



GRAEME JENNINGS/EXAMINER

Ici Urban Bistro's Franck Loquet combined French flavors and flair with American ingredients to craft the restaurant's new menu.

## Franckly speaking: Ici's great chef

By Alexandra Greeley  
Special to The Washington Examiner

Ratcheting up the glamour of the downtown restaurant Ici Urban Bistro, new chef Franck Loquet settles in with a new menu that melds French flavors with American ingredients. Imagine starting your meal with poached farm eggs served with mushrooms and asparagus and flavor-boosted with truffle dressing.

A native of Paris, Loquet admits his mother was not such a good cook, but both sets of grandparents had stellar credentials. He says he spent every Wednesday lunch with his grandfathers from Bordeaux, who taught him how to cook french fries to be really delicious. "That really matters to me," he said, "because that was a turning point."

But he also credits his dad's parents for some culinary influence. "My [other] grandparents were from Normandy, and my grandmother had a huge garden," he says. "So we ate tomatoes, strawberries, cherries, all sorts of fruits. Plus she grew lots of herbs ... so I was [always] picking vegetables. She was a great cook."

This certainly explains why becoming a chef beckoned to Loquet when he was just a youngster. "When I was 6 or 7," he explained, "I wanted to be a pastry chef because I was exposed to baking such things as cookies and cakes. I always liked it." Today, he admits, he no longer bakes or has the patience for it.

Loquet spent years earning degrees, learning the kitchen basics and finding that he really, really loved the career. "Friends thought I was crazy," he said. "But I went

**What is your comfort food?**  
Pasta or any cheese.

**What is your favorite ingredient?**  
Olive oil. I love vinegar because I love acidity. And peppers, spices.

**Which is your favorite restaurant?**  
I don't eat out much, but I live in Old Town, so I have eaten at BRABO, Majestic Cafe. I have been to Jose Andres' Oyamel, but I want to try Blue Duck Tavern, and, of course, I will try Alain Ducasse's Adour, Bourbon Steak.

**What's in your fridge?**  
Yogurt, sorbets, bacon, eggs, vegetables, fruits, all kinds of mustard and condiments, hot sauce, cheese for sure, and lots of drinks such as iced tea and wine.

**Which is your signature dish?**  
I really don't know. Probably the lemon tart, which I learned in first internship in the kitchen. I was in England and came back with the recipe. Now I have made it my own. I feel proud of it when I serve it up.

### If you go Ici Urban Bistro

» **Where:** 806 15th St. NW  
» **Info:** 202-730-8700; [iciurbanbistro.com](http://iciurbanbistro.com)  
» **Hours:** Breakfast 6:30 to 10 a.m. Monday to Friday, 7 to 11 a.m. Saturday and Sunday; lunch 11:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday to Friday; dinner 4 to 10 p.m. Monday to Friday, 5 to 10:30 p.m. Saturday, 5 to 10 p.m. Sunday

for it." After graduation, he took a job outside Paris at a high-volume restaurant that was very busy in the summertime. "Coming out of school, you don't know much," he said. "But this restaurant had high standards. I worked on the appetizer station. I just had a two-month contract."

Then Loquet says, he jumped on

every job that was offered in Paris and ended up changing jobs every few months. "I was very impatient at that time," he said, adding that after the first year, he worked in a chateau in the South of France, and then traveled abroad to work in England, Scotland, Canada and the United States.

Now well-established in Washington, Loquet can look over his years in the kitchen and point to various influences that have shaped his style: "My techniques are French," he said, "but I adopt them to my environment. I keep my cooking simple. And my influences are Mediterranean, French, Italian, Spanish" and now, American.

For Loquet, there's another major cooking lesson learned: "You have to have some kind of passion," he said. "Cooking is very demanding. It is a big sacrifice, and you have to learn to manage your professional life with your private life."

## The Vine Guy » Scott Greenberg Easy-to-find wines

One of the questions I am most often asked is "Where can I find that wine you wrote about last week?"

As I pointed out a couple of weeks ago, finding a wine that is widely available can be a challenge. Not all wine shops carry the same stock. Also complicating matters is that different states have varying policies about wine sales.

Of course, one of the most useful tools in finding any wine is the Internet. I have found some success in using search engines to locate a particular wine. Wine shop websites are also getting better at maintaining up-to-date inventories online (although it is always prudent to contact the shop to confirm availability). My favorite online tool is [wine-searcher.com](http://wine-searcher.com). While the standard version is free, it is limited to searching inventory of wine shops that pay a fee to be listed. Upgrading to the "pro" version (\$39 per year) offers full access to the website's comprehensive database of wines but may be overkill for the average consumer.

But what about finding wines that are widely available in our area? Thanks to Samantha Jimenez, a public relations consultant with Whole Foods Market, the problem may be temporarily solved. Samantha recently sent over some samples of wines that are available at all of the Whole Foods locations in our area that are allowed to sell wine. A quick search showed

these wines are also available at many wine shops in our area. Retail prices are approximate.

Bubbles are always fun. And organic grapes are just icing in the sparkling wine, like the prosecco grapes used to make the nonvintage **Mionetto Brut Prosecco (\$12)** from Italy. It possesses a lively palate with flavors of apple, nectarine and tangy citrus. The finish is crisp and clean and would make a perfect pairing with fresh strawberries or grilled oysters. **QPR 7.5**

As we glide into the last part of the summer season, I am spending a lot more time outside, cooking on the grill, so I am looking for a smooth, easy-drinking wine to complement both the food and the mood. Enter **Bolla Soave Classico (\$12)** from Italy. This isn't your parent's Soave. This charming white wine is full of aromas of white peach and white flowers on the nose and flavors of stone fruit, citrus and pear on the light-bodied frame. A touch of marzipan on the delicate finish reminds me to enjoy it with grilled chicken. **QPR 8**

One of the most renowned producers in the Burgundy region of France is Domaine Louis Latour. The **Louis Latour Ardeche Chardonnay (\$11)** from France is a value-driven white wine that has a lot to offer for the money. Crisp apple, white nectarine and lemony flavors cover the palate on a sheet of crisp acidity. Notes of steely mineral on the back end of the medium-bodied finish provide a great backdrop to roast chicken or pork loin. **QPR 8**

I really enjoy off-dry (ever-so-slightly sweet) wines as an aperitif or as an accompaniment to spicy fare. The **2011 Yalumba Christobel's Eden Valley Riesling (\$12)** from Australia shines with floral aromas of peach nectar and mango on the bouquet and crisp flavors of white nectarine, pineapple and guava in the mouth. The bright acidity balances the sweetness of the fruit, and the hint of minerality provides depth on the finish. **QPR 8.5**

If a charming red wine is on your agenda, then the **2008 Columbia Winery Merlot (\$20)** from Washington is a fun choice. Merlot grapes make up about 85 percent of the blend, but malbec, sangiovese, cabernet franc, barbera and petit verdot are also added in for balance and finesse. The nose is full of red plum, dried herbs and cedar aromatics. The palate is rewarded with flavors of blackberry, dark plum, black cherry and baking spices. A touch of tobacco highlights the soft, pretty finish. **QPR 8.5**

**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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