

Doug the Food Dude: Trucking it

By Alexandra Greeley
Special to The Washington Examiner

Washington's food-truck craze has resulted in the availability of every cuisine — from crepes and waffles to kabobs and kimchi and all else in between. But one blue-and-white truck graced with a cartoon surfer-dude character presents an all-American eats festival. The truck? Doug the Food Dude.

While Doug the Food Dude (aka Doug Maheu) may not serve pot roast, he does take contemporary American dishes, and with a tweak here and there, offers an appealing menu. Imagine standing on a curb downing an order of parmesan-crusted salmon, crispy fajita egg rolls, a Maine lobster roll, or even a chipotle taco.

What makes the story of Maheu's cooking career so compelling is this: Maheu had his own publishing company in Northern Virginia before the economy soured. But rest assured that Maheu has never been a stranger in or to the kitchen. Describing himself as a "Navy brat" whose family moved all over the United States, Maheu started cooking very early, though not at high-end eateries. "While growing up," he said, "I flipped burgers at every fast-food restaurant around. And by 16, I managed a Dairy Queen."

When his publishing company closed, Maheu relied on his set of cooking skills to start another business. "I have always cooked and always loved to cook," he said. "Other than shadowing chefs, caterers, and doing a lot of reading, I have not attended any schools." But his daughter's health issues may have been his best teacher. "I learned to read ingredients, and looked at cans for preservatives," he said. "I threw all that out the window, and started cooking all-natural, from-scratch meals. I really dived into cooking."

What started out as a small catering business and making lunches for people turned into something much bigger. "We had a friend who convinced me to hop into a truck and get out into the streets," he says. As it has turned out, Maheu hit the



GRAEME JENNINGS/EXAMINER

"Some say we have too many items," says Doug Maheu, also known as Doug the Food Dude, whose food truck offers a wide selection of all-American cuisine.

What is your comfort food?

I am a big eater. I think I am a beef stew guy. When snow is on the ground, and it's cold outside. Summer, I am a big seafood guy, like with spiced shrimp.

What's in your fridge?

A London broil, lunch meat, smoked cheddar cheese, blue cheese, 2 percent milk, and sour cream.

Which is your favorite restaurant?

There's actually in Annandale

a Silverado's. But the family doesn't let me go out too often, they have me cook at home.

What is your signature dish?

There are two of them, the Caribbean slow-roasted pork and the parmesan-crusted salmon.

What has been the greatest influence on your cooking?

I would say the Food Network. Especially, Robert Irvine. I am a big fan of his. And I like Guy Fieri. I am a big fan of his, too. But Irvine is no nonsense.

If you go Doug the Food Dude

- » **Where:** For location info, visit dougthefooddude.com
- » **Info:** 703-772-5182; dougthefooddude@gmail.com

streets at a good time. When bad weather does slow business, he turns to corporate catering. Maheu also caters for weddings and brings his truck along for informal events. "The whole food-truck phenomenon is hitting everyone," he said. "So I give tours of the truck. That's more interesting than even the cooking."

But out on the streets on a typical

day, it's Maheu's menu that draws the crowds. "Our menu is really different," he explained. "This is like a mobile restaurant," adding that most trucks really only feature one type of food. Maheu has even had customers complain that he offers too many choices. "Some say we have too many items," he said. "I had a woman lecturing me on that before."

Generally parked somewhere in Northern Virginia, Maheu says it has all been a learning experience. And it is one that has involved his family. "When our kids are out of school, you can find them on the truck," he says. "My 11-year-old daughter did our logo. ... My 20-year-old is often on the truck working with me. And my 7-year-old son and wife are also there," he said.

The Vine Guy » Scott Greenberg

The Sicilian wines of Planeta

Sicily has long been known for being the Italian crossroad of both ancient and modern culture.

The largest island in the Mediterranean Sea, separated by a narrow strait of water from the "toe" of southern Italy, Sicily has been home to settlers from ancient Greece, North Africa and various European countries, including, of course, Italy. But what many people don't know is that it is also home to some of the most remarkable wines in Italy. And lately, many of those wines bear the name Planeta.

The Planeta family has been farming the volcanic rich soils of Sicily for generations, however, their entry into the winemaking world is less than two decades old. Alessio, Francesca and Santi Planeta founded their first winery in 1995 on a family-owned vineyard called Sambuca di Sicilia. Today, the Planeta wine organization includes six unique vineyard locations totaling 900 acres and involves more than a dozen Planeta cousins. Each location has been selected for its particular soil composition, climate and ability to nurture specific grape varieties. This meticulous attention to detail has resulted in award-winning wines that express distinctive characteristics from the various sites throughout the island.

The Planeta family is also devoted to the environment. They take advantage of the continuous sunshine by harvesting power using solar panels and they use vineyard clippings and other organic materials to generate energy. The family is vigilant when it comes to recycling bottles and other manufacturing materials as well as the use of recycled paper for packaging.

Planeta wines are environmentally friendly and delicious. What's not to love? Retail prices are approximate.

The **2010 Planeta Carricante (\$40)** is a white wine that hails from the Sambuca di Sicilia region where the Planeta family has owned the vineyard since the 17th century. The nose sports a very fragrant bouquet

of citrus fruit and white flowers. Flavors of green apple, nectarine and roasted almonds are balanced by bright acidity and abundant minerality on the crisp, bone dry finish.

QPR 8

The white fiano grape for the **2009 Planeta Cometa Fiano (\$40)** comes from the Menfi region, located on the southwestern coast of the island. The maritime influences and chalky soils contribute to the fragrant nose of guava, kumquat and apricot. It has a distinctly tropical fruit palate that includes papaya and pineapple on the front of the tongue and notes of pear on the mellow finish. **QPR 8.5**

Also from the southwest corner of Sicily are the vineyards that produce the fruit for the **2009 Planeta Chardonnay (\$40)**. Peach, apple and nectarine fruit dominate both the nose and the palate. The uber-chalky finish is long and lush, where the presence of roasted nuts adds a layer of complexity. **QPR 7.5**

From the Vittoria region comes the **2010 Planeta Cerasuolo de Vittoria DOCG (\$22)**, the only DOCG (Denominazione di Origine Controllata e Garantita) in Sicily. Aromas of cherry and strawberry fill the bouquet while charming flavors of strawberry, pomegranate and red cherry fills the entire mouth on a simple — but delightful — frame. Just a touch of truffle on the medium-bodied finish adds to the amiable appeal of this wine. **QPR 7.5**

The limestone and tufa content that make up the soils of the Noto region also contribute to the wonderfully flavorful **2007 Planeta Sant Cecilia Nero D'Avola (\$40)**. Nero d'Avola is to Sicily what chianti is to Tuscany and the flagship grape produces a wine with a heady nose of dark plum, cocoa and leather. Chewy flavors of dark cherry, black plum and tobacco are nicely integrated on a full-bodied frame. The nicely balanced finish is long and smooth, with just a whisper of smokiness on the tail end. **QPR 9**

Note: QPR is a rating system that compares the quality a wine delivers relative to the price. A QPR of 10 is considered an excellent value.



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