

Jason Maddens: Centered on Central

By Alexandra Greeley
Special to *The Washington Examiner*

If working for one of the best chefs in America doesn't make you one of the luckiest chefs in D.C., it's hard to know what it would take. That's the case with young Jason Maddens, who in his late 20s, finds himself at the helm in Michel Richard's go-get-'em American eatery, Central Michel Richard.

A local boy who grew up in Sterling, Va., and went to school in Maryland, he majored in engineering so he could graduate and design aircraft. Maddens' life certainly changed with his year off after college. He moved to West Virginia, and ended up working in a restaurant. "I really liked what I was doing," he said. "I was scared to tell my mom I wanted to be a chef, but she was happy with the decision."

Maddens enrolled in L'Academie de Cuisine in Gaithersburg, and had the good fortune to serve his externship at Falls Church's restaurant 2941 where he worked as executive sous chef. And after graduating from L'Academie, Maddens says he has been cooking ever since, heading to Europe to backpack for several months, eating his way through 11 countries.

Upon his return, Maddens headed to northern Florida, where he pursued several different jobs, from serving as executive chef at Jackson's Bistro in Tampa to working as a butcher at the St. Petersburg Yacht Club. "Jackson's was right on the water," he said, "and I had the freedom to create the menu. ... Management was free with the food [primarily fresh seafood] and I experimented to see how things worked together."

And as Maddens points out, he learned another basic culinary lesson: how to run a kitchen. "That was the first time I was in charge of the kitchen, and I learned a lot about management," he said. "I also saw how specific cultures are with their food."

About one year ago, with his Florida experiences firmly under his belt, Maddens moved back to the metro area, and was hired by Michel Richard to help establish Richard's new restaurant at the Ritz-Carlton Tysons Corner, Michel by Michel Richard. Then Richard moved Maddens to the executive spot at Central, and his life seems set for the time being. "I'm loving it," he said. "I have spent time with Michel and I am comfortable with what he is cooking. Now I can give him a dish and know how he is going to react. He wants me to love what I am doing."

And love it he does, having now developed a style of his own. "Michel is into textures in every



COURTESY PHOTO

"I was scared to tell my mom I wanted to be a chef, but she was happy with the decision," says Central Michel Richard chef Jason Maddens.

What is your comfort food?

Italian food, a bowl of pasta with red sauce and garlic bread. Just like my mom and grandma made.

What are your must-have ingredients?

Salt, then duck or lobster because I can use the entire animal.

What's in your fridge?

A lot of condiments. Apple

sauce, yogurt, lots of fruit. I make chicken stock and freeze it. Meat for my wife for when I work.

Where is your favorite place in the world?

At home with my wife.

Which is your favorite restaurant?

Liberty Tavern in Arlington.

If you go Central Michel Richard

» **Where:** 1001 Pennsylvania Ave. NW

» **Info:** 202-626-0015

» **Hours:** Lunch, 11:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. Monday to Friday; dinner, 5 to 10:30 p.m. Monday to Thursday, 5 to 11 p.m. Friday to Saturday

dish," said Maddens, who has learned how to adapt that style. Maddens can even point to his own signature dish from Central's summer menu. "We did an olive-oil poached halibut served over creamy leeks and potatoes, and drizzled with a wine sauce. It was a good dish."

Has he any regrets that he chose cooking over engineering? Not at all, he says. His family comes in often to eat, and to watch him working in the kitchen. "It's a lot of fun," he said. And he really means it.

The Vine Guy » Scott Greenberg

White wines for winter

Winter is slowly creeping into Washington, and as the thermometer begins its descent into the chilly territory, the first thing that that most wine lovers think of is reaching for a big red wine. After all, big red wines are the perfect accompaniment for cold weather fare, such as stews and chili.

But what about white wines for weathering winter weather? Most consumers usually think of white wines as warm weather companions. However, there are many white wines on the market that can be enjoyed all year long. Like wool scarves and flannel sheets, big white wines can provide warmth and contentment. Pair them with comfort foods such as white bean chili or roasted chicken and you have a match akin to red wine and steak.

The essential characteristics that I look for in winter whites are relatively straightforward. It's really all about structure. I like white wines that carry a lot of weight and density in the mouth and fruit notes centered around pear, peach, roasted nuts and tropical fruits.

Here are a few of my favorite examples of white wines that are perfect for a winter evening. Retail prices are approximate.

There is not a lot of domestic semillon wine produced in California, but fortunately, the **2008 Saxon Brown Semillon (\$18)** from the Cricket Creek Vineyard in Alexander Valley is available in our area. The creamy mouthfeel is full of ripe pear, white fig and honeydew melon. The rich finish sports integrated notes of orange blossom and Gala apple. If you like crab cakes, this is your wine.

One of my favorite winter whites is the **2010 d'Arenberg Hermit Crab Viognier/Marsanne Blend (\$18)** from McLaren Vale region of Australia. The wonderfully rich wine is packed with tropical fruit characteristics, orange marmalade, honeysuckle and white flowers. It would pair

beautifully with fish tacos.

The French version of the aforementioned wine is the **2010 Gonet Cotes du Rhone Blanc (\$14)** from the Rhone Valley region. A blend of Roussanne and Viognier, it has a floral nose featuring scents of acacia and honeysuckle. The mouthfeel is juicy, featuring ripe pear and notes of canned peaches. The structure is wonderfully solid for a wine at this price. Pair it with grilled halibut or seared scallops.

For an American version of the white Rhone blend, try the **2009 Treana Viognier-Marsanne (\$23)** from the Central Coast of California. It displays a characteristic floral nose with aromas of orange blossom and white flowers. Hefty flavors of ripe peach, pear, pineapple have a beautiful weight in the mouth. The wine has excellent balance and complexity, and notes of honey on the back of the finish keep you come back for another sip. Perfect with roasted chicken.

While I may like to enjoy my chardonnays naked (unoaked) in the summer, I want them fully clothed in oak for winter consumption. It is the oak aging that gives chardonnay wines their depth and richness.

The **2008 Beringer Private Reserve Chardonnay (\$30)** from Napa Valley, Calif., is an excellent example of a rich, complex style that bends towards sumptuous without being overly excessive. It has layers of juicy pear, green melon and Calimyrna fig on the front of the palate. Notes of roasted hazelnut and a touch of pumpkin pie spices glide in on the remarkably balanced finish. It is a big white wine in search of a lobster dinner.

Another excellent chardonnay to warm up with this winter is the **2008 Ramey Chardonnay (\$32)** from Sonoma Coast, Calif. This wine is remarkably complex, featuring scents of apple blossoms and buttered toast on the fragrant nose and layers of peaches, pears and melon in the mouth. Highlights of roasted nuts and brioche camp out on the unctuous finish and would be an excellent choice to enjoy with apple cider braised pork.

