



GRAEME JENNINGS/EXAMINER

Tony Conte, executive chef at the Oval Room, took over the kitchen at 701 Restaurant, adding an Asian tilt to American fare.

Counting on Tony Conte

By Alexandra Greeley
Special to The Washington Examiner

Tony Conte is a culinary superstar in his own right. Last year, he was nominated by the Restaurant Association of Metropolitan Washington for Chef of the Year. And the Oval Room, where he is executive chef, was nominated for Power Spot of the Year and Fine Dining Restaurant of the Year.

But now Conte can add yet another star to his chef's toque, taking over the kitchen of 701 Restaurant, a sister to the Oval Room, pulling double duty. "I spend time in both restaurants," he said, adding that for the moment, he spends more time at 701. "Then I come back here at night," he said of the Oval Room.

In his earlier cooking days in Manhattan, Conte worked for Jean-Georges Vongerichten, as executive sous chef at the famous Jean-Georges restaurant. He also worked in its more casual sister restaurant, Nougatine, located within the same premises. "So that is how I can deal with two restaurants at once," he explained, recounting that he has learned how to fix menus and help staff in different settings. "All day long I run back and forth," he said, "but it has worked out quite well."

Of course, the biggest challenges

What is your comfort food?

Pizza. No question.

What is your must-have ingredient?

Olive oil and a couple of different ones.

Which is your favorite restaurant?

My favorite pizza place is Haven in Bethesda. It has a true coal

oven and has the essence of pizza that I remember.

What's in your fridge?

Burrata cheese, orange juice, milk, yogurt, lettuce, herbs, parsnips and carrots.

Which chef do you admire most in the world?

Jean-Georges Vongerichten.

**If you go
701 Restaurant**

- » **Where:** 701 Pennsylvania Ave. NW
- » **Info:** 202-393-0701; 701restaurant.com
- » **Hours:** Lunch 11:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. Monday to Friday; dinner 5:30 to 10 p.m. Monday and Tuesday, 5:30 to 10:30 p.m. Wednesday and Thursday, 5:30 to 11 p.m. Friday, 5 to 11 p.m. Saturday, 5 to 9:30 p.m. Sunday

he faces may well be with menu creation and how to avoid repeating flavors and presentations. One way he solves that problem

is to step back and ponder what dishes he would want to eat at any given moment. He admits he has unleashed his pasta passion at the Oval Room, where he creates freshly extruded pasta dishes with different elements, different sauces.

As for 701, he has eliminated the purees, jellies and crumbles — they're just not what he does, he says — and talks instead of creating a soy-lacquered beef cheek with pumpkin polenta and a cured pumpkin-apple salad. "My goal at 701 is to not mimic what is happening at the Oval Room," he said. "They are both American, but there should be a real difference. That's where the challenge lies. I am who I am."

If that whets your appetite, look for an Asian tilt to American fare at 701 Restaurant and a slightly Italian infusion at the Oval Room.

The Vine Guy » **Scott Greenberg**

My friend David's wine picks

To call my good friend and business partner David a deep thinker is an understatement. He is a walking version of a supercomputer. Before he renders an opinion about anything, he considers every angle, every option and every alternative. Of course, David fancies himself quite a knowledgeable practitioner when it comes to wine consumption.

Now in our relationship, I am the one who usually asks for the wine list during client dinners. After all, I'm the theoretical professional wine journalist in the group. And, to be candid, David's tastes in wine tend to run more toward the mysterious end of the spectrum. On the rare occasion when I have an opening at my regular wine tasting group, I will offer David an invitation and then almost immediately experience a pang of doubt. It is with a sense of foreboding that I wonder what peculiar wine he will proffer to the gathering. But David's wines are usually the hit of the evening.

Here's the thing — David really does know "his" wines. And by "his" wines, I mean interesting, delicious, value-oriented wines that I would not normally include. This occurred to me a few weeks ago when we were sitting down over a bottle of delicious-yet-unusual David wine, when I asked him, "How is it you always seem to find wines that I like but I have never heard of before?" He replied, "I try to find wines my wife likes. The fact you like it too is simply a bonus." Retail prices are approximate.

David is a big Groucho Marx fan, so it's no surprise he is also a fan of the **2005 Two Hands Bad Impersonator Shiraz (\$38)** from the Barossa Valley of Australia. The whimsical label features winemaker Michael Twelftree wearing Groucho-esque glasses, nose and mustache, but the wine inside is seriously delicious, with flavors of dark cherry, blackberry, mocha and toffee that are focused on the center of the palate and supported by refined tannins. Unlike a typical shiraz from Barossa, this is a delicate version that pairs well with food or is good on its own. **QPR 9**

Another one of David's favorites from the land Down Under is the **2011 Leeuwin Estate Siblings Sauvignon Blanc (\$18)**. This crisp white from the Margaret River region first came to his attention during a dinner at the Australian ambassador's residence, where Leeuwin Estate owner Denis Horgan was leading the tasting. The bouquet features bright lime/lemon scents and flavors of vibrant lemon citrus zest, grapefruit, guava and nectarine that is carried across the palate by super-crisp acidity, providing a clean, bright finish. **QPR 9**

One of the more interesting wines that David has brought to my attention is the **2006 Glen Carlou Grand Classique (\$16)** from the Paarl region of South Africa. This classic bordeaux blend of cabernet sauvignon, merlot, cabernet franc, malbec and petit verdot sports fascinating aromas of earthy blackberry, blackcurrant and clove on the nose. The palate is remarkably well-structured for such a reasonably priced wine, with flavors of blackberry, rhubarb, mocha and roasted coffee coating the palate from front to back and finishing with fine tannins and a touch of black licorice. **QPR 10**

David won't admit it, but he has a bit of a sweet tooth when it comes to dessert wines. He discovered an amazing value when he stumbled on the **2009 Chateau Tirecul La Graviere Les Pins (\$19 for 500ml)** from the Monbazillac region of France. The lesser-known sibling of the famous Cuvee Madame selection, which sells for five times the price, this version still delivers loads of unctuous apricot marmalade, orange peel and candied ginger on the palate, which is well-balanced and displays delightful purity thanks to the crisp acidity. **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.



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