



GRAEME JENNINGS/EXAMINER

"I decided early on that I wanted to own and open my own restaurant," says Memphis Barbeque owner and head chef Chris George.

Chris George: The Memphis man

By Alexandra Greeley
Special to The Washington Examiner

Dressed in his tailored suit and looking businesslike, Chris George does not fit the image of a barbecue chef. But as the owner and head chef of Crystal City's big-deal barbecue joint, Memphis Barbeque, he will certainly be feeling the pull of the grill and looking the part of a 'cue man.

That he is so attached to this smoky theme is no surprise: George grew up in Memphis, Tenn., arguably the site of some of the world's most acclaimed barbecued foods. Indeed, the annual international barbecue battle, Memphis in May, underscores Memphis' barbecue importance. For George, his new restaurant venture is a little like bringing his home to D.C. "It is close to our hearts," he says.

His passion for cooking was sparked long ago, he said. "As a child, I came from a legacy of great cooks," he says. "My mom and my grandma. I watched them and I learned." George remembers sitting on the kitchen counter, stirring and asking his mother what goes in the bowl next. "I decided early on that I wanted to own and open my own restaurant."

But George has spent much of the last 20 years working as a general manager after joining Houston's, which is under the Hillstone Restaurant Group, with restaurants both here and including Atlanta and Los Angeles, and once again, Memphis. "I have learned all parts of the restaurant business," he says,

What's your comfort food?

It would be either a great slab of ribs or a great burger grilled over a hickory fire. Also, macaroni and cheese

What's in your fridge?

Cheese. My wife is a cheeseaholic. Skim milk, ground beef. A good bottle of chardonnay and lots of produce.

What is your favorite ingredient?

It starts with what you bring

in the back door, the grades of meat. Our barbecue sauce, and bacon — applewood-smoked bacon.

What has been your luckiest moment?

Being hired as management for Houston's Atlanta and LA.

Which is your favorite restaurant?

Houston's. I am a prime steakhouse kind of guy.

If you go Memphis Barbeque

- » **Where:** 320 S. 23rd St., Arlington
- » **Info:** 571-970-2727
- » **Hours:** 11 a.m. to 10 p.m. Monday to Thursday, 11 a.m. to 11 p.m. Friday, 10 a.m. to 11 p.m. Saturday, 10 a.m. to 9 p.m. Sunday; brunch with daily specials 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Saturday and Sunday

from dishwasher and expeditor to server and bartender. And I have spent much time in the kitchen," he says.

In his move to Washington, George worked as the general manager of the Occidental Restaurant, where he revamped the menu and wine lists. After several more moves in a managerial capacity, George obviously felt the tug to initiate his own business. Heavily influenced

by the barbecuing style of the Houston's Group kitchen, George imparted this knowledge at Memphis Barbeque. "I learned the ropes, managed the grills and the wonderful array of grilling and of using the smokers," he explained. Of course, he notes, he had always had access to and the benefit of the Memphis-style barbecues. "Corky's is one of the best restaurants there, and one of its chefs is joining us."

But for the dining public who may associate a barbecue restaurant with smoky, casual joints having rib drippings on the floor, Memphis Barbeque will be a refined and welcoming place, with an open kitchen with its visible smokers. And barbecue fans will not be disappointed by the high-end ambiance: George's restaurant serves brisket, pork shoulder, and St. Louis cut ribs and baby backs, all slathered with the restaurant's own special, top-secret barbecue sauce. "It has ketchup, vinegar, and tomato," hinted George. "And a little sweetness."

The Vine Guy » Scott Greenberg

Sparklers for the holidays

Let's face it; sparkling wines were made for New Year's Eve. There is nothing quite like wine with bubbles to create a festive atmosphere and elevate the last night of the year to celebratory status.

Whether you're pouring a wine from California, Italy, Spain or France, the addition of bubbles somehow makes each sip a party. And the variety of sparkling wines is endless. The wines can range from bone-dry to wonderfully sweet. The bubbles can be tiny or effervescent. They can be white, red or rose.

Just how should you go about finding the right sparkler for your particular palate? Well, price is always a factor, but many consumers often overlook the importance of bubbles. How a wine gets its sparkle can affect both the flavor and the feeling it creates in the mouth.

For example, wines made using the Charmat Method, where the secondary fermentation occurs in large stainless steel tanks before the wine is bottled, creates larger bubbles that have more "fizz" and tends to emphasize the fresher fruit qualities of the grape varietal. All wines from the Champagne region of France, and many domestic sparkling wines, are made using the traditional Methode Champenoise, where the fermentation takes place in the bottle and produces wines with more delicate bubbles and refined characteristics.

The good news is that there are a number of sparkling wines on the market that fit every palate and every budget, so you won't have to sacrifice your Christmas bonus to enjoy tasty bubbly, unless you really want to.

Here are a few recommendations from around the globe. Retail prices are approximate.

The sparkling wines from the Cava region of Spain are the unsung hero of bubbly. The **NV Segura Viudas Brut Reserva Heredad (\$19)** from Cava, Spain, is an excellent example of how delicious these wines can be. I really like this wine for its balance and abundant flavors. It has a pretty nose of rose petals and creme brulee. It's nutty and creamy at the same time with flavors of green apple and ripe pear filling out the midpalate.

Of course, Italian proseccos are always fun and affordable. The **Casavola Non-vintage Prosecco (\$15)** from Vento, Italy, is one sure way to get your evening off to a great start. Made from the prosecco grape, this straw-gold white wine has a bouquet of honeysuckle and acacia and flavors of crisp apples, apricots and hints of honeyed oranges. The tight bubbles refresh and cleanse the palate.

The Alsace region of France

is home to the **Non-vintage Lucien Albrecht Cremant d'Alsace Brut Rose (\$18)**. This sparkler is made exclusively from pinot noir, using the Methode Champenoise, and sports fresh scents of strawberry, rhubarb and rose petals on the bouquet and bright flavors of strawberry, cherry and raspberry on the creamy palate.

If you're looking for a classic sparkling wine with a domestic label, the **Non-vintage J Vineyards Cuvee 20 Brut (\$20)** from the Russian River Valley of California is a great pick. It sports a wonderful bouquet that is full of toasted brioche, green apple and lemon scents. Tight, compact bubbles carry flavors of ripe apple, citrus and roasted almonds across the entire palate.

Of course, if you want to really splurge, the **Non-vintage Veuve Clicquot Rose (\$65)** from the Champagne region of France is a wonderful indulgence. Aromas of ripe peaches, honeyed nectarines, red raspberries and hints of yeasty notes are buoyed to the surface by tiny, precise bubbles. The party continues on the palate where flavors of baked apples and rich pears mingle with hints of buttered crust. It's all built on a creamy frame that emphasizes the long, clean finish.



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