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"I always use a unique component when creating a dish," says Richard Beckel, executive chef at Market Tavern in Arlington.

Richard Beckel: Marketing talent

By Alexandra Greeley
Special to The Washington Examiner

One of D.C.'s many talents in the restaurant arena is New York native Richard Beckel, executive chef of the newly opened Market Tavern in Arlington. Actually, both the chef and the restaurant are a perfect match: good food served in a sleekly elegant steakhouse ambiance, especially in its upstairs Chophouse.

Beckel attended the Culinary Institute of America. From there, his career has sizzled forth with kitchen stints at Manhattan's La Cote Basque. "I externed here," he said, telling of how he followed up with an opening from none other than steakhouse magnate Charlie Palmer, who referred the young Beckel to his first major job and first major chef. "It was to Jean-Jacques Rachou who was the chef at La Cote Basque, and that is where I got my first job in NYC, just as [Palmer] did," Beckel explained. "I showed up on a Monday, and at 20 I was the youngest line cook at the restaurant."

Later, he cooked at Le Bernardin, then at the Ritz-Carlton Hotel in Pentagon City, and then he went to work with two other D.C. chefs, Yannick Cam and Michel Richard. To top all that off, Beckel staged in a Michelin-starred restaurant, Eric Westermann's Buerehiesel in Strasbourg, France. He tells of pestering the executive chef for a tryout, and having the chef finally agree to give him a chance, and pointing him to a pile of vegetables to trim. Apparently, the chef could scarcely believe that a young American cook could produce such classically prepared vegetables. Beckel was hired.

What is your comfort food?

Chinese food. They deliver on my day off. I like egg foo young from Cheng's in Sterling.

What's in your fridge?

A bunch of condiments, organic milk, Mexican Coca-Cola, Hebrew National hot dogs, apple slices for my son.

Do you have a favorite cookbook?

Multiple, but in particular: "Simply French" by Patricia Wells and "Ma Gastronomie" by Escoffier

Which is your favorite ingredient?

Sea salt. It makes all the difference in the world. Every one of them, from fleur de sel to Korean sea salt. Each has an individual character and different personality.

Which chef do you admire most in the world?

It would probably be Fredy Girardet. He is a great chef... and has maintained his humility despite his fame. When he retired, he did so graciously, and walked out quietly.

If you go Market Tavern

- » **Where:** 2800 Clarendon Blvd., Arlington
- » **Info:** 703-778-7788
- » **Hours:** 3 to 11 p.m. Monday to Friday, 10 a.m. to midnight Saturday; 10 a.m. to 9 p.m. Sunday

After nine months on the job, Beckel moved on to tour around Europe, sampling haute fare in numerous cities. "I studied a lot of cuisines globally," he said. "I have learned to apply the best techniques so I can work on every cuisines. That way I can branch out to use other ethnic ingredients and incorporate them in American cooking."

He cites as an example pairing Middle Eastern tahini with Mexican jalapeno chiles for a dipping sauce. "I work on a product until it is 100 percent perfect," he said, noting

that the jalapeno tahini didn't work. Instead, Beckel chose a jalapeno-ginger emulsion instead.

Obviously, Beckel gets a kick out of being a chef, which for him is more following a passion than just going to work for the day. After all, before taking up his current position, Beckel co-owned his own seafood restaurant, Hooked, in Northern Virginia, and not so long ago worked with the renowned former Blue Duck Tavern chef Brian McBride.

With such diverse influences shaping his skills, it's no wonder Beckel creates such stunners as the appetizer of fried green tomatoes stacked with honey goat cheese and the warm asparagus salad with a fried farm egg. And the very meaty, very unusual and very thick veal chop, grilled just to perfection. "Nothing I prepare is monochromatic," he said. "I always use a unique component when creating a dish. I am mindful of that, so nothing is always the same."

The Vine Guy » Scott Greenberg Super picks for the Super Bowl

Once again, the culmination of the professional football season is rapidly approaching. The 46th annual Super Bowl is crawling toward us this Sunday like a super-tanker pulling into port. Millions of viewers eagerly await both the kickoff and the attention-grabbing commercials with equal anticipation.

And, of course, copious amounts of food of every manner will be consumed while watching the big game. From pizza and chicken wings to smoked brisket and barbecued ribs, the range of Super Bowl fare has the potential to run the gamut of every major food group. The choice of which beverages to serve alongside these culinary selections can be a challenge.

Here are a few ideas that will please a diversity of palates while leaving enough money in your wallet for the office pool. Retail prices are approximate.

Beer is always a great choice for watching any football game. And if you're a New England Patriots fan, the patriotic choice is **Sam Adams Third Voyage Double IPA (\$6/22 oz. bottle)**. This creation is part of Sam Adams' "Small Batch Series" and is a limited edition brew. The name pays homage to Capt. James Cook, whose third voyage took him from England to New Zealand and then to the Pacific Northwest. The beer was crafted using hops from each of these regions and produces a bright citrus nose with flavors of hops, a touch of malt and more citrus on the midpalate. The bitter finish ends crisp and clean and would be perfect with — what else? — New England clam chowder. **QPR 7**

If you're a Giants fan, then you'll enjoy this gigantic wine during the game. The **2008 Clos de los Siete (\$16)** from Argentina is a behemoth. Using a combination of malbec, merlot, syrah, and cabernet sauvignon, this is a wine that is massive and seductive at the same time. Scents of blackberries, dark cherries and black pepper fill the bouquet as flavors of blackberry, black olives and cassis liqueur coat the palate in waves of complexity. The superbly balanced finish highlights dark mocha notes that glide down the tongue like silk. Pair it with burgers topped with gruyere. **QPR 10**

One of the most versatile white wines on the market is Viognier, and the **2009 Miner Simpson Vineyard Viognier (\$17)** from Madera Valley, Calif., is no exception. Stainless steel fermentation promotes the aromatic bouquet of acacia flowers and honeysuckle and lets the flavors of tropical fruit and notes of white peaches and nectarines shine through on the bright, crisp body.



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The tangy acidity offers a clean finish that would pair beautifully with the flavors of sweet pineapple and rich ham on a Hawaiian style pizza. **QPR 8**

The tempranillo grape is often overlooked as a utility player in the wine world. The **2005 Bodegas LAN Reserva (\$18)** from the Rioja region of Spain plays well with a variety of food, including ribs, chicken and steak. Aromas of cherries and red plums fill the nose as well as the palate, where they are joined by flavors of raspberries along with hints of cinnamon. The velvety finish is long and juicy and offers a touch of licorice for good measure. **QPR 7.5**

The Super Bowl is a duel between two powerful teams. The **2009 The Federalist Dueling Pistols (\$35)** from Dry Creek Valley in Sonoma, Calif., is a duel between two powerful varietals; zinfandel and syrah. Aromas of dark cherry and violets fill the nose. In the mouth, zinfandel contributes juicy red cherry/berry notes while the syrah provides structure and hearty flavors of blackberry and mocha. The peppery, powerful finish would be a perfect partner with spicy wings and barbecued ribs. **QPR 8**

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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