

# Creating Asian-Cajun magic

By Alexandra Greeley  
Special to The Washington Examiner

Youthful and earnest, executive chef Daniel Wilcox Stevens creates a little bit of magic in the Sterling restaurant Mokomandy. Not only is the presentation whimsical and appealing, but also the flavors he and his cooks create are memorable. Where else can you find a kitchen that puts out a range of dishes that are part Korean, part Cajun and wholly delectable?

Why this gastronomic mix? The owner, Thaddeus Kim, is honoring his Korean heritage — hence, “Mo” for modern and “Ko” for Korean — and the Cajun heritage of his mother, Mandy. As unlikely as the melding is, the results are a credit to the culinary skills of Stevens, who interprets the flavors the family loves best. “This is what I do, this is my passion,” he noted.

This Maryland native and Culinary Institute of America graduate got his start in the kitchen early in life, thanks to family summers spent in Cape Cod, Mass. There the youngster picked mussels off rocks, emptied lobster pots and grilled blue fish in his grandfather’s yard. Added to that was the opportunity to pick and prepare garden-fresh veggies from his grandfather’s large garden.

“My first cookbooks were his James Beard and Craig Claiborne books,” Stevens said. “We made pickles together, and he explored that process with me,” adding that as a youngster, he watched “The Galloping Gourmet,” Julia Child and Bert Wolf on TV.

Before he enrolled at the CIA, Stevens worked flipping burgers at a burger shack and working the line at a yacht club kitchen in Nantucket, Mass. Once at the CIA, he says he read as many culinary textbooks as possible and worked at three off-campus kitchen jobs.

But perhaps his best off-campus job was the externship at the CIA’s Napa Valley campus. “I did all the mise en place for all the different classes, making the basics for everything from carnitas to kibbeh,” he says. “It was fun. Many of the chefs there knew I came early and stayed



COURTESY PHOTO

“I am exploring how Cajun and Korean flavors fit together,” says Mokomandy executive chef Daniel Wilcox Stevens.

#### What is your comfort food?

Probably cheese and bread. When I worked in New Jersey, I would work in the cheese department and eat cheese and charcuterie. Depending on the time of year, I love chowder, simple grilled stuff. In the fall, pumpkin and chestnut soups.

#### Which is your favorite cookbook?

Probably The Flavor Bible; Real Cajun: Rustic Home Cooking from Donald Link; Growing up in a Korean Kitchen; and The Modern Cafe.

#### Which is your favorite restaurant?

I have no idea. Maybe Han Gang in Annandale. In Baltimore, Papermoon Diner.

#### What’s in your fridge?

One bottle of sauvignon blanc, cheese, craqueline, raspberries.

#### What is your signature dish?

The mussels with pecan wood-smoked green cayenne chili compound butter, and an apple cider vinegar infused with Turkish bay leaves. We serve them steamed with fresh brioche.

late so they spent extra time with me to teach me.”

Now at the age of 27, this young chef is facing probably his most exhilarating challenge yet: creating dishes that are not just fusing two disparate cuisines but showcasing dishes that are faithful to the traditions of Cajun and modern Korean cooking.

“I am exploring how Cajun and Korean flavors fit together,” he says. “I like learning, and that is what I enjoy about cooking, how ingredients communicate a culture, ... There is a parallel between Korean and Cajun food. It has been interesting to see how their chili peppers are related.”

So how do his parents feel about

#### IF YOU GO Mokomandy

- » **Where:** 20789 Great Falls Plaza, Sterling
- » **Info:** 571-313-0505
- » **Hours:** 5 to 10 p.m. Monday to Saturday, 5 to 9 p.m. Sunday

Stevens’ rather unusual cooking challenge? “It is perplexing to them,” he says, “because they eat at accessible American and Italian restaurants. They have no foundation for understanding these cuisines. But they like it.”

## The Vine Guy » Scott Greenberg Beat the heat with rose wines

Like many things in life, rose wines appear to be the result of tradition rather than evolution. It is believed that ancient Greek traders brought grape vines to southern France around 600 B.C. At this time, all wines were light red or pale in color since the grapes were rarely vinified for long periods. Eventually, the pale, or rose, wines made in the area developed a reputation for their remarkably bright flavors.

Rose is not a specific varietal, but is a style of wine that ranges in color from soft pink to light purple. Traditional red wines get their color from lengthy contact between the juice and the red grape skins. Most rose wines are made using the saignee method — literally, “bleeding” — in which the juices are bled away from the skins soon after the grapes are crushed, leaving behind a pale-to-dark pinkish liquid.

Many different types of grapes are used to produce roses. The most popular are made from Rhone varietals including carignan, grenache, mourvedre and syrah, as well as varietals popular in other grape-growing regions such as sangiovese, malbec and pinot noir.

Rose wines are generally produced with little or no oak, so the wines characteristically run to the bright red fruit side of the flavor spectrum. The abundant acidity provides a crisp and refreshing finish.

Best of all, rose wines are versatile and easy on the wallet. Served well chilled, they make a great companion for the hammock or picnic basket, pairing well with grilled seafood, chicken or roasted pork. If you want to add a festive flair to your glass, try a sparkling version. Retail prices are approximate.

The **2009 Mulderbosch Rose** from South Africa (\$11) is a terrific value. It is made from 100 percent cabernet sauvignon. The deep pink wine features luscious strawberry and red currant aromas that lead into clean and bright flavors of wild

strawberry and pomegranate in the mouth. The wine finishes brisk and dry with hints of tangy citrus for a refreshing touch.

The **2009 Belle Glos Oeil de Perdrix Pinot Noir Blanc** from the North Coast of California (\$20) is produced by Caymus Vineyards. Made exclusively from pinot noir, this salmon pink wine offers vibrant aromas of fresh strawberries and red cherries. Flavors of raspberry, watermelon and bright red cherry linger on a creamy frame and finishes with a delightful note of minerality and crisp acidity.

Looking for a wine to shout “Hola!” on the tongue? Try the **2010 Marques de Caceres Rose** from Rioja, Spain (\$11). This rose is made from 100 percent tempranillo grapes. It exudes aromas of strawberry and rhabarb on the nose and flavors of strawberries, peaches and cherries in the mouth. The finish is crisp and dry, so it will pair well with grilled or roasted chicken.

A rose to consider with bubbles is the **Nonvintage NV Louis Bouillot Cremant de Bourgogne Rose Perle d’Aurore** from Burgundy, France (\$18). This sparkling rose is 100 percent pinot noir and made using the traditional methode champenoise process. Delicate and crisp, this rose is fresh and flavorful with aromas of raspberry,

strawberry and grenadine on the nose and repeated on the palate. A lingering sweet cherry note on the creamy finish is accented by bright acidity. An ideal aperitif or terrific pairing with Asian cuisine.

For a traditional rose experience, pick up a bottle of **2010 Chateau de Lancyre Rose, Pic Saint-Loup** from the Coteaux du Languedoc appellation of France (\$16). The pretty salmon-pink color belies its pedigree of syrah, grenache and cinsault, but produces a full-bodied wine with juicy flavors of wild strawberry, raspberry and cherry. The wonderful minerality and bright acidity act as a refreshing counterbalance, leaving a tangy sensation after each sip.



Addy Bassin's  
MacArthur Beverages  
Fine Wine and Spirits Since 1957

Best Selection, Lowest Prices, Period.

Find Out First!  
Sign up For Our  
Email Alerts Today  
at Bassins.com!

