

Robb Duncan: Chilling out

By Alexandra Greeley
Special to The Washington Examiner

If you have a sweet tooth and love the soothing chill of a scoop of ice cream, you might want to take over Robb Duncan's job. As founder, recipe developer, gelato taster and business mogul extraordinaire, this young man can look over the past decade and smile with pleasure: He has married his soul mate, he has two young children, and he has opened and developed a fast-growing gelato business in the D.C. area. The name? Dolcezza, which translates as "Sweetness."

A native of Portland, Ore., Duncan joined his dad, a history teacher focused on Native American life, at conferences in Brazil near the Amazon River. There the young man learned how local natives used plants for flavor infusions in their cooking. While at one of the conferences, Duncan met a young Argentine woman named Violeta. They struck up a friendship and kept in touch after he returned to Portland and his job as a software developer. "I planned to quit my job," he says, "and I returned to the Amazon region again, meeting up with Violeta. ... We really connected very deeply."

After the conference, the pair took an idyllic two-week boat trip down the river and later traveled along the coast of Brazil for two months. He returned to Argentina with her, and on the fifth day of his visit the couple went to a local gelato shop, Freddos, near her home. "It was the best frozen anything I have ever had," he says. "That was when our business was born."

Moving from Oregon to Buenos Aires, Duncan and then-fiancee Violeta delved into the local arts community. But when Argentina's economic crisis hit, the couple moved to the United States, set-

If you go Dolcezza

- » **Where:** 1560 Wisconsin Ave. NW
- » **Info:** 202-333-4646; dolcez-zagelato.com
- » **Hours:** Noon to 8 p.m. Tuesday to Thursday and Sunday, noon to 9 p.m. Friday and Saturday; closed Monday

ting in the D.C. area. After several trips to Buenos Aires, they decided to start a gelato business in the area because at the time, no handmade artisanal gelato store operated in town. "We jumped right in," he says, and the couple made small batches at home.

Duncan's in-laws decided to help the couple and took a one-week course in Buenos Aires on making gelato. Then they came to D.C. and helped the couple open their first shop on Wisconsin Avenue in Georgetown — with their most popular flavor being dulce de leche. Duncan admits that neither he or his wife had had any formal business training, much less any experience in making gelato. When they started, he says, they had no clue what they were doing. "We were starting from zero," he says. "We were defining ourselves."

From complete novices to seasoned professionals, Duncan and his wife not only have four gelato stores (Bethesda, Georgetown, Dupont Circle and the Mosaic District in Fairfax), their product is carried in many of the city's top-tier restaurants. In addition, they also have developed a line of gelato that mirrors their eclectic view of life: Flavors include such singularly unusual flavors as lemon-opal basil, avocado-honey-orange and sweet potato-pecan praline.



Duncan

The Vine Guy » Scott Greenberg

A historical lesson on Georgian wines

One of the benefits of writing a wine column is it is mostly subjective. Aromas and flavors can be as personal as one's taste in abstract art. However, on very rare occasions, my enthusiasm can supplant specific details.

Such an error was brought to my attention last week by alert reader Christopher T. He read my column on Greek wines and took exception to the first sentence, "Greece is considered by many to be the birthplace of wine." He correctly noted that while the Greek wine industry dates back to about 4,000 B.C., there is evidence of a thriving winemaking trade in and around the area that is now known as the Republic of Georgia as well as parts of Turkey (that were formerly Georgian) that date all the way back to 8,000 B.C. To support his point, he referenced author Patrick E. McGovern of the University of Pennsylvania, whose books "Uncorking the Past: The Quest for Wine, Beer, and Other Alcoholic Beverages" and "Ancient Wine: The Search for the Origins of Viniculture" explore the cultural and economic evolution of ancient Georgia (and other areas) through wine.

Furthermore, according to Nicholas Krivoruchko, an importer of Georgian wines, the word "wine" comes from the Georgian word "gvino," which, he says, "the Romans shorten to vino and the French shortened to vin." Ancient winemaking objects, including clay amphorae that date back to about 6,000 B.C., have been discovered in and around Georgia. In addition, the area boasts more than 500 grape varieties — many of which are only found in Georgia.

Unfortunately, the spread of Phylloxera (an agricultural pest) and various other fungal diseases devastated many vineyards during the

second half of the 19th century. Even though the vineyards were eventually replanted, Georgia's communist government imposed a prohibition on alcohol in the late 1980s, severely curtailing wine production.

But thanks to the rich alluvial soil-laden valleys nestled in the shadows of the Caucasus Mountains, and a temperate climate that provides warm sunny days and cool nights, the Georgian wine industry is making a significant comeback. Many of the wines display excellent structure, with firm tannins and great acidity. Well played, Christopher. Evidently, Georgia is one of the oldest wine-producing regions in the world. Here are a few Georgian wines that are worth having on your mind and palate. Retail prices are approximate.

The **2007 Mukhrani Tavkveri Rose (\$15)** is a charming wine made from

the indigenous tavkveri grape. It delivers loads of fresh fruit on the palate, including tart cranberries, ripe cherries and cloves. The bright finish features just a hint of orange peel and pomegranate that gets a boost from the crisp acidity. **QPR 8**

In the Georgian language, "mts-vani" means "new, young and green." In my world, it translates to a delicious white wine. The **2010 Teliani Valley Teli (\$11)** is made from 100 percent mtsvane grapes and fermented in oak, which provides a bouquet of toasted bread and green apple. The mouthfeel has a creamy quality to it that supports flavors of nectarine, apple and guava. Abundant acidity keeps the additional flavors of tropical fruit and nectarine focused on the rich finish. **QPR 8.5**

Saperavi is one of Georgia's most popular red wine varieties because it has a dark skin that imparts a deep red color and tannins for structure and aging. The **2007 Chateau Mukhrani Saperavi (\$10)** has well-defined flavors of blackberry, dark cassis and blueberry fruit on a very velvety frame. The structure is supported by soft tannins and exhibits just a touch of dark cocoa and vanilla, thanks to the oak treatment. **QPR 8**

A semisweet version of saperavi is the traditional rendition from the Kindzmarauli area of the Kakheti region, which produces about 70 percent of the country's grapes. The **2011 Teliani Valley Kindzmarauli (\$16)** features aromas of sweet plums, ripe red berries and candied apple. The flavors of plums, raspberries and pomegranate are sweet without being cloying and would make a wonderful accompaniment to Asian fare such as Peking duck and roast pork. **QPR 8**

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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