



GRAEME JENNINGS/EXAMINER

Zengo chef Graham Bartlett melds bright flavors and light textures in his dishes.

## Graham Bartlett wows at Zengo

By Alexandra Greeley  
Special to The Washington Examiner

“Bold” and “big” are adjectives many chefs use to describe their food’s flavor. For some, the words have no bite. But for Graham Bartlett, the longtime chef de cuisine of Penn Quarter’s thriving and trendy Zengo, these words portray exactly what he cooks — assertive meals that fuse the fiery flavors of Latin America and Asia. The result? Such offerings as ceviche dorado with kimchee purée.

“It’s how we eat and what we eat,” says Bartlett of himself and his chef friends. “So the dishes we develop are with really strong flavors,” he says. “Mexican and Korean food, the perfect marriage of flavors. ... We are challenging ourselves so we don’t get complacent, and we are always creating new things.”

Bartlett works with Richard Sandoval, who sees cooking as one grand, global adventure. Not surprisingly, Bartlett names Sandoval as his main culinary influence. “He taught me a lot about myself and about food,” Bartlett says. “I now see myself as a young American chef using bright flavors and light textures.”

Having worked at Zengo since it opened five years ago — and at Zengo’s Denver location before that — Bartlett is immersed in culinary inventiveness and has learned how to meld textures and flavors for surprising results. But don’t imagine that this chef does not have a firm grip on traditional French techniques. He attended the Ecole Ritz Escoffier in Paris. While there,

### What is your comfort food?

We eat really simply, like chicken, beans and tacos and cabbage salads ... beans and tortillas, either flour or corn tortillas.

### What is your favorite ingredient?

I don’t really know. I named my dog Yuzu [for a Japanese citrus-like fruit], so maybe that is it.

### Which is your favorite cuisine?

Latin and Asian at any given moment. Even at work with staff meals, it will be one of those elements. A stir-fry, Mexican rice with tortillas, chicken, beans or steamed jasmine rice.

### Which is your favorite restaurant?

You know, I really, really like Rasika. The chef does an outstanding job. Their flavors are so out there, so great. I eat a lot of pho on my days off, like at Pho 75.

### What’s in your fridge?

More often than not, besides wine, usually cheeses that don’t go bad fast. I cook dinner once a week, so get nonperishable vegetables like broccoli and cauliflower, and some cured meats. Mom and Dad send me lots of the preserves they make.

### If you go Zengo

- » **Where:** 781 Seventh St. NW
- » **Info:** 202-393-2929; richard.sandoval.com/zengodc
- » **Hours:** Lunch 11:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. Monday to Friday; dinner 5 to 10 p.m. Sunday to Thursday and 5 to 10:30 p.m. Friday and Saturday; brunch 11:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. Saturday and Sunday

he worked at L’Espadon, a two-star Michelin restaurant, where he received valuable on-the-job training and experience.

A native of Mississippi, Bartlett got his start in the kitchen by watching his parents, both of whom loved

to cook in their native French and Cajun styles. Besides that, he says, his grandmother owned a restaurant that served good, old-fashioned Southern home cooking. And she loved to cook for others, which, says Bartlett, is probably something he inherited.

Though Bartlett calls D.C. home, he is lucky to travel with Sandoval to help set up restaurants elsewhere. As a result, he picks up influences from chefs in other cities. But he also finds that the melting-pot atmosphere of D.C. offers its own kind of inspiration. “Here you meet a lot of people,” he says. “In D.C., we have an unfair advantage because of our location. Our clientele is a mixed bag, some tourists and some locals into the fine-dining scene. We have to ‘read’ the people from a food and service perspective.”

## The Vine Gal » Cindy Greenberg

# Annual gift giving guide

In our household, the day after Thanksgiving can only mean one thing — trying to figure out what gift I am going to get the man who already has every wine-related gadget for the holiday season. Personally, I like giving (and getting) “usable” wine gifts, something that can be helpful year after year. So, if you are scrambling for a hostess gift, Secret Santa present, stocking stuffer or the perfect gift for your wine lover, look no further: I’ve got you covered. Prices are approximate.

A terrific introductory book for someone overwhelmed by wine options is **“The One Minute Wine Master”** by Jennifer Simonetti-Bryan, MW (\$15). The crux of the book is a one-minute questionnaire that identifies potential wine varietals categorized into “seasons” most likely to be palate pleasing. It’s a Match.com for your palate, if you will. The research is self-guided. Pick a selection and start popping corks.

Who can resist chapters titled “Hangover Cures & Responsible Revelry,” “Aphrodisiacs & Magic Tinctures” and “Healing Juices”? That’s what you’ll find out in **“Dr. Cocktail — 50 Spirited Infusions to Stimulate the Mind & Body”** by Alex Ott (\$17). Ott’s knowledge of organic chemistry and hints of his well-traveled background infuse the recipes, pictures and prose. Many recipes have nonalcoholic options and include unique ingredients that may not be in the average kitchen pantry. The photography is alternately playful, mystical and serene.

A perennial good introductory book for the novice is **“Wine for Dummies, 5th Edition”** by Ed McCarthy and Mary Ewing-Mulligan (\$23). Use it as a guide to determine what topic you’d like to learn more about and then find a specific book on that wine topic.

I definitely have the book **“Power Entertaining”** by Eddie Osterland (\$22) on my “must have” list for my husband. This book provides tips and advice for incorporating wine and food events into your business plan and shows how to turn your passion into profit.

A fun and unique wine tasting equivalent of a multiplayer online game is **Winebattles.com (prices vary)**. Register on the website and chose your varietal. The two wines for your chosen battle are shipped to your home — if allowed in your state — along with instructions and a game kit. Invite friends over to play and then record your vote for the wine of the week. Repeat when the next two wines in the battle are delivered. Not inexpensive but a unique and recurring gift depending upon the option selected.

What do you get when you cross



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a cordless screwdriver with a corkscrew? A man’s idea of the perfect wine opener, of course. Made by SKIL, the **iXO Vivo corkscrew (about \$60)** has a unique corkscrew attachment that removes a wine bottle cork in under 10 seconds. This is perfect for the handyman wine lover.

I admit this last gift idea is a bit pricey, but the **Wine Satchel by First World Trash (\$110)** — produced in storm-ravaged Queens, N.Y. — is unique, artsy and environmentally friendly. This six-bottle wine satchel is made of recycled materials. The handle and removable, adjustable shoulder strap are made from car seat belts. The bottom is reinforced by bike inner tube rubber. The body of the satchel is made of old billboards. The bottle divider is collapsible so you can repurpose the bag as a tote when not toting wine. It’s a win-win-wine all around! Pun en-tire-ly intended.



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