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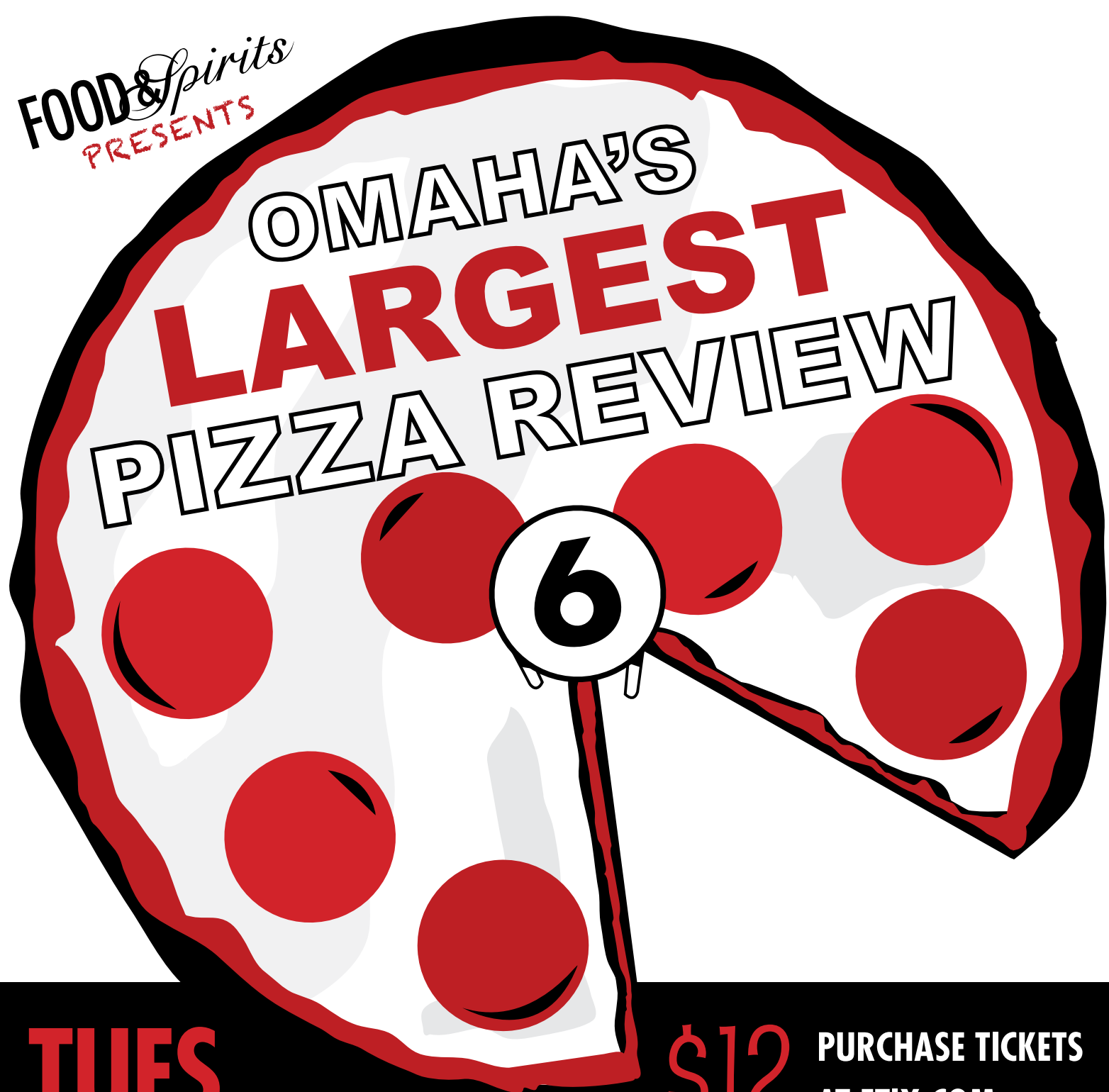
Issue 16

The Omaha Metro's Best Guide for Food, Dining, Spirits and Wine.

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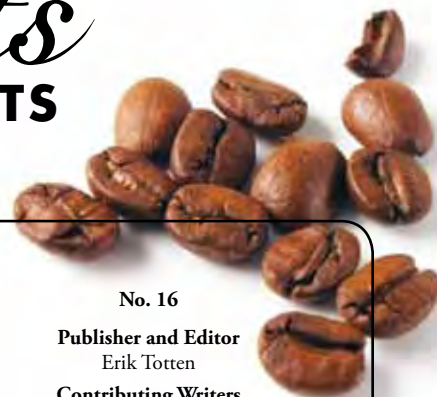
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ON THE COVER

The cover photo is the delicious cotton candy from Salt 88. Salt 88 provides this complimentary yummy goodness to every table. Ariel Fried shot the cover on location and we couldn't be more pleased with the results. To complete the cottony effect, the cover was printed with a Softtouch coating.



No. 16

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LETTER FROM THE PUBLISHER



Welcome to the 16th issue of *Food & Spirits Magazine*. It's loaded with some great articles and photos that you're sure to enjoy. In fact, I think you will find that the articles and accompanying art in this issue are some of the best that have ever graced our pages.

In the food section, the eminently readable Ann Summers tells us about the

mindset of the brain trust behind Old Market mainstays, *M's Pub* and *Vivace*. Be sure to check out Ann's *M's Pub* recipe-hack on their baked escargot. A new writer to our pages, Jessica Clem McClaren, takes us along with her on her recent culinary extravaganza in Nepal and, in an unrelated article, breaks down some of Omaha's best desserts. Speaking of desserts, Trisha Hunter gives us some background on the dessert apron.

"I think you will find that the articles and accompanying art in this issue are some of the best that have ever graced our pages."

Institute for the Culinary Arts student Shelby Hoins tours Benson with *The Supper Club*, while April Christenson explains some of the latest methods for brewing coffee and lists some of her favorite coffee shops in the Metro. Charles Schlusell provides his recipe for Thai mussels and Kent Cisar tells you what to do when a recipe goes wrong. Benjamin Doyle joins us for the first time with a review of some local places to find pho, and Rachel Mulder gives us the lowdown on juicing.

"Our spirits section is particularly strong this issue and loaded with contributions by local wunder-bartenders."

Our spirits section is particularly strong this issue and loaded with contributions by local wunder-bartenders. Binoy Fernandez gives us some history and perspective on speakeasies, while Dylan

Thaemert elaborates on the origins and flavors of Scotch. Lucas Korth details us the freaky science behind blacking out and Mallory Finch has an excellently detailed article on an often misunderstood, and critical, ingredient in our cocktails: bitters.

Our beer expert, Jason McLaughlin, takes us through the delicious and intoxicating adventure of pairing beers with desserts. John Finocchiaro, our resident wine aficionado, tells us about some of the different types of people you run into while attending a wine tasting.

"Omaha continues to dazzle with the creative talent you'll find within these pages. We hope you enjoy reading it as much as we enjoyed creating it for you."

On the last page you'll find the esteemed Michael Campbell reminiscing about the subject of our cover photo, cotton candy. Speaking of which, Ariel Fried was the photographer behind our cover. I've known Ariel and admired her work for a while and I'm glad it finally worked out for her to shoot our cover. She shot the cover photo with the delicious cotton candy that *Salt 88* makes. To add to the cottony effect, the cover is printed with a Softtouch coating.

Jacob Herrman was the photographer behind the fantastic photos for the Thai mussels recipe while, also nothing short of fantastic, the photos of the food found in Nepal were shot by Jason McClaren. The incredible Italian lemon cream cake from *Nicola's* was contributed by John Shartrand Photography. Shelby, the writer of the *Supper Club* piece also took the photos for that article. As a whole, they represent some very talented photographers.

Along with the writers, and our designer, Jake Scott, we're proud to have them as contributors in this issue. Omaha continues to dazzle with the creative talent you'll find within these pages. We hope you enjoy reading it as much as we enjoyed creating it for you. And, as always, let us know what we're doing right – and wrong. It's created for you, so don't hesitate to tell us what you think.

Erik Totten - Publisher

Juice On!

by Rachel Mulder

Omaha, keeping true to its tradition of being about five years behind on the national trend bandwagon, is now semi-health conscious. Restaurants like **Kitchen Table** and **The Grey Plume** have brought a focus to fresh, local produce and the beauty and color it can bring to a meal.

Though eating your vegetables is just oh so wonderful and important, it is not the only way to ingest them. Many people have taken to juicing their produce as a quick and flavorful way of taking in a lot of vegetables in a short amount of time. They're even using fresh fruit and vegetable juices in cocktails at some of the nicer drink spots in town, like **Boiler Room** and **The Berry & Rye**. Particularly helpful for those that want to justify your drinking.

"Many people have taken to juicing their produce as a quick and flavorful way of taking in a lot of vegetables in a short amount of time."

Fresh fruit and vegetable juice contains somewhere near 95% of the super-concentrated enzymes and vitamins necessary for human beings to thrive. Taking pills and supplements is fine, but unless they are whole food derived vitamins, they aren't bioavailable and the body can only process and utilize a percentage of the dose.

The body naturally knows how to process the vitamins and minerals from vegetables. It's also a nice way to expedite the absorption of all that good stuff. Juicing allows the body to process and assimilate the vegetables rapidly while allowing your digestive system to recuperate from overuse. To get the nutrition you'd receive from a juice, you'd have to eat pounds of raw vegetables, and people just don't do that. Juicing is a great way to self-medicate, as well. For nearly any health issue, there is a juice that will help heal you.

Cabbage juice is great for you skin, stomach, healing ulcers and is full of powerful antioxidants.

They are studying its effect against cancer with good results showing promise. The flavor is a

bit much on its own, but cut with sweeter fruits and vegetables like apple and carrot, its flavor is pretty innocuous.

Beet juice is naturally high in iron, which helps encourage mitochondrial processes and can give you a boost of energy. This makes beet juice especially good for women, who often have issues caused by low iron. It's also a very potent liver tonic. People who have liver issues or drink alcohol frequently should try beet juice. Be careful how much you ingest though, beet juice is so potent that more than four ounces at a time could cause some intestinal distress. Personally, beet juice is one of my favorite flavors, but if it's not your thing, blending it with apple, ginger, and lemon juice is great.

Kale juice is high in antioxidants and like beet juice, detoxifies and cleans the liver. For this reason, I would advise keeping your kale intake to less than four ounces. If you want to know what kale tastes like, just read any article published on any food blog for the past three years.

Celery and cucumber juices are full of antioxidants and electrolytes, as well as a strong amount of vitamins A, C and K making them good for your eyes. They are both very hydrating and detoxifying, and add bulk to any juice. They have a very nice, subtle flavor and even if you don't like their taste when ingested traditionally, the juice is slightly sweet and very pleasant.

Wheatgrass juice might be the 'Elixir of Life' that the Sorcerer's Stone was supposed to create. In my years working at **Jane's Health Market**, I've had hundreds of people try wheatgrass for the first time and come back saying how good it made them feel. I've seen people use it to treat cancer, the flu, lethargy, mental fogging, gastrointestinal issues and depression. The flavor isn't the most appealing, but if you can do a shot of whiskey, I'm sure you can handle a shot of wheatgrass. It's also pairs nicely with fresh pineapple juice.

A normal serving size of one ounce, wheatgrass should be taken on an empty stomach and is absorbed by your body within minutes. I took eight ounces once and felt like I was having an acid flashback so, yeah, maybe don't drink that much. Some places in Omaha that serve wheatgrass are **Jane's Health Market**, **McFoster's Natural Kind Café**, and **Juice Stop**.

If you haven't tried fresh juices from these sources yet, go to one of the businesses that serve them and treat yourself. You'll be glad you did.



7 Desserts We Love

by Jessica Clem-McClaren

At *Food & Spirits Magazine*, we believe dessert rules the culinary roost; the delicious curtain call at the end of a savory meal. No matter how great the entrée, how filling the appetizer, and how bottomless the drinks, we always manage to find room for something sweet. Omaha has made its mark as one of the best places to eat in the Midwest. With a multitude of ethnic groups, family restaurants and top chefs, Omaha has much to brag about. The following list is a collection of editor and writer favorite desserts, places that have perfected their craft of offering eye-opening and unique flavors. We hope you will stop at each of these places and enjoy some of the best flavors in the Midwest.

"No matter how great the entree, how filling the appetizer, and how bottomless the drinks, we always manage to find room for something sweet."



Patrons line up for the chocolate covered morsels found at The Cordial Cherry

Chocolates at the Grey Plume feature olive oil and vinegars from Chef²

Omaha Culinary Tours: Chocolate and Pastries Bus Tour

Imagine a place where you are encouraged to eat dessert before dinner. A place where you can be shuttled around to all the best places in Omaha to indulge in sweet samples, without having to figure out how to drive with a sugar buzz. Chocolate addicts rejoice, the desert route by **Omaha Culinary Tours (OCT)** is here.

Well-known for their Midtown walking tours, OCT has taken it up a nOCTh with the chocolate and pastries bus tour. For nearly three hours, tour members are taken across the city on a bus, often laden with sweet samples, to explore the best desserts in Omaha. At each stop, bakers, restaurant owners and chefs explain the passion behind their work and offer samples.

On our mid-February tour, stops included **The Cordial Cherry** for the most decadent cherries on the planet, **La Petit Paris French Bakery** for flaky, warm pastries, **The Market Basket** for meringue cake that knocked my boots off, **Gerda's** for homemade sugar cookies and **Stories** for a spread fit for a black tie event; wine, brownies, peppermint biscotti, caramel popcorn and more.

To top it off, our tour guides offered lemon and pecan bars from **Sweet Magnolias**, truffles and hot chocolate from **The Grey Plume**, and single roses for the ladies at the end of the tour.

The Cordial Cherry: Dark Chocolate Covered Cherries

So decadent were the cherries on this stop of the OCT bus tour, it deserves its own shout out. **The Cordial Cherry**, located at 180th and Pacific, is a hidden gem in a town saturated with breweries and burgers. Owner Melissa Stephens opened the store in 2010 after gaining a following for her chocolates during graduate school.

The store itself is mirrored after a boutique, whimsical and charming, with a "build it yourself" style of selection. Rows of chocolate cherries, cherries dressed as cupcakes and chocolate cherry wedding cakes dazzle the eye, and it is nearly impossible to fill a box in less than 20 minutes.

Walking in a wonderland of ganache and grandeur, I found an impossibly simple dessert that I will remember for a long time: the dark chocolate cherry. Nestled in a dollop of chocolate, a cordial filled cherry rests in a coat of dark, rich chocolate, drizzled with milk chocolate and finished with a delicate stem sticking out of the top. A warning to newbies, make sure to eat this all at once. The juicy cherry pops, and the chocolate shell breaks into smooth, velvety pieces, rendering you unable to pronounce your delight until you swallow. Unique and charming, **The Cordial Cherry** is a West Omaha gem.

Salt: Coffee Gelato

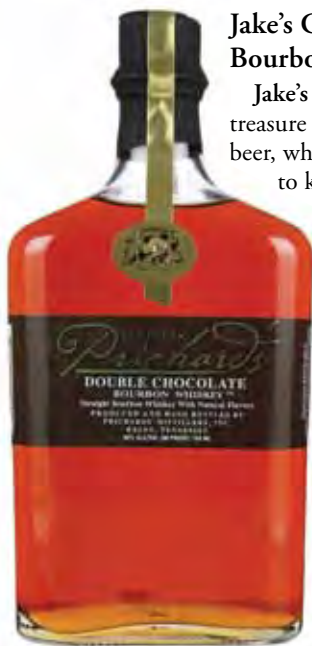
The first time I had gelato, it was served by a dark haired woman in sunglasses, out of a candy pink cart in Hungary, on the Pest side of the capital. It was cappuccino, perfectly sweet, creamy and delicious. Ever since, I wasn't sure if I was going to have another



Three layers of impossibly soft cake accented with lemon cream and a vanilla crumb topping make Nicola's Italian lemon cream cake a dessert must-have. Photo by John Shartrand Photography

love affair with gelato on this side of the world. Luckily, my dry spell was broken on a recent trip to Salt in West Omaha.

While the mushroom pasta, the salmon and the martinis were epic, I was looking forward to the gelato the most. Direct from Italy, the gelato is the real deal. As my spoon sliced into the perfect scoop, I noticed both the density and softness of the gelato, swirling into a slight melt. The taste was perfect, salted caramel punched with butterfat and cream. It is deliciously delicious, and a perfect way to end an evening.



Jake's Cigars: Prichard's Double Chocolate Bourbon

Jake's Cigars & Spirits is a Benson staple, a treasure trove disguised as a dive. The selection of beer, whisky, tequila (mezcal everyone!) is enough to keep the spirits lover busy for years. But what about dessert?

"Warmly chocolate, with essences of wood and caramel... best served neat."

Prichard's Rye is one of my favorite bourbons available. Robust, warm, without an overpowering burn, it is easy to drink neat or in a Manhattan. Prichard's Double Chocolate Bourbon, however, is a new way to splurge on dessert. The nose on this whisky is warmly chocolate, with essences of wood and caramel, finishing with the familiar burn of whisky. The taste is incredibly subtle, tasting more of raw cocoa than sweet and sugary. The chocolate is combined with the double barrel bourbon, giving it a mild finish.

The Double Chocolate is available in either big or small bar, and is best served neat. However, I would recommend a Chocolate Manhattan, made with this bourbon, vermouth and chocolate bitters instead of Angostura. A compliment on a classic, this bourbon is a great way to experience sweetness in a glass.

Nicola's Italian Wine & Fare: Italian Lemon Cream Cake

Nestled in a corner of the Old Market, Nicola's Italian Wine & Fare boasts incredible food and ambiance to match. Founded in 2003 by Nicola Collier-Nick, this fine dining staple has made its mark in Omaha with truly fresh food. With over 100 bottles of wine, a beautiful outdoor patio and authentic Northern Italian fare, it is hard to imagine what could be better.

"It is impossible to have a cake this moist and light. Yet Nicola's does it, day after day."

Magicians must have made this cake, because it is impossible to have a cake this moist and light. Yet Nicola's does it, day after day. Three layers of soft cake are accented with lemon cream, a tangy, mellow smoothness that acts as a perfect accent to the cake. Dusted with a vanilla crumb topping, this dessert combines all the pleasurable textures and flavors in one, making it a must-have for anyone who loves beautiful and delicious things.

España Tapas Bar: Fondue de Chocolate

Located in the heart of Benson on Maple St., España Tapas Bar serves up authentic Spanish cuisine in a fashion that has made it one of the best restaurants in town. It's easy to fill up on the paella, patatas bravas, tortilla a la Española or any number of their other mouthwatering selections, but that would be a rookie move.

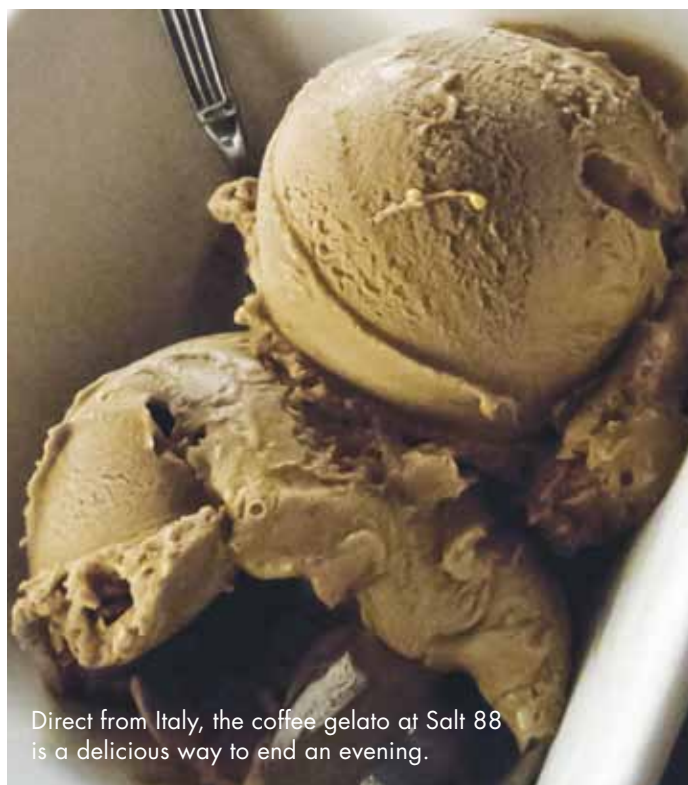
A true protip at España is to save room for dessert and order the chocolate fondue. It comes with bananas, strawberries and, best of all, house made and freshly fried churros. All of these are meant to be dipped in the generous pot of dark chocolate provided but the churros are easily good enough to eat on their own.

Petrow's: Homemade Ice Cream and Pies

Petrow's has been around for ages and the Petrow family has been active in the Omaha food scene for even longer. They're well-regarded for their classic comfort food dishes like hot beef sandwiches, country fried steaks, pork tenderloins and delicious burgers. But dessert at Petrow's offers a bevy of delicious treats.

"Petrow's usually has 5-6 different types of pies that rotate on a seasonal basis, served with their homemade ice cream."

Petrow's has a wide selection of freshly homemade pies available on a daily basis. That's right, chocolate cream, pecan, apple, berry, you name it. There are usually 5-6 different types that rotate on a seasonal basis (I'm talking to you, strawberry/rhubarb). Also served at Petrow's is their homemade ice cream, which has rotating flavors available as well. They've got an old-school soda fountain and make an array of malts, shakes and sundaes.



Direct from Italy, the coffee gelato at Salt 88 is a delicious way to end an evening.



Getting Formal with Dessert Aprons

story and photo by Trisha Hunter

For decades, people have worn different aprons to suit their various needs. One of those needs is an apron for formal times or for use with dessert. Many don't know that there is such a thing as a dessert or formal apron. They were originally called formal aprons because they were used for formal events such as dinner parties, weddings, catering and events.

"Some formal aprons were black and white, though those were most widely used by help to serve the guests drinks and dessert."

In the 1950's dessert/formal aprons were the ones you put on when company was coming to dinner. They generally were sheer, had perhaps a stitch of lace and perhaps a rose. Some formal aprons were black and white, though those were most widely used by help to serve the guests drinks and dessert when they arrived or at the end of a meal right before the men ran off to smoke and chat and the ladies stayed in the parlour to gab.

Nowadays, people mistake any apron that is super cute for a dessert apron which, technically, it is not. It is an adorable cute apron, granted, but unless it is a half apron, formal, and used only for formal events or dessert, they just aren't.



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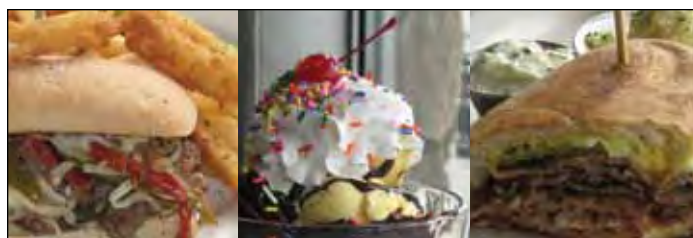
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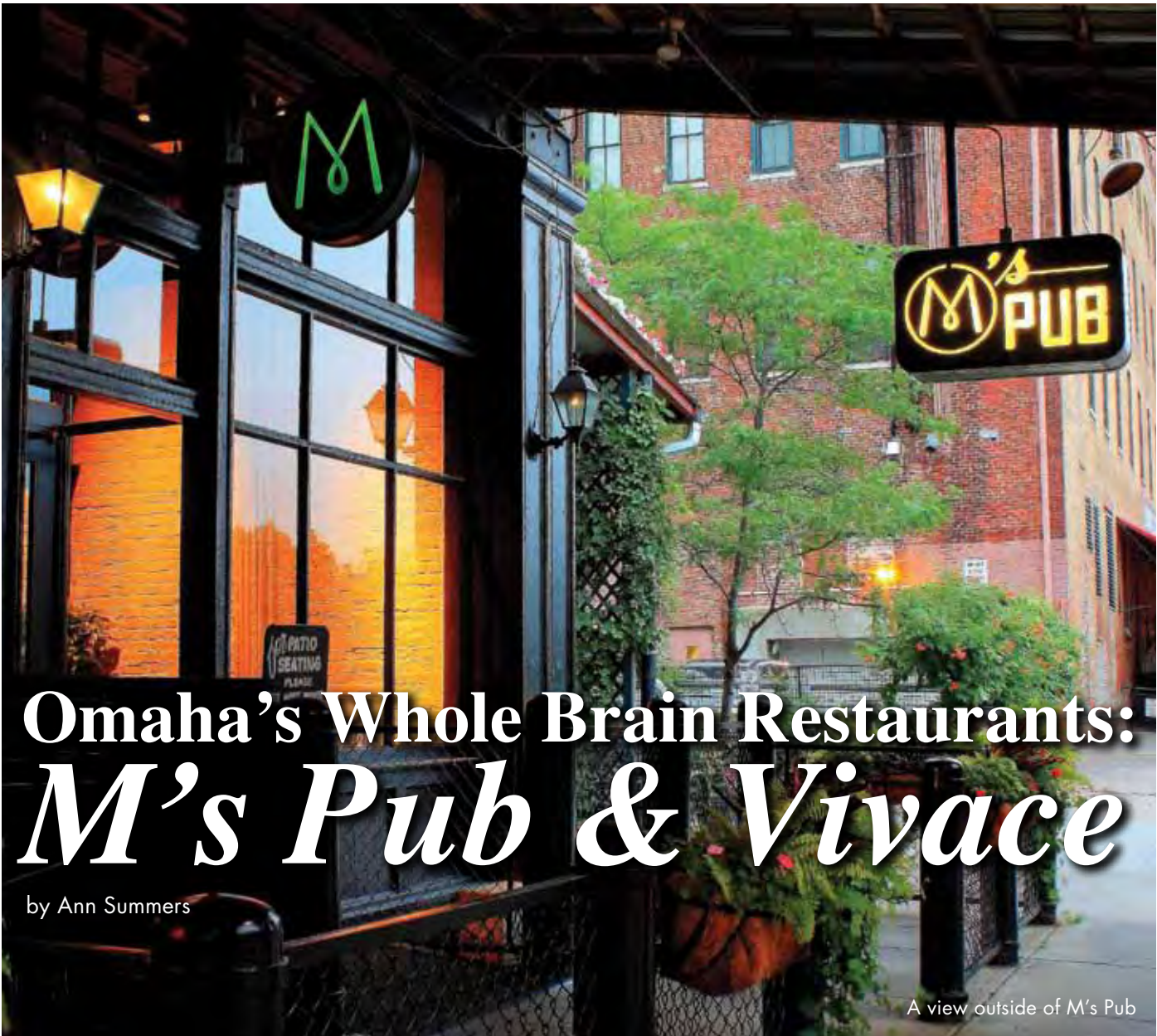
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Omaha's Whole Brain Restaurants: *M's Pub & Vivace*

by Ann Summers

A view outside of M's Pub

“Whenever anyone, but especially someone from out of town wants a dinner recommendation, I send them to M’s Pub because I know they will love their food, love the ambiance, and feel like they are experiencing that cool urban vibe,” *Food & Spirits Magazine* publisher Erik Totten told me. Erik is a nut, but he knows restaurants, and he’s not alone in his opinion. I’m not sure what a “cool urban vibe” is, since I am a country girl from Arkansas. But as some other redneck said, I know what I like. And I also know food.

I was skeptical. Omaha’s **Old Market** is quaint and lovely. But you can’t eat cobblestones. Well, picture this: turn of the century architecture, wood in hulking planks that clearly came from big trees, soaring ceilings, tradition that seeps through the air like cinnamon rolls on Christmas morning. Now this: forward-looking menu items, modern updates of classic dishes, killer mixology, made from scratch to-order food. It sounded a little schizophrenic. I mean, M’s Pub is one of the oldest running restaurants in the Old Market. And it is modern enough to capture the hearts of some heavy hitters (Google their website.) But M’s is considered by the family of people who run it to be more of a community treasure

than a restaurant. Strangely, though, that’s not what makes M’s Pub and its “sibling” restaurant **Vivace** so special.

To understand why, a little food for thought:

A new model of brain health and development based on integrating the emotive right-brain with the logical left-brain is being promoted by neurologist and behavioral psychologist, Dr. Daniel Seigel. In his book, *The Whole Brain Child*, he explains that this integration is not only possible, but essential for psychological balance and well-being, especially for the growing brains of children. In other words, to be happy, healthy and function well, we must integrate the number-cruncher and list-maker in our brains with our internal painter and performance artist. Or, as Seigel says, we must use our whole brain.

When I met **Ron Samuelson**, co-owner with **Ann Mellen** of M’s Pub and Vivace, I saw that he is one of those rare restaurant manager/owners who feels at home in both the front and back of house. His mission is obviously to micromanage details, not people.

As his head chef, **Robert Mekiny** said, “our mindset is to ‘geek out’ over the ingredients in any new menu item.” Perhaps a lamb burger, (which Samuelson ate so many of during its development

that he has a hard time eating them now) or the pizza and lahvosh that customers can't get enough of.

But the people who work in the restaurants, including Mekiny and Vivace operating manager **Becca Thompson**, are scolded if they work too much. "We demand a lot of creativity from our team, and they can't do that if their lives are one-dimensional and focused on just work," Samuelson told me. He himself seems happy meeting with chefs, or discussing marketing and sales, negotiating with suppliers, chatting with customers, hanging out with his young twins, or doing community service for projects like "Share Our Strength" (a program to fight hunger.)

Then I spoke with business partner, Ann Mellen, who is the bookkeeper of the operation, (and whom Chef Mekiny described as "a perfect picture of grace.") She told me she loved working the floor and bussing tables when M's is busy. That's when it became clear to me that the story of M's Pub and Vivace was a story of integration and balance.



Balance seems to be what both menus strive for. There are choices on both menus that kids can eat: hot dogs, lahvosh, pizza (but very, very good pizza in the Neapolitan tradition) half-portions of pasta, but there are also seafood and steak entrées that would be at home in any fine New York bistro. Regular at M's and local artist, **Larry Sosso**, says he loves that M's is a place where you can wear a suit or jeans and still feel comfortable. "We like to mix the dinner menu with the bar menu," he says, "and maybe have a lahvosh, a dessert, and a glass of wine after the symphony or a show."

This sort of versatility was echoed when I spoke to Ron (Samuelson insisted I call him Ron, and he's transparent but businesslike enough for me not to mind doing it) about how M's menu evolved from its origins in the seventies as a kind of bar/cafe to an elegant restaurant with a cool bar. Ron, Chef Bobby and Ann all describe their restaurant as being customer driven. "People tell us what they want, and our job is to make sure they all leave with a smile," says Becca at Vivace.

When Ron wanted to put pizza (the kind of pizza you expect to find in a cool urban setting – Naples, let's say) on the menu, he did a crazy thing. "We deconstructed it. Took all the ingredients separately and had blind taste tests." This was very scientific and left-brain of him, actually. Good tests results can only come when there is a double-blind situation, because no matter how much you try to be impartial, you just can't, something the aforementioned Dr. Siegel calls "implicit memory," or memory with emotional associations.

So they didn't ignore their instincts, but they were rigorous about their trials. As Ron explained it, there were some surprises. The best

tomatoes turned out not to be. The cheeses were critical and their suppliers even more so. The crust was tricky. Obviously, this was not some kiddie-birthday-party, dumbed-down pie; pizza aficionados in Italy slave for decades to win the coveted title of Vera Pizzaiolo Napolitano. Still, who would have guessed that for pizza, the actual taste overruled the tradition? Ron was, he admitted, slightly obsessed. They tested so many of them that Becca at Vivace told me in confidence that she got "really tired of eating pizza." But having sampled the fruit of their labors, I can tell you that this serious gourmet pizza was delicious to some very foodie moms I know, and was still eaten readily by five out of five children (not all mine, various ages) who snarfed up every scrap and loved it. The customer may not always be right, but at M's and Vivace, they have the final vote.



Ron Samuelson

"We demand a lot of creativity from our team, and they can't do that if their lives are one-dimensional and focused on just work."

That "customer driven" theme is also how Chef Bobby learned the hard way that some items on the M's menu were sacrosanct. The dubious-sounding Carrot Dog (a vegetarian entrée) was one he tried some new-chef changes on by removing. "I got hate mail," he told me, laughing. "And not just from Omaha, but from people all over Nebraska. I was like, come on, it's a carrot on a bun!" Oh,

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Crab cakes with pickled vegetables and sweet chile aioli at M's Pub. Photo by J. Michael McBride

but it is a braised carrot, with gourmet mustard and sauerkraut, and having sampled the way those veggies on the pizza are slow roasted for perfect flavor and sweetness, I can tell you it is certainly not just a carrot on a bun.



"We make sure everyone is happy: first to last. And we treat everyone equally as well."

Ann Mellen

Old Market developer and friend to Omaha visionary Sam Mercer, Mary Vogel, started M's Pub 40-plus years ago, and some of her original items are still served there. Yet this restaurant is an up and comer after decades. So how does this balance between

new and old coexist? Ron says, "I have never worked harder to find that balance between tradition and change. We don't want change for change's sake. But continued success is never a given. Ann and I consider ourselves caretakers of this business. To do our jobs well, we have to trust others to do theirs. It's about developing relationships and talent. We're not the flashiest place, but we have a certain spirit and energy."

Wow, and that's about as far from a business-class, lackluster mentality as you can possibly get.

I was still somewhat skeptical. It's a character flaw of mine. But like a child staring at a cuckoo clock, and being told all about Swiss engineering and loving craftsmanship, I kept thinking, yes, but how does it work? How does Vivace's regional Mediterranean food (which was new to Omaha when it opened 20 years ago, and now is in our vernacular) stay current, and how does M's hold up the weight of tradition without being stodgy? Maybe Chef Bobby told me that when he said that Ann and Ron run the whole show like






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a family and their employees and patrons are a part of it. “We see generations of families at our bar,” he tells me. “Ron has a certain idea of how life should be lived, and Ann leads from the heart. When I was new, they told me to go home, quit working so much. I thought I was going to be fired. But what we do demands creativity and energy, and you can’t give that if you’re tired and worn out.”

Talk about balance. Let your team rest and create? Have a life? What kind of insane management strategy is that? Dunno. But it seems to be working.

Lahvosh at M’s Pub



Ron said that the menus from both restaurants have “depth, and offer things that can give customers comfort or challenge their palettes.” Usually when restaurants offer “simple food done well” it means they can’t be bothered to prepare it properly and season it. But these dishes are well-tested, both by time and practical preparation, and we are talking nearly a hundred menu items prepared from scratch and made to-order. Ann said, “We make sure everyone is happy: first to last. And we treat everyone equally well,” whether they order a cucumber finger sandwich, a bowl of mushroom soup, or a soup-to-dessert banquet with wine for a dozen people.

Both she and Ron came up in the ranks, he as a pastry chef who joined the M’s team and she as a working part of her family that took over M’s from Mary Vogel. She told me, “The thing that has surprised me the most has been my business relationship with Ron,” one he described as “symbiotic.” “Lots of people have told us we should start an M’s Pub in D.C. or New York, but then it wouldn’t be M’s,” Ann said. To me, that statement doesn’t sound very analytical at all. Where’s the corporate-speak, the bottom-line jargon? And where did these folks get the kooky idea that leadership is equal to service?

I am no longer skeptical about how these two restaurants work. I think the magic stems from the balance and harmony these two people have achieved. When I asked Ann, the logical left-brain bookkeeper what she wanted people to know about M’s Pub, she ... um ... emoted: “Thank you, to the people of Nebraska that have supported us for so long. We love you guys.” I’d say it shows in both form and function.

Escargots Aux Omaha

by Ann Summers

Snails are delicious. There is a reason the French cry tears of liqueur over them. They are high in protein and magnesium, and low in fat. Of course, that leanness all goes out the window when you slather them with butter and cheese, but just save up some calories and let her rip. An alternative would be a fennel, parsley, olive oil and walnut pesto (or adding grated lemon and bread crumbs, which would make it a gremolata.) I urge you to explore, but for the Midwest, we’re using good old Nebraska ingredients, except for the snails, but you can get them at a grocery store.

A canned snail is a lovely thing. There is no wrenching them from rocks, no “starving” or putting them to sleep, or anything else unpleasant. In Anthony Bourdain’s fabulous “Les Halles Cookbook” he allows, in his tradition of confidential restaurant info, that no chef he knows uses anything but canned snails, unless they live in France with a large mossy garden. He also warns that piping hot snails tend to explode like new potatoes in a microwave, even after taken out of the oven, and offers the advice to cover up appropriately.

M’s Pub, which I recently visited for my article, does some beautiful escargots, and there are many, many classic variations on what they serve. Their cheese of choice is Havarti (but not the sliced one in the deli section) and I would say that if you choose to use cheese, experiment with some good French bread slices, an oven and some cheeses that melt beautifully, not too sharp, and local. I like gruyere and Emmentaler, but a local camembert is what I choose here. This can be an appetizer for a large group or a main course for two with a salad.

24 snails (two cans)

1 small package of medium-sized crimini or white mushrooms

¼ lb. (3 or 4 slices) smoked thick-cut bacon, diced

1 oz. or 2 tbsp. unsalted butter

½ cup of white wine or Pernod

1 minced shallot or 1 tbsp. minced mild onion

2 minced tablespoons of chopped parsley

One head of garlic, crushed

Black pepper and salt to taste

2 tbsp. vegetable broth (or duck broth if you can make it)

2-3 oz. finely diced camembert cheese

French or Italian style bread slices to sop up the goodness

Ceramic ramekins or heat-proof bowls/Pyrex dishes

Baking tray to help support the smaller dishes

Sauté – In a small non-stick skillet on medium heat, render bacon until brown. Reduce heat. Drain off bacon fat; add one tablespoon butter, shallots, salt and pepper, mushrooms and snails. Sauté until shallot is done and pour in wine. Cover and simmer for about 15 minutes.

Preheat – Bring an oven to 350 and spray a non-stick spray into some ceramic ramekins.

Prepare – Smush or process the garlic, butter and parsley, and place snails with bacon and mushrooms into baking dishes. Place baking dishes onto a tray lined with parchment to prevent sliding. Pour in broth. Plop or spoon bits of butter on top of snails and mushrooms, and sprinkle on cheese. Place tray in oven and bake until cheese is bubbly and just browning. Allow to cool slightly. Serve with slices of toasted bread.



The luxurious wedding rehearsal dinner Nepali style: yellow dal, tomato chutney, and chicken and potato curry

Noshing in Nepal:

Exploring Culture with Food

by Jessica Clem-McClaren, photography by Jason McClaren

We had been up for 30 hours when we had our first meal together. After hours of flying time and airport craziness, the jet lag and overall fuzziness in my head was threatening to suck out all the politeness I had left. It was nighttime when we sat in the middle of our host's living room, cross-legged on a floral sheet stretched over the marble floor, too tired to feel anything.

Until the smell of spicy noodle soup wafted through the room.

Already fussing over our comfort, our hosts, two beautiful Nepalese women with blindingly bright scarves and kind eyes pushed china bowls of steaming goodness into our hands. Ramen noodles in a spicy broth with scallions, egg and hot pepper.

"Food is a way to tell friends and neighbors they are loved, and it is incredibly evident in the way meals are conducted in Nepal."

The aroma cleared out my nasal passages and I felt reborn. What was once a room full of grumbling Americans turned into a chorus of slurping and murmuring, a positive energy filling our spirits as our bowls emptied.

This would be one of many food memories I would make in Nepal.

My husband and I were two of eight that made the journey from the United States to Pokhara, a lovely metropolis five hours from Kathmandu. The purpose of our visit was to see two dear friends, Jean and Joe, get married.

Though born and bred Nebraskans, the bride and groom have a particular calling for this side of the world. The bride's family resides in Pokhara, in homes set with ribbons of marble, and balconies offering the sights of sacred Fishtail Mountain, nestled in the Annapurna range. Jean's Aunt Phal was our amazing host during our time. Her cooking was nearly as perfect as her home, and she made us feel like royalty.



Fresh vegetables mimic a cake at the wedding ceremony

From boating on Phewa Lake, to paragliding over the Annapurnas, to hanging on for dear life in cabs, this trip did not disappoint, especially in the food department.

On the five hour drive from Kathmandu to Pokhara in an SUV that handled third world mountain roads better than I expected, we stopped off at a roadside restaurant cloaked in trees. Several levels of balconies and tables were stacked like Jenga pieces, and we were able to see the landscape for miles. Parched, we ordered a few beers before snacks.

Did I mention the beer? For three American dollars you are served a large format beer, the most popular choices being Carlsburg, a German pilsner brewed in Denmark; Tuborg Gold, a lager from the Carlsburg family; and Gorkha, a Nepali beer made in recycled bottles.

Now the most pressing question, what to eat? Enter the wonder of the veggie pakora.

Full of carrots, celery, burdock root and other veggies, these bites are slapped together with dough and egg, and fried in hot oil. They are crispy on the outside, and steaming and soft on this inside. I lived off pakoras for the majority of the trip, a safe option in nearly any establishment. Second only to the pakora is the momo. Momos are dumplings that can be either steamed or fried, and are stuffed with a variety of goodies from meat to veggies. Often spicy, they are little pillows of flavorful goodness. Water buffalo is a common meat used in the dumplings, and in most dishes, as cows are sacred in Nepal and are not eaten. I preferred the momos steamed, with spicy veggies, and served alongside a Tuborg.

At 4:00 a.m. each morning, a horn would sound from the mountains. Our first night, Jason and I were convinced there was a raid or a break-in, and peeked out the curtains every hour till light. Over breakfast, we were told one of the town members rings this bell every morning from a temple to gently wake the neighbors.

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Savory paneer butter masala in Kathmandu

Our days began with coffee and/or tea. The coffee is instant, but mixed in plastic containers with sugar and condensed milk, giving it a creamy, satisfying flavor. Black milk tea with sugar was a huge hit with the group, so much so that I brought a box back for my kitchen. Most days we would wake up to omelets with whatever veggies were available, and they were always spicy. Peppers grew in colorful clusters around the porch, warm from the sun. Other days would be a plate of steaming sel-roti, rice doughnuts that are fried then dusted with sugar. The sugar would sometimes cook down into a caramel, giving the dough a delightful toasty taste. French toast was also a hit, so sweet with cinnamon that no syrup was needed.

Pokhara is a friendly, vibrant city, full of diverse neighborhoods and shops. The tourist district, known as Lakeside, is a little less cluttered than the heart of the city. Here is where we found our favorite spot of the trip, Zorbas. Owned by a Nepalese woman and managed by an Aussie, this bar and restaurant is cozy and clean, and even has a hotel attached. Best part? Feel free to have ice in your glass. Most of the restaurants in the tourist districts use mineral or bottled water to cook with, keeping visitors safe from stomach bugs. Zorbas is where I had my first experience with prawn crackers, a popular snack food in Asia. Made of fried shrimp and starch, deep fried into a pillow of flavor, these little chips pack a ton of umami goodness, and are perfect for a night of drinking.

“Another experience for the books? That would be seeing dinner taken off the truck, bleating and breathing.”

On crooked, packed dirt sidewalks, we ventured down alleys and side streets, peeking inside little shops and cafes. Stopping into one nondescript spot, we ordered a couple of real sugar Fantas, and had curry with mutton and chicken chow mein. The dust from the sidewalk blew around our feet as we watched a young man load bottles onto what looked to be a lawnmower with a tent built over it. Cattle walked freely in the streets, with the occasional stray dog.

Eating by candlelight in the United States is often seen as a romantic gesture. In Nepal, it is a necessity. Because of an overstretched power grid, blackouts are commonplace in Pokhara, and can last anywhere from a few minutes to hours. Aunt Phal is fortunate enough to have generators that kick on when such power outages occur. However, one dinner was cloaked in darkness, which made it all the more enjoyable - chicken curry with tomatoes, potato curry with chives, and pumpkin curry. The pumpkin was actually a variety of squash, but was, by far, my favorite of the evening.

Most homes have gardens that supply food for the households, without the hint of pesticides tainting the freshness. Mountainous, robust heads of cilantro slouched like weeping willows over baskets in the kitchen, draped over tomatoes and green onions. From the care and attention to flavor that was given to smaller meals, I could only imagine how incredible the wedding meal was going to be.

In American weddings, the only involvement the family has with the food is arranging the catering. For days before the wedding in Pokhara, family members and neighbors starting bringing in massive steel pots and serving dishes to the courtyard, big enough to hold a water buffalo calf. Our host said that in this neighborhood, everyone contributes to having a set of dishes, chairs, and other items for use in events like weddings. Neighbors rent the equipment as needed, and make sure they are clean and ready for the next celebration.

Another experience for the books? That would be seeing dinner being taken off the truck, bleating and breathing. Six goats were the main course for the wedding, along with so many chickens that we lost count. There was enough food to feed the entire neighborhood, which is quite literally what was done. For weddings in close knit communities like Pokhara, the entire town is invited to join in the festivities and bless the bride and groom. In lieu of a church, we were in a Buddhist temple. Instead of taking shots in a bar, we had milk tea and cookies with the monks, while Rhesus monkeys played outside the gates. I wouldn't have traded it for all the Jameson in the land.

After the ceremony, we were dropped off about 15 minutes from Aunt Phal's home. It is tradition that the bride is walked home as a married woman by her groom and the wedding party. In front of us, we had a traditional Nepali band and a group of dancers swaddled in red saris. Behind us, more and more people joined in the walk, singing in Nepali and grabbing whomever was near to dance in celebration. By the time we walked home, the whole of the country was behind us and we were all famished. Through a pink and red gate, we walked to a tent where some damn fine smells were permeating the air. Marigolds were tossed around us, and I was turned in every which way, with women pressing flowers into my hands.

The giant vats had all sorts of amazing dishes; Potato curry with tomatoes and turmeric, truly fresh fried chicken, yellow dal, saag (sautéed greens that consist of spinach and mustard greens), chicken curry, goat curry (with “nasty bits,” the intestines), fresh vegetables and three different kinds of rice. As soon as our dishes were empty, we were encouraged to eat more, and I was worried I would be too full to dance.

All in all, the wedding was 12 hours of dancing, eating, blessing, laughing and clapping. One of the women told me this was a shorter version of a Nepali wedding; some go on for days.



These goats
will feed hundreds



The gorgeous bride with her wedding meal

“One of the women told me this was a shorter version of a Nepali wedding; some go on for days.”

All too quickly, our two weeks in Nepal came to an end. Our last night in town, we were treated to a meal at a little restaurant in Lakeside, with entertainment as we ate. A group of young dancers sang to a medley of traditional songs from all over the world, changing outfits for each country.

While entertaining, I could hardly notice the music over the mind blowing meal I was having: the very best butter chicken I have ever had. Rich, buttery and creamy, a small piece of chicken drowned in a sauce that must have been made by magicians. Chilies, turmeric, ginger, garlic and ghee (reduced butter) made up this red and gold sauce, glistening with butter oil and staining my fingers a rust color. I had a chow mein sitting in front of me, a popular item for tourists who can't handle super spicy foods, and delicious as it was, it became a sad spectator to my chicken demolishment.

Food is a way to tell friends and neighbors they are loved, and it is incredibly evident in the way meals are conducted in Nepal. For the wedding, every person in the community was invited to come eat and enjoy themselves. During our stay, the family worked around the clock to make sure we were taken care of, comfortable, and above all, full.

But there is something else in this place: a mellow kindness that you can see in every face. Women are beacons of light, loud, and always smiling. Men are stoic and strong, and children understand the importance of hard work and the reality of life on this side of the world. I never saw a tantrum being thrown, and children were always polite. From the food to the family, to the views of the mountains amidst endless marigold bushes, Nepal is truly a paradise for those who love to explore.

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Your Own Personal Bistro

story by Charles Schlusel, photo by Jacob Herrman

It's been many years since I've worked the line at a restaurant. For those of you who have never experienced the frenetically chaotic pace of working the line, let me say it is definitely a love/hate relationship.

There is nothing like the euphoric dance of all the crew on a line weaving in and out of each others way, sharp knives flashing, molten lava temperature pans flying through the air and beautifully perfect delectable plates going out all evening. Other nights bring back memories of a seemingly endless painful purgatory of flailing around in the weeds as we never quite reach critical mass for a successful lift off. In a word, it's chaotic.

"There is nothing more satisfying than feeding friends a meal that lights up their eyes and fills their heart as well as their belly."

That's why one of my favorite times of the evening was going out to the dining room for a few minutes of schmoozing with the guests. Who wouldn't love the accolades of praise rolling off the lips of blissfully satiated diners? I believe as human beings we all love to hear that we did good, that we made someone's day a little bit incredible.

As home cooks we all long to hear our loved ones wax poetic about the wonderful meals we have cooked for them in the past and how they eagerly anticipate the next invitation to come enjoy their favorite meals. A meal at our favorite restaurant can be sublime, but I know for myself there is nothing more satisfying than feeding friends a meal that lights up their eyes and fills their heart as well as their belly.



If you're one of those that read the articles and never try the recipe, I challenge you to try this one. It really is easy; the ingredients are relatively inexpensive and are readily available at most well stocked grocery stores. The lime leaves are a little harder to come by but are available at most Asian markets in the freezer section.

So go get in your car make a couple of stops to find the ingredients and make sure the mussels smell fresh and clean like the ocean. Grab a crusty baguette to sop up all the delicious brothy goodness and a bottle or two of good wine. Call a close friend or three, light a couple candles and settle in for cozy evening of wonderful food, stimulating conversation and heartwarming memories to last a lifetime as you schmooze with the diners at your own personal bistro.

Thai Mussels (Serves 4 as an appetizer or 2 as a main course)

INGREDIENTS

2 lbs. mussels
1 Tbsp butter
1 Tbsp finely minced garlic
1 Tbsp fresh grated ginger
1 Tbsp Thai red curry paste (Mae ploy is my favorite)
½ cup dry white wine
2 tsp finely chopped lime leaves
1 can (13.5oz) unsweetened coconut milk
1 Tbsp fish sauce (Three Crabs brand is my favorite)
1 Tbsp sugar
1 Tbsp fresh lime juice
Zest of 1 lime & 1 lemon finely chopped
2 Tbsp chopped fresh cilantro
2 Tbsp chopped fresh Thai basil (regular basil is also fine if Thai isn't available)

DIRECTIONS

Scrub mussels and remove any beards. Most of the available farmed mussels will have few if any of the stringy, wiry beards still attached and any remaining beards will come off easily with a firm tug. If any mussels are open, tap several times and if they don't close discard them along with any that are cracked.

Melt butter in a large deep pan, sauté the garlic, ginger and curry paste for about 30 seconds to a minute over medium heat until fragrant. Add the wine and simmer for a couple minutes. Add the lime leaves, coconut milk, fish sauce, sugar, lime juice, and lime and lemon zest and bring to a boil for a couple of minutes. Add the mussels and cover with a tight fitting lid, stir a couple of times until the mussels open, about 4-5 minutes.

Pour mussels with broth in a large serving bowl, discarding any that have not opened. Sprinkle with the cilantro and basil. Serve with lime wedges and plenty of crusty baguettes to soak up the broth.





Thai mussels



What the Pho?

by Benjamin Doyle

In winter, in Nebraska, the doldrums of winter's days wear on with the cold winds howling across the prairies, sending chills to all of our bones. To come inside and take off my coat, hat and gloves, and enjoy a bowl of soup that I love, cannot be beat. One of my favorites is a bowl of warm and spicy pho that is full of nutrients while filling the belly.

The last time I lived in the Big O, I discovered pho. Since then my travels have led me to pho in cities like Chicago, Austin, and San Francisco, where the flashing neon sign of a bowl dispersing steam with the word "pho" into the air became a cairn that signified my direction in life was the right one.

"The flashing neon sign of a bowl with the word 'pho' became a cairn that signified my direction in life was the right one."

It was in San Diego, however, that I learned to really enjoy pho. I moved there after college, and lived there until I returned to Omaha in 2013. From the batch of pho that my old roommate made for us in South Park to the Sunday morning (or afternoon, it all depends on perspective here) trip to Pho King with a friend or two, pho became a staple of my diet for this bachelor roaming the streets of San Diego.

After moving back to Omaha, I got a job working at Nebraska Furniture Mart. On my break one day, I walked over to the plaza across the way and noticed a little Vietnamese restaurant. I quickly altered my route from the nice, friendly neighborhood fast food

joint, **Sam and Louie's**, and followed the trail to the **Vietnamese Asian** on 72nd and Jones.

Because different people like different things, I should share how I like to eat pho. The base consists of rare flank steak and small rice noodles and topped with chopped green chives. Tripe and tongue are other ways that people eat pho, but I prefer to stay away from those variations (in fact, right after I moved to San Diego, I accidentally ordered the tripe pho. I didn't eat it again until years later when my roommate cooked a batch for the house. But, I digress...). It should be served with fresh bean sprouts, Thai basil, sliced jalapeños, and cilantro stacked on a side plate. A variety of sauces to choose from are necessary. Hoisin sauce and chili paste are my choices. Sriracha will do if there is no chili paste available.

With that being said, here are some of my favorites;

Every city has a downtown restaurant that is swanky. **Saigon Surface** on 14th Street in Omaha serves that role well. The restaurant was quiet, but we went at around 3 p.m., so it is entirely possible that they do good business for the lunch rush. They certainly look like they know what they are doing. The nine-hour simmer they give their oxtail sounds like they know what they are doing as well.

I was happy to see that they served all the fixings. The soup was spicy and the size was good. I gauged this one on my guest who is incredibly picky and always hungry. He finished it, no problem, and even gave the owner some compliments. It is downtown, so expect to pay a bit more for your food there. Its long, backlit lines fit right in with the sun chasing buildings that engulf it.

Saigon Restaurant is at 12100 West Center Road in Omaha. It has been there forever. I remember this place from years ago. Yet this seemed like my first time. For starters, they had some amazing

crab Rangoon. While low on jalapeños and basil, I enjoyed the soup. It was still quite spicy without the jalapeños, and I was full at the end. It came in a close second.

The next artistically named place to visit is called **Vietnamese Restaurant** on 8013 South 83rd Street in La Vista. I guess they can get away with that clever name since they are located in La Vista and not in Omaha. It was quiet and clean and the customers were quite friendly. I got into a conversation with the table next to me, and we talked about our favorite Asian cuisine. They were Pad Thai fans.

Their portions are perfect. For the truly famished and those who are hollow of leg, there is an extra large bowl available as well. The server brought out the sides. I would definitely go again.

New Gold Mountain is way out west, on 15505 Ruggles Street. They were nice and very friendly. I could tell that they had been doing this for a while. The staff seemed to know everyone who walked in the door much more than other places; their familiarity gave the place a real neighborhood feel.

One thing that I love about pho is the balance of sweet and spicy. The sweet rice noodles mix with the spicy basil and sliced jalapeños. The sweet hoisin sauce mixes with the zesty chili paste. Just as I was thinking of getting more spice for this particular bowl, a spoonful of the broth hit the back of my throat and I was off on a serious cough, and neither water nor ice could cure it – that's my kind of spicy.

I got the small bowl, but do not be fooled. This is a relic of the super-sized days gone by and I'm glad that I didn't get the larger bowl – I don't think I could fit the leftovers in the fridge. They also have a wide range of Asian food. Chinese dishes, Vietnamese soup, and even Dim Sum are all listed on the menu. I got an order of spicy pork Dim Sum just because they had it.

My favorite thing about traveling is that there are so many wonderful things you can see and experience during your time there. The food contributes to the aroma of the city, and the languages spoken within these restaurants indicate the diversity and wealth of global culture that a city can provide an individual. As I get reacquainted with the city of my youth, I visited **Asian Grill** at 333 North 78th Street.

I came here thinking I was going somewhere else that I had heard about before. But, when I arrived I saw that that place was no longer there and, instead, there was a new Asian restaurant in its place, with the magic words, "pho" glowing in red neon letters.

The name leaves the imagination starved, but there are two other words that are much more impressive: chili paste. It does not matter that they were out of basil, because the chili paste is key. I love the stuff. They leave oiled down, milder versions on the table, but if you ask, they will bring out the real deal that is in back that packs more of a punch – like Thai chilies sort of punch. This simple fact makes Asian Grill the number one place for me.

The owner was gracious enough to come out and apologize for running out of basil. A married couple owns the Asian Grill. She is Hmong and he is Vietnamese. She said her husband likes a lot of basil in his pho, so she knew I would be sad. They also gave me ample peppers and cilantro and sprouts. She informed me that she uses no MSG or sugar in her soup and in fact decided to open her own restaurant because she liked the pho made in her kitchen better than any other pho shops around. I always get excited when I hear the person cooking my meal say that.

They came from Sacramento, California, and we chatted and reminisced about Cali. She was thrilled when I said that this was the closest I had seen to Cali style Vietnamese pho and I thoroughly enjoyed it. I had a great time here and I will go back another day, when they have some of that fresh basil.



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RECIPE RESCUE:

How to steer dishes that go awry back on course

by Kent Cisar

What do sesame oil, fresh rosemary and Louisiana hot sauce have in common?

They were part of one of the seminal cooking moments of my lifetime. I was making a stir fry in a brand new wok. The veggies were brightening and I wanted one last splash to add a new flavor. I reached for sesame oil expecting a stopper lid, shook vigorously only to find no such lid. My brilliant stir fry was now swimming in sesame oil with precious little time before dinner. The dish needed something else that had firepower to soften the sesame. I turned to my fridge and found Frank's Louisiana Hot Sauce and some fresh rosemary from the farmer's market. A couple splashes of hot sauce and a couple sprigs of rosemary and the sesame oil all of the sudden took a back seat. Low and behold, it actually tasted good, REALLY good.

A mistake became magnificent and it happened on the fly.

Sometimes, the end result turns out better than the original intention. Here's how to embark on the task of recipe rescue.

"Sometimes, the end result turns out better than the original intention."

The three key areas of recipe rescue are *preparation*, *attention* and *accessibility*. The most important stage begins before you even pick up a knife. Reading the recipe before actively starting the cooking process provides ample time to venture to the store to grab that extra item if needed. For specialty dishes, more advanced planning is necessary because specific or seasonal ingredients may not be readily available at your closest grocer.

Take note of what you're cooking often. Nonperishable ingredients are much easier to have on hand. Checking the regular ads of grocery stores offers prime opportunity to acquire that extra bag of flour, sugar or baking soda. Anytime you're making a larger

amount of meat, seize the opportunity to siphon some stock and freeze it. Home gardening is a chance to save an overabundance of vegetables. Freeze a bag for that last minute need of peppers, onions, carrots and others.

The quality of ingredients on hand can also make a difference. Debbie Akyurek, owner of **Savory Spice Shop** in Omaha says "if you use a higher quality of cinnamon, salt, pepper, cardamom, and many other base ingredients, you don't have to use as much of it when making your adjustment. Often times you're just trying to move the needle a bit, rather than trying to completely overhaul a dish at a moment's notice".

The last focus of preparation lies with the organization and arrangement of your kitchen. Nick Evans, owner of the Cooking Site Macheesmo.com, states he does his best cooking when he has everything laid out in front of him and isn't spending time searching for things in the middle of the process. He adds that "it's also important for first time recipes to add 15-30 minutes of total time. Being rushed can lead to unnecessary improvisations."

Now that the kitchen and ingredients are organized, we've moved to the attention stage of recipe rescue. The more active and attentive you are with your dish, the more opportunity to make the necessary adjustments in the flow of the cooking. For example, on Thanksgiving this year I attempted a pomegranate molasses for a Brussels sprout salad. I thought I followed the recipe exactly but made one significant mistake. I reduced the juice and sugar at way too high a temperature, resulting in pomegranate hard candy – not syrup. Using physics in reverse I merely waited till the last minute of adding the molasses, reheated the mixture to liquid form and mixed it in to salvage the needed ingredient.

The temperature of one ingredient can be a catalyst for ruining a dish. Stan Santos of simplekitchenseasons.com was working with a brunch dish that required scrambling eggs, a task he rarely does. For the dish "I cooked the eggs on medium low heat instead of low resulting in the eggs cooking more quickly than intended and that threw off timing on everything else".

Other common problems that can be corrected in the process are: dishes being too dry/too wet, too savory/too sweet, and mixtures not coming together as a recipe or you intended. I surveyed several



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amateur chefs to learn what their strategies are for overcoming these problems and a few themes arose. For dishes that are too dry: stock, water and oils are your biggest assets. I've seen fellow Omahan Hillary Nather-Detisch for more than a decade at the local Farmer's Markets and organic food stores. She's always looking for new courses to cook for friends and family. A big part of her versatility comes from one staple ingredient, "I always have chicken stock on hand to help add moisture and flavor (if cooking)", Nather-Detisch says.

Terrance Hill, an Omaha native, specializes in clean eating with natural ingredients. Hill prefers to make as many of his base ingredients at home. The process taught him that it's cheaper, healthier, and the supplies last longer in doing so. He shared a couple important techniques he uses for cooking. He adds water or oils to liquefy sauces and gravies and cornstarch or flour if it needs to thicken. Hill also pays close attention to temperature and stirring the additional ingredients in to attain the desired thickness and flavors. "I always struggled with making mayo. Once, I added the olive oil too fast with the egg/vinegar mixture and the two never combined, or created an emulsion. I was able to start a new egg/vinegar mixture. And this time I slowly added the previously ruined recipe a drop at a time to the mixture while whisking briskly. Eventually it formed an emulsion and presto... mayo. It was an awesome feeling".

"For those who prepare, are attentive, and act quickly, cooking offers the opportunity for missteps to turn into magnificent creations."

Since you're paying close attention to your dish as it comes together, you'll have the opportunity to taste it to see how the flavors are evolving. If it's too sweet; add salt, pepper, chilies or rosemary. If it's too savory; sugars, fruits and honey could become your friends.

The taste dilemma brings us to our final rescue component; accessibility. In the heat of the kitchen and a culinary deadline coming, time is not your friend. It's important to have ingredients as you need them, when you need them and where you need them. The vegetables, herbs, spices, oils or dry ingredients need to be ready for immediate introduction into your dish. Savory owner Akyurek offers a few tips: "Chefs may not have time for chopping fresh herbs and spices such as garlic and basil, so having dried ingredients immediately available can provide the needed flavor impact".

Don't be afraid to purchase or to pre-toast and store ingredients such as onion, seeds, or nuts. When dishes are already in motion,

there may not be time to toast ingredients. It's at this point that the quality of what you purchase matters, "The better quality of the product you purchase, the quicker and fuller the flavors release into the dish" Akyurek adds.

Let's make one more step in your rescue – keep records. Take notes of what worked, and incorporate that into future preparations. Julie Berger, a local Omaha amateur chef, grew up baking with her family in Spaulding, Nebraska. Two years ago she discovered a wheat allergy and has been cooking gluten free meals ever since. She's found initial recipe adjustments become staples in her every day cooking, "I often have to substitute some ingredients, especially gluten free flours. For instance, I didn't have millet flour on hand for a pizza crust a few weeks ago, so used buckwheat instead and it was still really good. I've also found coconut or sorghum flour in meatloaf instead of bread crumbs is actually really good".

Bruce Moritz and his wife Lisa of Omaha make dining and cooking a big part of their travels and celebratory occasions. One night they were using an Asian themed approach for their multiple course meal. "I thought we had lettuce, spinach, or some kind of greens for a salad," Bruce said. "We didn't, so I ended up creating an Asian apple salad (Fuji apple, cilantro, soy sauce, jalapeño, broccoli slaw, red onion, ginger, lemon juice and cracked pepper). It is now one of our favorites."

Even the best chefs can and will fail. Cooking provides an avenue for both exploration and experimentation. For those who prepare, are attentive, and act quickly, it offers the opportunity for mistakes and missteps to turn into magnificent creations.



Coffee Talk

by April Christenson



Coffee... it's one of the oldest, most universally enjoyed beverages in the world. Brewed in the Middle East as far back as the 15th century, coffee has some serious staying power. And it's no wonder. It tastes delicious, contains energizing caffeine and is purported to have a myriad of health benefits.

Among its health claims, coffee is said to contain powerful antioxidants which researchers have found may be absorbed by the human body more easily than those contained in many types of fruits and vegetables. Coffee may reduce the risk of cancer and other diseases and some claim it may even increase athletic performance. At one time it was presumed that because of the diuretic impact of caffeine, coffee may have a dehydrating effect, but scientific evidence is now disputing those claims.

"Brewed in the Middle East as far back as the 15th century, coffee is purported to have a myriad of health benefits."

Obviously, there are many reasons to drink coffee, but, chances are you don't need to be convinced. The majority of American adults drink coffee not only on occasion, but every day. Many people enjoy the simple pleasure of stopping into their favorite coffee shop on the morning drive to work. And what could be more relaxing than spending a lazy Saturday afternoon drinking a cappuccino and catching up with a friend? But sometimes it's just not convenient or budget-friendly to outsource your coffee making. So, you may find yourself searching for the best method for brewing coffee at home or the office. Here are some of the most popular, effective methods for brewing coffee.

Before choosing your brewing method, keep in mind a few golden rules for always making a tasty cup of coffee. Whenever possible, buy freshly roasted beans. Store beans in an air-tight container and grind right before brewing. Determine what kind of grind is optimal for your brewing method (fine, coarse, etc.) and always use pure, filtered water.

Standard Coffee Maker

The most ubiquitous kind of coffee maker, these come in sizes ranging from four to 12 cups. The standard coffee maker

is economical and practical – good for making coffee for several people. It may not, however, produce the most custom, perfectly brewed cup.

French Press

A French press consists of a narrow, cylindrical beaker, usually made of glass or clear plastic, with a metal or plastic lid and a plunger that fits tightly in the cylinder and has a fine wire or mesh filter. A French press requires a coarser ground coffee than a drip brew filter, as fine grounds will seep through the filter and into the coffee. Coffee is brewed by placing the grinds in the empty beaker and adding hot water. Start by adding about 1/3 of the water, stir lightly, wait 30 seconds and add the remaining water, pouring slowly. Cover and let brew. Total brewing time from start to finish should be approximately four minutes. Press the plunger to separate the grounds and pour. Use about two tablespoons of grounds per eight ounces of water.

"Regardless of which brewing method you choose, a truly superior cup of coffee depends on the quality of the beans you are using."

Chemex

The Chemex is an hourglass-shaped device with a conical neck. It uses special filters which are thicker than standard coffee filters. The thicker filters remove most of the coffee oil, producing a different taste, unique from other brewing methods. Chemex brewing devices come in different sizes and are available with and without a handle. Coffee is prepared by placing the filter and grounds (use approximately one heaping tablespoon of medium coarse grinds per five ounces of water) in the neck of the flask. Add a small amount of very hot (just below boiling temperature) water to moisten the grinds, and then slowly pour the desired amount of water. Brew time depends on how many cups you are making, but generally

takes slightly longer than other methods (about six to seven minutes for ten cups). Chemex devotees claim that this device produces a superior cup of coffee due to its unique filters, which remove excess oil and produce an incredibly smooth coffee that is not bitter.

Single Cup Cone/Pour-Over

The single cup cone brewing method is somewhat similar to Chemex, but uses different filters and delivers a custom, single-cup serving. This method is ideal for the coffee drinker who is brewing just for him or herself. A cone-shaped filter is inserted into the single cup cone device and placed over the brew device (in most cases, this is a coffee cup). Place coffee grinds in the filter (two tablespoons of coffee per eight ounces of water) and slowly pour hot water (just under boiling temperature) over the grinds very slowly, stirring as you pour. Brew time should be about two to four minutes. The brewing time is essential to the quality of the finished product and is entirely at the hands of the brewer (i.e. don't pour too fast!). Use a medium-fine coarse grind.

In the end, regardless of which brewing method you choose, a truly superior cup of coffee depends on the quality of the beans you are using, so choose carefully and store properly.

For those times when you aren't brewing your own coffee, you're in luck because Omaha is rich with great local coffee shops and bean roasters. Below are five local coffee houses you may want to check out.

Accelerando

3504 S. 108th St., Omaha | accelerandocoffeehouse.com

Housed in the **Omaha Conservatory for Music** (and operated by the Conservatory's owners), **Accelerando** distinguishes itself by employing a variety of brewing techniques, including the French press, Chemex and siphon brewing techniques. The shop has a funky vibe and is a cool place to kick back and enjoy a specialty crafted beverage.

Culprit Café & Bakery

Unit 101, 1603 Farnam St., Omaha | culpritcafe.com

Culprit Café & Bakery, located in downtown Omaha on 16th and Farnam, is a relatively new spot (opened in 2013) gaining a reputation for brewing a superior cup of coffee. They offer French press, Chemex, espresso and specialty drinks, in addition to mouth-watering pastries and café fare.

Beansmith

12012 Roberts Rd., La Vista | beansmith.com

Beansmith is a truly unique experience in that it is more of a coffee tasting room than a traditional coffee house. Visitors have the opportunity to tour their roasting facility, explore different brewing

methods and enjoy an outstanding cup of coffee.

Aromas Coffeehouse

1033 Jones St. and 6051 Maple St.,
Omaha | blissbakery.com

Part coffee shop, part bakery, part art gallery – **Aromas** does a lot of things, but they know their coffee. Stop in and try everything from French press, espresso, cappuccino and other specialty drinks, and catch an art show or music performance. Aromas now has a second location in **Benson** at the corner of 60th and Maple.

Omaha Bicycle Co.

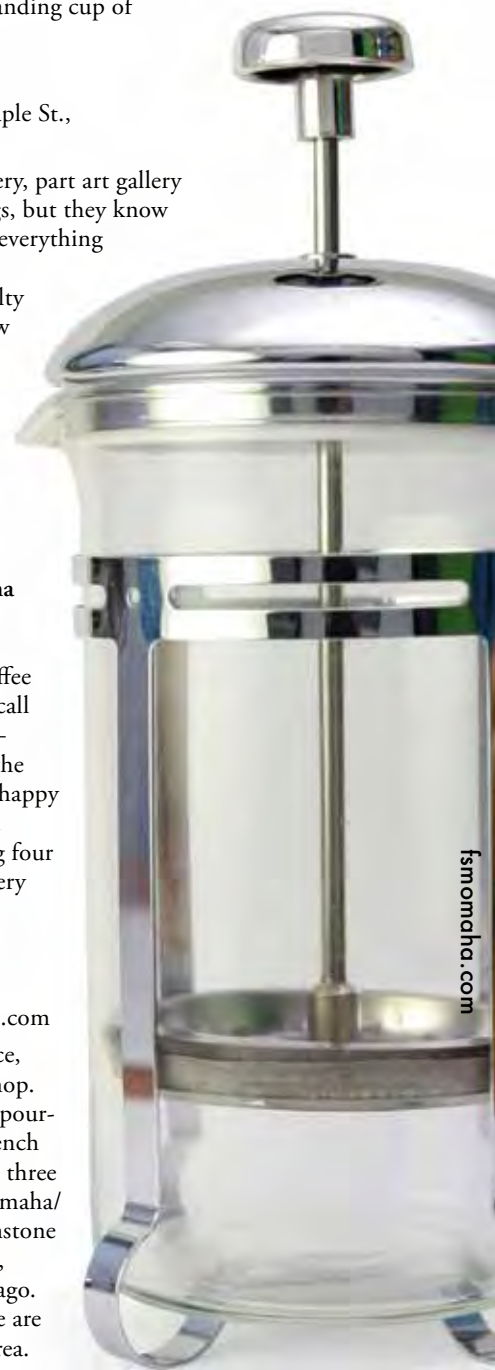
6015 Maple St., Benson
omahabicycleco.com

Located in Benson, **Omaha Bicycle Co.** is a coffeehouse-bicycle shop hybrid. They're serving up a full menu of coffee and tea drinks. They like to call themselves a "retail mullet" – coffee in the front, bikes in the back. Omaha Bicycle Co. is happy to cater to specific tastes and dietary restrictions – offering four different milk options and very informed, helpful baristas.

(drips)

1010 S. Main St. Suite 800,
Council Bluffs | dripscoffee.com

(drips) is a shared use space, art gallery and craft coffee shop. They make their coffee slow pour-over style and sometimes French press. They carry beans from three roasters; Beansmith, from Omaha/Council Bluffs Metro, Greenstone Roasters from Lawrence, KS, and Dark Matter from Chicago. Dark Matter and Greenstone are exclusive to (drips) for the area.



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THE SUPPER CLUB:

Benson Progressive Dinner

story and photography by Shelby Hoins



***Publisher's Note:** Omega Omega Omega (Tri Omega), the culinary fraternity at the Institute for the Culinary Arts at Metropolitan Community College, strives to provide students with opportunities to apply and develop their skills through unique experiences. One of these experiences is the Supper Club. The Supper Club selects a restaurant once a quarter and works with the chef of the restaurant to provide a unique dining experience to challenge the palate and minds of the students with the unique ingredients and techniques found in that chef's kitchen.*

This edition of the Supper Club found the culinary students taking Benson by storm. Benson has become a local food haven in the last few years, cultivating new and outstanding restaurants. Tri Omega held their first ever Discovering Benson Food Tour. 40 students and their guests were lucky enough to get to take part in one course at four different Benson restaurants. The participating restaurants were Taita, Benson Brewery, Lot 2 and España.

The night started with a meeting at Jake's Cigars & Spirits and then four groups of 10 dispersed to each of the four restaurants. Each restaurant was given the task to create a four course menu and the guests would each have one course before departing for the next stop on the tour.

"Benson has become a local food haven in the last few years, cultivating new and outstanding restaurants."

The first stop was Taita at 6109 Maple Street. Taita is a Peruvian inspired restaurant that holds the meaning "father" in its name.

The first two of Taita's courses required diners to choose between hot and cold.

Hailee, the general manager of Taita, offered us a choice, "Hot or cold?"

For appetizers, the cold course was a scallop ceviche presented in its shell and including mandarin oranges, tiger's milk and avocado. The hot course was an anticucho of tender beef heart with confit potatoes. For those so inclined, a refreshingly smooth pisco sour was also available.

For the second course, we were surprised to find that our hot option was a beautiful nigiri sushi with rice, foie gras and caramel gastrique. The roll had a perfect melt-in-your-mouth feeling that was thoroughly impressive. Our cold option was yellow tail tartare with bits of cilantro and fresh wasabi in each bite.

For the third course of the night Hailee gave our group a different choice, "Land or sea?"

The land option was very tender rabbit with an apple and hazelnut chutney, confit potatoes and kale in adobo sauce. The



Rockfish with chorizo and eggplant purée at Taita

apple and hazelnut chutney provided a homey feel to the plate and complimented the rabbit nicely. The sea option was a whole rockfish with chorizo and eggplant purée. This entire dish was spicy, crunchy and tender all at the same time.

The final course at Taita was a dark chocolate pave with caramel and powdered chocolate. It gave a smooth, rich flavor that was complimented by the saltiness of the caramel.

It wasn't just the food and staff that made us fall in love with Taita. The attention to detail was also very clever. Chef Jose has put

his heart into this restaurant, from the small nook that holds 10 guests, to the urban style murals on all of the walls.

The next stop for the night was the Benson Brewery at 6059 Maple Street. Benson Brewery is a cozy brewpub and upon entering you receive a warm, industrial feel that is finished with some excellent wood fixtures.

The first course of the night was spent grain bread with a beer cheese dipping sauce and paired with an Uncle Sunkel's beer. The beer cheese sauce was a solid hit for the group and provided a light, creamy texture by using white cheddar, Taleggio and baby Swiss cheese, with a hint of the beer flavor. The process of using spent grains was inventive - they use the grains from their brewing process and use them in their breads.

The second course was a pork confit salad accompanied by chevre cheese, cranberries, pickled onion and mustard vinaigrette. Overall, the salad was light and refreshing with the vinaigrette cutting the sharpness of the cheese and making it sweet, tangy and savory.

For our entrée course we were excitedly brought a true pub favorite: bangers n' mash. Benson Brewery's take on this dish brought a new life to it. Rabbit and sauterne sausages sat upon mashed potatoes, topped with the most glorious sweet onion demi, and buttered Brussels sprouts. Everything in this dish made you feel like you were sitting in a true British pub.

"The caramelized onions really make it," Steven said as he lifted our beer, Lord Benson, which was paired with the dish. Lord Benson holds up to its name and is a crisp pale beer that leaves you wanting more.

As the fourth course came out it was explained that the light and creamy cheesecake with caramel sauce was a family recipe. It



Pork confit salad at Benson Brewery

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delivered on all counts including its Belgium-style beer pairing of Stunt Dubbel.

Benson Brewery held true to its name and provided us with a great pub style feel. The staff, including brewer **Andy Elliot**, was extremely willing to talk to us about their brews as well as their process. Not only was Tri Omega able to take away good vibes from Benson Brewery, but we also took away new knowledge.

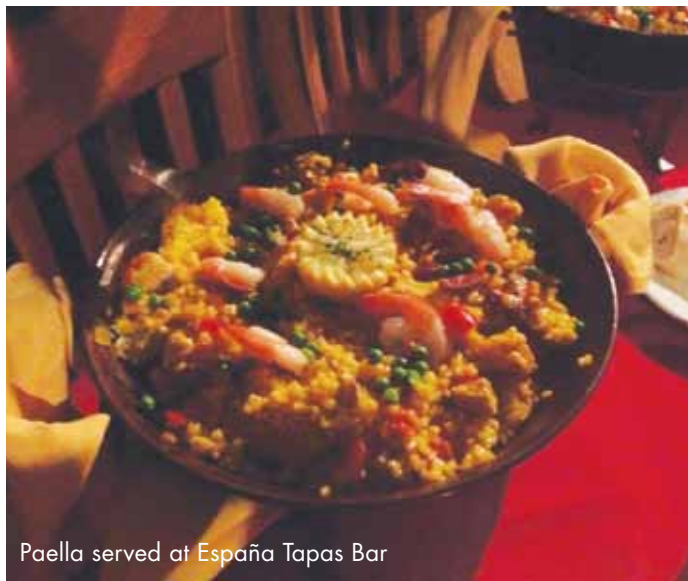
Our third restaurant of the night was Lot 2 at 6207 Maple Street. Chef **Joel Mahr** helped to cook *and* serve our meal, making quite the impression with his humble personality.

“España is a treasure to Benson. They provide a warm atmosphere of friendly faces that want to introduce you to Spanish cuisine.”

Our first course was an heirloom tomato soup using house canned heirloom tomatoes, grilled cheese croutons, bacon jam, smoked olive oil and chives. The combination created a smoky, better-than-mom’s, tomato soup.

The second course for the night will be premiering on their menu this spring: braised beef brisket croquets, along with a shaved Brussels sprout salad.

“If you could deep fry beef stew, this is what it would taste like,” Tri Omega Vice President Angie Thomas described.



Paella served at España Tapas Bar

The entrée course at Lot 2 was salmon with beans, bacon and mushrooms. A citrus note was added to create a good balance in the flavors.

The fourth course of the night was a maple bourbon yellow cake with chocolate ganache and a caramel center. This dessert presented an amazing sweet, salty and textural contrast.

“I want to crawl inside of this and stay for a little while,” a student commented as they ate.

Lot 2 brought out all of the best parts of our childhood memories with their menu. They also provided a laid back setting that makes you want to come back for cocktails and a good conversation with Chef Joel.

The last stop of the night was España Tapas Bar at 6064 Maple Street. Walking into España, modern paintings by local artists make you feel like you have been transported to an upscale restaurant in the heart of Spain.

The first two courses were served as tapas which are a wide variety of small appetizers. A wonderfully salty, but nice, acidic chicken croquette with garlic aioli was a hit, along with a very tender and sliced Serrano ham. A solomillo, or a steak sandwich, with Manchego cheese, roasted peppers and aioli was also raved about during this course.

The entrée course was a creamy chicken, pork, and chorizo paella using saffron rice with peas and carrots. This course brought a new experience to quite a few people, and impressed them all.

“Miracles happen,” Coral Hernandez commented on the paella.

The last course at España was a trio of desserts including cinnamon flan, tres leches cake with strawberry jam, and churros with chocolate sauce. The flan was perfectly light and creamy while the tres leches cake had a hint of lemon to compliment it. The churros were accompanied by a chocolate sauce that had most of us licking our plates clean and asking for more.

At the end of the each meal, Chef Carlos brought out the porron. The porron is a glass wine pitcher that you pour wine (or cranberry juice) in a stream to your mouth, and it usually produces entertaining results.

España is a wonderful treasure to Benson. They provide a warm atmosphere of friendly faces that want to introduce you to true Spanish cuisine.

Over all, this was a truly amazing experience. Tri Omega provided an adventure for their members for this Supper Club and a big thanks to all of the chefs, owners, servers and everybody else that made it possible for us to experience Benson.

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Speaking Easy

by Binoy Fernandez



One of the Metro's finest speakeasies

Prior to Prohibition it was said the cocktail was king among drinks, more consumed than either wine or beer and considered a flavored rival to water. It was so popular, in fact, that it required an amendment to the Constitution to ban the sale of it. To this day we still wonder, and, reputedly, still feel the effects of the dark decade that we refer to as Prohibition. Dark as those days must have been, though, and in spite of a constitutional amendment, did we stop drinking? No, a nation of drinkers found a way to keep drinking, and they found it through the speakeasies.

"Today, some of the best places to grab a mixed drink are those places that find inspiration in the concept of the speakeasy."

The name itself, speakeasy, comes from how you talked about them. You "spoke easy" about the bar because, if you didn't, several things would happen: the first would be you would get banned, and likely blacklisted from all the other ones in the area, the second would be that the proverbial "Johnny Law" would find out, shut down the place, make some arrests, confiscate (and probably drink some later) all the alcohol, and the third is that, given they were mob run establishments, you'd take some damage to your person to make sure you wouldn't ruin their business enterprise and money making. They weren't safe places, and they weren't places respectable people went.

When Prohibition happened we saw the cream of the American bartenders emigrate to Europe, and those that didn't traded their bar regalia to become operators of the soda fountains at pharmacies. Incidentally, it was during this time that we began to see things

such as artificial flavors get created as the chemists at pharmacies used their skills and inventories to obtain the flavors they wanted cheaper. It was likely that the former bartenders, craftsmen of their trades, lent their palates to the chemists in experimentation to get the flavors right. The 1920s were, of course, all about making money.

It was to the soda fountains that many of the former bar patrons went once Prohibition went into full swing. It was not to the speakeasy bars. Those that went to the speakeasy were those looking to get drunk, to find a fix, to find that girl he could take home and not worry about the next day, and to find a party. He was looking for the flapper, he was looking for the music and the dance, and he didn't care where he would get it. When we say that Prohibition marked the beginning of the death of the cocktail, it didn't happen because it was made illegal, it happened because the speakeasy changed what it meant to go out for a drink.

"It might be a place with no name and just an address... a green light above the door, two lit horses in a window, or three flickering candles."

It's almost an irony that today some of the best places to grab a mixed drink are those places that find inspiration in the concept of the speakeasy. This inspiration only goes as far as the hidden entrance – that bookcase that swings open, or that phone booth in a hot dog store. Or it might be what looks like a service door in the side alley of a hotel, or a painting of a door knob that actually is a door knob. It might be a place with no name and just an address. It could be a green light above a door, two lit horses in a window, or three flickering candles. There, though, the speakeasy ends, and the craft begins. Nearly a century later, we've romanticized the idea of the speakeasy, but those who operate these modern day ones look to those bartenders who didn't practice their craft illegally.

It's an irony, when you think about it. The speakeasies of Prohibition were probably one of the big reasons why we consider the 67 years (1933 – 2000) as the dark ages of the cocktail. They were places that didn't care about quality or about a good product. They cared only about money, and how to make as much of it as possible while spending as little as possible to do it. Now, the modern speakeasy has reinvented the concept, it is a place where the bartender is a crafts(wo)man, and where quality, product and experience are some of the most important aspects of the business.



Scotch, Scotch and More Scotch

by Dylan Thaemert

As a recent convert from bourbon to Scotch, I've found myself adrift in a sea of insane prices, limited releases and fluctuations in quality. While whisky is seeing a spike in demand and prices, it is also seeing a dip in availability of old and high quality whisky.

So here I am to help explain what exactly Scotch is, what makes it so special and how to best enjoy it in this current frenzied climate of supply and demand. I'll give a quick tour of the different regions of Scotch production, suggest some good examples to try and give a few tips for getting the most out of your tasting experience. If you've got a whisky on hand, now would be a good time to pour a glass.

"There are six geographical regions of Scotch production, each with individual flavor profiles ranging from light and floral to intense and smoky."

A Few Basics

Scotch is whisky distilled from malted barley produced and matured in Scotland. It is aged for a minimum of three years (though a standard offering is usually around 10) and can be bottled at no less than 40% alcohol by volume. It comes in two varieties: single malts and blends. A single malt is whisky produced at one distillery and a blend is a mixture of malt whisky from one or multiple distilleries and grain neutral spirits (clear, unaged spirit

made of a mix of grains). Expensive blends like Johnnie Walker Blue are made exclusively of malts. I'll be focusing mainly on single malts since that's what I've found most enjoyable in my whisky journey this far, and what I've found myself spending the majority of my drinking money on.

Fun Fact

If Scotland were a U.S. state it would be the 41st largest, about the size of South Carolina. Yet the range of flavors to be found in the range of Scotch whiskies is astounding. There are six geographical regions of Scotch production, each with individual flavor profiles ranging from light and floral to intense and smoky.

Regions

The Lowlands are home to a mild and light style of whisky. In the 19th century this region was home the highest volume of producing distilleries in Scotland. Now, there are only four distilleries left in operation.

A dram (one measure of whisky, usually two ounces) of Auchentoshan or Glenkinchie is a nice way to relax if you aren't in the mood for anything too demanding or complex. One of the reasons for this is their trademark use of triple distillation which rounds out some of the rougher flavors and textures of more typical double distilled whiskies. Geographically, the lowlands is about the lower half of the Scottish mainland.

It will come as no surprise then, that the northerly half of the mainland is called the Highlands. It is home to some of the more famous and recognizable distilleries such as Glenmorangie, Oban, and Macallan. These malts typically have more assertive floral and citrus qualities than their Lowland counterparts.



Speyside is its own small region within the Highlands that contains nearly half of Scotland's operating distilleries. This is a fascinating example of the term provenance in the Scotch whisky industry. It basically means you can't make this stuff just anywhere. There are reasons why Highland malts made in this particular river valley have the capacity to develop a range of deeply complex flavors, and other locations are without a distillery at all. There are reasons why a certain cask at one end of a warehouse will yield a different tasting spirit than another cask containing the same juice at the opposite end. We just aren't sure what those reasons are.

"Scotch is aged in primarily ex-bourbon barrels from the U.S.A, as well as ex-Sherry and to a lesser degree, wine casks."

Scotch is a mysterious spirit in that way, but much has been learned and handed down through the centuries of its production. Let's run through a few more things now. The quality and complexity of the final product is essentially down to a prolonged interaction between quality spirit and quality wood. Scotch is aged in primarily ex-bourbon barrels from the good old U.S. of A, as well as ex-Sherry and to a lesser degree, wine casks. Speysiders, like Macallan, are famously notorious for maturing well in Sherry casks. If you've tried one of these delicious (but expensive) whiskies rich in dark fruit, do your wallet a favor and try an Aberlour, a Glenfarclas or a Glendronach, if you can find it.

Continuing our regional journey in the southwest corner is a dwindling region called Campbeltown. Once home to 30 distilleries, it now has only two. Springbank is one of several "craft" distilleries now presenting their malts at 46% alcohol by volume, non-chill filtered, and natural color, something coveted by experts and purists. Something of note here is this term "natural color." If a whisky does not state these words on its label it is likely the distillery are using e150a caramel colorant to darken the color of their whisky for the purpose of making it look sexier to the consumer. The practice is controversial, but widespread. Knowledge is power, I guess, and the best way to speak to companies is with your dollar.

I've been speaking to a number of Islay distilleries with my dollars, mainly saying monosyllabic



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things like, “yum,” and “wow.” Islay (pronounced EYE-luh) is one of Scotland’s several whisky producing islands but, since it is home to eight distilleries, it is considered its own region. It boasts big, smoky, peaty flavor profiles from such whisky giants such as Laphroaig, Ardbeg and Lagavulin. So what exactly is peat? It is a layer of partially decayed and compacted vegetation cut out of the ground, dried and burned to roast the barley prior to fermentation.

“A small amount of water can ‘open up’ a scotch, shortening the alcohol burn and releasing different flavors.”

Though it does produce some fantastic unpeated whiskies such as Bruichladdich’s The Laddie 10, it is most well-known for the medicinal, smoky, earthy flavors of peat. These are undoubtedly some of the boldest flavor profiles around and tend to not be as immediately accessible as some of the other regions. The key to enjoying these whiskies is not so much “getting past” the peaty flavors; iodine, smoke, tar, Band-Aid, etc., as it is getting beyond them. It is the harmony and balance between these ancient, earthy flavors, and the other flavors of citrus, toffee, vanilla, and influence of the sherry and/or bourbon cask that make these whiskies so enjoyable. A few of my favorites are Ardbeg Uigeadail, Laphroaig Quarter Cask and Kilchoman Machir Bay.

The final region of Scotch production is an unofficial one in the eyes of the Scotch Whisky Association, but it’s good enough for me: the Islands. Any island other than Islay producing whisky fits into this category and it serves as a good reminder that the geographical regions are not married to their typical flavor profiles. Island whiskies come from Jura, right next to Islay to Orkney, nearly part

of Scandinavia in the north. Perhaps the most notable is Talisker from the Isle of Skye. It is peaty in a noticeably different way than the majority of Islays. It has more of a light saltwater air brininess to it, which is really quite delicious.

Thanks for joining me on this quick tour of Scotland’s whisky producing regions. I hope you’ve got an idea for what whisky you’d like to try next in your journey, and have a little bit better idea what it is you’re drinking when you do. Next I’ll offer a few opinions for getting the most out of your whisky drinking experience.

Rules of Enjoyment

Perhaps the number one rule for enjoyment is, ‘Drink it how you like it (but be willing to experiment)’. Some people only drink whisky with ice because they fear the alcohol burn, while some only drink it neat because they perceive themselves as purists. In truth, neither are getting the full range of experience a good Scotch whisky provides.

With that said, no Scotch worth spending money on *needs* ice. A small amount of water (anywhere from three drops to three teaspoons) can “open up” a scotch, shortening the alcohol burn and releasing different flavors. Most Scotch in the U.S. market is bottled between 40 and 46% alcohol by volume. Some are bottled at cask strength, usually between 50 and 60%. These will take a bit more water, but not only will the melting ice eventually drown the flavors you probably paid good money to experience, the chilling of the spirit also deadens certain chemical compounds important for tasting. Ultimately, it’s up to you to experiment and find how you enjoy it best. If I’m going to add water to a whisky, I’ll add a little bit at a time to see what happens as the ratio of water to alcohol increases.

“Chilling of the spirit deadens certain chemical compounds important for tasting.”

When you drink Scotch, savor it. Take small sips. Let the whisky sit on your tongue for a few seconds and take note how the flavors arrive and change. “Chew” the whisky by moving it around your mouth, coating the entirety of your mouth and getting your head inundated with the flavors. I probably don’t need to tell you that the senses of smell and taste are strongly linked. Smelling is arguably just as important in the whisky experience as tasting. Put your sniffer in the glass almost as often as you take a sip. Breathe in gently through your nose and out through your mouth and sniff gently. Don’t try too hard and let the aromas that are there come to you.

Proper glassware can be helpful for smelling and tasting everything that is there in a whisky. The universal whisky tasting glass is the Glencairn or a Copita. Both of these fancy looking glasses are not really that expensive and are worth the investment in my opinion. The key feature here is that, unlike a tumbler, they get narrower at the top so the aromas get concentrated in one place. It functions like a wine glass in this way. If you do not have one of these two whisky tasting glasses, a wine glass is a fine alternative.

Last but not least, take it easy. Scotch is a drink to be savored and appreciated. Also, have a glass of water as you’re drinking. After two or three, your ability to really taste what’s going on in the glass seriously diminishes – and that’s probably a good sign that it’s time to stop.

I hope these small pieces of information and opinions will help you on your Scotch whisky journey wherever you are. Cheers!





The *Bitter* Truth

by Mallory Finch

Found in every high-end cocktail lounge and neighborhood haunt, bitters are enjoying a serious revival within the service industry. Available in nearly every flavor profile imaginable, bitters conjure up a close association with the cocktail hour with connotations of luxury, leisure and time to kill. With that image in mind, understanding the concept of bitters as originally intended proves difficult. We are inclined to view bitters as a consumable item, intended to open the palate and complement the beverage, lacking the knowledge of bitters in their original purpose – as medicine.

“We are inclined to view bitters as a consumable item, lacking the knowledge of bitters in their original purpose – as medicine.”

What we recognize today as bitters differs significantly from the herbal bitters of yore. These concoctions treated a wide array of ailments, from respiratory complaints to mental fatigue, but their main purpose was to aid in digestion.

The exact composition of the bitters varied dramatically from region to region, with respect to availability of plant material – the species of gentian used in tonic bitters, great yellow gentian (*Gentiana lutea*) grows native to south and central Europe, while species of wild cherry (*Prunus* spp.) can be found in the Americas, Asia and Europe. In the same breath, the now-ubiquitous hops (*Humulus lupulus*) remained uncultivated in North America until the early seventeenth century. One might imagine the earliest American settlers, wishing to recreate their native herbal remedies,

but faced with a daunting landscape of unfamiliar flora. Of course, the pioneer spirit prevailed.

Regardless of biome or climate, the basic method for making bitters remained the same: a base alcohol extracted the medicinal and flavoring properties of various plant materials. Many of the medicinal plants employed in traditional Western herbalism possessed an intense bitterness. To lessen the unpleasantness of consuming such a bitter brew, more agreeable ingredients like citrus rind and sweetly-scented flowers found their way into the mix.

Though their homeopathic use has been rendered largely obsolete by the prevalence of Western allopathic medicine, many herbs can still be readily employed in home infusions and bitters. A list of notable bitters herbs follows.

Gentian, specifically Great Yellow Gentian (*Gentiana lutea*)

Native range: Alpine and sub-alpine areas of central and southern Europe.

Historical herbal uses:
Emmenagogue, antiseptic, digestive aid.

Plant part used: Root
The granddaddy of all bittering agents, possessed of an almost monumental bitterness, gentian root remains a primary ingredient in standby brands like Angostura and Peychaud's. The plant contains some of the bitterest compounds known to natural science. Considered a fortifying herb for the digestive system, gentian





also found use as a natural combatant of the exhaustion and lack of appetite associated with chronic disease.

With a place in the European herbalist's kit for thousands of years, gentian made its way into all kinds of classic European aperitif, digestif and amaro-styled liqueurs – Suze, Aperol and Fernet among them. Due to its extreme bitterness, gentian root is best used sparingly in home bitters preparations. A little goes a long way.

Dandelion roots impart a considerably mild bitterness, highlighted nicely in tandem with meadow flowers and honey.

Dandelion (*Taraxacum officinale*)

Native range: Europe and Asia; naturalized throughout North America, southern Africa, South America, New Zealand, Australia and India.

Historical herbal uses: Diuretic, laxative, appetite stimulant, digestive aid.

Plant part used: Root

Yes, this is the common weed your dad spent hours trying to eradicate from the cracks in the driveway. In America it appears in any vacant bit of ground it can find, its sunny head bobbing in the breeze. In Europe, the plants are larger, with strong stems, finely serrated leaves and a better reputation. The entire plant is renowned in all types of herbal medicine as a tonic herb, reputed to purify the blood. Dandelion root and leaves are exceptionally high in vitamins and nutrients. In herbal tradition, the root of the plant is considered a diuretic. The roots, when dried and chopped,

impart a considerably mild bitterness, with earthy and vegetal notes, highlighted nicely in tandem with meadow flowers and honey.

Wild Cherry (*Prunus serotina* or *Prunus virginiana*)

Native range: Eastern North America, ranging north to south from Canada to Texas and Florida.

Historical herbal uses: Cold suppressant, respiratory aid, digestive aid.

Plant part used: Outer bark

The storied cherry tree plays a central symbolic role in many folktales from around the world. Most tales revolve around the cherry as a symbol of female chasteness and virginity, but we're all familiar with the story of George Washington and the cherry tree as a parable of American honesty and integrity. Unlike its domesticated counterpart, the wild cherry tree produces unremarkable fruit; rather, its bounty lies in its bark.

Wild cherry is valued for timber and imparts a distinct fruit wood flavor to meats smoked with its wood. Traditionally, effective cough syrup could be made from its bark – hence the well-known 'wild cherry' flavor found in modern cough remedies, as well as most slushies and sodas at a gas station near you. As a bittering agent, wild cherry bark proves a smooth addition to whiskey-based recipes, pairing well with citrus and unsurprisingly, drupe fruits like cherries and peaches.

"Wild cherry bark proves a smooth addition to whiskey-based recipes."



Wormwood (*Artemisia absinthium*)

Native range: Native to temperate regions of Europe, Asia and Northern Africa.

Traditional herbal uses: Emmenagogue, cardiac stimulant, digestive aid.

Plant part used: Leaves, aerial parts.

'As bitter as wormwood' the old saying goes, and there is no question that wormwood is bitter, indeed. The plant achieved contemporary notoriety as a primary ingredient of absinthe, favored drink of artists like Hemingway and Van Gogh. As such, it remains a controversial and oft-maligned herb. Wormwood contains thujone, a psychoactive chemical compound that may induce hallucinations and can be fatally toxic if consumed in large doses. However, much of the bad press about this ancient plant can be attributed to misinformation, bad research and widespread moral panic at the close of the nineteenth century.

"Long employed as an additive to spirits, wines and beer, wormwood was also thought to stimulate the appetite and relieve indigestion."

Long employed as an additive to spirits, wines and beer, wormwood was also thought to stimulate the appetite and relieve indigestion. When used in bitters, wormwood imparts green chlorophyll bitterness, similar to fresh yarrow and carrot tops, which works well in a neutral or gin-based recipe. **A note of caution:** wormwood remains regulated by the FDA and similar organizations for its potential toxicity. I **do not** recommend the use of wormwood in bitters. Proceed at your own risk.

Herbs with a longstanding medicinal tradition possess rather strong magic, and as such should be treated with respect. When choosing materials for homemade bitters, be sure to use a reputable and ethical source. Some of the best plants for bitters are also the most ecologically fragile. Companies like Mountain Rose Herbs (www.mountainroseherbs.com) and Dandelion Botanical Company (www.dandelionbotanical.com) offer high quality, organic products and practice respectful harvest and cultivation of their plant materials. Due to the potency of many bitter herbs, practice moderation when employing bittering agents in home preparations. Too much of a good thing can be a real stomachache.

If you feel ambitious but don't know where to begin, try this recipe at home.

Spiced Bitters

- 2 cups high-proof bourbon or rye whiskey
- 1 cup pecans, toasted
- 1 whole nutmeg, cracked
- 2 cinnamon sticks
- 3 tbsp dried orange peel
- 5 star anise pods
- 2 vanilla beans, split
- 1 tsp allspice berries
- 1 tsp clove buds
- 1 tsp wild cherry bark
- 1 tsp white pine bark
- ½ tsp gentian root
- ½ tsp black peppercorns, cracked
- 3 tbsp pure maple syrup

1. Combine all ingredients except syrup in a glass jar. Cap and shake well, then store jar in a dark place for three to four weeks. Shake jar daily.

2. After three weeks, taste the infusion. At this point, if a certain flavor tastes too overpowering, you can remove that particular ingredient and allow the infusion to further develop. When the flavor suits you, strain the infused liquid into a clean jar using cheesecloth and a bar-sized metal strainer if necessary. Repeat straining process to remove any sediment.

3. Pour infused alcohol into a clean saucepan and add syrup. Bring mixture to a boil, and then simmer for a few moments to reduce the liquid. Allow mixture to cool then return to glass jar. Return jar to its dark place for a few days. Divide the bitters into dark glass bottles with dasher caps or dropper lids; slap a nametag on the bottles.

Store the bitters at room temperature. They will last indefinitely, but the flavor will be best if used within twelve months.

Please note: this information has not been evaluated by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). The author is not a licensed herbalist or medical professional. This information is for lively educational purposes only and is not intended to diagnose, treat, cure, or prevent any disease.

Jewelry Wish List:

- Earrings that don't rot my ears
- The right strand of pearls
- Natural materials, solid precious metals
- Custom, not costume



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by Lucas Korth

All Blacked Out and Somewhere to go

by Lucas Korth

I'm jarred suddenly into consciousness, as if revived from arrest. I feel bewildered, confused and ultimately depleted. I can't see anything. I'm actually not sure if it's too bright for my eyes to work or if they're crusted shut. *Why do I still have all of my clothes on? And why are they all wet?* The floor doesn't seem damp, so I don't think I wet myself. Oh great, I slept on the floor. At least it's my floor. I should get up. Oh my God my entire skeleton just cracked at once. I think I'm dead. No wait; I couldn't be dead if my ears are ringing. Also, this intense throbbing sensation I'm experiencing is probably a sign of life as well. I have established life. This is good.

And once we are given life we must immediately question it. This is the nature of humanity, or more succinctly, extremely hungover people. *Where am I? How did I get here? What did I do last night? Did I ever really enjoy LOST?* Lord knows I've had my share of doozies. A dozen or so intoxicants filling me past my God-given internal line, forcing my hand into some 'Great Unknown', and yet still we don't know. We must verify our deeds with others and listen in shame as our follies come home to roost. So many memories, however trifling they may be, live on only in the minds of others. They've become a sacrifice. I have created it, but I cannot truly attain it. It does not belong to me.

We all know damn well what causes this phenomenon: getting so absolutely pickled that the fellow in charge decides to engage autopilot. Let's dig a little deeper though. Get down to the real nuts and bolts of what happens to your brain when you try to drown it in hooch. In fact let me recount for you exactly what transpires. Maybe then you will think of this the next time you notice your grasp beginning to slip.

Of course, not all blackouts are created equal. They differ in severity based upon the same general rules regarding intoxication, as in gender, height, weight, amount consumed, time elapsed, food, tolerance and so on. If you haven't reached extreme levels

of intoxication, you may only "brownout". Basically you have a spotty recollection of the evening's transgressions, only failing to recall brief chunks of time. Of course, if you often find yourself on the podium for self-abuse you may experience a total blackout; the proverbial, "the lights are on, but nobody's home". But whether you're taking a moment or two off here and there or totally punching out for the night, the cause and ramifications are the same.

"Whether you're taking a moment or two off here and there or totally punching out for the night, the cause and ramifications are the same."

Alcohol disrupts the function of a part of the brain called the hippocampus. The hippocampus is integral in both memory formation and spatial navigation. When your BAC rises rapidly, some receptors in the hippocampus fail to transfer a compound called glutamate. Without glutamate, neurons in the hippocampus won't communicate properly, which really gums up the works. If enough neurons are disrupted your brain will temporarily lose the ability to create new memories, and you blackout.

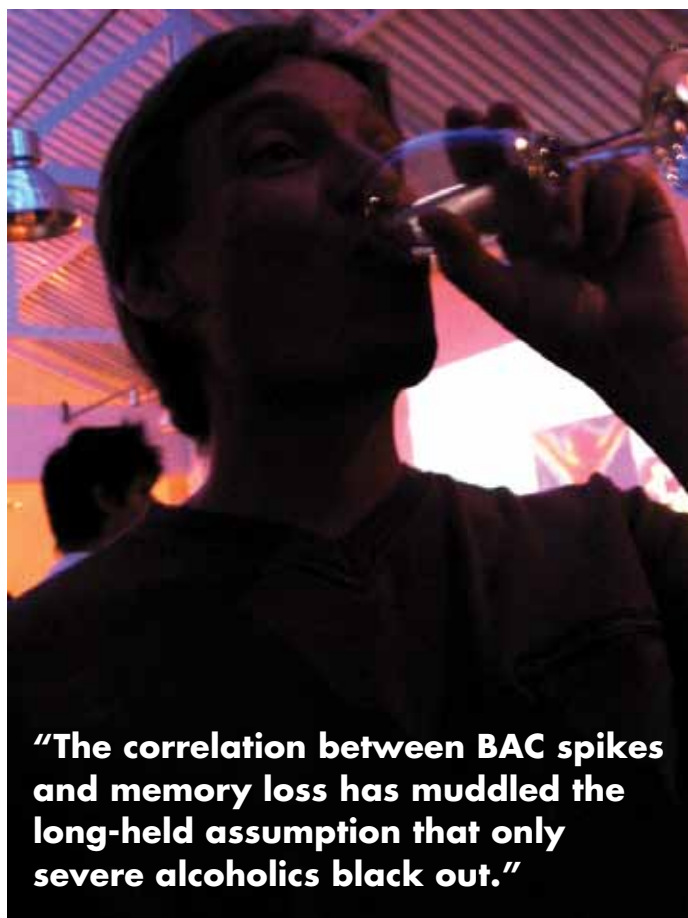
Recent studies have shown that blackouts are most common when there is a sudden and dramatic surge in blood alcohol content. In fact, if the rise in BAC is quick enough one could lose the ability to create memories before much of the other effects of alcohol abuse kick in. In other words, you could be carrying on a lucid conversation with your dear mother while playing minesweeper and writing an essay on overindulgence, and not remember any of it. Frightening, yes? Well what about the nightmare scenario where the intoxication has fully set in (i.e. poor judgment, rash decisions, aggressive behavior), and there is no recollection of it? You, my friend, came in like a wrecking ball (you wre-e-cked me).

"The tie to binge drinking also links blackouts to a veritable laundry list of long-term ills."

There is some semblance of a bright side, however. The correlation between BAC spikes and memory loss has muddled the long-held conception that only severe alcoholics black out. In fact, a recent study at Duke University found that social drinkers were just as likely to experience blackouts as your garden variety trench coat wearing, speech slurring, diatribe spouting everyday drunk. So if you've experienced these symptoms you may not necessarily be an alcoholic – yet (but, let's face it, you probably are a dang lush).

Unfortunately the tie to binge-drinking also links blackouts to a veritable laundry list of long-term ills. Basically the entire list of causes for American deaths has been associated with alcohol abuse in one form or another, which makes sense. Any time you alter the basic function of the brain you are cruising for a bruising – or hankering for a spanking, even.

My epilogue for this essay is titled, "When it's time to party, we should temper our partying and not party too hard". I love a good time and a few dozen cocktails as much as the next turkey, but let's simmer our gravy. Enjoy the slow burn of a nice, properly achieved drunk, and leave binging for the youthful. Nobody wants their head to turn into a bucket of mashed potatoes, so curb the intake and take the advice of a BBQ pitmaster: slow and low. After all, you want to remember all the dumb crap you do, right?



"The correlation between BAC spikes and memory loss has muddled the long-held assumption that only severe alcoholics black out."



YEAST INSPECTION:

Beer & Dessert Pairings

by Jason McLaughlin

Dessert and beer are very much alike. They are both treats which are often enjoyed as a reward for something. Whether an anniversary of life, the end of a long hard day, or just because, their similarities for indulging are many. When paired together, they are often sublime.

“The marriage between beer and dessert can be especially sweet... As long as a few easy guidelines are followed.”

As the craft beer movement continues to gain steam, so does the appreciation of pairing beer and food. The synergies and possibilities are nearly limitless because the flavor, aroma and

texture of a beer are so easily controlled by the brewer that anything is possible. That being said, the marriage between beer and dessert can be especially sweet.

As long as a few easy guidelines are followed, beer pairing is a cinch. Probably the most important rule is to make sure both the beer and dessert are similar in intensity. Pairing mild flavored beer with rich food, or vice versa, the stronger will overpower and drown out the more delicate one.

Another consideration is complementing flavors, like a chocolate dessert with a dark roasty stout. When likeminded flavors are paired together they work harmoniously to elevate each other. You can also pair contrasting flavors to create balance. Bitterness, acidity, spiciness and alcohol are counter balanced by sweetness, which opens up a whole world of possibilities. Using these simple tips, here are a few must tries.



"While the beer is relatively sweet to taste, it still has a somewhat drier finish... brilliant with a warm slice of apple pie."

Schneider Aventinus & Apple Pie

Aventinus is a delicious German made Weizenbock, which is basically a Bock strength version of a Dunkelweizen. What does that mean? It's a brown wheat beer of around 8% alcohol by volume with a rich toasty caramel malt character and surprisingly evident banana and clove complexity from the yeast. While the beer is relatively sweet to taste, it still has somewhat of a drier finish. These characteristics play brilliantly with a warm slice of classic American apple pie. The cinnamon and nutmeg dance with the spicy clove yeast phenolics. The banana esters and cooked apple create depth and complexity of fruit. The baked crust and toasty malt create a whole new pastry of their own.



"While the sweetness of the cake calms the sweetness of the beer, the chocolate adds further complexity to the caramel sweetness."

Founders Dirty Bastard & Mexican Hot Chocolate Cake

Dirty Bastard is a strong Scotch-style ale, also known as a "Wee Heavy". The style is incredibly rich in malt profile due to kettle caramelization which is the result of the brewers boiling the wort sometimes two to three times longer than a normal beer. This brewing technique, along with a colder than normal fermentation, creates an almost opulent, clean caramel malt character. This unabashed sweetness paired with the heat from the capsaicin of the peppers is what contrasting balance is all about. And while the sweetness of the cake calms the sweetness of the beer, the chocolate adds further complexity to the caramel explosion.



"The focus here is purely on rich, decadent chocolate... paired with the patent French vanilla custard dessert, the vanilla and chocolate are like a symphony."

Boulevard Chocolate Ale & Crème Brûlée

One of the Kansas City brewery's most sought after beers is a rich, amber colored, chocolate flavored ale that was brewed in collaboration with the famous chocolatier, Christopher Elbow. Many would think first of a dark roasty stout when they first imagine a beer by this name, but the focus here is purely on rich decadent chocolate with the malt component merely there to put the star flavor on display. Paired with the patent French vanilla custard dessert, the vanilla and chocolate are like a symphony. The high alcohol cuts the cream while the hard caramelized crust makes the sweet malt pop. It's simply to die for.



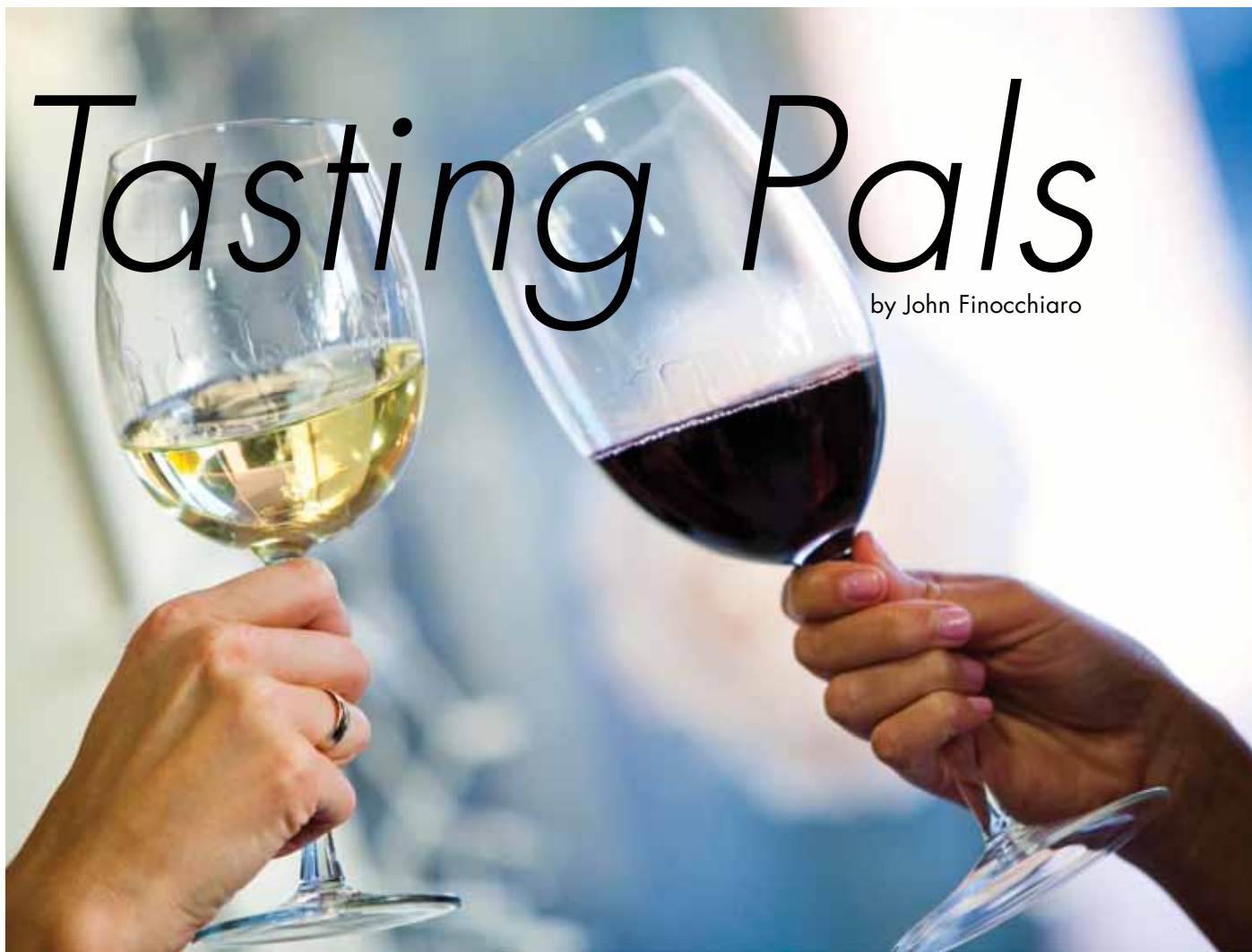
"Sweet cinnamon and frosting go head-to-head with the smoky meatiness and umami-like savory notes of this Rauchbier."

Aecht Schlenkerla Rauchbier Urbock & Cinnamon Roll

Rauchbier, literally meaning "smoke beer", is a lager-style beer brewed with a heavy amount of beechwood-smoked malt. The German brewery Schlenkerla's Urbock version is rich and sweet with the flavor of toasted bread crust along with an undeniably pronounced smoke character. The marriage of the malt and smoke give off what many perceive as hearty charred meat and even bacon. Nebraska has long enjoyed the contrasting balance of a rich meaty bowl of chili paired with a sweet cinnamon roll (yes out-of-towners, this is a thing here). Much in the same way, the sweet cinnamon and frosting go head-to-head with the smoky meatiness and umami-like savory notes of this Rauchbier, while the malt enhances the pastries buttery dough.

Tasting Pals

by John Finocchiaro



Everyone loves a wine tasting. After all, what's not to like when it comes to sipping vino with your friends. While the wines may highlight the event's marquis, it is truly the cast of characters assembled that make a wine tasting memorable. As wines swirl in glasses, personalities are magnified. Inhibitions dissipate. Rules of decorum may ease just a bit. The sights and sounds emulating from the tasters are a spectacle to behold. The swirling and sipping, sniffing and glass-gazing, the "oohs" and "ahhs", grand gestures and subtle expressions – you'd think these people were in the middle of massage therapy.

You can learn a lot about wine at such events. But also watch closely as your wine tasting buddies reveal much about themselves with each passing sip. Careful and analytical scientific research has categorized these sniffers and quaffers into a few distinct prototypes. See if any of your tasting pals fall into one or more of these descriptors.

The Cork Dork: You know the type. He doesn't smile. Conversation, if he decides to share any, revolves solely around the wine in hand. Absolute concentration is required before he commences his routine. Hospital emergency wards have been less tense than the aura surrounding this pulseless prince of pretentiousness. Eyes close, head tilts, air sucks in between his lips while he gurgles audibly for all to hear. No, it's not a Listerine commercial. It's the Cork Dork. And when he is through levitating and returns from his trance, in one last heroic expression of vino machismo, he spits. Because that's what real men do. They spit. He is not tasting this wine. He is having a relationship with it. And

based on his warm and inviting persona, this is probably the most intimate relationship he has had in years.

The Newbie – New to such an experience, Newbies are just thrilled to be there. Easy to please, polite and smiling, maybe even giggling (gasp!), the first timer is pure joy. Unless of course you are a Cork Dork, in which case you are highly offended. Neophytes are often the easiest to please and most grateful tasters in the room. They don't have a clue what they are sipping, but no matter. To them it's all fun. And unless you are a fun-hater, these folks can add levity to the sometimes thick air in the room.



The Sponge: The last ‘tasting’ that this meathead attended involved a styrene cup and a keg. Baffled by the stingy amount of juice procured into such a large glass, the quest for quantity becomes his priority. Eyes peak to see if anyone else’s glass is filled higher. He is known for rushing the tasting station like a Springsteen fan for concert tickets. Cuts in line are quite common – and how about that extra glass “for my friend”? Someone please tell this Neanderthal where he can find the Jagermeister.

The Rater: To this technologically addicted taster, wines have no brands and no names, only ratings and numbers. Not to be confused with the Cork Dork, this person needs no palate whatsoever. Armed with his all-knowing smartphone, this circus act can simultaneously swirl with one hand and thumb click with the other. Proceeding to sip and read microscopic text as his head tilts backwards, the actual tasting of the wine is a mere formality. It’s all about the wine rating. After all, why bother with individual tastes and preferences when the ‘experts’ can tell you what you are supposed to like? This may explain why their mothers still dress them in the morning.



“Emboldened by his seemingly bottomless glass of liquid courage, the Blowhard feels the need to pontificate endlessly of his wine prowess.”

The Moscato Mosquito: These are the anti-Raters. Numbers and ratings do not matter to this bunch. They care not whether the wine is from a renowned pedigree or appellation. All they want is Moscato. These jewelry rattlers may sample the other wines out of sheer courtesy, but you can bet their Lexus it won’t be long before they are hovering around the Moscato bottles like flies on... you get the idea. Domestic, imported, sparkling, not sparkling, pink or white, it doesn’t matter. Just pour them the sweet stuff and tell them you like their tan.

The Strong, Silent Type – This, my friends, is the quintessential wine taster. He is aware of ratings, but does not live by them. Quality, not quantity, is why he is here. His palate alone is his guide. This taster is educated and experienced with wine, appreciates wine, and knows that there is always more to learn and discover within the world of wine. He has no need for showboating. His reason for being here is to enjoy good wine and good times with friends, both old and new. If those friends happen to be Cork Dorks, Newbies, Sponges, Raters, or Moscato Mosquitos, well, that’s quite alright. It makes for an interesting evening.

The Blowhard – We all know this person. He can actually be quite entertaining. Emboldened by his seemingly bottomless glass of liquid courage, this king of the run-on sentence feels the need to pontificate endlessly of his wine prowess. He comes fully-armed with over the top metaphors, many of which are completely incomprehensible.

Someone please explain to me how this mammal can know of “the aroma of a fresh laundry basket at the break of dawn in the French countryside” when, by all indications, he has never left Fremont, or worn a clean shirt. Like tasting wine with Harry Caray must have been, you get his play-by-play of the entire experience. Most saddening is the fact that this mouthpiece may actually know a lot about wine. Most irritating is the fact that he won’t shut up about it. Most comforting is the knowledge that you can leave him at the table right along with your empty glass after the tasting is over, unless of course, he is yours (sigh).

“The Blotto is content to mind his own business while mumbling audible half-sentences to his nearby imaginary friend.”

The Emoter Mouth: This gem is easily the most unpredictable of all tasters. While the Blowhard can’t stop talking about wine, the Emoter can’t stop talking about anything *other* than wine. The Emoter may be quite capable of holding down multiple martinis or a six pack of beer at one sitting. Wine, however, is foreign. It

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does something strange to them. With each passing sip you come closer to becoming their new buddy, their confidant. It all seems so cordial and heart-warming, but fasten your seat belt. Mount Etna is preparing for eruption. Everything you never wanted to know about them is about to be thrust upon you, their newly christened BFF. From the mouths of babes come no holds barred, soul-baring confessions of spouses, kids, jobs, neighbors, illicit activities (we don't need to hear these!) and eye-popping revelations of all kinds. You can't stop this freight train and the Emoter is certain that you want to hear it all, in its ugly entirety. Chateau Truth Serum has been poured and along with the revelations comes the entire gamut of human emotion; anger, laughter, tears, joy, heartache...you name it. You did not order this appetizer, you do not *want* this appetizer, but it's coming anyway – it's on the house.

The Blotto: Look around. Find the potted plant. Moving ever so slowly, he is the one trying valiantly to complete a sentence. Grasping the bowl of his wine glass firmly in the palm of his hand, he appears to be using his stemware as a tightrope walker might use his balancing rod. In this case, however, the tightrope is called 'carpet'. Look down. That's the stuff with the spots that match those on his shoes and shirt. Those spots are also amazingly close in tint to the stuff that used to be in his glass. This walking coma is surprisingly not all that offensive. He is content to mind his own business while mumbling audible half-sentences to his nearby imaginary friend. Reacting in slow motion and with time-delay to any outside stimulus, this is much like watching an old second-rate movie, where the sound and movements don't quite match up. But fear not, he has his medicine in hand and a soulmate somewhere in the room ready to drive him home at the appropriate time. If he can be kept upright for a little while longer, he can stay. Just stand him

in the corner and make sure he doesn't fall over and make a mess. Like a potted plant.

The Superior Palate – This skilled manipulator can convince you exactly what aromas and flavors you will taste. Mind you, such flavors need not actually exist in the wine. All that is needed is an open mind and your willingness to accept – unquestioningly – the expertise of a supposed superior palate. Ladies and gentlemen, you are suffering from "The Emperor's New Clothes" syndrome. But fear not – eventually you realize the obvious, which is: if you can't taste it, IT'S NOT THERE! Imagine if someone could convince you that hamburger tasted like steak. Wouldn't McDonald's stock go through the roof?

The Smooth Operator: This person is at the wine tasting for one reason and one reason only – the opposite sex. Convinced that he/she just flat out looks more attractive, sophisticated, successful and distinguished with a glass of wine in hand, this player really isn't all that smooth – they just think they are. In reality, each sip of wine only makes everyone else in the room appear that much more attractive. Think about it. If this person was as all that desirable, why would they be trolling the room solo? Okay, there's no need to be insulting here. With admiration for his initiative and courageous efforts, we will respectfully dub this specimen 'The Smooth Operator'.

Wine tastings are, first and foremost, about the wine. While some industry-related formal events may be uber-serious, the vast majority of them are casual, social and entertaining. Either way, they're fun. Next time you attend one, do yourself a favor: Check out your tasting pals while you are working out your taste buds. You don't want to miss what may well be the best part of the show.

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712-256-4140
157 W. Broadway, Council Bluffs



Dixie Quicks features an ever-changing menu of Southern Cooking with Cajun, Tex-Mex and Southwest elements. We shop for ingredients every day so the food we serve is fresh. Comfort food, darn good flavors and plenty of personality help describe what you will find at Dixie Quicks.

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402-505-9917
6064 Maple Street



España is Omaha's only authentic Spanish/Mediterranean restaurant, bar and club featuring over 60 tapas or "small plates". Featuring performances by flamenco guitarists, Latin jazz musicians & flamenco/salsa dancers. Reverse Happy hour (10pm -12am) features \$3.50 glasses of Sangria.

Honey Creek Creamery

402-690-9252
Honey Creek, IA



Honey Creek Creamery, a certified goat cheese dairy, is located in the Loess Hills just 10 miles from Omaha. Locally-owned and operated, we offer several varieties of chevre flavored with organic herbs & spices. Stop in for a tour and cheese tastings at our renovated bunkhouse on our century farm.

IO

402-342-4856
1010 Howard Street



The restaurant that adds spice to Omaha! We prepare signature, traditional Indian dishes, slow-cooked and made-from-scratch. Each of our wines or made-from-scratch cocktails pairs naturally with our food menu. Open Mon - Sat, 11:30am - 2:00pm, 5:00 - close.

Julio's Restaurant

402-345-6921/ 402-330-2110
510 S. 13th St / 123rd & Center St.



Julio's Tex-Mex cuisine combines Mexican flavor with big Texas taste. Our staff doesn't pretend to be happy you are there - they really are. Originality isn't a word, it's a continual existence, and Julio's doesn't plan on stopping its quest to be an Omaha original. Since 1977. Online at julios.com

M's Pub

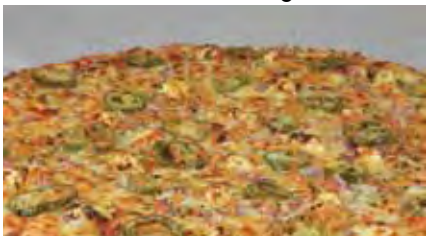
402-342-2050
1110 Howard St



M's Pub has been serving Omaha's discriminating diners in the heart of the Old Market for over 33 years. Our cutting edge, award winning cuisine is complemented by the Wine Spectator-recognized wine list, and served by our knowledgeable, courteous staff! Make reservations today and join us.

Mangia Italiana

402-614-0600
6516 Irvington Road



In our kitchen, recipes today taste much as they did in the "old days". Long-held customs prevail here in the style, taste and presentation of traditional Sicilian cooking. Featuring pasta, sugo, meatballs and our award-winning pizza. Located 1 block north of Sorenson Pkwy on Irvington Rd.

Orsi's Italian Bakery

402-345-3438
621 Pacific Street



Located in the heart of Omaha's Little Italy, Orsi's has been family run since 1919 and in the same location since 1934. Famous for our pizza and bread products, Orsi's now features an Italian deli including Italian cheeses, meats, homemade Italian sausage and imported olives.

Petrow's

402-551-0552
5914 Center Street



A family owned Omaha tradition since 1957. The whole family will love this original diner's look and taste. The menu features all the classic staples, from hot beef and pork tenderloin to made-from-scratch pies and homemade ice cream. Open 6am through 9:30pm.

Salt 88

402-991-9088
3623 North 129th Street



For inspired Mediterranean cuisine with an American twist, welcome to Salt88. For a special night out, enjoy seating at our owners table. Join us for a bite on what many call the best patio in Omaha, or at the bar for a delicious cocktail. Our extensive wine list is as eclectic as our menu.

Soaring Wings Vineyard

402-253-2479
1711 South 138th St, Springfield



Soaring Wings is one of the region's ultimate getaways just 10 minutes south of Omaha. Overlooking the Platte river valley, the view is often compared to Napa and Sonoma. Facilities include covered decks, outdoor seating for 3000, and indoor seating for 120. Come out and "Toast the Good Life".

Taxi's

402-898-1882
1822 North 120th Street



Taxi's large menu features soups, salads, sandwiches, comfort foods, seafood & steaks. Prix Fixe items are available nightly, & wine bottles are half-price on Tuesdays & Wednesdays. Our popular brunch features Egg Benedict, omelettes, quiches & more. Call ahead to get your name in.

Ted & Wally's

402-341-5827
1120 Jackson Street



Taste the difference of REAL homemade ice cream! Since 1984, we have been producing high-quality, homemade ice cream using only the highest quality ingredients, made the old-fashioned way. New flavors are continually being made in addition to several diabetic-friendly selections.

Vivace

402-342-2050
1110 Howard St



Serving contemporary Italian fare accented by a Mediterranean flair, our menu is complemented by an award-winning wine list, welcoming, attentive service, and the "most beautiful dining room in the Old Market"! Reservations honored @ www.OpenTable.com

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402-391-1881
7834 Dodge Street



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FOOD & *Spirits*
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The Dumpster

Cotton Candy: Into Thin Air

by Michael Campbell

Me at the Buffalo County Fair, 1972: “Please can I have some cotton candy?”

“No.”

“Pleeceeeze? Pleeceaaaauuuzzzhhh?” As if adding syllables would help.

“No.”

“I’ll never ask for any...”

“Fine—just to shut you up. Here’s fifty cents. Get outta here.”

“It costs seventy-five, Dad.”

“What? Seventy-five cents?! For air? For sugar air?”

I shrug. Dad flips me another quarter.

“The cotton candy machine debuted to raves at the 1904 World’s Fair... its inventor, William Morrison, was a dentist.”

The best part of getting cotton candy is watching them make it. It can’t be concocted in advance because it spoils so fast. They have to summon it before your very eyes.

First, they heat sugar in the middle of a device that looks like an empty washing machine basin. A needle valve spins, flinging thin strands of sugar-glue into the open drum, whipping it senseless until its natural crystalline structure is beat loose. Troll-doll pink hairs start appearing ghost-like along the edges, growing like a fast-motion spiderweb from a Water Willie. With a few deft twists of the wrist, the vendor whisks a long cardboard toilet paper tube through the air, gathering and cultivating strands on the baton like an orchestral conductor, building to a tippling crescendo to the grand finale: he hands me a teetering pile of Barbie-colored fluff as swirling and marvelous as grandma’s beehive hairdo.

“I’d tear furry strips loose and stuff them in my mouth. In a rush of renewed hyperactivity I head straight for the Zipper.”

The cotton candy machine debuted to raves at the 1904 World’s Fair in St. Louis. Its inventor, William Morrison, was a dentist. He gave his creation the unappetizing name “fairy floss.”

Cotton candy is 100% sugar. Sugar is hygroscopic: get cotton candy wet and it shrinks immediately back into crystals like the devil from holy water. I spit onto my cotton candy to watch it retreat in craters, fairy-floss pink collapsing into blood red drops, stuck like flies in its web.

I couldn’t bite into my cotton candy because the cloud was bigger than my head. I’d tear furry strips loose and stuff them in my mouth. Nothing there.

I saw it go in. I felt it. Yet my mouth is empty.

Another wad of a bite. The cotton candy disappears before I can chew it even once, dissolving into wee drops of sugar spit. My teeth turn red. They sting. August flies abandon blobs of ice cream spilled on the fairway dirt in favor of my sticky face. The giant cloud of pink sugar-air is soon gone, leaving no trace but a sticky cardboard tube, fuzzy-bald as an old man’s head.

There are a thousand ways to disappoint a small boy. This is one.

Perhaps it wasn’t quite nothing. I begin to feel a ringing in my ears amid an acute mental clarity. Then hyper-alertness. I’m extremely focused and energized. In a rush of renewed hyperactivity I head straight for the Zipper.

“Although I’ve eaten seemingly nothing, I barf. Pinwheels of pink gastrointestinal lacquer fling through the cage grate and across the midway.”

The Zipper is my favorite amusement park ride. It’s a combination of Ferris Wheel, bulldozer track, blender and shark cage. It is an assault on all your senses as you somersault from 200 feet in the air toward the littered ground, an end-over-end spin that rips loose coins from your pockets and pelts you with them like the inside of a popcorn popper.

Although I’ve eaten seemingly nothing, I barf. Pinwheels of pink gastrointestinal lacquer fling through the cage grate and across the midway. The clanging of loose coins quiets as they begin sticking to the gluey gum that lines the ceiling and floor of my torture chamber. I look on, heavy-lidded, noting that some of the coins are not mine. I’m now dimly aware of a collage of matchbook covers and ticket stubs stuck to the periphery of my cage, a time-honored tradition to be hosed away at closing time.

The ride stops with a yank. The carny unlocks the cage door. My seatbelt raises automatically. My bare white legs make a velcro sound as I rise from the black vinyl seat. A dollar’s worth of pennies, nickels and dimes are stuck on me like buttons. Halfheartedly I stoop to pry a few coins from the floor, but the barker yells for me to move along. I clear out, making room for the pale pink, pimple-faced boy at the front of the line, dutiful as a soldier awaiting D-Day. He is tearing at a giant cloud of cotton candy on a stick.

“Next.”

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