



Chef Michael Harr uses his knowledge of multiple cuisines to craft the menu at Bethesda's Food Wine & Co.

GRAEME JENNINGS/EXAMINER

Michael Harr redux

By Alexandra Greeley
Special to The Washington Examiner

He's back. Michael Harr, that is, who returned to the D.C. area a few years ago. And now he's back cooking, as the executive chef at Bethesda's Food Wine & Co. There, he puts all the diverse aspects of his background and training into play, ranging from his love of farm-fresh ingredients to his knowledge of many cuisines, from Italian to Asian to that of the American Southwest.

A local boy whose grandfather owned a farm in Virginia's Accomack County, Harr learned early on to respect the Earth's natural bounty. But what ignited his love for cooking began at home, where his mother inspired her son. "My mom is a passionate cook," he said. "That was my inspiration."

He also learned some basic restaurant skills, like dishwashing, when he was a teen, and working for his mom was his very first kitchen job. He later was permitted to work on the line making pizzas. Such experiences formed a passion for his future career and ensured he would get some formal education, graduating from Johnson & Wales University.

But Harr's cooking life has focused mainly on D.C.-area restaurants, starting with his stint with Jean-Louis Palladin. Their time working together proved inspirational, giving the young Harr knowledge about the work-

What's your comfort food?

I enjoy a fried chicken, but I love anything grilled, anything I can throw on the fire.

What's in your fridge?

Truffle butter, venison, farmed eggs, baby food and lots of veggies.

Any cooking tips?

Keep it simple. A lot of home cooks are always re-creating a recipe to impress, but they

should stick to something simple and familiar.

Which is your favorite restaurant?

Marc Vetri's restaurants in Philadelphia and Estadio [in D.C.].

Where do you get your inspiration?

From the seasons and finding out what local farmers have. I let the vegetables speak for themselves. And what I have on hand ... all inspires me.

If you go Food Wine & Co.

» **Where:** 7272 Wisconsin Ave., No. 2, Bethesda

» **Info:** 301-652-8008; food-wineandco.com

» **Hours:** 11:30 a.m. to 10 p.m. Monday to Thursday, 11 a.m. to 11 p.m. Friday, 4 to 11 p.m. Saturday, 4 to 9 p.m. Sunday

ings of the kitchen. He also spent time in Bethesda's La Miche, La Colline on Capitol Hill and later, at Mark Miller's Red Sage restaurant, where Harr learned about using bold spices to boost flavors.

Harr has also spent a generous amount of time traveling, from Miami and Canada to Las Vegas, and to kitchens in Europe. Most

recently, Harr worked as the corporate chef for Celebrity Cruises. "That was very different from working in a ground restaurant," he said. "It was a floating hotel with lots of staff. ... We were feeding thousands every day." Not only was he responsible for creating menus and instructing the cooks, he said the experience was very multicultural. Beyond that, he took away an ideology. "There were guys who work hard with no days off," he said. "And they are still smiling. They must have a great attitude."

Now, Harr has the chance to tweak and upgrade earlier menus at Food Wine & Co. With that in mind, he has drawn on his diverse cooking experiences, coming up with such dishes as sweet basil mussels and smoked salmon with crispy skin.

The Vine Guy » Scott Greenberg Rose wines from Provence

As the weather turns cooler, my wine thoughts usually turn to darker shades of red. But that is not necessarily the case in Provence, where the locals of the southern French region tend to do something that would appear unusual to American consumers: They drink roses all year-round. As a matter of fact, Provencal residents drink the pretty-in-pink wines throughout the year with a variety of foods.

I was recently informed of this fact during a rose wine dinner sponsored by Vins de Provence (Wines of Provence), a trade association representing more than 600 wine producers from the Provence region. Its mission is to educate American consumers about the wines of the region's principal appellations. Together, these appellations and their subappellations make up 96 percent of the regional production of wine, with rose leading the way at a whopping 87 percent. This translates to roughly 152 million bottles of wine.

The reason is versatility. Roses are typically made from popular Rhone varietals, including carignan, grenache, mourvedre and syrah, and are often described as having the body of a red wine with the crispness of a white wine. This is a result of a winemaking process in which the skins are kept in brief contact with the juice after the grapes are crushed, so the wines take on a pinkish hue. Their unique characteristics allow dry rose wines to pair well with a wide range of cuisines. The representatives shone to host the dinner at the renowned Indian restaurant Rasika to successfully demonstrate the unique versatility of rose. Retail prices are approximate.

The Cotes de Provence appellation produces about 75 percent of the region's wines and is home to the **2010 Chateau Leoube, Le Secret de Leoube (\$30)**, a rose made from grenache, cinsault and cabernet sauvignon. The creamy palate is a bit unusual for a rose, but the flavors of raspberry, apricot nectar and wild strawberry are surprisingly both unctuous and refreshing at the same time. **QPR 8**

Estandon is the oldest brand in the Cotes de Provence, and its **2011 Le Cercle des Vignerons de Provence (\$12)** is a testament to the brand's longevity. This affordable rose is a traditional blend of grenache, cinsault and syrah and features a very fragrant bouquet of red cherry and violets. The charming flavors of red raspberry, strawberry and citrusy lemon pile on the front of the palate, while notes of persimmon make a lasting impression on the crisp finish. **QPR 8.5**

The Provence region is where

I first fell in love with rose wines, and the **2010 Dom D'Eole Rose (\$17)** from the Coteaux d'Aix-en-Provence appellation, is one of the reasons why. It is wonderfully crisp and dry yet delivers tons of bright, fresh fruit flavors, including red apple, wild strawberry and cranberry. The finish is remarkably well-balanced and delightfully refreshing. **QPR 9**

Also hailing from the Cotes de Provence appellation is the **2010 Cave d'Esclans, Whispering Angel (\$20)**, made from a blend of grenache, rolle, syrah, cinsault and tibouren grapes. It possesses beautiful scents of raspberry and cherry on the nose with fresh, clean strawberry and cherry flavors in the mouth, and just a touch of spicy ginger on the crisp, clean finish. **QPR 9**

The little-known tibouren varietal is one of the reasons rose wines are so balanced. It's a bit like using salt in a recipe; just the right amount makes the wine so much better. Case in point is the **2011 Domaine de Rimauresq, Cru Classe Rose (\$20)**. This lovely wine could be the poster child of Provence. The flavors of strawberry, raspberry and red plum are bright and forward in the mouth. There is just a touch of cranberry on the crisp finish that makes this the perfect accompaniment to a wide range of foods or delightful on its own. **QPR 9.5**

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.

