

FOOD *& Spirits*[®]

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Issue 24

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

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FOOD & Spirits

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Charles Schlusel's gazpacho is filled with healthy summery goodness. This chilled tomato soup is flavored with Italian parsley, cilantro, basil, chives and fresh key limes. Photo by Jacob Herrman, see recipe on page 25.

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Welcome to the 24th issue of *Food & Spirits Magazine*. This issue also marks our ninth year anniversary and we're proud and honored to have served our readers and the Omaha food and spirits community for (what feels like) so long. I'm also humbled by the incredible local talent that has graced our pages through their writing, photography and design.

Speaking of which, I'm pleased to welcome a new design team

onboard for this issue. But first, before I tell you how great they are, a few words about our last designer, **Jake Scott**. All of you are very familiar with his work because Jake has been designing the magazine for the past eight years. It's been an incredible pleasure to work

"It's been an incredible pleasure to work with Jake over that time and I truly don't know where the magazine would be without his talented design work and compassion."

with Jake over that time and I truly don't know where the magazine would be without his talented design work and compassion. You see, along with the beautiful pages he's helped put before you, he's also helped the magazine through more than one crisis. Perhaps more than anyone I've worked with, he's seen me at my worst; confused, stressed out and otherwise unpleasant. I'm proud to say he has become a friend of mine over that time and I wish his growing family and career nothing but the best. Thank you, Jake.

But, as they say, life must go on and so must FSM. Our new design team is made up of **Sheri Potter** and **Beverly Nelligan** from **diTendenza** here in Omaha. They bring a vast skill set to the magazine and I'm excited to be working with them. Along with design work, diTendenza also specializes in food styling and photography so don't be surprised if you start to see more than just their design work in our pages. They're both very talented and I think you're going to like what you see.

"the 2016 Inaugural Food Truck Rodeo on October 7th in Benson on Military Avenue between Maple and Binny Streets. The event will feature a beer garden, DJ music and as many food trucks as we can fit"

Finally, a little shameless promotion. FSM will be hosting, along with Reverb Lounge and 1% Productions, the **2016 Inaugural Food Truck Rodeo** on October 7th in **Benson** on Military Avenue

between Maple and Binny Streets. The event will feature a beer garden, DJ music and as many food trucks as we can fit. It will start at 4 pm and I hope to see you all there.

"over 350 (our largest crowd ever) attendees sampled pizza from 15 different pizza places. Inside, you'll find the results of the people's choice and the judge's vote."

We also hosted the **8th Annual Omaha's Largest Pizza Review** in June at **The Waiting Room Lounge** and **Reverb Lounge** in Benson. While being serenaded by musicians **Sarah Benck Tardy** and **John Finocchiaro**, over 350 (our largest crowd ever) attendees sampled pizza from 15 different pizza places. Inside, you'll find the results of the people's choice and the judge's vote.

So, dear reader, here you are: a new issue of FSM loaded with some great articles and photography. As always, we're always happy to hear from you so tell us what you like, and what you don't. We're listening.

*Erik Totten – Publisher
Food & Spirits Magazine*

GOOD LIFE GREAT FOOD

Celebrating Omaha Restaurant Week

story by Jessica Clem, photos by Maureen Fritts

For some people, spring break is the week they look forward to all year long. For these landlocked travelers, there is nothing quite as exciting as journeying to the beach for a few days in the sun.

For others, there is another multi-day event to look forward to that requires less travel, but just as many exotic flavors. And they are all about the amazing food right here in Omaha.

"We love how **Omaha Restaurant Week** celebrates the rich and diverse restaurant culture we are so proud to be a part of," said **Megan Longo**, Marketing Director for **Flagship Restaurant Group**. "Our restaurants have participated in ORW since the beginning, and each year we look forward it."

Omaha Restaurant Week is the (food) baby of **Jen Kocher**, Executive Producer of Urban Events Inc., a company that creates events that celebrate the food and spirit culture here in our

"Kocher engages restaurants to participate by encouraging the creative freedom in their prix fixe, or fixed price menus during the event. "Since they have so much on their plates already, I try to make it as easy for them to participate as possible,""

Homaha. "I started Urban Events back in 2009, after attending a wine festival in St. Louis with my husband," she said. "I was a realtor at the time, and I thought the festival would be a fun hobby



Tiata Restaurant

in my spare time. But planning became a full time job. Thus, the Urban Events and **Riverfront Wine Festival** was born." The success of the festival paved the way for the beloved **Omaha Beer Fest** in 2011. And that same year, Omaha Restaurant Week was born.

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Omaha is known throughout the nation as a place where great food is sourced and prepared, from the dirt up. Recognizing the momentum of the food scene, Kocher began to formulate a plan to get the event started. “Over the years, I enjoyed restaurant weeks in other cities like Denver and Phoenix,” she said. “It was a chance to try restaurants I normally wouldn’t have enjoyed, at a price point I could afford.”

Knowing she would need support behind her, she initially approached the **Omaha Restaurant Association**, but she was told it may be a while before she would hear a definitive answer. “I was told the idea had been brought up off and on over the years at meetings, but no one had ever pulled the trigger. So I thought to myself, ‘I’ll do it!’”

After contacting a few restaurants and hearing positive responses, Kocher knew the next step was making sure the event gave back to the community. “I decided that the **Food Bank for the Heartland** had the greatest need, and that they were the best fit for the beneficiary.”

can’t think of a better fit for Omaha Restaurant Week, and I don’t expect that to change.”

Each year, planning for the fall event begins nearly a year in advance, during the chilly months of winter. “The Omaha restaurant scene changes monthly, so I stay on top of openings and closings throughout the year,” said Kocher. “Over the winter, I work with **Eleven Twenty-Three** in Ralston to create the graphic design for the event, and begin inviting restaurants to participate in early spring.” Summer is when things get literally heated. “I enroll restaurants, line up advertising, collect photos and menus, engage in social media, and update the website and mobile app.”

On the Omaha Restaurant Week website, each restaurant will have their own profile page, featuring their menu, reservation details, and prices. “In August, I have volunteers hanging posters all around town, and by the middle of the month, restaurants are taking reservations.” As the sole staff member at Urban Events, Inc., by September she finally has time to look forward to enjoying the literal fruits of her labor. “I am ready to relax and dine out during



During the pilot year in 2011, Omaha Restaurant Week had just over a few dozen restaurants participating. Now, six years later, she hopes to raise \$25,000 for the Food Bank of the Heartland, with the custom menu items of over 60 restaurants fueling the charity spirit.

Kocher engages restaurants to participate by encouraging the creative freedom in their prix fixe, or fixed price menus during the event. “Since they have so much on their plates already, I try to make it as easy for them to participate as possible,” she said. “They are responsible for paying their participating fee, providing their price points, creating and printing their menus, and engaging in social media. I try to do the rest.”

The real excitement for restaurants is in the fine print. Namely, the items on their fixed price menus.

“All restaurants are given some guidelines to follow, but they get as creative as they want for Omaha Restaurant Week,” said Kocher. Over the event period, participating restaurants promote a custom, fixed price menu with special items just for the event. They also donate 5% of these menu sales to the Food Bank of the Heartland. “The Food Bank is a local organization that is committed to helping individuals and families who struggle with hunger,” said Kocher. “I

“The Food Bank is a local organization that is committed to helping individuals and families who struggle with hunger,” said Kocher. “I can’t think of a better fit for Omaha Restaurant Week, and I don’t expect that to change.”

the promotion,” she said. “Sometimes I’ll squeeze in two ‘dinners’ in one night!”

The dining process for the week includes a menu centered on dishes that highlight the uniqueness of each establishment. Menus include appetizers, entrees, and desserts, and price points stay between \$20, \$30, and \$40 a person. An additional price point was also made available at **The Grey Plume**. Participating restaurants also offer their standard menus during Omaha Restaurant Week as well. With no tickets or passes required, patrons are encouraged to dine out often and merrily.

For many, this event is a chance to experience food like they have never had it, prepared in ways they will never forget. “I love how participating restaurants push the envelope,” said Kocher. “One year, **360 Steakhouse** served alligator on their restaurant week menu, and it got a LOT of attention. I also get to introduce diners to brand new restaurants.” **Modern Love**, **Heritage Food & Wine**, **Pig & Finch**, among others, participated in Omaha Restaurant Week soon after opening their doors to the public.

The event gives patrons and chefs alike the opportunity for new experiences in the dining world. And this year will be no exception. “**Omaha Culinary Tours** has planned some restaurant week themed



“The dining process for the week includes a menu centered on dishes that highlight the uniqueness of each establishment. Menus include appetizers, entrees, and desserts, and price points stay between \$20, \$30, and \$40 a person.”

tours that will give diners a sneak peek of this year’s dishes,” said Kocher. “I also look forward to debuting restaurants like **Jazz**, **Riva**, **Agave Azteca**, and **Julio’s** in the promotion.” 45 restaurants, including **Farnam House Brewery**, **Le Voltaire**, and **J CoCo’s**, have confirmed their participation in this year’s event, with more coming in every month.

With over 7,000 likes on social media, and an overwhelmingly positive public response, Kocher has created an event that gives similar events in larger cities a run for their money. However, her metrics are focused on the plates that aren’t as evident. “I measure success primarily by the dollars raised to Food Bank for the Heartland,” she said. “This year my goal is to raise \$25,000. For every one dollar raised, three meals are provided by the Food Bank.” If this year’s event reaches this goal, 75,000 meals will be provided to those in need in the Omaha area. “To me, that would mean Omaha Restaurant Week is an overwhelming success.”

This September, forget the hassle of an overseas flight or complicated fall break. All the excitement you could need is right here on your plate in Omaha.

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Passing The Torch At The DUNDEE DELL

by Leo Adam Biga

In the wake of **Piccolo's** closing, leaving Omaha one less signature Italian steakhouse, the **Bohemian Cafe** announced it would serve its last Czech specialties in September. So when rumors surfaced **Pat Gobel** was selling the city's oldest pub, the **Dundee Dell**, local diners and imbibers alike quaked at the thought of some dillitante swooping in and ruining a good thing.

Fears were allayed when news got out the Dell was purchased by veteran Omaha restaurateur and wholesale food maven **Greg Lindberg**. The midtown landmark has joined his **Absolutely Fresh Seafood, Shucks Fish House and Oyster Bar** and **Bailey's** family of businesses.

Since taking over last spring, with Gobel staying on to ease the transition at Lindberg's request, the new owner's made it known to devotees the magic that makes the Dell won't change.

Lindberg, who often bent an elbow at its old 50th and Dodge location and followed it to its current 50th and Underwood site, appreciates what he's inherited when he calls the homey establishment an "icon and institution."

"The pressure I feel is to not screw it up, because it is the Dundee Dell," Lindberg said. "My witnesses or judges are the loyal customers and employees."

He said being the steward of a legacy that goes back to 1934, when it started as a Jewish delicatessen, then went through a steakhouse phase, before tuning pub, is a "labor of love." He's also quick to add, "I believe I can make money with this. I think I can make it a good business and a fun place for me to be. I'm doing this because I want to do this." There's also a deeper reason that motivated him to buy the Dell – he didn't want to see it shuttered the way so many historic restaurants have and chance a franchise opening in its place.

"I believe in small business," he said. That belief goes back to his father who championed buying on main street as publisher of newspapers in Sargent and West Point, Nebraska.

By the time Lindberg operated his own ventures, he saw too many mom-and-pops go under.

"I was selling fish to all these restaurants owned by hard working people trying to feed their families. The chains kept moving in and kicking these people out. That sucked, that is not the way I want my town to be, so I fight back."

Lindberg admires that Gobel enjoyed a long run (he bought it in 1989) and "kept the vibe, the spirit" while giving it "a breath of fresh air" upon moving to its new digs in 2000. Lindberg's added new systems, fresh carpeting and other overdue updates to provide "new energy" and "get it shiny," but he's kept most everything

"The pressure I feel is to not screw it up, because it is the Dundee Dell," Lindberg said. "My witnesses or judges are the loyal customers and employees."

else the same. That includes the famous fish and chips and the hot pastrami sandwich. Holdover executive chef **Mary Tomes** is introducing new seafood and traditional English pub items. The Dell's epic collection of Scotch varietals is being curated to further brand the Dell as a niche neighborhood joint where you can get certain scotches you can't anywhere else.

Lindberg said his familiarity with Scotch was limited to drinking it, but he's learning from Gobel, a bonafide connoisseur. Gobel's

vast store of spirits knowledge is not the only reason Lindberg asked he remain in-house awhile.

"A lot of the Dell is between his ears, quite frankly. Plus, he's the face of the Dell."

Lindberg's getting ample face time with Dundee regulars. "Whatever the politically correct term is for people with money and education, well, they're here in the Dundee neighborhood," he said, "and that's cool, I like it." The Dell can appeal to an upscale clientele looking for a relaxed setting, but looking at Dundee's mostly gourmet eateries, it fills the inexpensive pub niche otherwise missing.

He's learned things since starting his first business in 1979.

"A lot of times in my life it's been knowing what not to do. I have ideas from here to the Interstate. I'm a list guy. I've kept my last two phones and computers because they have so many lists and they don't talk to each other. There's some good ideas in there, but you can't do everything."

Many eateries go awry, he said, by "trying to be all things to all people - too many things on the menu." "Ideally," he said, "I'd shave off a third of any menu."

He believes the front and back of the house are only as good as the people working them. He was impressed enough by Gobel's tight-knit corps that he's kept the entire staff intact.

"We haven't gotten rid of anybody."

"I could not be more pleased," Gobel said. "It really is family."

So many of our staff have been here 10 years-plus. We take care of our people, we support each other. If somebody's having a rough spot, we gather around and help them through it. If there's a wedding or a new baby's born, we all celebrate."

Lindberg isn't messing with a good thing. "Everybody talks about their place is family," he said. "This is the real deal. There's a lot of amazing stories about what Pat's done for these people. If you've got good people, you can do anything. I believe that in my soul. I've done my best to surround myself with talented, hard-working people. I actually like them and they tend to like me." Yes, running a business comes with hassles, but "good people take most of those away from you," he said.

Goebel feels he's leaving his people and place in good hands.

"Greg and I really see eye-to-eye on things. I wanted to find somebody who's vested in the legacy, in the tradition, in the Dundee Dell, and wanted to maintain that going forward, and I found that in Greg. I wouldn't have done it any other way. I'm very invested emotionally here. I will always be. But it's time for me to pass the torch."

"This thing needs to be respected and honored and cherished. It's not just another part of a large operation. I mean, do we really need

another Applebees? Does it make Omaha better? The Dundee Dell does make Omaha better."

Lindberg said the timing was right. The Dell took a hit from extended street construction a few years ago that made accessing it a pain. Business further lagged this last year. When he heard Gobel was seeking a buyer, he contacted him to discuss terms and discovered the depths of the struggles.

"Lindberg's added new systems, fresh carpeting and other overdue updates to provide "new energy" and "get it shiny," but he's kept most everything else the same."

"It got rough. It was spiraling down. Staff were a little beat down over lack of money to fix things. The way I saw it," Lindberg said, "if I didn't do it, this thing was going to fall. It was close."

Besides not wanting the Dell be another Omaha eatery casualty, taking on a new challenge is just what he needed.

"I've just been having a good time with Shucks and Bailey's and Absolutely Fresh for decades. It wasn't always fun, but it has been for quite some time. This has reenergized me. I don't have to work, but I like it. I'm 61-years old, I've been doing this for 37 years. I've been saving money – not for the first 12 or so – but I've been saving money ever since. I'd be fine. I could retire."

"But then what?"

Ever the entrepreneur, Lindberg needs the rush that comes with business risk and reward. Then there's the symmetry of it.

"I bought it from Pat, who had it for 27 years. He bought it from Neill Everitt, who had it for 27 years. That's Haley's comet weird."

Lindberg's not sure he'll make it 27 years himself, which would be 2043, but he's happy to settle for another milestone.

"It will be a hundred years old in 2034. I can make it that long."

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SAM & LOUIE'S PIZZA

IS AN ELKHORN FAMILY AFFAIR

by Leah Parodi

Henry Ford is quoted as saying, “Coming together is a beginning; keeping together is progress; working together is success.” For the **Nolan family** of Elkhorn, Ford’s words reflect not only this family’s spirit, but their thriving business and giving impact on the community. For over 22 years, **Sam & Louie’s New York Style Pizzerias** have been serving delicious hand-tossed New York style pizza to those in and around the Omaha metro. Unbeknownst to many, this once one-store operation has grown into a franchise that now covers six states.

Greg and Nancy, both originally from Niobrara, Nebraska, moved their family to Elkhorn in 1986 when Greg was reassigned to Omaha from Tulsa, OK where he worked for Electrolux. They have two adult children, **Melissa and Michael**, and are grandparents to four beautiful granddaughters. Both Melissa and Michael went to Elkhorn Public Schools. Today, Melissa is a busy single mom to two teen daughters and Michael and his wife Sarah are busy chasing two young daughters who now attend the same elementary school as they did. As a family unit, the Nolan’s operate three stores (Elkhorn, 120th and Blondo and 180th and Q) and have 14 franchises in 6 states, the newest opening weeks ago in Sterling, Colorado. And it all started with an overnight drive Melissa made some years ago.

“The dough needed to be crusty on the outside, chewy on the inside. It was fun over the years to create our pizzas with input from customers and staff, the favorite by far is Sam & Louie’s Best.”

Melissa was an interior design student at Northwest Missouri State, or so Greg and Nancy thought. They awoke one morning in the fall of 1993 to find Melissa in their driveway, her car stuffed with her belongings and a college-no-more declaration. Greg, a roll-with-the-punches kind of guy, shrugged at Melissa in his pajamas, asking her what she wanted to do. Melissa, who had been

working in pizzerias for over five summers, responded, “Why don’t we do pizza?” Greg answered back, “Why not?” And in April of 1994 Sam & Louie’s opened at the 120th and Blondo location, which is now celebrating its 22nd year.

After deciding to open a pizza place, two things needed to happen; a name for the new pizzeria and the perfect pizza recipe, the rest Greg felt, would fall into place. The name, much like the decision to open a pizza place, came on the fly. Driving around town the name Sam & Louie’s hit Greg like a bolt. “My father’s name was Sam and my wife’s father Louie,” Greg said. “I loved keeping in line with the family operated business and choosing a name with real family meaning was key.”

Pizzeria name in place, next on the menu was the perfect New York style pizza recipe. New York Style pizza, by definition, is one with a hand-tossed, thin crust pie with a crispy crust, yet dough soft enough to fold in half to eat. That is exactly what Greg and Melissa wanted to serve to guests.

“Melissa worked in a pizzeria that served New York Style, we took what she knew and made our own recipes through trial and error,” Greg said. “The dough needed to be crusty on the outside, chewy on the inside. It was fun over the years to create our pizzas with input from customers and staff, the favorite by far is Sam & Louie’s Best.”

The Sam & Louie’s menu has since expanded to include Italian comfort food, an upscale catering and special events division and over 20 specialty pizzas. And the Nolan’s it seems, were way ahead of their time by introducing gluten-free pizzas. “We didn’t realize it at the time,” said Melissa. “But we were one of the first restaurants in Omaha to offer gluten-free.” Melissa, who has gluten health issues, had trouble finding food in restaurants that she could eat, including pizza. “I would go to a vitamin store and pick up gluten-free dough and make my own pizza in the restaurant. Then we found a crust that we could use for our customers and they love it, I love it!” Their gluten free and low fat menu success has earned Sam & Louie’s a spot in the book *Gluten Free Guide to Chain Restaurants* written by Adam Bryan.

After opening their first location at 120th and Blondo, it didn’t take the Nolan’s too long to realize that they were on to something. “Blondo opened and we had a very successful first few years,” said Greg. “Our yearly sales went up 20%. That’s unheard of. I think that was due to the fact that we were family orientated, we knew all customers by name. And we were one of the furthest restaurants out west at that time. They only other was Vincenzo’s on 144th.”

The Blondo location was armed with a tight knit group of family and key employees. Michael, who was rather young at that time, worked alongside of his parents and sister, and was destined to lead

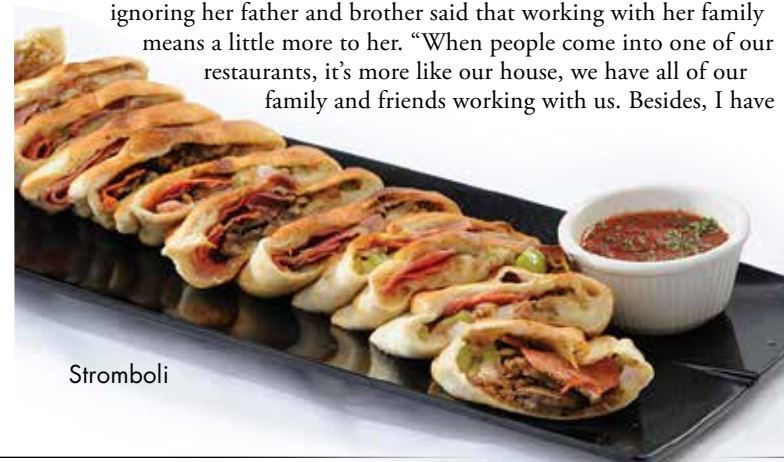
“When people come into one of our restaurants, it’s more like our house, we have all of our family and friends working with us.”

the charge for expansion. “I started working at Sam & Louie’s in 1994 at age 16, I had to get a job anyway so I figured why not work there,” he joked. “It was fun, really fun. All of my friends worked there, my sister’s friends worked there, my parents were there.” That fun and festive environment seemed to be contagious and soon the Nolan’s were being approached by friends, neighbors and customers who all wanted to be a part of the Sam & Louie’s family.

In 2000, the first Sam & Louie’s franchise was sold, although they had set up a licensing agreement the year before. In 2001, they were officially a pizza franchise. “We sold about 12 franchises by accident up until about 3 years ago,” Michael said. “We never advertised, we sold all franchises to customers, even the one in Billings, Montana. Then we began to advertise, we began to trust in ourselves.” There are now franchises in Colorado, Kansas, Iowa, Montana, Nebraska and Wisconsin.

And here they are, the Nolan’s, 22 years later. Greg is president and CEO and Nancy is vice president and consultant. Melissa is director of sales and operations and Michael Director of franchise sales. They have a corporate team and restaurant staff, many of whom have been with them since the beginning. “Our employees, they just don’t leave,” said Melissa. “They move away and then come back, unless Greg scares them off! They become family.” As one could have predicted, the third generation of Nolan’s is coming on board as Melissa’s teenage daughters; Isabella and Lillian are now working in the restaurants and at catering events.

As they reflect on the past and how they got their start in the pizzeria business, the Nolan’s take time to discuss how they have endured working together, so closely and for so long. “Working with family, they drive me crazy every day!” said Michael. “But I get to speak my mind more directly than I could in a more, let’s say PC environment.” Greg quickly followed Michael’s comments with his own; “It’s really exciting to be me, I get to cause trouble for someone else then go on my way,” he grinned at his kids. Melissa, ignoring her father and brother said that working with her family means a little more to her. “When people come into one of our restaurants, it’s more like our house, we have all of our family and friends working with us. Besides, I have



Stromboli

no choice but to work here,” she laughed. “What else would I do? What else could I do that keeps me doing what I love to do each day?”

All fun and frolic aside, the Nolan’s also know and recognize that their success comes from the loyalty of their customers. “Our customers are family, our neighbors, they are suits and ties to lawn mowing crews and construction workers,” said Michael.

“Our customers, they are our friends, people we have known for years, they come in go, to their booth and we know just what they want to order,” added Melissa.

“That is why community involvement is such a big thing for us, especially after we opened the Elkhorn location in 2008,” said Greg. “It was a natural thing to do; I know people in the community, my kids are here, my granddaughters go to school here. People need things and we are happy to give to those who supported us over the years.”

As for the future of Sam & Louie’s, Greg gets the last word, most likely as one would expect. “The future, it looks so exciting and bright to me. We have a lot of really good franchisees. And we have Omaha. I cannot thank everyone enough for all of the support, thank you for giving us as a franchise, thank you for your loyalty. We work for you.”

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8 OF OUR FAVORITE PLACES FOR BRUNCH

Brunch has been a trending craze in the national food scene for a while now and Omaha is no exception. Our Metro area abounds with plenty of great options to enjoy a weekend brunch. Here are eight of our favorite places to satisfy your mid-meal cravings.

1 BAILEY'S BREAKFAST AND LUNCH 1259 S. 120th St. 402-932-5577



Bailey's is comfort food done with flair. For breakfast you'll find all your favorites, featuring one of Omaha's finest eggs Benedict with seven different varieties (and crepes, too), topped with hollandaise made from scratch, fresh every day. And the bacon is something special. Breakfast is served all day. A highlight of the menu is the 'porkasaurus.' It's just ridiculous! All things pork: bacon, sausage patty and links, Canadian bacon, ham steak, plus Andouille sausage, all on a big bed of red taters with jack and cheddar cheese. Crowned with three eggs any style, a buttered biscuit and choice of toast. Served with a side of sausage gravy. Whew! Finish this dish and get a T-shirt. And treat yourself to some of Omaha's finest salads, soups, and sandwiches, plus chicken fried steak, fresh Angus burgers, along with Bloody Marys and mimosas. When is the last time you had really good egg salad or chicken salad? You'll find it here. Open seven days a week 7 am – 2 pm.

2 DARIO'S BRASSERIE 4920 Underwood Ave. 402-933-0799



Dario's Brasserie focuses on traditional French & Belgian cuisine and authentic Belgian beers. Dining at Dario's gives you the feeling of being in a beautiful European brasserie with a lovely, intimate patio with a street view for people watching. The perfect spot for a quick burger, date night, celebrations, or bringing friends and

family from out of town for a fantastic brunch. Dario's has a passion for honest, authentic food and friendly, attentive service. Dario's Saturday brunch is one of Omaha's best kept secrets, featuring a one of a kind mortadella croissant, and incredible eggs benedict, their house-infused spicy Bloody Mary and, of course, all of those wonderful Belgian beers. They also offer some of their dinner staples for brunch – croque madame, mussel pots and platters, savory crepes, burgers and our amazing Belgian pommes frites.

Omaha's only brasserie is located in the heart of Omaha in the Dundee neighborhood. Dario's Brasserie is open for dinner service Tuesday – Saturday from 5 pm until 10 pm and Sunday dinner from 5 pm until 8:30 pm. Brunch is served Saturday from 11:30 am until 2 pm and Sunday from 10 am until 2 pm. Reservations are recommended.

3 FIRST WATCH 1222 S 71st St. 402-932-5691



At First Watch they begin each morning at the crack of dawn, slicing fresh fruits and vegetables, baking muffins and whipping up their French toast batter from scratch. Everything is made to order, and freshness is never compromised. They don't use heat lamps or deep fryers and they also use only the finest ingredients possible for the freshest taste around.

When you arrive, your welcomed with a pot — not just a cup — of their Sunrise Select Premium Blend® coffee, along with complimentary newspapers and Wi-Fi internet access. They are open seven days a week from 7:00 am until 2:30 pm, covering breakfast, brunch and lunch – they've got you covered. Fresh food is key, but so is their fresh approach to friendly, fast and accommodating service. Whatever it takes to make your visit memorable and to keep you coming back for more. Your food prepared just the way you like it – and if they can, they will.

First Watch, a daytime café, is located on the southeast corner of 72nd and Pacific. They're close to Aksarben, University of Nebraska-Omaha Pacific campus, First Data and College of St. Mary's. As their trademark says, "Yeah, it's fresh™"

4 JAMS BAR & GRILL MIDTOWN - 7814 Dodge St. 402-399-8300 Old Market - 1101 Harney St. 402-614-9333



Jams, an Omaha restaurant legacy, is an American grill that offers a melting pot of different styles and varieties of food dishes containing high-quality ingredients paired with the optional cold drink or creative cocktail. Opened on 78th and Dodge, twenty-five years ago, it has become a favorite local eatery. In 2015, a second

location was opened on the corner of 11th and Harney in the Old Market of Omaha offering the same fine menu but with the addition of a lovely outdoor patio on the east side. Jams offers an excellent happy hour from 3 pm until 6 pm and after 9 pm at both locations with drink and appetizers specials. Jams also offers a Saturday farmers market brunch from 9 am until 2 pm at the Old Market location and Sunday brunch at both locations from 10 am to 1 pm. Seasonal food menus offer the best their chefs have to offer and pairings with their wine offerings abound. You can't go wrong with either location. Reservations available through Open Table. They can be found on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter, or at jamseats.com.

6 MANTRA BAR & GRILL 6913 Maple St. 402-933-1666



Located in an upscale and urban environment (also known as Benson), Mantra offers up one of the top brunches in Omaha. Along with various versions of eggs Benedict, they also provide a variety of other spectacular brunch dishes including a berry salad, waffles (with sugared pecans, caramel and whipped crème, among other combinations), a prosciutto omelet and a crepe special. The fun doesn't stop there though. Mantra has some of the best brunch drink specials to be found in the area. Bottomless mimosas (classic, along with blood orange and mango versions) and house-infused veggie vodka Bloody Marys are just a few of their specialties. For dog lovers, Mantra also provides an outdoor, dog-friendly patio. Mantra serves brunch from 10 am until 2 pm on Saturdays and on Sundays from 9 am until 2 pm. An all-day menu is served after 2 pm until close on the weekends. During the week, they are open for lunch from Tuesday through Friday from 11 am until 2 pm and dinner is available Monday through Friday from 4:30 pm until close.

7 RAILCAR MODERN AMERICAN KITCHEN 1814 N 144th St. 402-493-4743



Railcar does brunch every Saturday from 9:30 am until 1 pm and on Sunday from 9:30 am until 2 pm. Their menu boasts all made from scratch breakfast and lunch choices made fresh every time. If you're in the mood for something sweet, their homemade lemon ricotta pancakes will hit the spot and are topped with fresh whip cream, raspberries and maple syrup. If something savory is more to your liking, their 'pig three-ways frittata' will hit the spot; house made country sausage, slab bacon, smoked ham and white cheddar all baked with free range eggs and smothered in homemade made country gravy. In the mood for both sweet and savory on the same plate? Go out on a limb and try their 'no hole waffle and fried chicken;' the made from scratch waffle is cooked to perfection and

served with fried chicken, fried free range eggs, bourbon glaze and homemade country gravy right over the top. Another bonus is their unlimited Bloody Marys and mimosas – they're truly delicious. Stop out in your pajamas or Sunday best and see what makes them different.

8 SPEZIA 3125 S 72nd St. 402-391-2950



An atmospheric Italian dining experience, rich with ambiance and romantic charm, Spezia calls you back again and again. Rendezvous with them for a delightful early afternoon brunch buffet offered every Sunday from 11 am to 2 pm with seemingly endless culinary options. Breakfast items including Parmesan prosciutto hash browns, baked quiche, breakfast flatbread or a golden malted mini waffle station fully stocked with warm golden syrup and an array of tasty toppings. Spezia also offers lunch buffet selections like delicious wood fire pot roast, French Acadian chicken pasta or build your own bruschetta, just to name a few. At Spezia, the wait staff takes pride in delivering excellent and professional service. So treat yourself to a service experience with fresh baked muffins, caramel pecan cinnamon rolls, side salad tossed to order, warm bread service and their famous tomato basil soup served right to your table. Don't forget to take advantage of their enticing cocktail specials exclusively offered during Sunday brunch, such as bottomless mimosas and Bloody Marys. At \$20.95 per person, enjoy a tour of our full-service Sunday brunch buffet - perfect for friends and the family.

9 TAXI'S GRILLE & BAR 1822 N 120th St. 402-898-1882



Nestled in a contemporary and casual setting, while still feeling upscale, Taxi's has long provided one of the best brunches in town, and has racked up the awards to prove it. Taxi's focuses on providing sophisticated dining in a relaxed neighborhood environment. With offerings ranging from gourmet signature salads to fine steaks and seafood, Taxi's is designed to accommodate any occasion. Mac Thompson and the late Bill Johnette were among the first to bring Sunday brunch to Omaha. Today, Taxi's continues to honor that tradition with many dishes dating back to the Neon Goose. Along with multiple signature benedicts and omelets, Taxi's offers Omaha's favorite Grand Marnier dipped French toast. Specialty mimosas and Bloody Marys are also available from their bar. Taxi's is open on Saturday from 11 am – 2 pm and 5 pm – close, and on Sundays from 10 am – 2 pm. During the week they are open from Tuesday through Friday 11 am – 2:30 pm and 5 pm – 11 pm.

FOOD & Spirits

8 OF OUR FAVORITE PLACES FOR BRUNCH

1

BAILEY'S BREAKFAST AND LUNCH
1259 S. 120th St.
402-932-5577

2

DARIO'S BRASSERIE
4920 Underwood Ave.
402-933-0799

3

FIRST WATCH
1222 S 71st St.
402-932-5691

4

JAMS MIDTOWN
7814 Dodge St.
402-399-8300

7

144th Street

132nd Street

9

120th Street

Dodge Street

90th Street

Maple Street

4

72nd Street

1

Pacific Street

78th Street

3

8

W. Center Rd

I-80

I-480

5

13th Street

5

JAMS OLD MARKET
1101 Harney St.
402-614-9333

6

MANTRA BAR & GRILL
6913 Maple St.
402-933-1666

7

RAILCAR MODERN AMERICAN KITCHEN
1814 N 144th St.
402-493-4743

8

SPEZIA
3125 S 72nd St.
402-391-2950

9

TAXI'S GRILLE & BAR
1822 N 120th St.
402-898-1882

SALT

AN 88 RESTAURANT

3623 North 129th Street 402.991.9088

What makes an award winning restaurant great?
A GREAT CHEF...JOHN HORVATINOVICH

AWARD YEAR: 2016 • WORLD OF FINE WINE: WORLD'S BEST WINE LISTS AWARD, 1-STAR • OREGON WINE PRESS A-LIST RESTAURANT AWARDS WINNER • TRIP ADVISOR CERTIFICATE OF EXCELLENCE WINNER • OMAHA MAGAZINE BEST OF OMAHA: **BEST PATIO** • PUBLISHER'S PICK, FOOD & SPIRITS MAGAZINE ANNUAL PIZZA REVIEW AWARD YEAR: 2015 • WINE SPECTATOR RESTAURANT WINE LIST AWARDS: AWARD OF EXCELLENCE • OMAHA MAGAZINE BEST OF OMAHA: **BEST NEW RESTAURANT, BEST APPETIZERS, BEST OUTDOOR DINING PATIO** • BEST OF THE BIG O READERS' CHOICE AWARDS: **BEST RESTAURANT WINE SELECTION, BEST RESTAURANT MENU SPECIAL, BEST HAPPY HOUR BAR, BEST NOUVEAU CUISINE** • TRIP ADVISOR CERTIFICATE OF EXCELLENCE WINNER AWARD YEAR: 2014 • WINE SPECTATOR RESTAURANT WINE LIST AWARDS: AWARD OF EXCELLENCE • OMAHA MAGAZINE BEST OF OMAHA: **BEST NEW RESTAURANT** • VNA ART & SOUP EVENT, PEOPLE'S CHOICE: 2ND PLACE • BEST OF THE BIG O, READERS' CHOICE AWARDS: **BEST NOUVEAU CUISINE, BEST MENU SPECIALS, BEST WINE SELECTION, BEST HAPPY HOUR BAR** AWARD YEAR: 2013 • FOOD & SPIRITS MAGAZINE ANNUAL PIZZA REVIEW, PEOPLE'S CHOICE AWARD, 1ST PLACE & JUDGE'S CHOICE AWARD, 1ST PLACE



MON-SAT
11 AM - 10 PM

HAPPY HOUR
MON-SAT
3:00-6:30

www.salt88.com



A MIDSUMMER'S PICNIC with Salt 88

by Eddie Morin

Mostly people enjoy picnics, and I believe Omahans are no exception. This is the thought that woke me up sweating in the night - having a picnic adventure (or many) was inevitable. Where to start though? Oh, oh, I know. I would choose from the few exceptional eateries of Omaha and consume them in the outdoors, like a marauding wild man. A raw look at cuisine is just what this town needs. No more lavish food orgies in the Turkish bath. I needed to take the food to the streets. Or in this case, a public swimming pool.

It was imperative that I chose my first restaurant wisely. After much consideration, I landed on the always incredible **Salt 88**. If you haven't heard a few wild stories about this place, you are a real nerd. I called up **John Horvatinovich**, the owner and resident deity. John was more than on board with my vision. In fact he demanded that I head over there that day so he could get this show on the road.

"A raw look at cuisine is just what this town needs. No more lavish food orgies in the Turkish bath. I needed to take the food to the streets. Or in this case, a public swimming pool."

There was only one necessary task I needed to accomplish before embarking. I needed some super-cool buddies to eat with. First, I chose myself because no one else is as funny or good. After that had been established, the next human I chose was **Dan Crane**. He's a guy from Omaha who specializes in some type of street art or something. I don't really get it because I'm a big dork, but I guess he's getting pretty popular. But most importantly, he has a car and could pick



up the food and the key players. So Dan swung by and grabbed me and we headed off in the direction of **David Nance**. This silly goose is from Grand Island and Los Angeles (yeah, the California one). We arrived at David's place and snagged him. David is best known for his time in the band Forbidden Tigers. They were a real big in Europe. He is still involved in music, but he's basically just riding out the success from his incredible record sales of Forbidden Tiger albums in Prague. Lastly, the three of us needed to grab one more person, because you know what they say, "Three's a party, but four's a picnic!" After an excruciating ride in Dan's car listening to top 40's music we arrived at Eric's. We honked and waited and waited. It took Eric a really long time to come outside and the three of us immediately regretted including him. You might know Eric as the head chef at **B & G Tasty Foods**. He is jolly and, mostly, people like him and a few hate his guts. But, for the most part, he's pretty good and he has a keen food tasting mouth. Eric was my secret weapon. If I didn't know what was going on with some of the recipes we would be encountering, surely he could figure them out. Okay, the team was now assembled and we headed toward Salt.

Salt is out on 129th and Maple right by the golf course holes. Upon entering, we were nicely greeted by the hostess and directed to John himself. This was my first time meeting John and I didn't know what to expect. He could be terrifying! I stole my nerves and stepped forward. John wasn't terrifying at all! He was friendly and inviting and didn't even scare me once. If you want to meet John yourself, I highly suggest it. While John was talking to me, I did have a hard time concentrating on what he was saying because the interior of Salt was beautiful! I asked John if he designed everything himself and he said he did. Salt is his vision and he has fine-tuned it to perfection. I also met John's wife and I bet she did a lot too. I don't want to get anybody in trouble!

John invited our rag tag team of picnic misfits to explore the restaurant and explore we did. Dan even went behind the bar and said, "Look at me, I'm a bartender, haha." Boy did we chuckle. Salt has this super awesome patio with chairs that look like they are made out of special 2001 Space Odyssey plastic, but way cooler. I bet Stanley Kubrick is jealous. The patio was shaded nicely and looked like it could be a real oasis to those trying to escape the heat, but still experience the thrill of the outdoors. The interior seats were similar to the outdoor ones, which I thought was a good move. Good Move, John. I sat down at this point and John had some drinks brought over, but I want to finish talking about the

setting first, so I will. The bathrooms (or at least the men’s room, I didn’t go in the ladies room) we spectacular and huge. The tile work was immaculate and the lighting was real classy. I just wanted to stay in there all day. I didn’t though. I went back to the bar where my buddies were sitting because I’m trying to be more social lately. Dan is reading this over my shoulder and he keeps yelling at me to mention all the cool lights popping up all over the place. He’s right though, the lighting was tucked away and peeking out here and there and I really dug it. I bet this place is really something special at night. Okay, that’s enough about the interior. Writing about this stuff definitely isn’t my strong point. If you don’t like how Salt looks inside you’ll have some serious explaining to do.

“...awesome patio with chairs that look like they are made out of special 2001 Space Odyssey plastic, but way cooler. I bet Stanley Kubrick is jealous...Good Move, John.”



On to the drinks! I didn’t even know we were getting drinks! John had his mixologist whip some stuff up for us while he prepared our food. The first beverage was the Water Hazard. This is the drink Eric won’t shut up about. He was blown away. As soon as he saw its striking blue color, he said, “That one is for me.” Eventually we all were able to sample the Water Hazard and for once, Eric was right. It is made with coconut vodka, pineapple juice, soda pop and curacao. I could drink these all day. Yummy, yummy, yum. The next drink was the Make It Rain. This drink is organic cucumber and lime vodka, sour, mint and freshly sliced cucumber. Here are some quotes we had about this one, Eddie – “I don’t even like cucumber but this is an absolute treat.” David – “Tastes like rain!” (David is wrong, but the drink is still great). Anyway, it was really refreshing and if you need to cool down while getting tipsy, this one is for you. The third drink was the Juicy Orange. Oh, I forgot, the first two drinks were in mason jars. That’s cool. This one was in a martini glass. The Juicy Orange is made with orange vodka and fresh lemon and orange juice. I swear to God, it tasted like vodka and Tang. That is a huge compliment from me. I freaking love Tang. The fourth and final drink was the Ginger Drop. This baby is vodka, ginger, lemon juice, mint and candied ginger. It had a sugary rim to tempt your tongue. Dan fell in love with this one. As soon as he got his hands on it, none of us got it back. So I’m going to quote Dan on how this tasted. Dan, how did it taste? Dan – “Right now? Yeah? Okay, it surprised me because I don’t really like ginger. I am now questioning all sorts of life decisions I’ve made. I don’t even know who I am anymore.” That is one hell of a cocktail.

At this point, John had all the food ready for us. He had it all boxed up nicely and labeled. What a great guy. We chit chatted for a few minutes then loaded up the car and headed to the pool. It was



super-hot outside so the pool was packed full of teens and children splashing and shouting. It was perfect. Don’t forget, reader, that this article is picnic themed! I highly suggest eating your meal at Salt, but if you must, a swimming pool is the next best location. We took the last table with some shade, which was in the baby pool section even though none of us are even babies. John gave us so much food that we could hardly fit it all on the table. Let’s dive right in (haha, a swimming pool joke).

The first of the appetizers we partook in was a goat cheese Rangoon. Everyone is familiar with the crab Rangoon at Chinese restaurants but these are definitely not your common fare. These Rangoon may look normal but the sweetness of the goat cheese along with the acidity of the sun dried tomatoes and red sauce really put these in a league of their own. We all tried them and decided that these were not only meant to be enjoyed in the shade poolside, they needed to explore the wonders of pool life along with us. Dan decided that these would be a perfect snack to take along on his journey off the diving board. Dan patiently waited in the line of children 1/5th his age, Rangoon in hand. He quickly ate the Rangoon prior to splashing into the comforting waters. If this appetizer were to have emotions, I would say that it was equally as stoked as Dan.

The next appetizer did not get to go on any fun adventures because it was gone before anyone had time to concoct a plan. The Salt charcuterie board was a treat even with the soaring temperature of the mid-June day. The salty meats combined with the acidity from briny olives and peppers was just too much for David to resist. He said, “If there is one thing I know that I can’t live without on these hundred degree days, it’s meats and mustard.” David isn’t a very interesting dude, but the truth is the spicy mustard that came with our charcuterie plate does match his personality well. Not too spicy to be a bad boy but just enough heat to get you excited. You could ask his wife if you don’t believe me.

All the boys couldn’t seem to get enough of the Parmesan edamame. They are just so pleasant to bust open and chug the little beans down your gullet. These did not go very quickly as we were using them as a bit of a break between our bigger portions. If I could compare edamame at the pool to a well know American tradition, I would say they are similar to peanuts at a baseball game. Not something to scarf down, something to enjoy throughout the duration of your stay. I know you may think, “I am at the pool. I want Bomb Pops and soda.” You just listen to me – next time you are headed to the pool stop at Salt on your way and grab some edamame. Folks may look at you weird but you know the truth.

Continuing with the lighter fare, the next menu item we dug into was the Mediterranean salad. This was a pleasure for us to partake



in before getting into our pizza and entrees. A bed of romaine with kalamata olives, tomatoes and feta all topped with herbed chicken. This reminded all of us of the wonderful seaside picnics we had on the beaches of Greece (we actually never took a joint trip to Greece but this salad was enough to make us pretend that we had, even if only for a fleeting moment.) David was so drawn back to the “Grecian beaches” that he had to go lie in the shallow waters of the kiddie pool to enjoy his final bites of this salad. Lying on his stomach in mere inches of water he cherished his last bites, the waves of joy lapping over him.



The time of reckoning was now upon us, and by reckoning I mean pizza. PIZZA TIME! Now we aren’t just sitting poolside eating some greasy pepperoni wheel; we had the Salt pizza of the week by our side. This is a bummer for all of you readers because by the time this is printed it will be a different week and there will be a different pizza, sorry guys and gals. It will all be okay though, I promise. The chicken and Marsala spiked mushrooms made this pizza plenty enjoyable for all four of us. I decided that though thoroughly exciting, this pizza needed a little bit of fun in its life. Slice in hand I casually sauntered over to the water slide. I ascended the stairs, took a bite and let the slice take me away. Did I say slice? Sorry I meant slide. I walked away from this refreshing experience realizing that this pizza is great and life isn’t worth living if you can’t have a slice on the slide.

Fun and games aside we had to get to the heavy hitters, the entrees. The first entree John had selected for us was the plank-fired Scottish salmon. I have had fish cooked on plank before but this was a very different experience as it was to-go. Much to all of our surprise and excitement, we opened our box to find the mesquite plank in our to-go container! The fish came with a tomato basil sauce with a sweetness and acidity that paired wonderfully with the smoky, salty and fatty elements of the salmon. Eating fish poolside while children around you are stuffing their faces with nachos is an odd experience. I love stuffing my face and nachos are great, don’t get me wrong. The joke was on the children, however. Their nachos were pathetic compared to Salt’s salmon.

The next and final entree was salmon’s smaller cousin, the rainbow trout. This one was really exciting! We looked at our to-go box and it read, “When in doubt go with trout.” This was a good sign. All of us agreed that this was maybe our favorite item we consumed all day. With a citrus buerre blanc and a hazelnut



breadding that complimented the slightly more mild fish very well. We would swarm the table grabbing edamame or random bites of pizza but it always seemed you had to wait in line to get back to have more trout. I guess they knew what they were doing at Salt when they labeled that box. Grab some trout, it’s great. I may be wrong, but as I was eating the rainbow trout, I thought I glimpsed an actual rainbow on the horizon. By this point in time we had all had our fill, but there was one last treat...

Cotton candy. This was a last minute surprise as we were leaving the restaurant. Lightly tossed upon the top of the bag we all waited patiently until the end of our meal to dig in to the light, sugary fluff. Eric wasn’t in a very sharing mood and took a whole bundle for himself and rushed off to his poolside lounge to enjoy his cotton candy in the serenity of the mid-afternoon day.

Well, the boys and I had a blast. I can’t believe how successful our Salt picnic at the pool was. John is such a nice guy, too. It is very evident how much effort he has put into every aspect of Salt. The restaurant itself is beautiful and the food is not only delicious, but also visually appealing. I, for one, would not blame you in the least for trying to recreate our adventure. Whether you eat at the actual restaurant, or you take it to-go, you will have a wonderful experience with Salt.



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THE SUPPER CLUB

Mexique, Chicago

story and photography by Angela Nichols

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. The article and photography for this article are also done by students.

This quarter's supper club was in the windy city of Chicago where we spent 4 days attending the 2016 National Restaurant Association Tradeshaw. Since one of our students, **Danny Flores**, was working as an intern at **Mexique**, we decided to have our supper club there. Mexique is a 1 Michelin star Mexican restaurant helmed by chef **Carlos Gaytan** located at 1529 W. Chicago Avenue, a picturesque street lined with quaint brick buildings, shops and churches.

"Chef Gaytan won his first Michelin star in November of 2012. I was excited to experience this unique cuisine for myself."

Chef Gaytan has a familiar story of dishwasher turned chef through hard work and perseverance. As a child he would hunt wild game and iguana with his father, and cook it with his mother from whom he gained his love of food and serving others. He opened Mexique in 2008 to share his style of Mexican food in a modern way with the world. He applies the French techniques he learned from his mentors to his Mexican roots. When Mexique opened its doors, the majority of the equipment was donated. Chairs had holes, the dishes and silverware were mismatched and lighting was minimal. Mexique was very close to shutting down when, out of the blue, Chef Gaytan won his first Michelin star in November of 2012. I was excited to experience this unique cuisine for myself.

As I stepped into small shotgun style building, the high ceilings gave the space an open feel while the large front windows made it bright. I could feel the excitement build with light and airy chatter that echoed the modern, minimalist environment as we gathered around the bar before being escorted to our tables.

The time came to be seated and start my dining experience. As the server handed out menus, he explained that Mexique offers el primero which translates into the first one (appetizer), as well as platos fuertes, a strong dish or sturdy plate (main course), and a tasting menu. The tasting menu was described as starting out light and fresh and building in flavor and richness. I opted for the



Chef's six course tasting menu and was not disappointed. The food, atmosphere, and service were excellent. As was the ever humble and gracious Chef Gaytan, who took time out of his busy night to take pictures and talk with each of us

The meal started with an appetizer course of ancho chile liver pâté mousse with pineapple chutney, served with a French baguette. The pâté was soft and buttery with a hint of heat and smoke from the ancho chiles. A sweet, slightly tart pineapple compote with a burst of juicy orange sat on top of the luxurious pâté balancing out the richness of the mousse. The simple act of spreading the pâté onto my crisp baguette and topping it with the compote was sublime and a perfect way to start the meal.

First course was a play on a traditional aguachile, a dish typically made with seafood that is submerged in a liquid with fresh vegetables and spices. Chef Gaytan's version was a blue fin tuna ceviche in a passion fruit gelato with fresh serrano chile water, cucumber relish and sugared micro flowers. The blue fin tuna cubes were fresh and plump, perfectly seasoned with serrano chile water that gave the tuna a wonderful bite of heat. Passion fruit gelato imparted a crisp, tart note to the tuna, while the cucumber added a much needed crunchy texture to the dish. A sugared flower topped off the dish like icing on a cake, sweet and very pleasing to the eye. I loved this rich, fresh, crunchy, bright, spicy and tart dish. It was a successful modern take on a traditional Mexican dish.

The second course was a lobster bisque with poached shrimp, red radish and micro cilantro. The bisque was warm with a rich, intense flavor of sweet lobster, fresh fennel and thickened with semolina, which gave it a comforting mouth feel. Thinly shaved red radish perched alongside the perfectly poached shrimp imparted a



bright visual note as well as a spicy crunch. Chopped fresh cilantro and a single micro bloom topped the dish off adding a grassy, herbal note. This dish challenged my view on Mexican food. The classic French techniques paired with Mexican ingredients opened my eyes to what stereotypes there are in cuisines.

"This dish challenged my view on Mexican food. The classic French techniques paired with Mexican ingredients opened my eyes to what stereotypes there are in cuisines."

The third course was a pan seared swordfish with tamal, huitlacoche corn sauce, pickled vegetables, shaved radish and micro greens. My Swordfish was perfectly cooked with a moist, meaty texture and mildly sweet flavor that was brightened with fresh lemon. Chef Gaytan's tamal is a blue corn masa made with over 40 ingredients including annatto which gives the deep corn flavor a light peppery note. Shaved radish partnered with the peppery flavor of the annatto while bringing a crisp, bright addition to the dish. The huitlacoche sauce was rich and earthy, reminiscent of mushrooms. Huitlacoche is a bluish-black fungus that grows directly on the corn kernel and dates back to the Aztecs. It is used in sauces, stews, soups and tamales. The depth of the corn flavor and the airy consistency of the masa paired with the earthy huitlacoche sauce was my favorite part of the dish. It has become one of my favorite food memories.

Our fourth course consisted of braised pork belly with a mole teloloapan, sweet potato puree, slaw, roasted Brussels sprouts with bacon crumble and cocoa nibs. The decadent pork belly was braised for over six hours and topped with a rich, 20-ingredient mole sauce. The sweet potato puree was a smooth and savory base, while the red cabbage and strawberry slaw added a tart component balancing the fatty pork belly. The roasted Brussels sprouts were perfectly cooked and sprinkled with a bacon and cocoa nib crumble that married well with the mole. Mole is a traditional Mexican sauce that varies by region and usually consists of a mixture of chiles, nuts, seeds, spices, vegetables and sometimes includes unsweetened Mexican chocolate, tomatoes and raisins or avocado leaves. I savored every last bite, and begged my server for a few pieces of bread to mop up the last drops of the mole. The deeply spiced, nutty mole paired

with the rich pork belly made for a truly guilty, almost sinful, dining experience.

For the fifth course, a pan seared duck breast, fresh corn tamal and stewed spinach with a red wine reduction was served up. My duck breast was seasoned well, had a crispy skin and a juicy medium rare doneness. The tender corn tamal reminded me of a cornbread stuffing with fresh corn kernels. The stewed spinach gave a slightly bitter, vegetal note to the dish that cut through the richness perfectly. A cranberry red wine reduction with tamarind and ancho chiles added the right amount of tart, sweet, sour and spicy to the entire dish which was reminiscent of a Thanksgiving dinner.

The final course was a rice pudding with white chocolate ice cream and a brown sugar, cocoa powder crumble. The rice was cooked through while maintaining a firm, not soggy, texture inside a cinnamon milk custard. A smooth, rich white chocolate ice cream gave an interesting temperature contrast to the rice pudding and wasn't overly sweet. The decadence came from the brown sugar and cocoa powder crumble that I added to each and every bite. This rice pudding was a comforting way to end the meal.

As my meal was winding down, I was lingering over a digestive of Ancho Reyes, an ancho chile liquor, when Chef Carlos Gaytan joined us at our tables. Taking time out of his busy night, he shared a bit of his story, talking with us about his food, family, heritage and philosophies of being a chef, making this a truly memorable dining experience. His final thought to us before taking a picture with all 16 members of our group was, "We can touch so many lives through our cooking and our food, so we as chefs should take that responsibility seriously and truly serve others."



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AN EXPLORATION OF OMAHA'S EXPANDING
CAJUN, CREOLE AND SOUL FOOD SCENE by Kent Cisar

It was a warm and windy Wednesday morning in Mid-June. My girlfriend Melissa and I were driving down Interstate 77 from Charlotte to Charleston. It was our first visit and we had heard first hand from friends that their food scene is spectacular. We were going over culinary wish lists as we got closer: shrimp, scallops, crab cakes, the freshest fish we could find, biscuits and cornbread. Charleston lived up to our high hopes. From the hushpuppies at Red's Ale House on Shem Creek to the low country paella at the Low Country Bistro in Downtown Charleston and the best biscuits of my life at Callie's Hot Little Biscuit, our appetites were squelched and our flavor palate full of Southern delights. One would think that leaving such a fine food city such as Charleston would leave us longing to make a trip back as quickly as possible. While we'd enjoy the getaway immensely, our tastebuds can take pleasure in the blossoming Southern food scene we have here in the Omaha area year round.

"The Southern, Cajun, and creole food scene is alive and well here on both sides of the Missouri River. Excellent fare exists in almost all corners of the area and several in between."

The most recent entry into this tasty genre is **Simply NOLA**. Simply NOLA opened in May and is located in the **Mall of the Bluffs**. It's the dream come true of **Iris Thomas**, a New Orleans native. Thomas offers a chicken etouffee, shrimp creole, crawfish pasta, a jambalaya and a gumbo as her current menu staples. On Friday and Saturday evenings they create their own version of stuffed peppers that is quite popular. I was fortunate enough to try her crawfish pasta. The crawfish were tasty, the sauce hot and creamy, and the seasoning she adds gives the perfect New Orleans aftertaste. She makes an ooey gooey cake for dessert and even makes two custom drinks: a Roffignac fruit punch and berry infused tea. Their hours are Tuesdays 11-6 and Wednesdays-Saturdays 11-8.

"Our hours and location make it very easy for people to pick up lunches and dinners to go," Thomas explained. Her portion sizes are extremely family friendly and meant to be shared. They can be ordered in a small size or large (which Thomas calls a "Louisiana small").

A highlight of their menu is their homemade seasoning they use. "We make sure our customers can season their food to their flavor and spice tolerance, and it's become so popular we sell it by itself now," says Thomas. Their combination of portion sizing, spice

adjustment, beverages, and proximity to the interstate make it one of the best to-go dinner options of any cuisine type in the area.

Our next stop for Southern food takes us to one of northern most parts of the metro in the **Florence neighborhood** to meet the **Mouth of the South**. It opened in May of 2014 and word spread quickly that a mouthful of Southern flavors awaited diners. **Ryan Ernst**, the owner, grew up eating jambalaya, gumbo and loves everything about the food. "We've kept the menu pretty static due to the consistent popularity of it and because of our regular clientele, for whom I am very appreciative of".

He thinks people come for the food and for the history of the Florence neighborhood. It's easy for anyone to find it as its only six blocks south of Interstate 680. On my visits there, I've always had a terrific meal. The boudin balls are a fantastic starter and their poblano chicken has become a restaurant favorite. Their po' boys and onion rings make a satisfying plate. I've loved sweet tea for 20 years, and they fill my glass with the best sweet tea I've had in the last few years anywhere in the country.

Cajun food can also come to you if you follow the **Taste of New Orleans Food Truck** on Facebook. Taste of New Orleans' kitchen is small but their Cajun choices are vast every day. Their po' boys come in array of carnivorous treats including: shrimp, catfish, chicken, steak, even pork. They have fried pickles and okra as starters too. **Lee Franklin** works in the truck on a daily basis and stressed the importance of cooking their catfish and seafood perfectly. They combine it with their homemade sauces to give customers the best taste and texture possible. The truck is evolving to meet the growing needs of their client base.

"Our rice bowls with creole steak and creole chicken are more popular than ever," said Franklin. "We're starting to roll out a menu with more healthy choices without sacrificing any of the flavors people love." Through their Facebook page and word of mouth, they've learned how to prepare enough food to meet demand at each stop.

Big Mama's Kitchen has a menu full of food that brings happiness to your mouth, satisfaction to your stomach and comfort to your soul. They are located on **North 45th Street between Bedford and Wirt Streets**. Big Mama's specialty is their fried chicken. Marinated with buttermilk and seasoned with her own special rub, it's the best of Southern fried chicken right here in the heart of Omaha. The tasty bird can be accompanied by macaroni and cheese, fried okra, collard greens or other Southern delights. Do save room for her signature sweet potato pie. It's baked fresh daily and is the perfect way to top off your Southern staycation.

Lolo's Chicken and Waffles originated in Arizona and **Cutthall Management** opened their first location in Omaha near 72nd

and Military last fall. As their namesake states, they serve any combination of the chicken you can eat along with their homemade waffles. A quick look at the rest of their menu and you'll find generous portions of other Southern staples such as grits, mac n' cheese, catfish, fried green tomatoes, cornbread and more.

A downtown Cajun connoisseur can find Southern shelter at **Jazz, a Louisiana Kitchen** at 1421 Farnam Street. Jazz has an assortment of po' boys. You can choose from Cajun, fried or blackened seafood choices, including an alligator entrée. Diners can dive into sautéed shrimp, scallops, chicken, or crawfish pastas as well.



Jazz, a Louisiana Kitchen - Crawfish Pasta

The metro also has several establishments where Southern, Cajun/creole cuisine may not be the central focus, but have dishes offer worthy representations of it. **Plank Seafood** and **Provisions** at 12th and Howard has excellent Cajun and creole food within their menu. Their fried alligator is one of my favorite appetizers in the city. Their po' boys are diverse and flavorful. Plank has a spicy yet satisfying Andouille sandwich not found often here. A visit to a Shucks Fish house will reward you with a shrimp po' boy that's so big it's best to eat it with a fork. You can also find jambalaya, gumbo, Cajun catfish and a Deep South risotto that has fresh shrimp and Andouille sausage. My first experience with chicken and waffles came from **Wheatfields** on 105th and Pacific. Their deep

dish Belgian waffle, crispy chicken tenders and maple syrup make it hard for me to try anything else on their expansive menu! **Voodoo Taco** may be known for their tasty tacos, but it's hard for me to pass up their beignets every time I spend an evening in **Aksarben**. They are hot and crispy on the outside and doughy on the inside. The beignets are served with a choice of chocolate sauce, strawberry sauce or both.

"If you're a catfish, oyster, Andouille, shrimp or alligator enthusiast we have it here. If you seek po'boys, jambalaya, etoufee, or gumbo we have it."

The Southern, Cajun, and creole food scene is alive and well here on both sides of the Missouri River. Excellent fare exists in almost all corners of the area and several in between. It's easy to find a dish to meet your palate's preference. If you're a catfish, oyster, Andouille, shrimp or alligator enthusiast we have it here. If you seek po'boys, jambalaya, etoufee, or gumbo we have it. Do not let your thirst go unattended and choose a sweet tea, fruit punch, hurricane or other creative cocktail. Somehow if an appetite still exists then chase it with an ooey gooey cake, sweet potato pie or beignet. The quality and diversity of this cuisine in our area may come as a surprise. The good news for diners is business is bustling for our eateries so our opportunities to eat and share sublime Southern cuisine is only getting better!

Web and Contact Information

Simply Nola: Search Simply NOLA on Facebook

Mouth of the South: Facebook.com/mouthofthesoutherngrub

Taste of New Orleans: search Taste of New Orleans Food Truck Omaha on Facebook

Lolo's Chicken and Waffles: www.loloschickenandwaffles.com

Big Mama's Kitchen: www.bigmamaskitchen.com

Jazz, A Louisiana Kitchen: www.omaha.jazzkitchen.com

Plank Seafood and Provisions: www.plankseafood.com

Shuck's Fish House: www.absolutelyfresh.com

Wheatfield's: www.wheatfieldscatering.com

Voodoo Taco: www.voodootaco.com

SUMMERTIME GOODNESS

by Charles Schlusell, photo by Jacob Herrman

Another season is upon us and with it comes the sunny and sweltering hot days of summer. What better way to refresh and recharge than a quiet warm evening on the patio sipping chilled white wine or maybe a deliciously decadent iced craft cocktail you've found while perusing the pages of *Food & Spirits Magazine*?

After you've quenched your thirst, a bowl of chilled gazpacho is the perfect foil to the muggy blistery heat of the day. The bright fresh flavors of tomatoes are accentuated by crisp bites of cucumber, bell peppers, sweet Vidalia onions and, in my version, bursts of flavor from several fresh herbs and a spike of acidity from both the classic sherry vinegar and the citrusy notes of fresh key lime juice, and finally a little hit of spice from some Serrano peppers.

This season brings us the bounty of our local farmers, and especially the coveted few months a year when we can taste sunlight captured and encapsulated in those brilliant red orbs of tomatoey goodness. Sure, we can get tomatoes year round, but now my friends is the only time that they whisper to you from the vendors stalls at the farmers markets begging to be taken home and turned into a myriad of delectable dishes. The home grown tomato has a taste that has no comparison to their crunchy and/or alternately mushy flavorless distant cousins found in your local supermarket. Now is the time to take advantage of the fleeting arrival of this short-lived wonder and create some freshly delicious dishes to share with your family and friends.

One of my favorite ways to showcase the flavor of the summer tomato is a soup I've made for years. Gazpacho has history that many believe dates back to Roman times and, in more recent

"This season brings us the bounty of our local farmers, and especially the coveted few months a year when we can taste sunlight captured and encapsulated in those brilliant red orbs of tomatoey goodness."

centuries, the Andalusian region of Spain. It traditionally starts with a base of tomatoes, garlic, vinegar and usually a combination of diced cucumbers, bell peppers and onions. Most of the original versions used stale bread as thickener, while many of the modern versions opt for no bread or adding the bread in the form of croutons as a topping.

I've experimented with my recipe for gazpacho over the years and it is always a hit with friends and family. I've tried many variations and have found that although many recipes call for using the blender to liquefy some or most of the veggies, I am not a fan of the resulting light pink concoction. I much prefer hand cutting all the vegetables to highlight their individual flavors and textures. Using a food processor to chop the vegetables is acceptable but will result in a much different, slightly muddled flavor profile.

I also veer from many standard recipes in that although I peel the tomatoes, I leave them unseeded. Recent taste studies have found that much of the flavor of the tomato is contained within seeds and



Gazpacho
Serves 8

INGREDIENTS

8 cups tomatoes, peeled and chopped

2 cups chopped, peeled and seeded cucumber

1 cup chopped green bell pepper

1 cup chopped yellow bell pepper

1 1/2 cups finely chopped sweet Vidalia onions

2 cloves of garlic finely minced or more traditionally ground to a paste in a mortar and pestle

1 Serrano pepper finely minced, seeds and ribs removed

4 tsp sherry vinegar

4 tsp fresh key lime juice (or you may substitute 2 tsp fresh lime juice and 2 tsp fresh orange juice)

2 tbsp each chopped fresh Italian parsley, cilantro, basil and chives

Salt and fresh ground black pepper

Extra virgin olive oil

Croutons

Croutons are easily made by sautéing fresh bread cubes in butter and olive oil over medium heat until lightly browned and crispy.

DIRECTIONS

Mix all ingredients together in a large bowl. Add water as needed to thin to desired consistency and season to taste with salt and fresh cracked black pepper. Refrigerate for at least 2-3 hours to allow soup to chill and flavors to marry. Stir soup and taste for any final addition of extra salt as needed.

Place extra virgin olive oil, homemade croutons, extra vegetables and herbs on the table in separate bowls for guests to garnish as they wish.

gel. By seeding the tomatoes we were actually discarding the most intense flavor components of the tomato. Although I was trained in culinary school to make a classic tomato concasse' (peeled chopped and seeded tomatoes), I am fine with a more rustic looking soup, as opposed to a less tastier but prettier version. I like to serve the soup sprinkled with homemade croutons and a drizzle of good extra virgin olive oil. You may also like to chop extra cucumbers, bell peppers and herbs and place them on the table for guests to add as they like. Although I usually serve it in bowls as a soup, it makes for a wonderful summertime appetizer served up in a stemless wine glass or small shot glasses.

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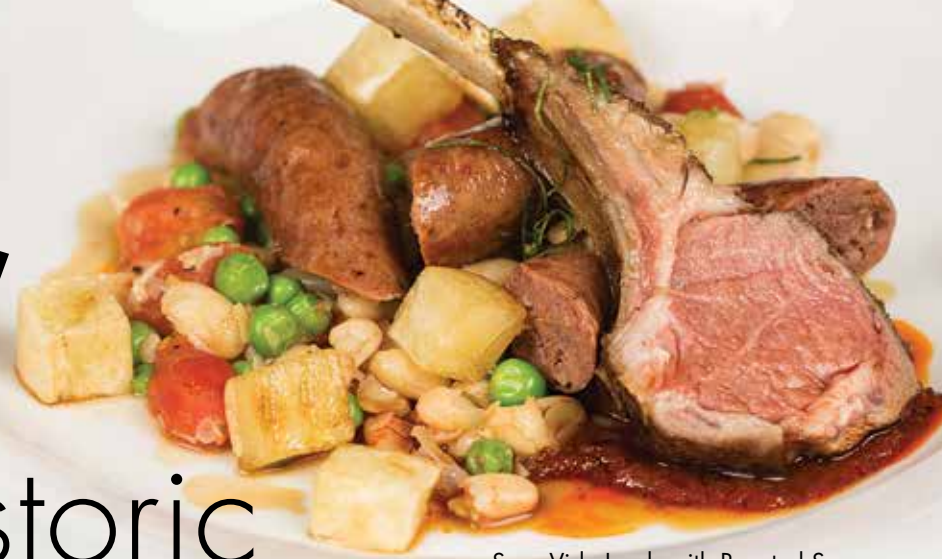
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Sous Vide, Not Paleo but Prehistoric

by Ann Summers



Sous Vide Lamb with Roasted Sausage
photo by diTendenza

Sous-vide, or just unhyphenated sous vide cooking is cooking under vacuum. Say, “soo-veed.” Don’t pronounce the terminal S or the final E and you’ll be square with any waiter. Rhyme the first word with grouse and say, “souse viday” and you’re likely to get some sort of pig entrails in a bedpan. It’s true, only the French could conceive pronunciation so fickle, but truth be told, they didn’t invent the thing at all.

That honor goes to 18th century globe-trotter Benjamin Thompson, a Yankee born and bred to middle class parents who charmed a rich widow into marriage. He joined up with the loyalists, fought against the American Revolutionary forces, then abandoned his rich Massachusetts wife and fled to Britain where rat-finking against your soon-to-be-country paid well, and rose in the military ranks. Then he was off to Bavaria, where he reorganized their army: its structure, diet and wardrobe, invented the double boiler and did heat experiments, invented a fireplace, published a lot of rubbish papers, designed gardens, married Courvoisier’s

“The idea of sous vide was turned into a commercial cooking method by French and American engineers in the 1950’s — maybe what was good enough for the Bavarian Army was good enough for industrial kitchens”

widow, was knighted by King George III (the crazy one,) and became Count Rumford of the Holy Roman Empire. Rat-finking apparently forgotten, he then endowed a professorship at Harvard and a medal at the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

(Count Rumford. Wikipedia. Retr. June 2, 2016 from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Benjamin_Thompson) Weird. But he did some calculations on heat transfer that, although less accurate, predated and anticipated Joule’s work.

One night he sort of left a “wonderful shoulder of mutton” in some sort of box or “machine” all night (maybe the sort of thing one roasts a Cuban pork roast in, he doesn’t specify) and in the morning, “It was perfectly tender but though it was so much done it did not appear to be in the least sodden or insipid on the contrary it was uncommonly savoury and high flavoured. It was neither boiled nor roasted nor baked Its taste seemed to indicate the manner in which it had been prepared that the gentle heat to which it had for so long a time been exposed had by degrees loosened the cohesion of its fibres and concocted its juices without driving off their fine and more volatile parts....” (Complete Works, Vol.4, 1876)

The idea of sous vide was turned into a commercial cooking method by French and American engineers in the 1950’s — maybe what was good enough for the Bavarian Army was good enough for industrial kitchens — and voila! Airline food was born, and no one has managed to kill it yet. And then in the 1960’s, some French guys (Pralus. La Cuisine Sous Vide. 1985) at a little restaurant called Troisgros figured out that vacuum sealing and poaching foie gras was superb, and voila! A not-so-new technology was born and migrated onto the Food Channel.

You can’t buy a sous vide; it is a method of cooking that involves sealing food (shrimp, beef, veggies, pickling spices and cauliflower) in heavy duty plastic bags and sucking the air out with a vacuum sealer, then immersing said bags into a container of water that is held at a constant low temperature (111-140°) by a hefty space-age

heat-generating stick called an immersion circulator that looks like something you’d use to take a rhino’s temperature. This device has numbers and blinking lights and it circulates the water like a teeny trolling motor and keeps whatever you are cooking at a steady temperature for as long as it’s on.

With sous vide, you set the temperature for the temp you want at the end, and it stays there. So you can hold your perfectly rare steak at that temp and it won’t get any less rare. Your moist tender shrimp or your braised beets won’t come out hammered if you forget them, and you can flip anything out last minute and shove

“When Iron Chef Japan reintroduced this thing to the world, you had to be an iron chef to afford the circulator and the vacuum sealer because they were like the first car phones: ginormous, rare and very spendy.”

it under the broiler, flash sear it in a pan or grill, or torch it till it browns and sizzles. Now you can see why a restaurant (or an airline kitchen, or someone in a 5th-floor walkup with no stove) might find this process really useful. You can even make hollandaise sauce in these things and it won’t burn or curdle. You can witness this and other sous vide miracles at the cooking blog, Chef Steps, at www.ChefSteps.com. They will also be putting out a new immersion circulator called “Joule,” which I think sounds better than “Rumfeld.”

Now sous vide is used in a great many restaurant kitchens, but as chef/owner at Salt 88, John Horvatinovich says, “back in the day, it was unusual technology and only high-end kitchens could afford them. Now, it’s another tool in the box.” And it goes for the same in home kitchens. When Iron Chef Japan reintroduced this thing to the world, you had to be an iron chef to afford the circulator and the vacuum sealer because they were like the first car phones: ginormous, rare and very spendy. Now, the price has come down considerably. You can get bags, a sealer, and a circulator (the thermometer thingy) and get yourself a pot or plastic tub or small cooler and sous vide anything within reach.

Fun, huh? But why would anyone do that?

Because sous vide cooking is magic. It employs a wet method of cooking and one of the most powerful weapons known to cookery: convection. When you put food in a skillet, it has to touch the skillet which has to touch the heat source, but it only cooks where the pan conducts the heat. We all know convection as the steroid-enhanced big brother of ovens, cooking faster, and often better than the indirect heat of a regular oven. The convection oven has a fan that keeps the air circulating and increases convection or heat transfer (recall Count Whatshisface.) And with kicked up insulation, works very well. Water, however, blows air out of the kitchen.

If your water is hotter than your food, it transfers heat so much better than air to the whole mass of whatever you’re cooking because it’s denser. And moving water transfers even more heat. But it goes both ways. Hypothermia cases almost always take place in water because mere exposure to the elements isn’t usually enough to rob your entire body of heat. But put that same person in cold running water and they will go into shock and die before you can preheat your oven. That’s why frozen food in plastic thaws quickest in running water (see Alton Brown’s How to Thaw a Frozen Turkey.) Hence convection, hence the circulation. And vacuum sealing means there’s no air to insulate the food, which is slightly under pressure which can speed things up even more.



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Final bonus: you don't have to babysit it. In fact, you can't.

You plop your flavor packets in the water, close the lid (at home, we use a cheap cooler with a hole drilled in the lid for the circulator) and no peeking! Leave it alone, for hours if you like, and go take a nap while nothing gets overcooked. New technology can work for you, only it isn't really new. We've been doing it since we started cooking.

The real history of sous vide, I would argue, is the history of man. Let's skip the 1700's and skip back to two million years ago, about the time Homo habilis met a slightly more uptown form of hominid: Homo erectus. Habilines may have been hairy, but they were upright, and they cranked out stone tools like we do iPads. In terms of fine cuisine, they knew all about hacking up carcass bones to get the marrow, something highly thought of in charcuterie. But alas, as far as we know, hacking was the limit of their kitchen prep. Recently in the journal, Nature, evolutionary biologists Katherine D. Zink and Daniel E. Lieberman,

(March 2016, p. 16990) said that our stone tools helped us cut up stuff, which allowed less chewing, which gave us more energy, which fueled the big jump in brain size and body shape that we see in H. erectus who was as like us as you can get without being us.

As tantalizing as it is to think that mashing up our food made our brains big, I doubt it. After all, babies eat nothing but mush, and you've never seen them even start a crossword. For those who have never read The Far Side comics, that baby thing was a joke. Evolution doesn't work like that.

My bet is snugged in the same pocket as that of Richard Wrangham, an imminent biological anthropologist and primatologist with a résumé longer than human evolution. Wrangham says that stuff about mashing is twaddle. It wasn't tools, mashing, hunting, or running around that jacked up our brains. It was fire. Michael Pollan's recent book and documentary series Cooked seems to come down on the fire-side, and I am right there, roasting my prehistoric wieners.

Wrangham explained at length in his incredible book, Catching Fire, How Cooking Made Us Human (2010) that every single society known to man, no matter how specialized, uncivilized, or grubby, cooks its food. He blows up some myths about tribes who eat raw food, saying that raw is preferred only in certain cases where the food is easily digestible (like with seal blubber) or already really soft (never you mind what) but that overall, the taste of cooked food is always preferred.

And why do we like our food cooked? As Wrangham says, it provides us with more available calories, and more energy, because, in a sense, cooking is pre-digestion. We have less chewing, waste less energy digesting, and end up with food that doesn't spoil nearly as rapidly. Many nonhuman species even prefer cooked food. And everyone agrees, except for those raw food people who, like good

vegans, can only survive on their special diet because it is highly processed, not yanked from the ground, highly domesticated, not sour and tiny or lean and stringy, and readily available in natural food marts not gathered after a nine hour sojourn in the bush. We cook, therefore we are, human. And we have been doing it forever. How do I know this? Because people and their ancestors are really freaking smart and we didn't have immersion circulators and microwaves so we had to figure stuff out. Don't believe me?

Neanderthals, nobody's dumb cousins, (Nova, 2012) mined bitumen and dry-distilled birch resin, not just over a fire, but in an oxygen-reducing oven (like is used to make charcoal) to make

“Better than braising or boiling or poaching because the food is surrounded and in constant contact with whatever you put inside the bag: poaching liquid, pesto, herbs and spices, natural juices...”

superglue that surpasses modern standards over 200,000 years ago. And they glued on their spear points and went off and killed mammoths. What? You think they just tripped over the birch bark? Accidentally murdered a whole mammoth with crazy technology? That manipulation of fire and chemistry shows some sophisticated chops right there. So you know we've been using fire for millions of years.

One of the most ancient one-pot dishes is haggis, and it dates way before the Romans; no one knows how old. Stuff some tough meat and whatever else in a sheep's stomach and immerse in a pit of water heated with hot rocks. And what would you do if you had



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some meat and a carcass (with entrails!) and no cooking vessels? You could use a stick to create a rotisserie, but that takes time and you end up with the burnt marshmallow equivalent of game meat. Good luck chewing it. Or, you could wrap it up in something, palm leaves, banana leaves, grape leaves, all good, but what if you didn't have large-leaved plants or it was winter? What about those entrails? Could work.

But we didn't have to figure mutton out from scratch because we'd already learned how to cook stuff that couldn't run away. Oldest domesticated animal on the planet? Snails. They don't run, and they come in their own handy casserole shell—fire pit to table. And scientists like Wrangham say we did this really early on in our evolution. But there is one small problem.

There is no evidence in the archaeological record for cooking with fire as far back as the one to two million year (erectus) range. And even though most believe there must be evidence somewhere, a fire and some buried bits of food don't preserve very well. Still, there are many food historians like Pollan, who think that fire + food = big brain. It only means that we haven't found the evidence, not that we won't. Then again, most of it might just be under water.

Which takes us back to sous vide. Water is what we are talking about here. Water + fire + food. You think that sounds like grandma's stove? Think again. Cooking stuff wrapped up for maximum convection is so ancient we had time to lose it and re-find it and make a big deal out of it. So I groan when paleo-people scientists say, “Wow, early people were way more sophisticated than we thought.” No. We were smart. We figured out how to chop, dice, puree, and sous vide quite nicely. Because there was food and fire everywhere, and we were really hungry.

Hefty evidence of hominid migration shows that H. erectus moved out of Africa and just toodled along the coast from one freshwater inlet to the next. We must have been renewing our love of things in shells. Why not? We were great at finding food, and where better to find heaps of it than coastal waters. You got mussels, clams, oysters, and all manner of little scurrying tidal creatures. Make a fire pit, if you have anything without a shell, say a wild pig wanders down for a drink, you wrap it in seaweed or leaves, fire it and leave it. Gives you plenty of time to invent surfing. And when you're tired of that spot, toodle up the coast again 'til you find another inlet and hang there.

People say it's eggs, but evolutionarily speaking, shellfish is nature's perfect food. It's the only food you can eat exclusively and get enough fat in your diet to feed your hungry brain. And it's the only thing that contains the exact right balance of essential vitamins, minerals and amino acids to live on. Need fiber? Have a go at that seaweed. And that's how people populated the world. Cruising up the coast, clamming, chilling and chowing. And this leaves a lot of what is probably the earliest evidence of cooking

under water. Sea levels have fallen and risen (we had coast before, now not so much) and so the next really big wave of archaeologists is going to come dressed in scuba gear. In fact, it has already begun. The earliest evidence of human cooking will be found, betcha, right where the former coast was, where some wandering families dug a fire pit and made a lovo.

If you ever get to Fiji, you must try the lovo dishes: protein or root vegetables wrapped in banana leaves, and immersed in a pit oven full of charcoal, hot rocks and slowly cooking food, all pressed together and covered over for maximum convection. This sort of thing is done all over the world in indigenous societies, at Luaos in Hawaii, and we have the exact same oven used to cook mammoth bits at a site dating from 200,000 years ago. But ten will get you twenty there are some that are a lot older.

Convection, slow-cooking, preserving. We lost this very elemental

“If you ever get to Fiji, you must try the lovo dishes: protein or root vegetables wrapped in banana leaves, and immersed in a pit oven full of charcoal...”

art, stumbled over it on the way to the pantry, and then ran around the kitchen acting like we'd discovered something really new. As Kevin Newlin, Kroc Banquet and Community Center's executive chef, told me, “Sous vide began as this very French, very trendy, high-end thing. As a young chef, it was intriguing to me because it was so different.” As a former instructor of garde manger (it means “food keeper”) at the Institute for the Culinary Arts at Metro Community College, he taught students the art of preserving, curing, pickling and cheese-making. Sous vide, he says, is wonderful for pickles and is also a killer way to process meats for curing. Kevin added, “Now sous vide is on menus everywhere and it's about refining technique and adapting it to fit your style. It makes you more versatile as a chef.”

And he proved his versatility recently at a fête/pop-up with Block 16, Gray Plume and chef Bryce Coulton called “Charcuterie Partuterie” where he helped cover a whole 24-foot table with gorgeous dainties showcasing local Nebraska ingredients. His contribution: duck pâté en croûte around a smoked tenderloin with aspic with pistachio jam. At least I think that's what he said, I was too busy crying that I couldn't go eat it that weekend. Kevin's take on sous vide for pâté? “There's nothing better, it's absolutely perfect.”

Now that immersion circulators and vacuum sealers are essential in the restaurant and well-heeled home kitchen, the pretentious-sounding name, sous vide, just rolls off the tongue like candied bacon ice cream, which, by the way, you can make sous vide.



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OMAHA'S 8TH ANNUAL PIZZA REVIEW

photography by Lisa Dirks

Food & Spirits Magazine hosted the 8th Annual Omaha Pizza Review at The Waiting Room Lounge and Reverb Lounge on June 7th at 6:30 pm. Musicians John Finocchiaro and Sarah Benck Tardy performed.

Those attending voted for their top three pizzas and judging was conducted by Food & Spirits Magazine's panel of judges.

PEOPLE'S VOTE

- 1 - Villagio Pizzeria Omaha Nebraska
- 2 - Johnny Riccos Brooklyn Pizza
- 3 - The Pizza Pie Guys
- 4 - Dudley's Pizza & Tavern
- 5 - Official LaCasa Pizzeria Fan Page
- 6 - Pizza Shoppe Collective
- 7 (tie) - Varsity Sports Cafe & Roman Coin Pizza - Dundee
- 7 (tie) - Orsi's Italian Bakery

JUDGE'S VOTE

- 1 - La Casa
- 2 - Johnny Ricco's
- 3 - Prairie Fire Pizza
- 4 - Mama's Pizza Omaha
- 5 - Villagio
- 6 - Pizza Shoppe
- 7 (tie) - Red's Savoy Pizza & Sports Pub, Omaha
- 7 (tie) - The Official Sam & Louie's

PUBLISHER'S PICK

Salt 88

MISC. CATEGORY WINNERS

Best Omaha Throwback - Prairie Fire Pizza
Best No Show - Godfather's
Most Traditional - Orsi's
Most Original - Salt 88

OMAHA'S 8TH ANNUAL PIZZA REVIEW - MENU

Hosted by Food & Spirits Magazine

Dudley's Pizza

Chicken-Bacon-Spinach-Artichoke Pizza (CBSA) - Dudley's favorite, this pizza is exactly what it says: full flavors of chicken, bacon, spinach and artichoke made with our famous Dudley's cheese blend and house made garlic white sauce.

Johnny Ricco's

Ricco's Red - Italian sausage, pepperoni, red onion, and basil pesto, with mozzarella and our house-made red sauce.

La Casa

Bourbon Bacon Sausage Pizza - This features a bourbon bacon marmalade, house made Italian sausage, spicy sliced sausage, pepperonchini and mozzarella cheese.

Mama's

Bacon Cheeseburger Pizza - BBQ sauce or ketchup and mustard for the base, fresh ground beef, cheddar cheese, then topped with red onion, pickles and fresh cooked bacon.

Marco's

Deluxe Uno - Cheese, classic pepperoni, Italian sausage, mushrooms, green peppers, onions and a sprinkle of extra cheese with all our crust toppers (garlic, Roma seasoning and Parmesan).





Red's Savoy

Hammer Pizza - The Hammer has our house made pizza sauce, our house made Italian sausage, cream cheese, banana peppers, sauerkraut and our house blend mozzarella cheese.

Salt

Teriyaki Salmon Pizza - Our pizza dough is made in house and features a cracker-like crust with a tender center. We bake our pizzas in our stone hearth oven at 600 degrees. This pizza grilled Scottish salmon, rich house-made teriyaki sauce, crisp snow peas, green onions and toasted sesame seeds a top our mozzarella, provolone and Romano cheese blend.

Sam & Louie's

Sriracha Chicken & Spinach Pizza - Ranch dressing base, Sriracha chicken, spinach, red onion, cream cheese, Romano, mozzarella and Sriracha drizzle.

Varsity

Tommy Girl - Cream cheese and ranch sauce base topped with buffalo style chicken and mozzarella.

Villaggio

Sweet Chili Chicken Pizza - Chili base, grilled chicken, cream cheese, red onion, red pepper, pineapple, our house blend cheese and topped off with chopped fresh scallions.

BONUS PIZZA (wasn't voted on)

Roberto's Pizza

Mediterranean Style Chicken Pizza - It is a savory blend of white garlic chicken, onions, red, green, and yellow bell peppers, mushrooms, parsley, mozzarella cheese and creamy feta cheese on a medium style crust.

Orsi's

Combo - Hamburger, pepperoni, sausage, green pepper, mushroom, onion, black olives.

Vegetarian Combo - Green pepper, mushroom, onion, black olives, tomato.

The Pizza Pie Guys

Spicy Meatball (both regular and gluten free) - Spicy red sauce topped with all-natural and gluten-free meatballs and cream cheese.

Pizza Shoppe

The Captain Kirk - Alfredo base, Italian sausage, red onion, black olives, mushrooms, mozzarella, oregano and Parmesan.

Prairie Fire Pizza

Ruben Pizza - Base is Thousand Island, layered with thin sliced corned beef and sauerkraut, finished with my 5 cheese blend plus Swiss cheese.



I hate the term 'bar program'. It is meaningless. You either have a bar, or you don't. You either have a bar manager, or you don't. The addition of the word 'program' simply communicates that your bar is a specific area of focus, as it should be. This attempt to spruce up the title of a manger is redundant to what any bar owner/manager should be focusing on. "Oh, so you take care of your bar?" Somewhere in the distance, Chris Rock is screaming, "You're SUPPOSED to take care of your bar, you dumb mother#*%&%!"

"The spectrum for this job description in hospitality ranges from having the keys to lock the door at the end of the night, to: hiring, firing, training, scheduling, the development of brand. . ."

There is a pervasive existence of meaningless titles in the bar business. Enhanced job titles start out as an innocent effort to trick an employee into taking on way more responsibility for slightly more pay and resume padding. They result, however, in depleting legitimate titles of any inherent meaning whatsoever. Just consider the word 'manager'. The spectrum for this job description in hospitality ranges from having the keys to lock the door at the end of the night, to: hiring, firing, training, scheduling, the development of brand reinforcement strategies, menu development, inventory assessment, ordering, production of profit & loss reports, financial goal setting, etc. For this reason, when I see the word 'manager' in the 'experience' section of a resume, it means absolutely nothing to me. An intense interview process is needed to determine whether their previous 'management' experience lines up with the job requirements at hand and, usually, it doesn't. Unfortunately, too many people trust the word 'manager' for its face-value, and the result has been disastrous for our industry.

Prohibition did more than criminalize the production and consumption of alcohol; it wiped out a professional job description, thereby removing anyone capable of passing on the skill-set. Prohibition essentially removed the teachers from the bar education curriculum. This disruption left unqualified apprentices to do the job of the master, and in charge of training the next generation. To make matters worse, not long after Prohibition was repealed, the industrial food revolution began. For bars, this meant that commercial mixers, tonics, bitters, juices, etc. became readily available, thereby diminishing the necessary job description of the bartender. 'Bartenders' lost their accreditation as professionals due to a combined lack of leadership, and a diminished skill set requirement.

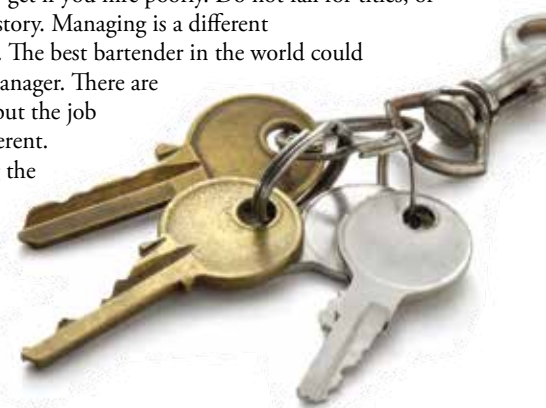
Sadly, we have yet to recover management training structure, and the future isn't looking good.

Today, owners with little or no experience are in the position to hire, and they are defenseless against the creative use of titles on a resume that trick them into hiring. To the untrained eye, every decent resume will look more-or-less the same. A 'bar manager' or 'bar program manager' should be able to foresee, identify and offer solutions to business obstacles, be able to help set realistic financial goals, create and execute a menu that is appropriate for those goals, hire the right people for the job, calculate and budget for labor, determine proper compensation, produce adequate training material, make prep time as efficient as possible, manage inventory and create systems to help them do so, be able to schedule effectively for service quality and staff retention, etc., etc., etc. Developing a drink menu does not make you a bar manager.

The egos of Millennial 'mixologists', and their contrived 'bar program manager' titles, who are less concerned about the profitability of the bar they have been hired to run, and more concerned with the next competition, or article featuring their newest tincture, or whatever, are keeping the failure rate of our industry alive and well. The unethical practice of taking a job you are not qualified for, for the purpose of using the title of that position on your next resume, is epidemic and abhorrent. So...

Bartenders: You don't have the right to take a position for your personal agenda, and risk the success of a business. A true professional will seek the education and training they need, and not apply for, or take, a position before they are qualified for it. A good litmus test is whether you would need to jump on social media, or the internet, for guidance on how to do any of the aforementioned tasks. Those resources are amazing during your education process (and for ongoing continuing education), but if you lack the skill-set to begin with, you simply are not management material yet. Be patient and reverent of the process.

Bar Owners: If you lack the experience to properly hire a manager, it is worth it to pay a consultant who does to head-hunt that position for you. Be wary of employing Facebook as your bar manager, which is what you will most likely get if you hire poorly. Do not fall for titles, or awards, or bartending history. Managing is a different skill set than tending bar. The best bartender in the world could make for a terrible bar manager. There are some transferable skills, but the job descriptions are very different. Make sure you are hiring the right people for the right job or the only 'program' you will need to worry about is the program for the equipment auction when you close.





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Sodas Which You May Not Be Entirely Aware Of: SKI SODA

by Eddie Morin

Hey folks, here we are again at your favorite quarterly vintage soda review feature. This time I'm going to take a look at Ski Soda. Or I should say WE are going to take a look at Ski Soda. I need to remember that other people are around me and this isn't just an inward look at my own self-discovery. Yes, we are all here together. But to be honest, I'm the wealthy explorer and you are just the Sherpa tasked with carrying all my survival gear up this mountain. But let's just pretend we are equals in this adventure. Yeah, that's nice.

Usually I start these articles with a bit of a format I follow, but I just bought a PlayStation 4 on Tuesday and can't peel myself away from it. I tried to be responsible and put the controller down and rejoin real life, but I am a weak person with hardly any self-control. This is where Ski Soda comes in. It's a green soda and they have started to really clump together in my view of sodas recently. There are brown sodas, red

sodas and green sodas. You usually know what you're getting into just by the color. Did Ski Soda surprise me? No it did not. It tastes like green. But hey, green sodas are some of my favorites so that's okay.

Ski Soda is a crisp, summer drink with an equal mixture of lemon and orange flavors and what seems like a hefty portion of caffeine. I say that because as I consume them (I'm on number three right now), I find myself getting jittery and enjoying my video game more. In an attempt to show some level of self-direction, I turned off my PS4 and headed to the other side of my basement and turned on my all-time favorite arcade game, Espgaluda. In it you are a tiny butterfly/fairy man-woman combo where you must dodge an onslaught of tiny bullets while firing back and taking down the bad dudes. It is a real twitchy game that suits my personality and I figured could only be enhanced by Ski Soda. Oh, I forgot to mention that Ski Soda has a lady water skiing on the label and resembles a week-at-the-lake-vacation type vibe. She is not a professional skier. She is still able to lose herself in her activity much as I am able to lose myself in Espgaluda. Did the extra twitchiness help my gameplay, you are probably wondering?

No, no it did not. I found myself over-steering and smashing into bullets in an effort to traverse the battlefield more quickly. It was frustrating, really. I'm really good at this game. I'm horrible at almost everything important, but with Espgaluda

(or simply "Galuda" as it's called in the biz) I am good. Ski Soda is not a performance enhancing drug. I'm glad nobody from the shmup.com forum was here to see this. The shmup forum is a place where dudes like me hang out to talk about "shoot 'em up" games and to feel important. Shmup is short for shoot 'em up. We are super elitist and snobby. Whoa, jeez, I'm getting off the rails here. I better get this thing back on track.

I turned off the arcade machine and sat back down in front of the PlayStation. I lead a very active life in which changing video games is, in fact, a new activity. Why did I think I could fight back? Even



Far Cry 4 Screen Image

though I promised myself I would skip it, all the guys at work talked me into buying this game called Far Cry 4 for my new console. Parts of it sounded amazing, but it is in the first person perspective and I have a difficult time with that. To me, it isn't really first person unless I have peripheral vision, which until I get a VR setup is impossible. But again, I am weak and bought it and here we go. I'm on Ski Soda number six at this point. I'm trying to catch up to my buddies, Ross and Dan, on Far Cry so I'm pushing it pretty hard. I'm fighting in some civil war in India where it seems like all parties involved are morons. You get to hunt badgers and stuff though and ride around in little one-man helicopters so that's pretty good. I wonder if the lady on the Ski Soda label would still be water skiing if she had a PS4. Probably. She probably still likes to go outside. I, however, have no interest in skiing, but I'll drink the soda. It's pretty good. I'm real shaky. I've read that every culture has its acceptable drugs, and in America it is caffeine, nicotine and alcohol. Get outta here you crack heads! I'm so much better than you because I'm abusing an acceptable drug!

Did I tell you that you can ride elephants in Far Cry and smash through cars and enemies and stuff? That's pretty fun. I think Ski Soda

and Far Cry pair nicely. I like exploring the wilderness in this game because there are no bugs and it isn't sticky on my skin, unless I spill the soda. But I don't do that; I'm a careful boy. There are about forty different guns you can acquire in Far Cry which is confusing to me. Are people really that interested in guns? Yes they are. I better have another Ski Soda.

I like how the label doesn't really tell you anything about the flavor. It comes from a simpler time when consumers just tried stuff and had more guts. Just try it. Some guy named Byron Clarson invented Ski Soda in 1956. I don't have time to figure out if he's still alive, but someone surely owns Ski Soda. You should probably buy one or two to pretend that you are a fan of the "little guy." You can buy them at B & G Tasty Foods which is where I work. If you come in and can find me, we can talk about soda, or even better, we can talk about video games. Or whatever really, I just like to talk. I got in trouble a lot as a kid for talking in school too much. It hasn't gotten any better. Do people really change?

I'm still drinking Ski Soda. Number seven for me, and this will probably be the last one. I'm getting pretty fat, but I owe it to you, the fans, to drink these sodas and report back. My official report? Okay, sure whatever. Bottle appearance: 4 out of 5 because it's pretty fun looking and who doesn't want to think about water skiing even if you haven't ever done it. Plus, it doesn't tell you too much about the flavor which weeds out the cowards. Smell: 5 out of 5 because it smells really good. If you smelled it, I'm confident you would say, "Really good." Taste: 3 out of 5 because it's another green soda. It'll do, for sure, but it really doesn't break down any walls here. Jazz-Level: 5 out of 5 because I'm really jazzed up. It's a great soda for playing video games with. I think if you drank a lot of it outside you'd feel sweaty and anxious though. Who drinks a bunch of soda outside anymore

"I like how the label doesn't really tell you anything about the flavor. It comes from a simpler time when consumers just tried stuff and had more guts. Just try it."

though? All that sugar intake is best consumed in your basement where nobody is there to judge you.

it may help to make your cellar great again (see what I did there?). And if we're being completely honest with ourselves right now, we're all likely to need a healthy amount of fermented grape-juice if we're going to emerge from the next four years with our sanity, and country, intact.

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IT'S JUST NATURAL

Nebraska's Craft Beer Breweries Are On The Rise Part One of Two

by Jason McLaughlin

With the explosion of craft beer and the dozens of new breweries in the great state of Nebraska, it's starting to feel like our natural way of life. As the number of connoisseurs has multiplied many times over, so has the level of knowledge and appreciation from the mainstream population. At a recent beer fest,

"Here in Nebraska, there are now over 30 operational breweries in the state with at least 10 more currently in planning or build out."

it was not abnormal to overhear a pair of sorority sisters in deep conversation about which was their favorite sour ale, nor was it to hear a friendly debate between a couple of farmers about hop profiles and who's currently making the best IPA. While macro brewery sales continue to nosedive, craft beer has continued to rise and become the new norm. It's official, for the first time since prohibition, America again has its own nationally celebrated beer culture. Here in Nebraska, there are now over 30 operational breweries in the state with at least 10 more currently in planning or build out. Is that too many? Not even close. It's now part of who we are and part of how we enjoy time spent with each other. It's our culture.

Please sit back with a fresh pour of your favorite brew and enjoy a few stories about the future of our new reality.

WHITE ELM (Lincoln, NE)

While Lincoln may have just one third the population of the Omaha metro area, it is currently on a more rapid pace of adding new breweries. The next brewery ready to hit the capital city is **White Elm Brewing Company**, and co-owner and brewer **Kolby Wood** says they plan to open the doors to their production facility located on Van Dorn Street between 7th and 8th as soon as August or September of this year.

Kolby fell in love with homebrewing some 13 years ago while receiving his informal brewing education from **Kirk Weidner**, owner of Lincoln's Kirk's Brew homebrew supply store. Just a few years later, he and his friend, now business partner, **Matt Heyne** first entertained the idea of starting their own brewery. While they didn't end up pulling the trigger then, Kolby made plans for a move to Denver where he hoped to find a position at a brewery that he could start on the ground floor and work his way up to a brewing position. Unfortunately that brewery job didn't materialize and, strapped for cash, he tried finding bar tending work in Denver. Little did he know at the time that his golden key awaited him. Kolby explained, "I

sent out something like 150 resumes and got one call back at a place called the Irish Snug. I ended up getting the opportunity to work as an hourly manager at the Snug for Jim and Frank McLoughlin, who, without their guidance and training, I'd have never been able to get the brewery open. I ended up opening two new locations and expanding our original two locations with the McLoughlins working my way into the regional manager/partner position. I worked for the McLoughlins for nearly a decade, all the while home brewing on every occasion that I was not at work."

With seven years focused on setting himself up to reach his dreams, Kolby and his wife Sarah, a Denver native, packed up in 2014 and moved back to his home town of Lincoln. "Throughout my time in Denver, Matt Heyne and I had stayed in touch and our talks about

"When we had the, "this is really going to happen," talk it was beer in hand under the white elm."

the brewery started back up after I sent him and his wife Martha Lee a few growlers. Matt, Martha Lee and I later had a meeting to talk about the viability of opening a brewery in Lincoln. When we left the meeting, it was full speed ahead. I quit my job, the two of them took on another in the form of the brewery, and we've been pushing forward since".

Kolby has also been fortunate to have made great connections in the brewing industry during his time in Denver, and has been able to lean on many of them for advice on opening up his own operation, which is never an easy process. When asked what some of the challenges have been throughout the process, he shared his optimistic outlook saying, "Seeing the forest from the trees is the hardest part. It's easy to get caught up in the frustrations of the daily grind and large amount of legal efforts in getting a brewery open, but at the end of the day, we get to make beer. It might not be now, or next week but soon all of the construction will be over, the permit process will be less intensive and the crew will be hired; then we get to pursue our passion. We've yet to reach a hill not worth the view from the summit."

The brewhouse at White Elm includes a two vessel 15 barrel gas fired system with a 30 barrel hot liquor tank from American Beer Equipment. ABE is conveniently headquartered right here in Lincoln. They were happy to buy local and Kolby explained that he had the brewhouse designed to be somewhat of an enormous homebrew system. "All the valves are manual and the dials don't spin themselves. I liked the idea of making the system as hands on as possible knowing full well I'll be working hard for every pint." While some breweries are literally run by touchscreens, it makes sense that White Elm will

take a more traditional approach with their plan to offer a lineup of rustic farmhouse styles where a saison, grisette and biere de garde will be a large part of their production. Beyond that we can look forward to modern hoppy American styles including IPA and American Pale Wheat and an extensive barrel aging program.

As for the name, the first thing Kolby and his wife did when they moved back to Lincoln was buy an old home in the Country Club area that was in need a lot of work. Their first four months were dedicated to long hours of renovating. What time they found for relaxing was spent under a giant white elm tree in the front yard that they immediately fell in love with. They came to learn from the city arborist that it was one of the oldest survivors in the Lincoln, as many have fallen to Dutch elm disease. As Kolby puts it, "It became almost ritualistic to sit on our front porch under the white elm and have a beer after a long day of work. When we had the, "this is really going to happen," talk it was beer in hand under the white elm. The name came pretty easy from there."

CODEBEER.CO (Lincoln, NE)

On deck in the Lincoln brewery pipeline is **Code Beer Company**, or as they like it be referred to as: CodeBeer.Co, which conveniently doubles as their website's URL. With plans to open their doors sometime in late 2016, they will do so with great fame already



attached to them. Not for anything they've brewed, but because CodeBeer.Co is the new home of the brewhouse used for 17 years in the now shuttered Wrigleyville Goose Island brewpub in Chicago.

Code came about all due to **Adam Holmberg's** persistent hounding of his good friend and now business partner **Matt Gohring** to open a brewery. While Adam had dabbled in homebrewing himself, he was especially fond of what Matt was creating, and as Gohring puts it, "The conversation about opening a brewery came up a lot when we were around each other. It was something I often thought about, but

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figured it would happen a little further down the road if it was going to happen at all". Matt had been brewing at home since 2008, and like many other home enthusiasts that later turn pro, found himself digging deeper and deeper into flavor development and process. Matt admits, "Pretty soon you find yourself counting yeast cells under a microscope at the end of your brew days thinking, how did I get myself to this point?" Still, the thought of opening a brewery rightfully felt daunting, but Adam continued to push. After many talks and a few planning sessions the two decided it was worth giving it a shot.

The day everything got real was when Matt spotted the famous Wrigleyville Goose Island brewery system come up for sale online. The Chicago brewpub had officially closed at the end of the Cubs 2015 season to make way for a new \$140 million development in the area. The 15 barrel brewhouse is an older system by today's standards, but as Matt explained, "it's still in great condition and with a lot of life left in it". The deal came with all of the equipment they would need and was simply too good to pass up. The only trick was that

they were responsible for disassembling the entire system and then getting it out of the building. To that Matt added, "What we didn't know was how tightly packed everything was in this old building in Wrigleyville and how much work it would take to get the equipment off the second floor of a building that was never meant to house a brewery. It was a rough four days of grinding it out, but we got some good photos, a lot of quality time with the equipment and an interesting story out of the deal."

CodeBeer.Co is located on the corner of N Street and Antelope Valley Parkway, which finds itself just on the edge of Lincoln's next revitalization project called the Telegraph District, where some 20

"The day everything got real was when Matt spotted the famous Wrigleyville Goose Island brewery system come up for sale online."

acres of industrial area will soon be transformed into retail store fronts, office buildings, town houses and lofts. The Telegraph District is also where the whole name came about. "We wanted our name to tie into the neighborhood we'd be calling home. So playing into the theme of the telegraph and Morse code, we came up with CodeBeer.Co," Matt said. The brewery will also enjoy having the newly opened N Street protected bike path running along the North side of the building, where thirsty cyclist are sure to make their taproom a regular stop during weekend rides and daily commutes home from work.

With dreams of a canning line in the future, they plan to start things off focusing on draft only for the first year, mostly through taproom sales and a few local tap handle accounts. As for what can we expect to be brewed? No guarantees have been made quite yet, but Matt did hint, "I rarely brew the same recipe twice. For the last few months, I've been working at dialing in a handful of styles. Those tend to be saisons, IPAs, red ales, cream ales, and stouts. The goal is to have a handful of mainstays as well as plenty of rotators and one-offs." Also adding, "We love variety and plan to have as many different styles on tap as we're able. There are still so many things to learn with beer and I want to be able to share what I learn with the community as often as possible."

Read the next installment in Issue 25.



Portrait of a Bartender: LINDA LICHTENWALTER

I sat down with **Linda Lichtenwaller** for this issue's bartender portrait. Linda has written for *Food & Spirits Magazine* in the past, mostly in her capacity as a pastry chef for **Modern Love**, but she can turn an outstanding cocktail around in hurry.

Food & Spirits Magazine: Where do you work and how long have you worked there?

Linda Lichtenwaller: Currently, I am employed at **Slowdown** (about 8 years), **Trap Room** (about 3 years), and **Jake's Cigars** (about 5 years)

FSM: How long have you been bartending and what are some of the past places you bartended at in the past?

Linda: I have been in the industry for almost 14 years. Over the years I have had the privilege to bartend in a variety of environments. I got my start at the **Ranch Bowl**, bartending in all the bars there, for the volleyball and bowling leagues, concerts, as well as in the pub. After they closed, I moved to bartending at the **Old Market Underground**, a very fast paced college bar for a few years. I tried my hand restaurant bartending a little here and there, mostly in the **French Café**, where I was able to get a little more practice on the classic cocktails. I also worked at **House of Loom** when they first opened, further expanding my knowledge of the classics, as well as the craft side of bartending.

FSM: Have you had any people along the way who have helped you be the bartender you are today?

Linda: Absolutely! We are all constantly learning from each other in this field. I have definitely learned about new varieties of spirits and flavor profiles from my college years, as well as from the many beer and liquor representatives I have been able to work with over the years at the different bars. Those of us that are passionate about this field, and especially those of us who are cocktail nerds, definitely love to pick each other's brain about new and exciting things we are doing.

FSM: What is the best part of your job? And the worst?

Linda: I have two favorite parts to my job. Being able to create something that a guest enjoys. And if it is a cocktail that I come up with on the fly, it is even more rewarding. That is the most

"Someone who bellies up to the bar likely wants a bartender that can hold a conversation while they enjoy their beverage."

satisfying part of my job, I would say. The second aspect I love about bartending would be the people. Getting to meet new and interesting people is always exciting. As far as parts I don't enjoy, it is never fun to have to cut someone off or ask someone to leave, especially if they don't agree with you on making that call. While I do love my guests that I serve, there are also sometimes people that come through that are not quite as nice as others and can be rude to

the staff. It is not so enjoyable to put on a fake smile and try to cater to the needs of someone who is trying not to have a good time.

FSM: What makes a good bartender?

Linda: There are several aspects to being a good bartender. First of all, you have to be able to talk to people. Someone who bellies up to the bar likely wants a bartender that can hold a conversation while they enjoy their beverage. A good bartender is also knowledgeable about their products they serve. He or she should have a good general knowledge of the varieties of spirits, wines, and beers and know the flavor profiles. This helps inform the guest of what they

“I am quite a connoisseur in the cocktail world. I do enjoy the occasional beer or glass of wine in certain settings, but overall I definitely gravitate towards cocktails.”

are about to order, or help them to find the right beverage to enjoy. In some bars, speed plays a big part, especially on a weekend night. Be able to quickly serve drinks without sacrificing quality, either on the cocktail or the interaction with the guest. Finally, it is always a bonus if the bartender can come up with drinks on the spot for someone who may not know what they want. We have to find what the guest wants even if they don't know what that may be.

FSM: What is your favorite drink to make?

Linda: I love making classic and craft cocktails, of any variety. I do particularly enjoy making the more labor-intensive libations, at least when I am not three people deep at the bar. If I have the time to dedicate to one drink for one person, then I jump on the opportunity. Cocktails involving muddling of fresh ingredients, using egg whites, or making pretty garnishes? Throw them my way!

FSM: What do you drink?

Linda: I am quite a connoisseur in the cocktail world. I do enjoy the occasional beer or glass of wine in certain settings, but overall I definitely gravitate towards cocktails. I always like to peruse a cocktail menu when I am out, and I find the cocktail with the most unique combination of ingredients or flavors, or one with a spirit I am unfamiliar with. If I were at a venue without a cocktail list, my go-to drinks would be either the Horse Feather or the Pimm's Cup.

FSM: What's something you wished people knew about being a bartender?

Linda: Well, I feel that many of us in the service industry generally agree that everyone should work in the service industry, even for a brief amount of time. Just so that everyone can understand the stress involved in this business. For example, in your faster paced atmospheres, some people get impatient after

waiting for a drink and often can take it out on the bar staff. They don't seem to notice that we are moving as quickly as we can to get everyone taken care of. They can also better understand reasons why in some cases that we may need to cut off a guest. Of course it would also allow them to better understand tipping etiquette. When a person orders a more complicated cocktail that requires a little extra time to create, you probably would want to tip a little more than you would if you just asked them to crack open a beer.

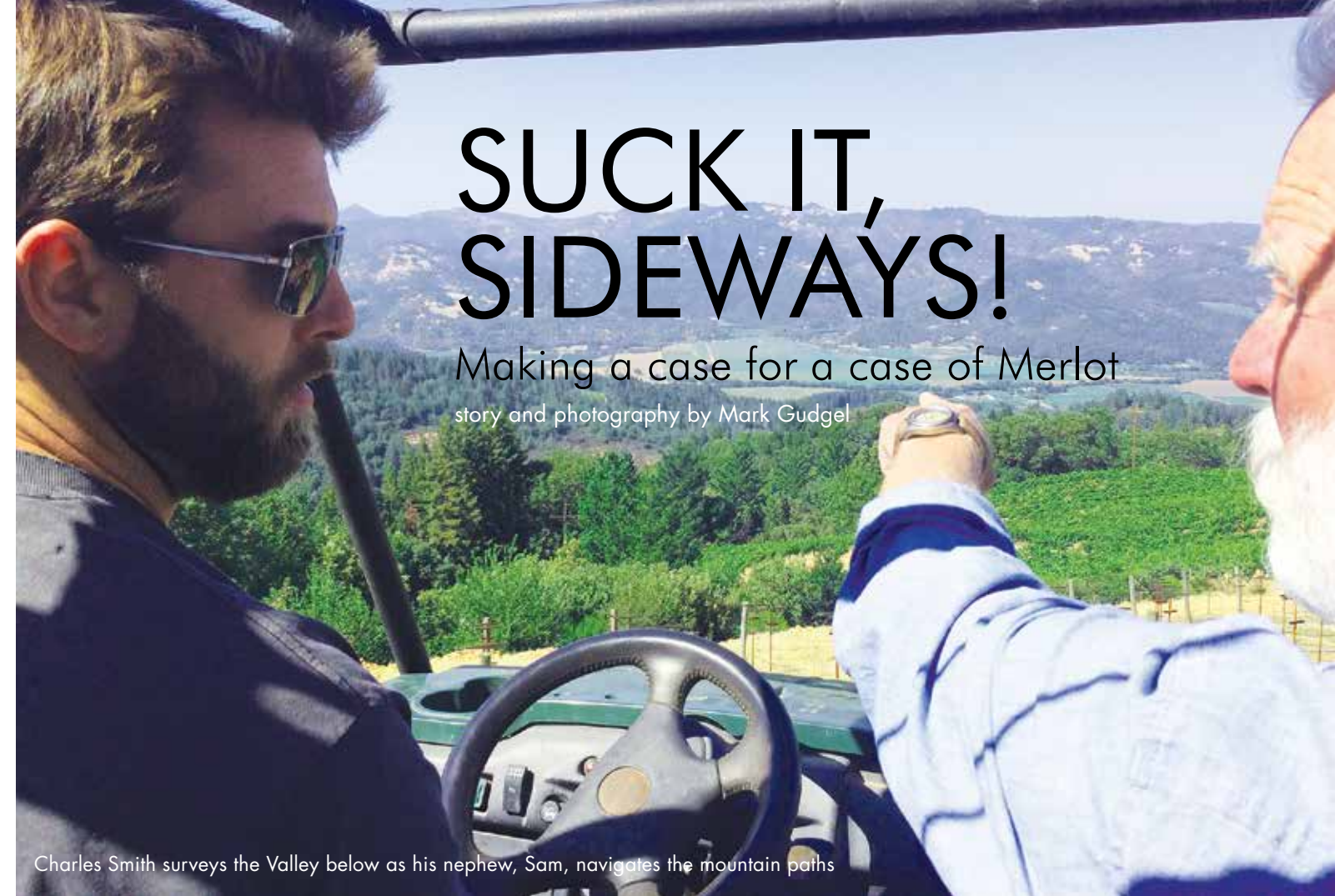
FSM: Describe the perfect cocktail?

Linda: While there are many styles of cocktails, my favorites are always ones that are well balanced and hit the various parts of your palate. It should have a little tart, sweet, bitter, and bonus if you can incorporate a touch of savory. The flavors should also gradually open up with the sip. The nuances can be lost if the flavors are just muddled together when you take a drink. It is much more enjoyable if you smell one element as you raise your glass, taste one as it hits your tongue, another as you drink, and another with the aftertaste.

“In my experience as a pastry chef, I have definitely noticed some similarities in the two fields. Knowledge of flavor profiles is key in both.”

FSM: Since you're also a baker, what are some of the similarities and differences between baking and bartending?

Linda: In my experience as a pastry chef, I have definitely noticed some similarities in the two fields. Knowledge of flavor profiles is key in both. Where in baking I am focusing on spices and fresh ingredients, when it comes to cocktails, I am simply incorporating spirits. This can be spirits to go along with spices and fresh ingredients, or spirits that mimic those same flavors. I have definitely expanded my knowledge on syrups and shrubs as well. I have learned some new approaches to making these ingredients to bring about stronger flavors so that when used in garnishing on a dessert it can pack more of a punch. This easily applies to bartending as well since these ingredients are frequently used in the field. I specialize in vegan and gluten-free baking which allows me to use some more unique ingredients with interesting scientific properties. Knowing how to handle those ingredients can allow for me to make some unique garnishes to add to a cocktail. Working in both these fields, it is definitely fun to use crossover knowledge. I have made desserts mimicking classic cocktails as well cocktails to pair with desserts I have made and brought to the bar to share with my guests.



Charles Smith surveys the Valley below as his nephew, Sam, navigates the mountain paths

The current political “scene” (read: shit show) in the United States has made it abundantly clear that stereotypes and sweeping generalizations remain the preferred currency of communication for the ignorant and uneducated in this country, and around the world. Candidates paint xenophobic pictures with broad brushes, outdo one another with petty attacks, and promote racism and intolerance 140 characters at a time. At times the result is merely offensive; at others it means departing the European Union. But history and common sense agree that painting with broad brush strokes can be dangerous, whether it is about groups of people, other cultures, or even wine.

I cringe and a little piece of me dies inside when I hear someone say, “I don't like merlot.” It's like saying, “I don't like books,” or “I don't like men.” Sure, some of them suck, and my guess would be that if you're the one saying this, then you yourself may well have encountered a pretty unimpressive example. But let me encourage you to put the very human urge to make generalizations aside for a second, for your own sake. Just as men, or books, (or other cultures, races and religions) vary widely both inside and out, the same is true of grape varieties, and that of course includes merlot. Maybe when you were forced to read the Russian classics in undergrad or having that particularly bad second date at HuHott with the cocky guy in the Affliction t-shirt who ruined us all for you, the experience was unfortunately complimented by a glass of funky merlot. But remember for a moment that it is possible to tell a good story in under a thousand pages, that the meathead you briefly dated is not my representative, and that whatever bad juice you may have previously

imbibed was not indicative of the entirety of merlot as a grape, regardless of winemaker, vintage, or style.

The merlot varietal, a favorite of the storied winemakers of Bordeaux and the primary grape used in all reds crafted on the Right Bank, has been around as long as any, and has been enjoyed for just as much time. Well crafted, it's known to be soft and velvety in the mouth, exhibiting plum and other dark fruit flavors, and an excellent compliment to foods that vary from casserole to cheeseburgers, barbecue and more. And yet, the wines made from this beautiful grape seem to be tragically underappreciated here in the United States. Of the 928,000 acres of California that the USDA estimates are planted to grapes, a mere 44,460 of those, or 4.8%, are planted to merlot, and much of that is used for blending. Contrast that to

“I cringe and a little piece of me dies inside when I hear someone say, “I don't like merlot.” It's like saying, “I don't like books,” or “I don't like men.”

87,972 acres for cabernet sauvignon, or 97,826 acres for chardonnay, and you get a snapshot of where merlot ranks on the proverbial drink-chain.

Some of merlot's apparent overshadowing may be attributed in part to pop culture. In 2004, the already in-decline merlot industry took another blow with the release of the now cult movie Sideways.

If you haven't seen it, Sideways is the story of a sad little wine snob whose frat-tastic douchebag of a best friend cheats on his fiancé while the two of them drink their way through California wine country. The would-be novelist played by Paul Giamatti was the one to utter the now infamous, "If anyone orders merlot, I'm leaving." Then, through clenched teeth, "I am not drinking any fucking merlot!" Though there is some debate about the true impact of the movie, this short scene appears to have done no favors to the already-hobbled merlot industry. Why anyone would deliberately take a cue from the characters in this movie is beyond my understanding, but wine lore holds that this movie somehow managed to do further damage to merlot sales.

Interestingly, director **Alexander Payne** is reportedly a fan of the varietal and, with deliberate irony, the climax of the movie involves Giamatti's character seated in a fast food restaurant drinking a bottle of 1961 Chateau Cheval Blanc (a bottle of wine currently valued between \$2,500 - \$5,000) out of a Styrofoam cup. Chateau Cheval Blanc, located in Saint-Émilion, is a Right Bank Bordeaux, and thus the blend is composed mainly of merlot.

Every time I find a new merlot I love, and this occurs with a fair degree of regularity, I include the line "Suck it, Sideways" in my

"Oh, merlot really isn't my thing," and, in spite of my urges, I've politely not run over them with my Jeep as a response."

review, a passive-aggressive response to the many people who would never have tried the wine because, well, I suppose because Paul Giamatti is such a phenomenal actor. Or else because they're stupid doodie-heads. It's one of those two.

Truth be told, the damage done to the merlot industry by Sideways is probably significantly exaggerated, though more than one study has suggested that at least some negative effects were felt. But whether it was a cult movie, a bad bottle of wine, or something else entirely, that merlot remains an underappreciated grape varietal in los Estados Unidos seems to hold true to this day. As recently as July of 2016 I've had people say to me, "Oh, merlot really isn't my thing," and, in spite of my urges, I've politely not run over them with my Jeep as a response. With that in mind, I wanted to recommend a few bottles that, if you're not presently inclined to drink merlot, may help to expand your horizons.

Before the recommendations, one caveat: As a wine lover, I have to acknowledge that my palate is just that – mine. What I love stylistically or in a flavor profile you may not, and in fact as I write this I need only to think back as far as dinner last night to recall a

bottle of merlot that I absolutely loved, and which my wife was quite underwhelmed by. Every palate is different, and for that reason, rather than listing a bunch of merlots that I personally enjoy, I've reached out to some friends in the industry to ask them what merlot they might recommend to you. Peruse this list, an easy feat given that these wines are all available locally or online, and I hope you'll find at least a few that will wow you.

CHATEAU D'AIGUILHE
Bordeaux, France (Available at **V. MERTZ**)

Matthew Brown is a sommelier and the single best representative of the service industry that I have ever met, a trait that makes him well suited for his position as the General Manager at one of Omaha's very finest restaurants, V. Mertz. Matthew's recommendation:

"Hailing from its famous right bank this is one of Bordeaux's oldest estates, over time this château has spent time as a major vineyard, a defense fortress, and a major vineyard, a defense fortress, and a commandery for the Knights Templar. Modernized in the 1990's by the renowned Stephan van Nieperg this wine is consistently a favorite every vintage. Merlot is blended with a small amount of cabernet franc delivering a phenomenal balance of power and elegance that is hard to find. The price varies with vintage; in recent years it has become considerably more friendly."

PARCEL 41
Napa Valley, California (Available at **Corkscrew**)

Zach Ferguson is a good friend and a tasting companion; we recently spent a week in Napa drinking, among other things, a bunch of great merlot. Zach manages Corkscrew Wine and Cheese here in Omaha. Zach's recommendation:

"My personal favorite merlot in a mid-range price point would have to be the Parcel 41 from Nine North Wines. This 100% Napa merlot is an outstanding value with its expressive nose full of chocolate and roses followed by a palate of dark fruits and espresso. It tends to be a crowd a pleaser, allowing multiple wine preferences to come together over one wine. At roughly \$20, it's a hard wine to beat."

BARNARD GRIFFIN
Columbia Valley, Washington State (Available online)

Jay Frogness is a fellow avid rater on the Vivino app who has visited me here in Omaha. Jay lives in the Pacific Northwest, and is more knowledgeable about the wines of that region than anyone else I know. Jay's recommendation:

"Barnard Griffin is a winery in the Tri Cities area of South Central Washington. Dry and arid conditions prevail here along the shores of the Columbia River. When I blind taste test this wine with friends,



they all think it is priced three to four times what I can buy this in the store for. On the lighter, elegant side of merlots, this has black cherry, currant, spice, cocoa, licorice and some delicate floral notes."

DELECTUS
Napa Valley, California (Available online)

Michael Consbruck is a longtime friend, dating back to our days in college at the University of Nebraska. A Husker transplant to LA, he is the owner of "V", a West Hollywood wine bar specializing in small production and boutique wines. Mikey's recommendation:

"The 2008 Delectus merlot from Napa has deep earthy characteristics with hints of dark currant and blackberry and pepper. Crafted by Gerhard Reisacher, this wine embodies all the characteristics a cab lover loves about cab, in a merlot. Soft tannins and subtle oak finish, this merlot is not to be missed."

KINDRED POINTE
Virginia (Available online)

I've worked for Jim Finley as a correspondent for his web page, American Winery Guide, for several years now. Jim is a resident of Virginia, and has a broad knowledge of American wines. Jim's recommendation:

"The 2013 Kindred Pointe merlot is a fine example of what Virginia wineries can achieve with merlot even when the growing season isn't ideal. Light and easygoing, the 2013 is well-balanced with cherry, vanilla and cola flavors. The short to medium finish and soft tannins make it an excellent complement to a wide variety of foods. The wine also goes particularly well with the winery's outdoor fire pit on a cool Shenandoah Valley weekend!"

QUILCEDA CREEK
Columbia Valley, Washington State (Available online)

Christine Havens is a former winemaker, fellow "Featured User" for Vivino, and internationally recognized reviewer of wines from around the world. She is the proprietor of Christine-Havens.com. Christine's recommendation:

"My all-time favorite domestic merlot is from Quilceda Creek, sourced from Columbia Valley in Washington State. Something of a cult wine in the Pacific Northwest, Quilceda garners more 100-point scores (WA) of any winery outside of Napa Valley. They also have a fascinating history: think Russian Tzars. The 2006 vintage opens with boisterous notes of red currant, blueberries, incense, sandalwood and mint. It has weight and structure for a Washington merlot. The tannins are mouth-coating and palate saturating glycerolly roundness lead into a finish of dried herbs and cedar. As with all Quilceda Creek wines, it's best to lay them down for a decade or more."

CHATEAU LAPLAGNOTTE-BELLEVUE
Bordeaux, France (Available at **The Winery**)

Dave Deao is kind, soft-spoken, and easily one of the most knowledgeable wine gurus in the Omaha metro area. His extensive travels, time spent in the industry, and willingness to let me pick his brain make him one of my go-to people when I'm looking for a recommendation. The long-time proprietor of The Winery, Dave's recommendation comes from the old world:

"The 2012 Chateau Laplagnotte-Bellevue Saint-Emilion Grand Cru is a balanced blend of 70% merlot and 30% cabernet franc is fruit-driven, exhibiting a deep plum and ruby hue with heady aromas of black currant, black cherry, licorice and graphite. The Chateau

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Laplagnotte Bellevue Bordeaux exhibits a medium body with soft, silky tannins and an easy drinkability.”

Then finally, there’s me. I wasn’t going to wrap up my own merlot article without making a few personal recommendations, of course. I’m a Napa lover, and I’d say unequivocally that the merlots being produced by Peju, Ballentine, Titus, Tamber Bey and Grgich Hills are consistently excellent – if you enjoy the bolder style of wine that I prefer. That said, the below are three merlots that I think are unique for one reason or other, and very worth a try. Enjoy!

MOLLYDOOKER “THE SCOOTER”
McLaren Vale, Australia (Available at **Brix**)

One of the more accessible cult producers of our time, Mollydooker wines are consistent in quality and typically a solid QPR. “The Scooter” merlot is a deep red hue, with notes of black fruit – plums, blackberry and more, along with subtle hints of spice. Fine tannins lead into a dry finish. This is a fun wine to share with friends and goes well with medium-rare Nebraska grass-fed beef, amongst other things.

AMIGONI
Kansas City, Missouri (Available at **Amigoni** on your next road trip)

An urban winery not far from Kemper Arena, Amigoni is one of the few Midwestern wineries delving successfully into producing wines made from vinifera. Amigoni’s merlot is fruit forward and well-structured, exhibiting dark fruits and hints of vanilla. It recently held its own in an informal blind tasting of the varietal at my house, and is very

worth seeking out the next time you’re in KC. Of course, I recommend pairing it with Arthur Bryant’s or KC Joe’s, but you be you.

HOURGLASS BLUELINE ESTATE
Napa Valley, California (Available at **Omaha Wine Co.**)

This is my Holy Grail of merlot. Its perfect balance enables it to walk the tightropes between big, fruit forward, and smooth with the skill of an acrobat, and is as exemplary of the varietal and region as a wine can be. This is, in short, my favorite merlot. Ever. Period. Both the 2012 and 2013 vintages are utterly phenomenal, so good that I often refuse to pair it with food for fear that even the best of fare might detract from the experience that is this wine. Something I only drink in celebration, I think you’ll agree that it’s special.

So there you have it; a primer on what I think is the most underappreciated of the noble grape varietals, and a list of wines to keep you busy until the next edition of FSM comes out. If you found something here that you haven’t tried before, it’s my sincere hope that you enjoy it, and that it helps open for you the doors to a varietal that sadly many have never endeavored to walk through. If you actually go through this list and can find nothing on it you enjoy, shoot me an email and I’ll buy you a bottle of your favorite white zinfandel to make up for it. But if you’re ready for merlot, it may help to make your cellar great again (see what I did there?). And if we’re being completely honest with ourselves right now, we’re all likely to need a healthy amount of fermented grape-juice if we’re going to emerge from the next four years with our sanity, and country, intact.



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Wine(ry) Recommendation: SMITH-MADRONE

story and photography by Mark Gudgel



Charles, Stu, and Sam Smith have one hell of a good thing going high up in the Spring Mountain District of California’s Napa Valley. Last month my friend Zach, who manages **Corkscrew**, and I had the opportunity to visit them at their winery, and we agreed that the experience set a new bar for future winery visits. Normally I take this short spot to recommend a wine, but after a visit to their winery, I’m recommending the entire Smith-Madrone portfolio. The Smith’s (a Madrone is a tree) just don’t miss; their wines are some of the best I’ve had in recent memory, and if you haven’t already tried them, I strongly recommend that you seek them out.



Sam Smith uses a wine thief to pour a taste of his Smith-Madrone Cabernet from the barrel

Upon our arrival, Sam was outside cleaning up and Charles was inside putting pen to ledger. He stopped working when he saw us and immediately engaged us in conversation; he appeared as interested in us as we were in him, asking all sorts of questions about where we were from and what we did for a living. When Sam came inside, he, Charles, Zach and I each grabbed a glass of Chardonnay and struck out side-by-side to tour the 200-acre estate, 40 of which is planted. Sam expertly navigated the rough, dusty trails, occasionally shifting into four-wheel-drive, while Charles pointed out the different vineyards, changes to the soil composition, and recognizable landmarks on the Valley floor far below. We maneuvered under stands of what he referred to as “young” redwoods, some 150 years in age, until we found our way to the spring. Sam stopped to pick fresh bay leaves and we chewed them on the way back, our Chardonnay long since having been imbibed or spilled.

Upon our return, we tasted different vintages of their wines and chatted about life. Sam grabbed a thief and pulled a few tastes from a barrel that got us excited about the years to come. When the evening began to wind down, Charles checked the time. “No sense leaving

now,” he informed us. “The highway will be backed up for miles.” We took the cue, and spent another hour out front in folding chairs, sharing stories. We discussed everything from the season finale of Game of Thrones, to killing rattlesnakes, to Sam’s post-LSAT decision to skip law school and join the family business. All the while, Charles made a strong case for Hamlet as the best of the Elizabethan revenge tragedies, and we laughed and told jokes for quite some time. A new friend of mine often says that the personality of a winemaker invariably comes through in their wines. I would suggest that this is likely what makes the wines of Smith-Madrone so wonderful.

The best place to look for Smith-Madrone wines in Omaha is **The Winery**, where fellow Smith-Madrone junkies are known to congregate. Below is a brief run-down of what’s currently available:

RIESLING - Vintages presently available: 2013, 2014 - Price: \$29.99
Notes: *Think Alsace. This is the kind of Riesling you can pair with steak, lay down to age for a few decades, or both. I’ve had dozens of Rieslings from California, and this one is the best I’ve tried, period.*

CHARDONNAY - Vintage presently available: 2013 - Price: \$34.99
Notes: *Far more reminiscent stylistically of Chablis than of the Napa Valley from whence it hails, this is what subtlety tastes like. Lovers of cougar juice need not inquire.*

CABERNET SAUVIGNON - Vintage presently available: 2012 just sold out. 2013 will be released this fall. - Price: \$49.99

Notes: *In a place where Cab of this caliber can easily cost over \$100/bottle, this is a solid QPR. Thanks to the generosity of some wonderful people, I’ve tasted vintages dating as far back as 1995 and can attest that this Cab drinks very well now but is also extremely age-worthy.*

COOK’S FLAT RESERVE - Vintage presently available: 2009
Price: \$200.00
Notes: *Charles probably put it best: “We make this wine because it makes us really happy.” It made me really happy, too. A blend of 64% Cab Sauv, 22% Cab Franc, and 14% Merlot, this wine gets the best of everything during the winemaking process, and you’re sure to love it the next time you’re splurging.*

There were less than 25 wineries in the Napa Valley when the Smith brothers started theirs. There had not yet been a “Judgment of Paris” to put the valley on the wine world’s radar, and the area was still planted primarily to fruit and nut orchards when their vineyards went in. Today, the short drive up from the valley floor is barely enough time to forget that below, the glitz and glamour of the wine industry is in full bloom, but at the somehow timeless Smith-Madrone Winery, you can experience the Valley for what it once was, and what it still so clearly wants to be.

Stu typically comes to Omaha every spring for **Vin Nebraska**, but that’s half a year from now. Until then, picking up a stock of their wines at The Winery would be a terrific introduction to Smith-Madrone (you’ll have to race me to the rest of the ’13 Riesling), however don’t stop there. With flights in the \$300 range right now, a visit to Spring Mountain would be the perfect fall getaway, and in case the Smith’s outstanding wine isn’t draw enough, they’re pretty damn charming people to boot.

A ROSE IS A ROSE IS A ROSE'

by John Finocchiaro



You know her. High school - the girl that didn't say much, that kept to herself, preferring to mind her own business. Let's call her Rose. She wasn't one of the cool kids, but she definitely wasn't a dork. She just didn't feel the need to attract attention to herself like some in the more popular crowd. In the rare occurrence that anyone would show a little attention and dare give her the time of day, she was quite nice. Come to think of it, I would say she was extremely nice. And she was smart too, definitely way above average. The same thing could be said for her physical appearance, if anyone bothered to give her more than a passing glance. I mean, she didn't exactly go out of her way to

fluff herself up. But if you were looking for beauty, it was there. She did have her small circle of friends, but, like her, they were barely noticeable. They didn't seem to mind. I think they preferred it that way. Sad to say, for all her positive attributes, she was undeservedly easily forgotten.

Fast forward a decade. Or two. Ok, maybe three. Rose is a knockout. And I'm not just talking about her looks. She's fun,

"You may remember rose' as the featured wine filled to the brim of a teeny tiny wine glass adorning the checkered table cloth of many an Italian steakhouse from days long gone by. That's not the wine we're talking about here. "

but in a classy way. Likewise, she can be super classy, but in a fun, non-stuffy way. She can fit seamlessly into any social situation, be it a formal white table cloth affair of a backyard barbeque. She is very down to earth and unpretentious, definitely not the type that demands a lot be spent on her. And did I tell you, she's smart? I mean, she's more than just a pretty piece of eye candy. There's a lot going on here. She's fascinating. And interesting. Everybody likes her, and for good reason. I think it's safe to say that a lot of people missed the boat when it came to Rose.

Now, say her name as they might in Canada - "Rose, eh?" See, that's really what I'm really talking about - the wine. You may remember rose' as the featured wine filled to the brim of a teeny tiny wine glass adorning the checkered table cloth of many an Italian steakhouse from days long gone by. That's not the wine we're talking about here. Rose' is not a generic jug wine from the Prohibition era. Rose' is not white zinfandel. Rose' is not a one dimensional always-sweet tooth decaying girly wine. And quality rose' is not unsophisticated or lacking in complexity, depth and nuance. Largely forgotten, unmistakably absent from far too many wine lists, and all but hidden in so many wine shops, rose' is quite simply the most underappreciated and, frankly, forgotten of all wines.

Rose', the good stuff, is fresh, expressive and fruit driven. Most are crisp, lively and refreshing. They can be produced from dozens of less conventional grape types such as cinsault, mourvedre, grenache, and tempranillo, resulting in a vast array of interesting and unique flavor profiles. Many are absolutely delicious. Rose' does not taste like red wine or white wine. It is very much its own animal. And believe me, they do not all taste alike.

Rose' wines are extremely versatile. They can be equally terrific as a cocktail wine, especially for warm weather patio quaffing, as well as a great dinner wines. They pair wonderfully with spicy Thai food, barbeque, chicken, and fish (particularly salmon)... heck, even hamburgers. Granted, a big hefty steak may demand a more hearty wine than rose', but that is the exception. Contrary to popular impressions, the right rose' can be a relatively safe bet, not the oddball, when it comes to pairing with an entrée'. Rose' is the Swiss army knife of wines: when it comes to diversity and flexibility, you simply can't beat it.

As an added bonus, a good bottle rose' can usually be found at a relatively inexpensive cost, \$15 or less. I recommend the advice of a good wine steward to assist in your selections, since rose' can come in a range of styles and various levels of sweetness, from bone dry to sweet dessert wines.

Most all of us wine drinkers know Rose. We've seen her before. We just passed her by, for some unknown reason. Don't let her get away this time. Take her out sometime. She's a jewel.

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712-256-4140
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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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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 6:30am - 9:30pm Mon-Thurs and 6:30am - 10pm Fri & Sat.

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.

Sam & Louie's

402-575-5500
2949 N 204th St



Sam & Louie's specializes in fresh, hand tossed pizza, pasta, burgers, chicken sandwiches, calzones, stromboli, salads and more. Gluten free? We have a wide variety of dishes for you to enjoy. Open 7 days a week for lunch & dinner. Catering is available for any occasion, weddings, meetings, graduations & birthdays.

Shucks Fish House & Oyster Bar

402-827-4376
1218 South 119th Street



Shucks Fish House & Oyster Bar is a locally owned restaurant that is inspired by many different areas along the coast. We've been opened for over eight years and now have three convenient locations in Omaha. We offer a very casual environment with Omaha's best seafood. Open 7 days a week.

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.

Villagio

402-502-4400
6922 North 102nd Circle



A family-owned restaurant where you'll feel right at home! Villagio's menu offers award-winning specialty pizzas, sandwiches, calzones, pasta, salads & appetizers. Tucked back in the corner of Cheffy Hills Village, Villagio has been called "Omaha's best-kept secret" Dine-in and carry-out available.

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THE DUMPSTER

In The Raw

On a recent jaunt to Hawaii's Big Island, I was introduced to the traditional bowl of raw ahi stirred up with soy sauce and sesame seeds, called poke. Although it looked like an exposed brain, I fell instantly in love with its decadent healthiness. Bonus: I had just finished Larry McMurtry's Lonesome Dove, and enjoyed quoting from it: "Can I have a little poke?"

We also prepared raw ono marinated in lime, coconut milk and pineapple—basically a fish daiquiri. And kalua pig. (Also not a cocktail). We cooked all this at home. By home I mean the sterile rental house which had clearly never been anyone's actual home, and by cooked I mean we put it in a bowl and stirred it.



"While the French linger over lunches, picking at course after course, Hawaiians dive into poi and laulau and kalua pig, git-er-done, and move on—much like my father ate, who in no other way resembled a Hawaiian."

Our home kitchen was very spartan, which is fine in Hawaii because:

1. cooking heats up the house,
2. few houses have air conditioning, and,
3. why cook when you can be at the beach?

Besides the occasional brewpub burgers and deep-fried bits of things, I didn't encounter much cook-type cooking. Most of the food we saw was simple, fresh and cold. While the French linger over lunches, picking at course after course, Hawaiians dive into poi and laulau and kalua pig, git-er-done, and move on—much like my father ate, who in no other way resembled a Hawaiian.

Hawaii offers lots of fresh fish because:

1. it's far better than frozen fish,
2. it's right there, and
3. Hawaii is 2,500 miles from the nearest Costco.

by Michael Campbell

In 1794, British Captain George Vancouver gifted a dozen cows to Hawaiian King Kamehameha, who was so impressed that he placed a kapu (taboo) on them. The kapu was lifted fifty years later because:

1. there were now over 35,000 cows,
2. they were killing people and tromping hundreds of plants into extinction, and,
3. cows taste good.

I had a couple of locally-grown, grass-fed hamburgers that were out of this world, putting my Midwestern meat snobbery to shame. The restaurateurs were not posey locavores. It's just that in Hawaii, everything is locally grown. Even the Big Island, at its widest, is only 90 miles across, marked by an 8-mile-long feature named the Great Crack, which I mention here because even geography can be naughty.

"Lest you miss your Costco cuisine, most every restaurant offers stadium cheese, which is the Hawaiian term for that plasticky orange food-like product we glob onto "nachos" out of a pump at the movie theater"

Anything that can't be grown must be shipped in a can across the Pacific, which is why crap food is so much more expensive in Hawaii than fresh.

Lest you miss your Costco cuisine, most every restaurant offers stadium cheese, which is the Hawaiian term for that plasticky orange food-like product we glob onto "nachos" out of a pump at the movie theater. Besides the dreamy fresh fish, bananas and pineapple, Hawaii offers pretty much any canned food that can survive on a literal slow boat from China.

Back in Omaha I was offered a culinary class in which one names a pig, butchers it, then takes the pieces home to store in the freezer. It's all well and good to know where your food comes from, and I suppose naming your pig is appropriate when you're going to eat off of it for a year. That's longer than many of my so-called serious relationships. Hawaiians don't give their fish names because really it's just a one meal fling and then it's over.

It is a 1,500-mile journey from my home in Nebraska to the Pacific Coast, then 2,500 miles more to Hawaii. That's how far my wife traveled to enjoy her first taste of Spam, a Hawaiian favorite, after she snapped up a can prominently displayed in a Kona grocery store. That's also how far the can of Spam traveled. It was made in Nebraska.



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