, then you'll want a glass of the **2008 Brazil Old Vine Zinfandel from Lodi, Calif. (\$16)** by your side. This spicy red has intense flavors of plum, cherry and black pepper that coat the entire tongue and has great mouthfeel. The briary finish is long and lithe and can certainly hold its own with spicier rolls.



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