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GRAEME JENNINGS/EXAMINER



Orlando Amaro: He loves to cook

By Alexandra Greeley
Special to The Washington Examiner

With his goatee and rugged build, Orlando Amaro, executive chef at the new Station 4 restaurant, looks more like an athlete than a chef. But playing sport is not how Amaro has spent most of his life. He'd rather stand in the kitchen facing a line of cookpots than to do almost anything else.

Venezuelan-born Amaro grew up in a culturally diverse setting and in a family in which food played an important role. For one, his Italian grandmother was a pastry chef and his mother was a fine home cook. When he was still young, he began cooking for his family and friends, forging a love for all things culinary. "I grew up in the kitchen with breads, croissants," he said. "I love the kitchen."

When the time came for Amaro to attend college, his father and he faced an impasse. "My dad wanted me to be a lawyer," he explained. "I wanted to cook. Now my whole family loves good food and we share food every Sunday. Now they support me."

Looking for a permanent career path, at the age of 20, he moved to Mexico to attend the Culinary Institute of Mexico in Puebla. "Twenty-five years ago in Venezuela, there were no culinary schools," he said. After graduation, he interned in Cancun and Acapulco. After that, the Hilton Hotel group hired him as an executive sous chef, sending Amaro to cook in various Venezuelan kitchens and elsewhere.

But perhaps of all his culinary trials and experiences, the two different stages he spent working in

What is your comfort food?

That's simple. I want to open the fridge and eat whatever is there — rice, salad, pasta, which I can eat every day. Soups, ciabatta bread.

What is your signature dish?

My charred octopus. It's a Spanish recipe.

What are your must-have ingredients?

Mediterranean and Indian spices and Middle-Eastern foods. I love curry, and star anise, cloves, cinnamon sticks,

kosher salt. My food is infused with spices.

What's in your fridge?

Celery, carrots, romaine lettuce; gouda, manchego, and goat cheese; and I love meat and fish.

Where's your favorite place in the world?

La Boqueria in Barcelona. It is the best fresh market in the world. Everything is live. I could spend the whole day there. It is open all day every day. It is amazing.

IF YOU GO Station 4

- » **Where:** 1101 Fourth St. SW
- » **Info:** 202-488-0987
- » **Hours:** 11 a.m. to 2 a.m. Monday to Thursday; 11 a.m. to 3 a.m. Friday; 10 a.m. to 3 a.m. Saturday; 10 a.m. to 2 a.m. Sunday

the kitchen of Spain's celebrated chef Ferran Adria, may have been the most formative. While there, Amaro learned fine dining practices and applications. He also got an insider training with some of Adria's cutting edge culinary techniques, such as immersion circulators, hydrocolloids, methocells and modified starches.

Moving to the United States about eight years ago, Amaro took full advantage of his new living situation, learning some regional

American cooking from the ground up: He lived in Louisiana, Texas and Florida. Now in Washington to help open his friend's restaurant, Station 4, Amaro feels that today he is cooking for the American neighborhood. "They are my guests," he said, of the many patrons who file through the restaurant doors. "They want fried chicken, burgers and crab cakes. I can play with foams, but people here don't like that. They want to see the food."

In addition, he makes all the cakes, pies and charcuterie for this new restaurant. "Sometimes I make some dishes from Italy and from Spain," he said. "But I support local farmers. The best goat cheese in the world comes from the kitchen at Cherry Glen Farm in Maryland."

It's no surprise then that Amaro is happy right where he is, cooking at this new restaurant in Southwest near the waterfront. "I don't know about anything else," he said. "I just know my kitchen."

The Vine Guy » Scott Greenberg

Thanksgiving Day wines

Every Thanksgiving, my wife and I experience the same crisis. It has nothing to do with who we invite or even what size turkey to buy, but rather what wine to serve.

Yes, in our house, it's a big deal, mainly because my spouse and I differ on the style of wine to serve. I take a modern approach to wine and food pairings while Cindy likes to take a more traditional approach when it comes to her selections.

In order to keep the peace this year, we decided to employ the advice of four "neutral" wine experts in D.C. to play referee and keep our Thanksgiving Day wine choices stress-free. Retail prices are approximate.

Mark Wessels, is the managing director at MacArthur Beverages in D.C. His palate usually tends towards old-world styles, but this Thanksgiving, Mark steps outside his traditional choices with two domestic selections, including the **2009 Girard Chardonnay (\$19)** from the Russian River region in Sonoma, Calif. This chardonnay has a nice body to go with the Thanksgiving meal, but it is not too oaky.

Wessels also thinks pinot noir is a versatile wine, and it is especially delicious when it's from the terrific 2008 vintage in Willamette Valley, Ore. The **2008 Holloran 'LaChenaie' Pinot Noir (\$20)** from the Eola-Amity Hills AVA is a stylish pinot with medium dark cherry fruit and good balance.

Jon Genderson co-owns and operates Schneider's of Capitol Hill near Union Station. He loves rosé sparkling wines because they work wonders with Thanksgiving dinner, so he has selected the **2009 Mont Ferrant Brut Rosé (\$20)** from Cava, Spain, to get the festivities started. This elegant Cava possesses fragrant cranberry and rhubarb aromas leading to creamy, intense, savory middle and a long clean finish.

For an avant-garde red selection, Genderson likes the **2008 Bodegas y Vinos del Jalon "Las Pizarras" (\$15)** from Calatayud, Spain. This delicious wine is pure grenache from vines planted between 70 and 100 years ago. It offers up black cherry and raspberry aromas that leap from the glass. Full bodied with excellent depth of flavor, gobs of fruit and great balance.

Omar Hishmeh is the wine director/sommelier at Bistro Bis restaurant. He knows everyone's menu varies considerably on Thanksgiving, so he likes wines that pair well with fall seasonings and flavors. For example, he thinks that the **2008 Weingut Glatzer St. Laurent (\$20)** is reminiscent of an earthy, spicy burgundy from a ripe vintage. On

the nose, dark fruit spice and wet earth dominate. The palate shows a wonderful richness of fruit balanced with minerality and soft tannic structure. The first time Hishmeh tasted this wine, he thought, "This is a whole turkey dinner in a bottle."

Ben Giliberti is the former wine writer for the Washington Post and current director of wine education at Calvert Woodley Fine Wines and Spirits. Pairing wines with Thanksgiving doesn't present a conundrum in Giliberti's house, since his traditional white choice is the **2010 Caymus Conundrum (\$18)** from California. The multigrape blend is ideal because it harmonizes well with both the bird and the trimmings. He likes the juicy, honeysuckle and citrus fruit and noticeable sweetness on the finish that sends a big wake-up call to the palate after every sip.

Giliberti is also a big fan of employing a good Beaujolais-Villages on Thanksgiving because it is a red wine that really captures the harvest. Because 2009 is the best Beaujolais vintage anyone can remember, Giliberti is going to open a **2009 Georges Duboeuf Beaujolais-Villages (\$12)** this year, because, as he notes, "[Duboeuf] is the king of Beaujolais and always will be, for me."

