



Michel chef Jon Mathieson started out following his grandmother's recipes for family dinners.

EXAMINER FILE

Jon Mathieson: Careful classical chef

By Alexandra Greeley
Special to The Washington Examiner

After a yearlong break, Jon Mathieson, executive chef of Tysons Corner's Michel restaurant, is back to his old tricks: turning ingredients into savory treats. But as he reminisces about his year's break, Mathieson says that it was all good, an amazing learning experience. "I was teaching myself about artisanal breads using natural starters and organic flours," he said. "I have a passion for good bread, and my wife and kids loved it. I passed the extras on to neighbors or I would bring bread along as a party food."

That says a lot about the intelligence and dedication of this high-profile chef, who is a graduate of the Culinary Institute of America, and who entered the competitive culinary world as an apprentice in the kitchen with legendary chef, Seppi Renggli, at the Four Seasons in New York. Later he was hired as chef de cuisine at the very upscale L'Espinasse in Manhattan. "I have been very fortunate because I have worked for or alongside of many icons in the industry," he explained.

Like many of his culinary colleagues, Mathieson attributes his cooking passion to his kitchen duties as a child. "I did a lot of cooking with my mother and grandmother," he said. "My mom was very frugal, always making preserves and canning for the fall and winter. All the vegetables and fruits would fill up our chest freezer for the winter."

In addition, his grandmother had a house in the Catskills, Mathieson's summertime destination. "I worked on the dairy farm, milking cows, bringing cows in from the

What is your comfort food?

Sauteed broccoli rabe with caramelized onions and spicy chiles. (See recipe.)

What's in your fridge?

Champagne, Dijon mustard, natural brown eggs, lots of fruits and vegetables, yogurt and bread.

What is your must-have ingredient?

Mustard. I love mustard — violet, Dijon, whole-grain. And hot sauce.

Which is your favorite restaurant?

CityZen, Marcel's, Eve, Citronelle, the Source, Fiola and Bistrot du Coin.

What would you do with a year off work?

I like to travel and explore cuisines nationally and internationally. Continue baking bread and working out more. And spend more time with my family.

IF YOU GO Michel by Michel Richard

» **Where:** The Ritz-Carlton, Tysons Corner, 1700 Tysons Blvd., McLean

» **Info:** 703-744-3999

» **Hours:** Breakfast 6:30 to 10:30 a.m. Monday to Friday, 7 to 11:30 a.m. Saturday and Sunday; dinner 5:30 to 10 p.m. Tuesday to Thursday, 5:30 to 10:30 p.m. Friday and Saturday

pastures, picking strawberries, raspberries and blueberries, and catching fish," he explained. While that sounds like an idyllic summer's activity, it also formed a firm culinary foundation for the boy who became the chef.

And, of course, there was a turning point in his life, a time when summer fun became the proving ground for a future career. "All the siblings were there," he said. "My

grandmother would leave a recipe for us to get ready for a family dinner. That is how I started to really learn. My signature was a strawberry rhubarb pie for when the family came to visit."

Add to that the courses Mathieson took at a local community college. "These were culinary classes," he said, "and it really clicked. I met with a guy, a really happy guy, who was the pastry chef. I chose then to take the savory route ... I also saw the passion in Seppi's kitchen."

After working at several other high-profile restaurants in Manhattan, Mathieson was hired to work at Falls Church's 2941 restaurant, and later joined in to co-own and cook for the short-lived Inox restaurant, also in Tysons. Adding to his culinary knowledge as well, Mathieson has consulted on various restaurant projects throughout the United States, giving him a very broad exposure to regional American cooking. Pairing that with his classical French training has given this chef a very comprehensive focus on how he creates his dishes at Michel.

The Vine Guy » Scott Greenberg Cupcake Wines are a value treat

What happens when a naval aviator from the Royal Australian Navy turns his sights to winemaking? You get wines that take off in the mouth with well-grounded prices. You get Cupcake Vineyard wines.

Adam Richardson earned his pilot's license before he learned to drive. But the winemaking bug bit him late. As a lieutenant in the Royal Australian Navy, Richardson spent eight years directing maritime helicopter search and rescue missions before changing careers. Toward the end of his military commitment, Richardson decided to enroll in one of Australia's finest oenology and viticulture schools.

During his education, Richardson participated in a wide variety of winery jobs throughout Australia. In 1998, he moved to California for an assignment that led to extended stints at top wineries. His remarkable accomplishments brought him to the attention of Underdog Wine & Spirits, a multibrand producer who was looking for the right winemaker to start a new concept.

Richardson joined the Cupcake team in 2008, bringing with him the same passion for winemaking that he shared for flying. His inaugural release of three wines, a chardonnay, a cabernet sauvignon and a merlot, all from the central coast of California, were an immediate success. Since then, Richardson has expanded the Cupcake Vineyards portfolio to consist of wines from five different countries. His repertoire now includes sauvignon blanc from New Zealand, malbec from Argentina, prosecco from Italy, riesling from Germany and shiraz from his native Australia.

Needless to say, Richardson spends a lot of time traveling the world, collaborating with winemakers and growers in each location. This exhaustive process gives Adam the tools and resources he needs to craft remarkably delicious wines at remarkably reasonable prices. Retail prices are approximate.

I am a fan of prosecco in general and this one in particular. The **Non-vintage Cupcake Vineyards Prosecco (\$14)** is produced using the traditional glera grape varietal and possesses a brilliant nose of citrus, green melon and nectarine. The bubbles are remarkably tiny

and precise and give the flavors of creamy lemon, roasted nuts and nectarine a wonderful lift in the mouth. Charming toasted bread notes chime in on the bright, clean citrus-fueled finish.

The **2011 Cupcake Vineyards Sauvignon Blanc (\$14)** hails from the Marlborough region of New Zealand and proves that not all sauvignon blancs are created equal. While the wine does sport notes of traditional grassy scents on the bouquet, it is the extended exposure to the yeast sediments during maturation that really bring out the best of the fruit. Flavors of grapefruit, lemon and lime hit the front of the palate with a refreshing citrusy blast, but the creamy midpalate expands to incorporate yellow cake and mango. The creamy texture continues onto the medium-balanced finish, with just enough acidity to keep it clean and crisp.

If you've been looking for a reasonably priced, high quality domestic chardonnay, then the **2010 Cupcake Vineyards Chardonnay from California (\$14)** is your wine. About 30 percent of the wine undergoes malolactic fermentation which imparts a creamy texture in the mouth, where flavors of apple, nectarine, lemon/lime and buttery highlights meld together. Use of American oak barrels (about 20 percent new) imparts additional complexity and notes of toasted buttered bread and vanilla on the soft finish.

It's only appropriate that Richardson's talents shine even brighter when he gets a chance to make a wine from his native Australia, like the **2010 Cupcake Vineyards Shiraz (\$14)** from the Barossa Valley. Deep, dark and brooding, it features full-throated flavors of ripe blackberry, dark plums, smokey cassis and rich chocolate on the front of the palate and just enough black pepper spice on the medium-bodied finish.

The **2009 Cupcake Vineyards Red Velvet (\$14)** is a blend of zinfandel, merlot, cabernet sauvignon and petite sirah grapes that has been sourced from vineyards located throughout California. Each varietal has been vinified separately and then blended. The result is a wine that actually is reminiscent of a blackberry cupcake with chocolate icing. Hints of red fruit and mocha add a delicious note on the creamy finish.

