



GRAEME JENNINGS/EXAMINER

Chef Ann Cashion puts an emphasis on Eastern Shore and Gulf Coast dishes at Johnny's Half Shell in D.C.

Ann Cashion: Complete chef

By Alexandra Greeley
Special to The Washington Examiner

Chances are, those who have lived in the area for a while, they have eaten at Cashion's Eat Place in Adams Morgan when Ann Cashion owned and cooked. Her restaurant still retains her name, but Cashion has since moved on to be executive chef at Johnny's Half Shell, a popular restaurant on Capitol Hill. Famous for its seafood creations, Johnny's is also a hangout for Hill types, who like their meals cooked and served with skill and panache.

Obviously no newcomer to the local restaurant scene, Cashion has a way with food that has earned her respect in a city rife with top-tier chefs competing for the limelight. That Cashion holds her own with such particular grace is a mark of distinction in a male-dominated profession.

A native of Mississippi, Cashion got her culinary inspiration from her family's involvement in the food world. "My grandmother was a legendary baker, and my mom is a great cook. But I am the only one who wanted to make a living having this much fun," she said, nodding toward the interior of Johnny's.

In a twist of fate, Cashion was working on getting a Ph.D. in English literature from Stanford University, but she spent her free time exploring the food scene in San Francisco. She would then host dinner parties based on what she learned. To further fuel her food passion, she spent a semester in Italy and managed to get an invitation to cook with D.C.

What is your comfort food?

Greens are a big one, and I have a craving all the time. And all that food from Italy, like the meat sauce; it takes eight hours to make, but then it is quite stable. Anything with rabbit, and vegetables in general plus legumes.

Where do you get your inspiration?

I do get a lot from learning more and more about American regional cooking, especially in the South. Louisiana has a true indigenous cuisine.

Which is your favorite restaurant?

Palena, Obelisk and Kaz

Sushi Bistro. These are my go-to places. And, of course, Cashion's.

What is in your fridge?

Greens, whole milk, Parmesan cheese, eggs and whatever I will need for veggies that week. Hot sauces, mustards, all kinds of pickles, relishes and Duke's Mayonnaise. I don't keep a lot.

Which is your favorite cookbook?

Marcella Hazan's and any authentic Mexican cookbook. And in French, Joel Robuchon's first book, "Joel Robuchon Cooking Through the Seasons."

If you go Johnny's Half Shell

- » **When:** 400 N. Capitol St. NW
- » **Info:** 202-737-0400; johnnyshalfshell.net
- » **Hours:** 7 a.m. to 10 p.m. Monday to Friday, 5 to 10 p.m. Saturday; closed Sunday

chef Francesco Ricchi, who was working in Cercina, Italy. "What we did there was to cook and serve classic Tuscan repertoire derived from home cooking," she said. "It was the most formative experience, really idyllic, and a major influence."

That experience laid the groundwork for her return to Washington,

where she worked as the executive chef for a local restaurant group. Her next step: opening Cashion's. "You could see it clearly," she said. "It was an American equivalent of a trattoria as you would find in Italy," she said. "I was sourcing around the area and buying whole animals. That required a firm commitment to cook in a certain way," she says. "That is what makes food great, and it is very important to me."

At Johnny's, the Italian influence has receded, replaced by an emphasis on Eastern Shore and Gulf Coast cooking. "It took me months to develop a crab cake recipe," she said. "It was so simple, but how to figure it out?" Cashion wants to retain the Tuscan model of preserving culinary traditions with a repertoire that people understand. "That is being true to what I am."

The Vine Guy » Scott Greenberg

Wines for the holidays

The holiday season is here and, hopefully, most of your shopping is done. Now it's time to concentrate on one last detail: the wine.

Whether you celebrate with carols, candles or caviar, a great bottle of wine to share can be a memorable experience. In addition, if you're hosting a holiday party, or have been invited to one, you'll want to provide a wine that will be delicious, impressive, easy to find and reasonably priced, particularly if you're picking up several bottles.

Here are a few suggestions that run the gamut from affordable to splurge-worthy. Retail prices are approximate.

I know that I sound like a broken record, but I really do enjoy beginning every festive occasion with sparkling wine, and good Champagne is always worth the splurge. The nonvintage **Laurent-Perrier Brut Champagne (\$30)** from France is one of the best values in authentic Champagne sparklers. The lovely flavors of green apples, pears, roasted nuts and buttered toast are enhanced by the tight bubbles and the firm, crisp finish. **QPR 8.5**

If you are preparing roast chicken and latkes, spice up the pairing by painting outside of the usual chardonnay lines with the **2010 d'Arenberg the Hermit Crab Viognier Marsanne Blend (\$15)** from the McLaren Vale region of Australia. This lovely white wine offers an aromatic nose with scents of peach, nectarine and tropical fruit. The flavors of white peaches, guava, mango and apricot are rich and full in the mouth and are kept in check by the crisp acidity and notes of lemon/lime and mineral highlights on the nicely balanced finish. **QPR 9**

The traditional holiday ham can sometimes present a wine pairing challenge, but the **2010 Reata Pinot Noir (\$30)** from the Sonoma Coast of California does a masterful job of cutting through the richness of the fat while standing. This award-winning wine roped me in with smooth flavors of dark baked cherries, red plum and cherry cola on the front of the palate that combine effortlessly with a focused finish that continues on for almost a minute. **QPR 9**

I know more than a few families that elect the takeout option. If Peking duck, or any other game fowl, is on the menu, then consider a red wine whose jammy richness and fruit-forward characteristics will complement the duck's higher fat content and gamier flavors, such as the **2010 QUO Premium Garnacha (\$20)** from Campo de Borja, Spain. This 100 percent grenache-based wine features scents of cherry and plum on the nose that complements the softer fruit-centric

flavors of black cherries and dark strawberries in the mouth. The medium-bodied finish has a hint of spice at the end that adds an additional dimension wine. **QPR 8**

A good friend of mine insisted that I try the **2010 Stolpman Syrah Santa Ynez (\$27)** from the Central Coast of California with lamb, and I am glad that I did. This powerful red has wonderful aromas of roasted meat, ripe blackberries and cassia. In the mouth, flavors of blackberry, black cherry, dark cassia and licorice coat the tongue. The long and luxurious finish is well-integrated with toasty oak tones and black olives, supported by sweet-but-firm tannins. Treat yourself to a few extra bottles for future celebrations. **QPR 9.5**

For a special treat at the end of the night, pull out a bottle of nonvintage **Dow's 10 Year Old Tawny Port (\$30)** from Oporto, Portugal. Rich flavors of caramel, raisin, brown sugar and baking spices open on a richly textured bodied. The medium sweetness is nicely balanced by a touch of acidity, and the coffee/toffee notes on the long finish are a perfect foil to either pecan or pumpkin pie. **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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