



"I am passionate about sustainability of the air, earth, water and people," says Harth chef Thomas Elder.

## Super chef, 'Elder' statesman

By Alexandra Greeley  
Special to The Washington Examiner

Presiding over the new, high-tech Harth Restaurant in Tysons Corner, executive chef Thomas Elder has a quiet charm. Without drama, Elder conveys the fact that he knows his kitchen and his cuisine, and his meals demonstrate that.

A native Midwesterner, Elder learned to respect his craft early in life. "My grandfather was a butcher during the Depression," he said. "And my mom worked for him, plucking chickens. My inspiration for cooking came from his butcher block." That occurred because when his grandfather closed his store, his mother inherited the 100-year-old butcher block, and as a young boy, Elder helped her clean it.

"I have all these food memories," he says. "I love food," adding that since he was 16 he worked his way up from potato scrubber to broiler cook and along the way has enjoyed every minute of the food world. "I fell in love with it, and I don't know how to describe it," he added.

After attending and graduating from the Culinary Institute of America, Elder went to work for a hotel company outside Chicago, then moved to Boston to work with a firm that owned several restaurants. "That was in the mid-1980s," he said. "Boston had a big food explosion with [chefs using] such ingredients as truffles. Those were exciting times with amazing food."

**What is your comfort food?**  
I always like a good burger place.

**Which are your essential ingredients?**

Olive oil and garlic. You can always do so many different things with great olive oil. Garlic is used for so many [flavor] layerings.

**Which is your favorite restaurant?**  
I don't really have a favorite, but I really like 2 Amys for pizza and Bob & Edith's for breakfast. They cook the bacon fresh.

### IF YOU GO

#### Harth Restaurant

» **Where:** Hilton McLean  
Tysons Corner, 7920 Jones  
Branch Drive, McLean  
» **Info:** 703-761-5131  
» **Hours:** Breakfast 6:30 to 11  
a.m.; Lunch 11:30 a.m. to 2  
p.m.; Dinner 5 to 10 p.m.

Eventually, Elder ended up back in Chicago, where his career took on a different meaning: He started sourcing ingredients from local farmers and volunteering with after-school programs by starting community gardens. "The emphasis was on healthy living," he said.

**What has been your luckiest moment?**

I've had some lucky moments, but my best moment is when I talk to a cook and explain a technique, and I see in their face that they understand it. My best moments are in the kitchen.

**What's in your fridge?**

I am going to buy every day, but there are staples. Three bottles of champagne, three different white wines, a chunk of Pecorino Romano, half-bar of Scharffen Berger chocolate, purified water and a few condiments.

That experience made him a solid fit with Harth, which has a multifaceted farm-to-table concept: bee hives on the hotel roof and a mini vegetable garden with a hot pepper patch on a plot of land behind the hotel. "This will encourage local residents to get to understand and eat fresh produce," he said. "I am passionate about sustainability of the air, earth, water and people. I want to practice what I preach."

With a smile, Elder notes that now is an exciting time to work as a chef, when the American public really knows something about good food, making creative cooking more possible. "So when I write 'gastrique' on the menu," he said, "people will know what it is."

stages over a week or so, selecting fruit that was at its peak.

This ripe fruit vintage produced wines with solid core flavors, good acidity, and lovely concentration and balance. Here are a few excellent values to look out for. Retail prices are approximate.

The **2009 Maison Joseph Drouhin Laforet Bourgogne (\$14)** takes advantage of sourcing its chardonnay grapes from all over Burgundy.

chablis-like in character, with hints of honeysuckle and nectarine on the nose, it sports a solid mouthfeel, featuring flavors of baked apples and green melon, with just a whisper of mineral-notes on the crisp finish.

The **2009 Guy Mothe Domaine de Colombier Petit Chablis (\$16)** retains all of the true characteristics of Chablis, with tangy notes of green apple and citrus in the mouth and flinty crisp dryness on the mineral-supported finish.

If your palate favors a richer-style chardonnay, try the **2009 Michel Bouzereau Bourgogne Blanc (\$20)**. Its floral bouquet is seductive, and the well-delineated flavors of apples, citrus and buttered toast are supported on a creamy texture. The medium-bodied finish is persistent and clean.

A personal favorite in my home is the **2009 Verget Macon-Bussieres Vieilles Vignes du Clos (\$22)**. It's a step up from the producer's Macon Village, featuring intense flavors of crisp apple, green melon and ripe pear. A touch of citrus and mineral notes on the slightly flinty finish provides nice balance and structure.

Ex-pat Blair Petel makes an extraordinary chardonnay from his winery in the Cote de Beaune region. Blair's **2009 Dublere Bourgogne Blanc (\$25)** is graced by scents of acacia and melon on the lovely nose that beautifully complements the flavors of green apple and pear in the mouth. The balance is delightful, featuring a clean, crisp finish.



## The Vine Guy » Scott Greenberg

### White Burgundy: Something for all

Why is it that the French make such a fuss whenever they have a decent vintage? Probably because they don't actually happen that often — or at least, not as often as in other parts of the wine world, where growing conditions are more consistent from year to year.

So when wine-growing regions such as Burgundy, Bordeaux and Champagne have a good-to-great year, two things happen: First, demand is higher and prices for premium labels go through the roof, and second, there is more wine to sell, which can result in some great bargains if you know where to look. And that is just what happened with white wines from the 2009 vintage in Burgundy.

Produced exclusively from chardonnay grapes, white Burgundies take on a completely unique personality compared with their domestic cousins. Many wine lovers consider chardonnay from Burgundy to be the Holy Grail of white wines, sought after by collectors for its seductive flavors, incredible balance and remarkable aging potential.

What gives the chardonnay grape its well-deserved reputation is the diverse micro-climates and soil compositions that hopscotch across Burgundy like a patchwork quilt. The main Appellation d'Origine Controlee (AOC) of Burgundy is the Cote d'Or. Located to the north is the Chablis appellation.

The 2009 vintage started off with a cold winter that melted into a warm spring, resulting in even flowering on healthy vines. Summer was hot, and several hail and thunderstorms reduced crop yield in several vineyards and hastened ripening. But sunny and dry weather carried all the way through the rest of the summer and into the harvest. This made it possible for winemakers to pick grapes in several

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