



GRAEME JENNINGS/EXAMINER

"I look at how I am classical," says Acacia Bistro chef Ravi Narayanan. "I love purity and simplicity of flavors."

## Raves for Acacia's Ravi

By Alexandra Greeley  
Special to The Washington Examiner

In case you haven't noticed, Acacia Bistro & Wine Bar — located just steps away from UDC — has a new executive chef. His name: Ravi Narayanan. Despite his Indian name and background, Narayanan is a Maryland native, having grown up in Gaithersburg.

That said, this energetic fellow has not let his Maryland ties nor his Indian background determine his cooking style. He has traveled the globe, cooking in various world-class restaurants. In the D.C. area, these include the now-closed La Colline and Maryland's Old Angler's Inn.

For another, in his own words, Narayanan had an innate cooking talent, and by the age of 8 or 9, was cooking full dinners for his family. When he started working at La Colline, he was only 14 years old. "In those days," he says, "I didn't know what being a chef was. I worked there as an apprentice for three years."

After attending Penn State, Narayanan earned a culinary degree from the Baltimore Culinary Academy. "Not only did I go through their entire program," he explains, "but also I went to all those practical externship in St. Louis, Missouri." And after graduation, he says, he took his first job at the Manor in West Orange, N.J.

That was the beginning of his cooking odyssey, a tour of work-

**What is your comfort food?**  
Dim sum at New Fortune

**What's in your fridge?**  
South Indian foods, such as sambal, idli, brown rice, coconut chutney, tomatoes, fruits, and vegetables

**Which chef influenced you the most?**  
All my mentors have played a pivotal part in my career. I

always have looked to those who guide me because they have your best interest at heart.

**Which is your favorite restaurant?**  
Citronelle and Rasika

**What would do with a year off?**  
I would travel half time with my wife and the rest of the time I would go back to India to smell the roses.

### If you go Acacia Bistro & Wine Bar

- » **Where:** 4340 Connecticut Ave. NW
- » **Info:** 202-537-1040; [acacia.bistro.com](http://acacia.bistro.com)
- » **Hours:** 11 a.m. to 10 p.m. Monday to Thursday, 11 a.m. to 11 p.m. Friday to Saturday, closed Sunday

ing in kitchens from Paris to Manhattan to D.C. to San Francisco and, after several other locations, to India, where he worked for the famous Oberoi group of hotels and restaurants.

Narayanan says his personal cooking style has been very strongly influenced by the classical part of his training. "I look at how

I am classical," he says. "That is part of me. Molecular gastronomy [cooking style] is not. I love purity and simplicity of flavors."

To achieve this, Narayanan relies on his vast experiences to produce some outstanding dishes. For one, he describes his signature as a pork belly paired with port wine, garlic and candy. For another, he has achieved what he calls "cauliflower essence," the result of heating olive oil in a large skillet and frying cauliflower until it turns golden brown, then pureeing the cauliflower, and slowly cooking it to evaporate the water. "This develops the [internal] sugar just to a certain point," he says. The result? The essence of cauliflower.

For sure, Narayanan is a chef who loves his profession. Indeed, how many chefs call their workplace — the restaurant — their home? Narayanan does.

## The Vine Guy » Scott Greenberg

### I got sunshine on a Cloudy Bay

When Captain Cook, on his 1770 voyage to New Zealand dubbed the inlet at the eastern end of the Wairau Valley "Cloudy Bay," he definitely got it wrong. Good thing, too, since Cloudy Bay is both a wonderfully sunny place to grow grapes and home to Cloudy Bay Vineyards.

Cloudy Bay Vineyards was established in 1985 at the northern end of the South Island of New Zealand. The Wairau Valley enjoys the longest hours of sunshine in the country, and maritime influences provide cool, clear nights. This combination results in ideal conditions for growing cool-climate grape varieties. In addition, the porous soil of the valley floor allows water to drain away, leaving behind minerals and nutrients for the vine roots.

Cloudy Bay Vineyards' philosophy is simple; they believe in the production of the highest quality wines from the best varieties grown in the most appropriate vineyard locations. This dedication to detail results in a distinctive style that shines through in every bottle of sauvignon blanc, chardonnay and pinot noir that Cloudy Bay produces. Retail prices are approximate.

The Marlborough region is blessed with a unique terroir and a cool maritime climate that results in large swings in temperature. These conditions are the foundation for producing the classic expression found in the **2011 Cloudy Bay Sauvignon Blanc (\$20)**. Fermentation in stainless steel tanks, prolonged exposure to yeast and minimal intervention by the winemakers combine to yield a wine full of aromatics that include mango, guava and lemon-lime citrus scents. The weighty mouthfeel is slightly atypical for a sauvignon blanc, but the juicy flavors of grapefruit, tropical fruits and nectarine are hallmark traits of the varietal. Abundant acidity and mineral undertones combine on the crisp, refreshing finish and would be a brilliant pairing with fresh oysters. **QPR 8**

Oak is used in the barrel fermentation of the **2007 Cloudy Bay Chardonnay (\$28)**. Most of the wine is allowed to go through malolactic fermentation. This secondary fermentation leads

to an appealing mix of ripe citrus, white fig and toasted hazelnuts on the bouquet and creamy flavors of grapefruit, nectarine, green apple and roasted nuts on the well-balanced frame. The light touch of oak highlights notes of baked bread on the medium-bodied finish and would pair well with pasta primavera or roasted halibut. **QPR 7**

In 1989, Cloudy Bay decided to produce their first pinot noir, and the winemaking team has been obsessed with the varietal ever since. It is the only red wine varietal in the Cloudy Bay portfolio and they believe it is the only red grape wine that grows flawlessly in the Marlborough climate. The **2009 Cloudy Bay Pinot Noir (\$38)** is painstakingly crafted from 40 unique plots from 25 different vineyards. Thoughtful blending of the lots leads to a wine with enticing aromas of red berries, boysenberry and baking spices. The delicate palate sports lovely flavors of red cherries, red plums and cinnamon that flow into a well-integrated finish that highlights earthy notes of dark strawberries and mineral undertones. This lighter-style pinot would pair beautifully with grilled salmon or roasted pork loin. **QPR 7.5**

Te Koko is the indigenous name for Cloudy Bay and is characterized by the vineyard as the "wild child" of the portfolio. It is a full-bodied alternative-style sauvignon blanc that undergoes both barrel fermentation and malolactic fermentation, inoculated with wild yeast. It is then bottled aged and released as a fully matured wine. The **2006 Cloudy Bay Te Koko Sauvignon Blanc (\$42)** delivers a rather intricate and intense bouquet combining lemon curd, acacia flowers and ripe peach. In the mouth, complex flavors of orange blossom, tropical fruits, white peach and grapefruit attack in waves and layers. Notes of ginger and spice, underlined by vibrant acidity, dominate the clean, balanced finish. The complexity and depth of this wine would make it an excellent choice to enjoy with poached lobster or steamed mussels. **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.*

