

Jeff Richardson: Unmatched

By Alexandra Greeley
Special to The Washington Examiner

If you love pizza and other casual American dishes, you will certainly wish you were Jeff Richardson, the executive chef of the recently opened Matchbox restaurant on 14th Street Northwest. The newest addition to the company's range of easygoing restaurants, this new eatery will challenge even the most dedicated dieter to pass up a bistro burger with Gorgonzola or a hot-out-of-the oven fire and smoke pizza, given an extra flavor boost with chipotle chiles.

A native of New Jersey whose mother moved with him to Frederick when he was a teenager, Richardson worked as a waiter in a local restaurant. As fate would have it, one day, management said the kitchen staff needed help. Richardson volunteered and found he really liked the experience. That seemed to set his course, for Richardson attended culinary school at the Baltimore International College, and while there, he also worked part-time as a grill and a line cook at the Marriott Renaissance hotel. But D.C. beckoned, he says, because he was looking for more of a culinary challenge.

"I decided to come to D.C. because there was a more interesting food scene," he explained.

He first landed at the now-closed Mie N Yu in Georgetown, where he worked as a sous chef. He then worked briefly for a country club in Maryland, before landing a position with the Matchbox restaurant on Capitol Hill. After a stint in the restaurant group's Rockville location, Richardson is now the master of his own domain. "Some of the dishes are my own recipes," he said, noting that steak frites and the coconut-braised short ribs are his creations.

"My palate has done a 180-degree turn," he says, recalling how his



GRAEME JENNINGS/EXAMINER

The steak frites and coconut-braised short ribs at Matchbox 14th Street are creations of the restaurant's new chef, Jeff Richardson.

If you go Matchbox 14th Street

- » **Where:** 1901 14th St. NW
- » **Info:** 202-328-0369; matchbox14thstreet.com
- » **Hours:** 5 to 10:30 p.m. Monday to Thursday, 5 to 11:30 p.m. Friday, 10 a.m. to 11:30 p.m. Saturday, 10 a.m. to 10:30 p.m. Sunday

parents were meat-and-potatoes eaters. But today, they totally support his career choice, even flying up from Florida for the recent opening of this Matchbox. It follows, of course, that Richardson has no

What is your comfort food?

It's pasta. My stepdad is full-blown Italian. Sunday afternoon macaroni reminds me of home.

What's in your fridge?

Stocked full of venison. I love to hunt deer.

What are your favorite ingredients?

Fresh fruits, particularly apples. I love cooking with them.

What is your signature dish?

Right now, the short ribs. ... It's out of the box.

Which are your favorite restaurants?

Corduroy. And I am a big fan of Jaleo. I love the tapas scene.

regrets, except wishing he had attended culinary school earlier. "I love going to work," he says. "This is the right career path, and working here is like being with an extended family."

The Vine Guy » Scott Greenberg

Wines for a very Southern cuisine

One of the benefits of writing a wine column is that my friends are always inviting me to parties. Now, I am not in any way suggesting that the only reason they are asking me to join is based on my ability to bring wine to the celebration, but, to date, no one has yet to decline the offer when I have made the obvious suggestion.

However, I recently met one of my more interesting challenges when a friend invited me to a post-holiday holiday party. When he extended the invitation, he did so without any preconceived notion that I would bring anything in tow other than my wife. However, I insisted that I contribute the obvious element, so naturally I inquired what was on the menu. Since Antonio and his wife are from Venezuela, the buffet included some pairing challenges from the south — South America.

All of the food on the menu is full of flavorful spices and rich textures that require wines with a tight-rope balance between punch and panache. I decided to jump in and see if I could come up with a few interesting wine choices to satisfy both the diverse assortment of food on the table and the varied palates of the friends on the guest list. Retail prices are approximate.

The well-drained vineyards located on the steep slopes of the hills overlooking the Adriatic Sea, between the communes of Conegliano and Valdobbiadene, are where the prosecco grapes develop their crisp acidity and bright flavors. The nonvintage **Aneri Brut Prosecco (\$20)**, from Veneto, Italy, was a perfect foil for the citrus-based ceviche that started the evening. It has bright floral scents of peach and nectarine on the bouquet, and the flavors of ripe peach, green apple and tangy citrus are delivered across the palate by effervescent bubbles. **QPR 8**

Trying to find a wine to pair with

the asparagus and cheese tart was a fairly tall order because tannins from oak can overaccentuate the grassy characteristics in the asparagus, but the **2010 Lucien Albrecht Gewurztraminer Reserve (\$16)**, from Alsace, France, was a winner. The bouquet is jam-packed with perfumed scents of rose petals, orange blossom and lychee. In the mouth, the wine rewards the palate with vibrant flavors of apricot, nectarine, spice, nutmeg and lychee nut. **QPR 9**

Empanadas are a traditional Latin American treat, but the variety of fillings calls for a wine that can match up to the multiplicity of flavors. Enter the collaboration between former Penfolds Grange winemaker John Duval and Chilean agricultural entrepreneur Gonzalo Vial. The **2007 Ventisquero Vertice (\$35)**, from Chile's Apalta Valley, is a blend of syrah and carmenere that Duval and Ventisquero winemaker Felipe Tosso craft into a wine that is lighter in style but big in character, with mouth-filling flavors of dark cherry, black plum and velvety chocolate upfront and touches of spice and pepper emerging on the smooth finish. **QPR 9**

The highlight of the evening was the pan de jamon, a slightly sweet bread loaf stuffed with ham, olives and raisins that is especially popular at Christmastime in Venezuela. The bread dough is rolled up around savory fillings into a log, baked and then sliced into attractive spirals. The uberluxurious **2005 Bodegas Catena Zapata Malbec Nicasia Vineyard (\$65)**, located in Mendoza, Argentina, spent 18 months in new French oak. Beautiful scents of blackberry, cassis and smoked meats waft up from the fragrant bouquet while complex flavors of black fruit, black cherry, clove and earthy minerals fill the entire mouth on a smoothly textured frame. The long finish is mesmerizing. **QPR 9.5**

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