



GRAEME JENNINGS/EXAMINER

Chef Tom Crenshaw is putting a light twist on Southern fare at Georgia Brown's on 15th Street Northwest.

Tom Crenshaw goes Southern

By Alexandra Greeley
Special to The Washington Examiner

From rural farm boy to chef in D.C. may seem like an unlikely life path. But for Tom Crenshaw, executive chef of the city's beloved Georgia Brown's, his destiny was shaped early.

"My earliest memories are of spending time in the kitchen watching my mother preparing breads and pastries from scratch," he said. "These times, along with growing up on a farm in the rural Midwest, planted the seeds of local farm-to-table ideals at an early age. ... We grew all our own vegetables, cows, chickens."

Before he settled on this as his final career, Crenshaw considered becoming an actor, working in a dinner theater. But even there cooking beckoned to him. He remembers how the kitchen staff were having so much fun, and he wanted to be part of that. Without going to culinary school, Crenshaw trained on the job, working first for several Midwestern restaurants.

In 1998, he relocated to Virginia to join Interstate Hotels & Resorts and spent the next 10 years working in a dual role as director of food and beverage and executive chef in five of their hotels, ranging from Maryland to Seattle. "In Seattle, I learned to cook with seafood," he said. "Coming here [was] a shock to cook

What is your comfort food?

All the things I grew up on, such as homemade noodles and beef stew.

What is your must-have ingredient?

That varies. Right now, Brussels sprouts; beets; cauliflower.

What's in your fridge?

Nothing. Maybe a can of Pepsi and a six-pack of Diet Coke.

Which chef do you admire most in the world?

I like the chefs I turn to for what they do. Michael Symon, who keeps it straightforward. Thomas Keller, who is always straightforward. They are really important in this day and age.

Which is your favorite restaurant?

Blue Duck Tavern, Virtue Feed & Grain and Citronelle.

If you go Georgia Brown's

- » **Where:** 950 15th St., NW
- » **Info:** 202-393-4499; gbrowns.com
- » **Hours:** 11:30 a.m. to 10 p.m. Monday to Thursday, 11:30 a.m. to 11 p.m. Friday, noon to 11 p.m. Saturday, 10 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. and 5:30 to 10 p.m. Sunday

without all the plentiful seafood."

Of course, as an Illinois farm boy, Crenshaw has learned to adapt to many cooking styles over the years. "It takes some ingenuity," he said of the flavors he has learned to put together. "I love playing with miso paste, for example, like combing miso with scallops. Miso

and bonito broth for salmon has wonderful smoky flavors, an earthy flavor I love." He also plays around with Italian cooking, since he spent chunks of time working at Paolo's Ristorante in Georgetown — one of the several local restaurants in the Capital Restaurant Concepts group. "We even make our own gelato from scratch," he said of his days in Paolo's kitchen. "The wackiest flavor was oatmeal, either caramelized or pureed."

Now faced with translating a whole Southern repertoire at Georgia Brown's, Crenshaw is taking a slightly different approach to that cooking genre. "I am lightening it up a bit," he explained. "So I use quail and not roasted chicken. I also now use Carolina gold rice, a heritage rice that was almost extinct but has been brought back. ... I even make tomato marmalade."

The Vine Guy » Scott Greenberg An old resolution for the new year

A new year is here again, providing yet another opportunity to pledge to improve our lives and vanquish bad habits. For me, the celebration is a chance to reminisce about some great wine-centric experiences and chart my wine route for the year ahead. Of course, it is the same resolution I make every year — hey, I know I'm predictable — but I like to set realistic goals and feel good about attaining my objectives.

Many studies have shown that in order to give any goal a greater chance of success, one should always state the goal in the affirmative. I have done this year in and year out, and I can tell you, it definitely works. This year, I will continue to drink more of the good stuff. Life is too short to drink bad wine, let alone write about it. So look out, new year, here's to the "good stuff." Retail prices are approximate.

One of the unsung heroes of California chardonnay is the **2010 Girard Chardonnay Russian River Valley (\$24)** from Sonoma, Calif. Lemon zest, ripe pear and buttered toast aromas jump from the glass. The palate is rewarded with well-delineated flavors of pear, pineapple, tropical fruits and roasted nuts, all held together in near-perfect balance by toasty oak and crisp acidity. **QPR 9**

The Burgundy region of France is considered the birthplace of pinot noir, and one of the most consistent producers of the persnickety grape is Ponsot. The **2007 Ponsot Cuvee du Pinson Bourgogne Rouge (\$30)** is a gorgeous example of what this grape can do under the right conditions. Packed with loads of delicate fruit including red cherries, ripe strawberries and red plums on the front of the palate and hints of cinnamon, cloves and pencil lead on the luscious finish, this wine seduces the tongue in waves. The soft, luxurious finish is simply lovely. **QPR 9**

There are few things in the wine-paring world that are as satisfying as pasta and chianti. I am looking forward to enjoying the **2006 Antinori Chianti Classico Riserva (\$35)** from Tuscany, Italy, with a large bowl of pasta Bolognese. This 100 percent sangiovese beauty is chock-full of black cherries and violets scents on the aromatic bouquet, while elegant flavors of rich plum, black raspberries and red licorice glide over the tongue, supported on the backbone of soft tannins. This wine has remarkable depth and balance. **QPR 9.5**

Grenache is one of my favorite cold-weather wines, and the **2010 Perrin Vacqueyras Les Christins (\$30)** is a beautiful example of a grenache-based wine from the Southern Rhone Valley of France. Surprisingly approachable for such a young Rhone wine, it still couldn't

hurt to throw it in a decanter an hour or two before serving it. Don't be afraid to drink these wines on the younger side, especially when they reward you with flavors of black fruit, black licorice, black pepper and rich earthiness. The notes of bramble and eucalyptus are prominently displayed on the commanding finish. **QPR 9.5**

One of the classic blends of Australian red wines is the "GSM," which stands for grenache, shiraz and mourvedre. The **2007 John Duval Plexus GSM (\$40)** from the Barossa region of Australia is one of my favorites of the land Down Under. This juicy blend is crafted by renowned winemaker John Duval, who was responsible for some of the most legendary Grange Hermitage wines from the Penfolds family. Today, he makes some of the most complex and beautiful wines under his own name. The bouquet of the GSM features dazzling scents of blackberry, cassis, sweet earth and rose petals. Full-throated flavors of blackberry, black cherry and hints of vanilla are well-balanced over the entire palate. Prominent notes of coffee and mint chocolate cookies slide in on the lengthy finish. **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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