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"I guess I'm a foodie at heart," says Lisa Frantz, chef at Cafe Deluxe in D.C. "I love to ... experience cultures. Their food excited me."

Lisa Frantz's deluxe cooking

By Alexandra Greeley
Special to The Washington Examiner

Lisa Frantz takes center stage at D.C.'s Cafe Deluxe, where as executive chef, she oversees the kitchen of one of the city's busiest restaurants. But landing in this position was not her first choice, nor was a food-centric family her origin. "Nobody in my family cooks in the restaurant industry," she said. "We had no real family food." Her main tie to the food world? Her dad is a butcher.

While attending college and art school, Frantz decided pursuing an artist's life seemed more like a hobby than work. "I guess I'm a foodie at heart," she said. "I love to travel and experience cultures. Their food excited me."

Her food journey led her from her native California to Arizona where she enrolled Le Cordon Bleu College of Culinary Arts in Scottsdale, Ariz. — and graduated top of her class.

Onward from there, she came to Washington for a restaurant job at Founding Farmers. After three years there, she finally decided to look for a different challenge, and that led her to Cafe Deluxe. In her current position, she can use skills learned in both the savory and sweet sides of the kitchen. "In the past, I worked in the savory kitchen," she explained, but here she hopes eventually to get into the culinary development of all four area Cafe Deluxe restaurants (also in Tysons Corner, Bethesda and Gaithersburg).

Although the restaurant's menus are well established, Frantz does draw up specials on a regular basis. Indeed, one of her signature dishes

What is your comfort food?

Meat and potatoes, steak, ribs and bacon ... well, my father was a butcher.

What's in your fridge?

Always have condiments such as Sriracha sauce. I go to the farmers market nearby, so I have lots of veggies and fruits. A bottle of champagne and some takeout sushi.

Who has been the greatest influence on your career?

It's hard to say because I don't have someone who led me. So probably my travels have been a great influence. And my 10-year-old niece wants to be a chef like

Aunt Lisa. I love talking to her about food.

What has been your luckiest moment?

That's hard to say. I have gotten very far in a short time, so overall my career has been very lucky. I really started just a few years ago, so my whole journey is very lucky. In my first restaurant I went from prep cook to sous chef. It was something that just clicked.

Which is your favorite restaurant?

Cafe Deluxe, Ichiban Sushi on King Street in Alexandria, La Limena in Rockville, Vidalia, Marcel's and BLT.

If you go Cafe Deluxe

- » **Where:** 3228 Wisconsin Ave. NW
- » **Info:** 202-686-2233, cafedeluxe.com
- » **Hours:** 11:30 a.m. to 10:30 p.m. Monday to Thursday, 11:30 a.m. to 11 p.m. Friday, 10 a.m. to 11 p.m. Saturday, 10 a.m. to 10 p.m. Sunday

has great appeal: mussels with barbecue cream sauce served with roasted corn and blue cheese.

She traces her recipe inspirations to her extensive annual travels and to the sensibilities of her inner artist. As well, Frantz scours the food press and listens to what restaurant guests have to say about the

menu. "We get so many regulars," she said. "At least 85 percent are returnees, so I have gotten to know what they like."

Despite her long kitchen hours, Frantz has absolutely no regrets over her career choice, eschewing the idea of a 9-to-5 job. "I can't imagine doing anything else," she said.

Her family embraces her life as well. "It seems so glamorous," she said. "My mom must think that I am a Food Network star. She loves to hear what new things I am cooking." Alas, her parents, now residents of Alaska, can't just drop in to sample their daughter's culinary creations. But, says Frantz, she still turns to her dad for advice about cuts of meat. "There is one good thing about their living in Alaska," she said. "My dad sends and stocks my freezer with salmon every year."

The Vine Guy » Scott Greenberg

Finding a sense of place in Spain's Ribera del Duero

Over the last decade or so, many critics have alluded to a trend in wine where wines are produced to a standard referred to as an "international" style. This points to a homogenization of many red wines that, regardless of country of origin or varietal, taste the same. Wine-makers appear to be focusing on producing wines with clean, fruit-forward flavors and finishes that are big, bold and one-dimensional. While the movement toward this style has definitely helped to improve the quality of wines, it apparently has come at the expense of removing a sense of place and time that the soul of a wine can — and should — convey.

So when I had the opportunity to attend a recent tasting of Spanish wines from the region of Ribera del Duero, I was pleasantly surprised by how many of the wines actually tasted "of a place."

Located in Spain's northern plateau, approximately two hours north of Madrid, Ribera del Duero is synonymous with tempranillo, Spain's most popular grape varietal. The term "ribera" means "river bank" and is defined by the 71-mile-long Duero River Valley, whose diverse soil composition, steep banks and temperate climate provide an ideal location for viticulture. And for producing wines that taste "of a place." Retail prices are approximate.

Located in Gumiel de Mercado, a small village in the western region of Ribera del Duero, is the Arrocal winery. Just 10 years old, Arrocal has already grabbed the attention of consumers and critics alike. The **2010 Arrocal (\$19)** is 100 percent tempranillo and spends about six months aging in oak barrels, just enough time to give the rustic black cherry fruit, plum and licorice flavors a chance to mellow and meld with the bright acidity. **QPR 7.5**

The first vintage of **2009 Arrocal Finca la Mata (\$19)** spends just about 18 months in oak barrels and has a more pronounced dark fruit characteristics on both the nose and in the mouth, including blackberry, black raspberry and rum cherry notes. The lengthy finish leaves both a charming and rustic impression that features a touch of saddle leather and earthiness. **QPR 8**

Tempranillo flourishes in Ribera del Duero, where it is also known as tinto fino or tinta del pais. It takes on a particularly brooding characteristic in the **2007 Bodegas Cepa 21 (\$25)**. Made exclusively from tinto fino, the red cherry and floral violet nose leads to a very well-balanced palate featuring flavors of black

cherry, dark plum and black currants. The 14-month aging in French and American oak barrels contributes to the structured finish where notes of vanilla and toasty oak linger. **QPR 8.5**

Bodegas y Vinedos O. Fournier produces three distinct wines, including the **2005 Bodegas y Vinedos O. Fournier Spiga (\$24)**, whose tempranillo fruit is harvested from vineyards located at 2,600 feet. It is aged approximately 12 months in both new and used oak barrels and features charming flavors of red plum, dark strawberry and pomegranate that glide across the tongue on a mellow chassis and lead to a soft, laid-back finish. **QPR 8.5**

Bridging the gap between traditional and new-world is the mother-son team of Bodega Martin Berdugo, located in the Aranda de Duero region. Even the label on the **2006 Bodega Martin Berdugo MB (\$30)** is a homage to new (top half) and old (bottom half). The tempranillo features both ripe flavors of big red fruit and subtle earthy tones on the beautifully structured palate. Additional notes of leather and tobacco combine on the long and elegant finish, supported by sweet, ripe tannins. **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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