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Issue 25

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No. 25

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LETTER FROM THE PUBLISHER



Welcome to the new issue of Food & Spirits Magazine, our 25th. As we move into a new year, 2017, FSM will be approaching our 10th anniversary. While we have some exciting things in store for next year, 2016 isn't quite gone yet.

2016 has seen so many things happen, both locally and nationally, in just 12 short months (and no, I won't be talking about the election).

Perhaps my age is starting to show, but it seems like nationally, celebrities have been dropping left and right. Prince, David Bowie, Alan Rickman, Glenn Frey, Abe Vigoda, Harper Lee, Merle Haggard, Morley Safer, Muhammad Ali. The list goes on and on with so many people that have had such a significant impact on all of our lives. We're all better for getting to experience their talent and passion and, of course, they will be sorely missed.

Locally, Omaha's food and spirits industry also suffered the loss of people and institutions that had no less of an impact on many of our lives. Personally and professionally, we here at FSM have felt the void those losses have created.

"M's Pub and its legacy in Omaha were things that few other restaurants, or even local businesses, could match. M's Pub was considered a paragon of excellence in so many ways and the impact of their absence was felt by so many former employees and Omaha residents."

In January, **M's Pub and Market House** restaurants were destroyed in a massive fire that also consumed retail clothing store **Nouvelle Eve**, many residential apartments and a decent chunk of Omaha's premiere entertainment district. The Market House was an up and coming restaurant that had already established itself as a top dining destination. M's Pub and its legacy in Omaha were things that few other restaurants, or even local businesses, could match. M's Pub was considered a paragon of excellence in so many ways and the impact of their absence was felt by so many former employees and Omaha residents.

For FSM, M's Pub was such a special place. Along with its owners **Ann Mellen and Ron Samuelson**, M's Pub provided an outstanding example of what a restaurant should look like in Omaha. They were the very first advertiser the magazine ever had and I can't possibly overstate their importance to myself or FSM (I also miss the Thai Lavosh a great deal).

Rene Orduna, chef and one of the owners at **Dixie Quicks Public House**, also recently passed away. Rene was such a dear friend and mentor to both me and Food & Spirits Magazine. I remember many early mornings sitting with Rene (when Dixie Quicks was still on Leavenworth St. in Omaha, rather than their newish location in Council Bluffs) talking about what a magazine in Omaha should be, food, restaurants, life, philosophy and so many other big topics. There

was also a time, when it didn't look like FSM would make it, that Rene and his husband, **Rob Gilmer**, gave me a job and helped me get back on my feet. It's difficult to imagine where I would be without the lifeline they provided. I know I'm, by far, not the only one that he showed such compassion and understanding to. I miss him dearly, but I'm often reminded of the many things he taught me and I won't soon forget those.

"I remember many early mornings sitting with Rene (when Dixie Quicks was still on Leavenworth St. in Omaha, rather than their newish location in Council Bluffs) talking about what a magazine in Omaha should be, food, restaurants, life, philosophy and so many other big topics."

While always remembering such significant losses, life, creation and resurrection plod onward.

Ann Mellen has plans to resurrect M's Pub (although, perhaps, under a different name, but in the same location), while Ron has moved on with a new creation to start **Herbe Sainte in Aksarben Village**. As well, Rob and Dixie Quicks plan to carry on Rene's profound legacy. We're fortunate for all them.

As well, Omaha has had its share of new places emerge. The aforementioned Herbe Sainte, along with **Beacon Hills, Suji's Korean Grill, Ted & Wally's in Benson, Au Courant, Simply Nola, Ugly Duck, Leadbelly, Cedar** and many others.

Of course, always remember those in our past, but don't forget to turn your face towards the sun and embrace the new creations in front of us.

*Erik Totten – Publisher
Food & Spirits Magazine*

FOOD & SPIRITS MAGAZINE ANNOUNCES 2017 EVENT SCHEDULE

2016 was a great year for events at **Food & Spirits Magazine**. Along with the **8th Annual Omaha's Largest Pizza Review** continuing its streak of being sold out every year, we also kicked off the inaugural **Omaha Doughnut Shootout** and the first **Omaha Food Truck Rodeo**.

2017 will see the return of all those events, along with the addition of one more.

On February 12th **THE 2ND ANNUAL DOUGHNUT SHOOTOUT** will take place at **The Waiting Room Lounge, Krug Park and Reverb Lounge** from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. Like last year, bakeries from across the metro will make their doughnuts available for tastings, with warm drinks to wash down all that sugary goodness. Attendees will be able to taste, compare, contrast and rate their favorites in various categories.

THE 9TH ANNUAL OMAHA'S LARGEST PIZZA REVIEW will be held on June 6th at the Waiting Room Lounge and Reverb Lounge from 6:30 p.m. until 9 p.m. As in years past, pizza will be available from around 15 different pizza restaurants for pizza lovers to sample and vote for their favorites. Judging will also be conducted

by Food & Spirits Magazine's panel of judges. Live music will also be available. A portion of the proceeds will be helping to provide scholarships for the culinary students at the **Institute for the Culinary Arts at Metro Community College**, some of whom will be on hand to help serve the pizza. The scholarships are provided through the **Omaha Chapter of the American Culinary Federation**.

THE OMAHA FOOD TRUCK RODEO(S) will take place twice in 2017 and will be held all day Saturday, rather than just Friday night, giving attendees the entire day to sample the fine foods from our local food trucks. The first food truck rodeo will take place May 20th and the second will be held September 30th. Both will be from 11 a.m. to 11 p.m. and take place in downtown **Benson** (on Military Ave.). There will be 15-20 food trucks along with a DJ, beer garden, multiple outdoor bars and outdoor seating.

Ticket information will be announced on the Food & Spirits Magazine Facebook page and interested vendors can send an email to eriktotten@darkhorsepublishing.com.





DOING THINGS THE DARIO WAY

NETS OMAHA TWO OF ITS MOST DISTINCTIVE RESTAURANTS

story by Leo Adam Biga, photos by Ryan Tantillo

Half measures don't cut it with **Dario Schicke**, the Bosnian chef-owner who bears a striking resemblance to Alec Baldwin. Schicke's helped raise the Omaha culinary scene through a pair of Dundee restaurants dedicated to distinct, authentic European cuisines.

His **Dario's Brassiere** and **Avoli Osteria**, located within a block of each other on Underwood Avenue, represent unique concepts at the upper end of casual fine dining. Dario's features a French and Belgian-influenced menu complemented by imported beers. Avoli features northern Italian fare paired with wines of the region.

Each eatery contributes to Dundee's foodie haven reputation. Though widely acclaimed, including a James Beard nomination for Dario's, they were risky niche ventures made more risky by Schicke adamantly sticking to his vision. He admits he used to be even "more

hardcore" demanding things be done his way but he's relaxed some since putting together systems and staff that execute his vision.

His stubborn refusal to compromise makes sense when you understand all he went through to earn the right to do things his

"Both of our places are focused on a region in Europe and that's what we've stayed true to from day one."

own way. He fled his homeland at age 20 only a few months after the Bosnian War erupted. His refugee experience began in Croatia before he moved to Germany and reunited with fellow refugees who could



work but couldn't travel. He met his wife Amy, a native of Kearney, Nebraska, at a Munich beer house where he worked.

He grew up in a restaurant family in Sarajevo. While surviving in Germany he worked various food jobs. Then he and Amy moved to New York City, where they soon took over a Greek deli that sold imported beers he set about studying. That search led him to train at the French Culinary Institute and he used those skills to transform the deli into a French bistro. The couple planned moving to the south of France when Amy got pregnant. The first of their two daughters was born in NYC. Amy got pregnant again. Then 9/11 happened – with the twin towers collapsing less than a mile away. The business suffered and the trauma led Amy and the girls to resettle in Omaha while a shell-shocked Schicke tried salvaging the business, then searching for a buyer until recouping his investment and joining his family here.

He briefly worked at the **French Cafe** before landing at the **Market Basket**. His classically prepared chef dinners found enough of a following that he and Amy invested everything they owned in order to open Dario's. Its staple entrees and beers set it apart. For less adventurous diners it proved too much an outlier.



"When we grate our parmesan it's like snowflakes and it just melts into the pasta. It's a huge difference. We use certified olive oils. We went out and sourced authentic Italian olive oils. We get double zero flour from Italy. San Marzano tomatoes, farm fresh eggs. That's what we do."

"At the beginning it wasn't easy. I can't tell you how many people would look at our menu and just walk out," Schicke said. "We didn't sell anything but Belgian beers and that was unheard of at the time. We lost a lot of business but it was the only way I could push our waiters and front of house staff to learn about those beers. All those beers didn't exist in Nebraska. We had to special order them."

Some customers resisted the hefty prices but he explained these hearty brews are far different than even domestic crafts. Besides, he argues, you get more for your money at Dario's.





"Nobody has a problem paying \$6 or \$7 for a glass of so-so house wine with their meal, but in this case you get 11 ounces of the best of the best beer."

People who tried it, invariably liked it. The same with the well north of \$10 burger and fries, "I knew our burger and fries were going to be a hit because they're delicious, but if we sold that for \$6.99 that's all we were going to sell. We had duck breast and scallops and mussels and crepes and chicken and pork chops. We brought our sandwich and entree prices as close as we could so we didn't turn into a burger joint. But even if you order a hamburger you're still going to get brasserie service – you're going to get bread and butter, a huge beer glass and water glass, both hand-washed and polished. You're going to get all that, plus fries, for \$14. Our fries are hand-peeled, hand-cut, soaked in water overnight, then blanched. You get what you pay for. There was nothing to compare to it at the time."

He recalled a disgruntled customer who complained about a burger, fries and beer costing nearly \$30 with tax.

"This guy told me, 'I'm not happy.' I was like, 'Sorry.' Two days later the same guy came in, even angrier, saying, 'Damn it. I couldn't stop thinking about that burger and fries.' Exactly. So we just stuck with our passion and now the culture has caught up with us."

Then, with Avoli, he filled a local gap in northern Italian food. In keeping with that cuisine's tenets, there's no pizza or lasagna or spaghetti on the menu, rather a curated selection of fresh, homemade and imported dry pasta dishes.

"Both of our places are focused on a region in Europe and that's what we've stayed true to from day one. Dario's ten years now and three and a half years with Avoli. We don't change for any trends or influences. That was the idea. As a chef and restaurant owner I really

want to commit to the style and region we're going to represent. We didn't want to deviate in any way."

He couldn't have created more different eateries.

"They are so opposite, these two restaurants, that I can't even mix a single person working in both places," Schicke said. "Everything about them is different. There's no overlapping menu items. I went so extreme even our security companies and computer systems are different. I

"He said the success of his restaurants is simply a function of "our crazy passion and not giving up – we just do what we do and I'm very proud of what we've done."

didn't want to open a second Dario's – I wanted to start something new."

Besides, he said, "the only way for me to step outside of Dario's was to do something else." With Dario's already well-established and having a "great crew there," he devotes more of his hands-on time to supporting Avoli with its complex menu and larger kitchen and dining room. But he still starts and ends every night at his namesake spot, Dario's.

He, Amy and friends did the interior designs of both places themselves.

"It's very personal to us. Why pay somebody a lot of money to tell you what you like?"

Schicke's passion for getting thing right and his hunger for always learning new things finds him taking off to hone his craft. To prep for

Avoli, he said, “I went to Italy and worked in a whole bunch of Italian restaurants because I wanted to do it right. I wanted to do what today’s Italian food is. So I went all the way down deep, from product to menu to how people eat, what they eat, how they source and how we translate that in Omaha.”

There are no fussy fusions at his restaurants. The dishes are created using the same ingredients and preparations as in Europe.

“At Avoli we use only Prosciutto di Parma and Prosciutto di San Daniele. We don’t cut our Parmesan, we get a wheel of Parmesan every few months that’s about 95 to 110 pounds. It’s like a \$1,200 to \$1,400 piece of cheese. That’s what we use exclusively. When we grate our parmesan it’s like snowflakes and it just melts into the pasta. It’s a huge difference. We use certified olive oils. We went out and sourced authentic Italian olive oils. We get double zero flour from Italy. San Marzano tomatoes, farm fresh eggs. That’s what we do.”

He acknowledges his ability to adhere to such standards is made possible by the independence he maintains.

“I’m really lucky I have people at home supporting me because it could easily be a situation where partners say, ‘we could be making a lot more money serving something else.’ But we don’t have investors – we don’t have a lot of people involved. I don’t have anybody telling me what to do.”

If he took shortcuts, it would only spoil things for this perfectionist and traditionalist.

“I do this for passion but also you have to make a living doing it. I have a family to raise, I have a house. You have to be able to build a life around it. It’s exciting and challenging. Running a restaurant, dealing with business aspects, being creative and cooking every day for two places, not easy, and a lot of times not fun. To mix all that in one bowl, it’s rough. That’s when those Belgian beers come in handy.

“Raising teenage girls – I need stronger than Belgian beer to get over that,” he said, laughing.

In the restaurant business there’s no option but to be committed, “There’s too many moving parts, it’s too expensive,” he said. “Our art is probably the most expensive art in the world. We have to have heat, air conditioning, plumbing, electrical, insurance, all this stuff to practice our art. You need like a thousand bucks a day to practice, so you have to be smart about it. I tell people, if you don’t have passion, just don’t do it, and do something else.

“Otherwise, you’ll get burned out.”

He said the success of his restaurants is simply a function of “our crazy passion and not giving up – we just do what we do and I’m very proud of what we’ve done.”

Even though both places feature staples that never change, Schicke allows himself and his chef’s freedom to experiment with new dishes. He recently introduced Avoli staff and diners to Croatian pasta.



“You make like a bread dough, roll it really thin, and then bake it. Then you break it into pieces and cook it like pasta, so it’s twice-cooked pasta that has like a bread quality. We’re going to serve goose and the dried pasta is going to be rehydrated and cooked in those goose juices, with

Chestnuts and all that stuff. That’s my comfort food.”

Some inspiration is tied to the seasons. At Avoli, for example, he said, “You get to the summer and it’s all about great olive oil, vinegars, tomatoes, basil. You can’t help it. But as soon as it gets colder, the nights are a little longer, that’s when I shine with flavorful marinades and braises. A little more complex food – using less expensive ingredients and making them luxurious,”

Meanwhile, he’ll keep pushing his skills by guest working in kitchens.

“It’s fun, it keeps me excited, I learn to do things better. Then I come back here torturing everybody with what I saw.”

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BACK TO THE FUTURE

Anne & Craig McVeigh
bring Beacon Hills'
take on American
comfort cuisine
back to where
their food careers
started

story by Leo Adam Biga
photos by Wyn Wiley

It is back to the future for **Anne and Craig McVeigh** and their new **Beacon Hills** restaurant at 6750 Mercy Road in **Aksarben Village**.

The restaurateurs got their industry start at **M's Pub** and the **Garden Cafe** in Omaha before moving to Lincoln. As franchisees, they opened two successful Gardens in the capital city and eventually created their own signature place – the original Beacon Hills.

They did American comfort food before it turned trendy. That was Garden's staple brand and the couple refined the cuisine concept at Beacon Hills.

Craig McVeigh, who supervises the kitchen, said he and his wife are bemused by the whole comfort food revolution that's made the tried-and-true cuisine fashionable.

"We're not trying to catch up, we're trying to just keep doing what we've been doing. We've been doing it all along. We were doing it without even realizing the comfort food march was going on. It was cool way before it got cool."

Anne McVeigh said, "I look at what other people are doing but I'm more concerned with what we're doing and the product we put out."

They long ago sold their Garden Cafes. This past summer they closed the old Beacon Hills in Lincoln after a 16-year run. Now, the pair is making magic again with their Omaha eatery. The combined restaurant, catering operation and banquet facility opened in the Pacific

Life building on October 14. **Stinson Park** is just to the south and **Baxter Arena** just beyond it. The **Keystone Trail** and **College of St. Mary's** campus are to the west. A large patio features a stone fireplace, decorative pavers and a distinctive wrought-iron gate. The relaxed outdoor area is just off the Elmwood Room, an informal Beacon Hills party space that can accommodate 80 seated diners.

"They did American comfort food before it turned trendy. That was Garden's staple brand and the couple refined the cuisine concept at Beacon Hills. "

The Elmwood Room and main dining area feature a wood and stone motif of earthen-colors. The exposed, industrial ceiling is given warmth and texture by big wood beams and stone-splashed walls. Salvaged artifacts serve as vintage wall art. Mounted in the dining room are weathered windmill blades. Between the restrooms hangs an old unpainted barn door. On a back wall are splays of Spanish oak branches.

"We didn't want to do anything cookie-cutter," Anne said. "We're not just going to hang anything on the walls. We're going to display stuff we really like."

The dining room is dominated by the quartz-topped bar. The Elmwood Room features an over-sized credenza. Large windows let in ample light throughout.

Anne, who runs the front of the house with daughter Beth, said diners like the intended cozy, neighborhood feel. Comfort is behind much of Beacon Hills. It's in the homey, familiar dishes like meatloaf, chicken pot pie, pot roast, mac and cheese and crab cakes. A signature dish is the garlic-mustard-butter sauced sirloin steak.

Craig said, "The comfort food thing... it's just good food that doesn't go out of style. I think sometimes it goes away for a little while, but if you get a slice of perfectly baked meatloaf or fried chicken that's crispy not soggy, who's not going to like that? My description has always been we take the classics and put our spin on them."

"There's a lot of things on this menu we've been doing since the first menu (in Lincoln)," Anne said. "It all started with the crab cakes. People love them. The recipe comes from a 1940s-era Maryland cookbook. Our crab cakes are very simple. Crab meat is the star.

"Friends say that Craig and I are together because of his crab Rangoon. They're so delicious. They're super-stuffed with real crab.

"On the creative side," she said "we have pretty good palates. We are not fussy people but we try to put selections on our menu that everybody will like. Our chef **Elizabeth Reissig-Anderson** has worked with us for 25 years. The three of us bring all of our unique backgrounds together to create our menus."

Since their Garden Cafe adventures until now, the McVeighs have worked virtually every day together for 30 years

"Most people would say that's insane," Anne said, "but the reason it works so well is that what Craig does he does very well and what I do I think I do very well, but we don't do the same job. It's always his decision when it comes to anything in the kitchen. He's the wheel or the ramrod."

As the expeditor, no order leaves the kitchen without Craig's approval. Anne handles the business side, writing all the checks. It's not to say they never butt heads.

"Now, have we had some spirited conversations from time to time? I think so," she said, smiling.

The key is letting the small stuff go and getting together on the big stuff. It helps that they both thrive on hard work and putting customers first.

"This comes with our shared Midwestern upbringing and value system. Nobody works as hard as Craig and I do," she said.

The point of putting in long hours and seeing to every detail is customer satisfaction. "When we can be part of making people's day a little bit better for the short time they're here with us, that really makes us happy," Anne said.

Just as in Lincoln, their new Beacon Hills is already drawing notables and creating regulars. Craig said the goal is giving everyone, no matter who you are, the same quality service and experience.

"We just want you to come back."

Craig was born and raised in Tekamah, Nebraska. Anne, in Omaha. He came here as a young man to help his brother frame houses. He did that by day and at night worked food jobs. He learned the kitchen ropes at the old **Playboy Club** and the **Acapulco**, then did a stint at Bonanza, before a chance meeting with an M's co-owner got him hired there.

He acknowledges he "fibbed a bit" about his skill set. But with help from his old boss at the club he learned the essentials of food costing and executing fancy culinary techniques.

Meanwhile, Anne's grandfather and father were cattle brokers at the Omaha stockyards, where she spent much time as a girl. She traces her love of restaurants to Sunday family dinners at **Johnny's Cafe**. Anne worked her way through college waitressing at various venues before joining M's, which is where she and Craig met. They both mourn the loss of M's to fire in

"Comfort is behind much of Beacon Hills. It's in the homey, familiar dishes like meatloaf, chicken pot pie, pot roast, mac and cheese and crab cakes. A signature dish is the garlic-mustard-butter sauced sirloin steak."

2015. The "anchor" Old Market spot gave many others their start in the food industry.

The ambitious couple then caught on with Garden Cafe just as the Omaha-based business began expanding and franchising.

"We got in on the ground floor," Craig said.

They moved quickly up the corporate ladder before seizing an opportunity they saw to buy the franchise rights for Lincoln. While other Garden Cafes struggled and the company downsized, the McVeigh's first facility was such a hit that they built a second.

After Lincoln developer **Larry Price** passed away before completing a new venture tied to a hotel complex under construction, the



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developers who bought the property from the Price estate finished the project and invited the McVeighs to open their Beacon Hills restaurant there on a handshake deal.

Developers came to them, Anne said, "Because we'd established ourselves as good operators." Craig said their Garden Cafes "did numbers that I don't know we'll ever match anywhere again – Lincoln was so ripe for that (concept) at the time."

Beacon Hills cultivated many loyal restaurant, catering and banquet customers. The McVeigh's experience helping Garden Cafe grow prepared them for having their own food ventures. It helps that Craig enjoys working through challenges until he finds solutions.

"I like problem-solving. Because of how fast Garden Cafe moved, we spent every day solving growth problems. I wasn't involved in planning new stores but once new ones came on board I was involved in hiring people in and getting things organized."

He said the hardest transition they ever undertook was implementing POS systems, or point of sale. Twenty years ago he devised a custom system he still uses today that automatically updates food costs as prices change.

The couple wanted to keep the flagship Lincoln store even after deciding to open the new one in Omaha. But the Lincoln hotel changed ownership, and when lease negotiations stalled, Craig said "we saw the writing on the wall." The couple has brought some veteran Lincoln staff to Omaha.

Aksarben was their choice for the Omaha startup because of its dense residential-commercial surroundings, high traffic and vibrant goings-on.

"This is an A plus location and it's only going to get better with the new HDR headquarters and the new hotel coming in," Craig said. "Our location in Lincoln was a C."

Being at historic Aksarben is full-circle for Anne, whose family has long ties to the rodeo, coronation and ball and foundation. She loves "the symmetry of it all," adding, "I just love being back at home."

The couple didn't doubt they wanted to do a new Beacon Hills, but Anne said, "We weren't sure we could do this again physically – we're not young." They've proved they can. Besides, not much can throw them by now. As she put it, "We've seen it all."

While she appreciates imitation is high flattery, she sees several local eateries that have copied some of Beacon Hills 16 year old dishes. As her cattle broker family used to say, "It chaps my hide."

But as the McVeighs know, all is fair in love, war and restaurant competition. After all, they reinvented Garden Cafe with Beacon Hills. Now they've reinvented Beacon Hills in Omaha. Let the good times roll.

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CULINARY ARTS**

CHEF-OWNER JENNY COCO PROVES SHE CAN HANG WITH THE BOYS

story by Leo Adam Biga
photos by Ryan Tantillo

In the male-dominated culinary field men get the lion's share of attention. In Omaha, **Clayton Chapman and Paul Kulik** headline a deep roster of acclaimed chefs. But at least one woman, **Jenny Coco**, has proved her chops compare with anyone's, regardless of gender.

Coco doesn't make a big deal about breaking down the doors to this exclusive boys club.

"It takes a certain personality, male or female, to do this and we all have the same type of mentality I think," she said. "Since our brains are wired very similarly, it doesn't matter that I'm a woman. I mean, if I wasn't meant to be doing this, I wouldn't be doing it."

Besides, she added, "I know I can hang with them."

Like the best of her male colleagues in town, she's been nominated for the prestigious **James Beard** prize. Unlike many of them, she never went to culinary school. She's learned everything she knows working on the line, reading and absorbing things where she finds them. The Omaha native paid her dues at landmark Omaha eateries. She did her first professional cooking at the **Baking Company** in an all women-staffed kitchen – a rarity then and now.

Though she doesn't consider herself a trailblazer, she's well aware that women chefs are still few and far between and often face a tough road.

"I don't want to see that keeping other women from jumping in and I'm finally seeing that change," she said. "I can count on one hand how many women I worked with after the Baking Company 30 years ago. There's just not a lot of women chefs. A lot of them still do pastry. There's so much more now though, there's so much talent."

She's heartened by the many talents, male and female, emerging from **Metropolitan Community College's Institute for Culinary Arts**.

"They're woven into the fabric of kitchens all over the city. There's so many restaurants in this town," she continued, "that opportunities

abound for young chefs starting out here or going away for more experience and coming back to make their mark."

Coco really honed her skills at **V. Mertz and the Flatiron Cafe**, where she developed a following.

Then, in 2012, ready to break from her chef-for-hire career, she opened her own **J. Coco** restaurant. The chic, not fussy spot at 5203 Leavenworth is all about her fresh take on traditional dishes using refined yet simple techniques and fresh, quality ingredients. Like so many of her contemporaries, she passionately elevates American

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comfort food to new heights, whether the espresso and chili-rubbed pork chop or peppercorn and porcini-dusted ribeye.

Directly across the street is a venerable bakery and cafe, **Gerda's**, which features a German slant on comfort food. Its namesake proprietor is also female. Indeed, Coco said the stretch of Leavenworth from 52nd to 48th Streets includes more than a dozen female-owned businesses.

It's a full circle life for Coco. As a girl she ate home-cooked meals that her mother, Joan Militti, who went from lunch lady to school District 66 food services manager. Now Coco's putting a gourmet

stamp on things like oxtails, short ribs and mac and cheese that she grew up eating.

"It's just taking what everybody recognizes and maybe showing them something different or doing a new twist on things. I want to make sure my food is prepared properly and is as approachable and clean and simple as possible, so that we're always on people's radar. Maybe we're not breaking down the culinary walls, but you're going to get a wonderful meal here and we work very hard at that."

Tradition is important to Coco, who located her restaurant in the former **Wohlner's** grocery store. The iconic Wohlner's occupied the brick building from the 1940s until moving a few years back. Before that, the structure housed another grocer, **Newman's**. All this matters to Coco because her great-grandfather was part owner of **Kotera & Sloup Staple and Fancy Groceries** generations ago. A blown-up black and white photograph of that store's proprietors proudly standing in front of their wares pops at one end of J. Coco.

Adorning another wall are oversized prints picturing vintage goods from Wohlner's.



Always wanting a neighborhood place of her own, she knew she wanted the Aksarben-Elmwood space as soon as it became available.

"It's a beautiful building with a good history to it. We wanted to keep the neighborhood connection. There were such strong feelings after the store left. People were so mad. They liked seeing their neighbors here.

They liked coming every day and grabbing the food for that evening's dinner. It was part of their thing, their day, their routine and then it was gone and being in this neighborhood here I know that's who are going to support us day in and day out.

"Residents of this neighborhood and surrounding neighborhoods are dedicated, devoted, supportive. They prove it over and over again.

They're not going past 72nd (Street) – they're here and they don't want to go anywhere else."

She said she's taken pains to make her place "very comfortable," adding, "It's like eating in my dining room at my house. We have family pictures up at home, so why wouldn't we here?"



With J. Coco established, she's about to open a second, as-yet-unnamed, spot on the southeast corner of 50th and Underwood, in a building that's seen much turnover and recently suffered a fire.

"It's a big space we're planning on dividing it to have two concepts under one roof. One side will be a lounge-bar with craft cocktails and

"What I'd like to move into now is more playful. Like doing a food truck inside that serves street cuisine or updating the Cheese Frenchee. I want to feature small plates that people can share. That's how my friends and I eat when we go out."

late night food. That's where the restaurant side comes in. It will keep regular restaurant hours and then close down, but the bar side will be able to serve food later. There's nobody doing late night food.

"What I'd like to move into now is more playful. Like doing a food truck inside that serves street cuisine or updating the Cheese Frenchee. I want to feature small plates that people can share. That's how my friends and I eat when we go out."

She said she meant to take J. Coco in a similar direction, and she has pared down its entrees and expanded the starters, but she and her patrons weren't ready for it.

"I wanted this to be a complete break from what I've always done but the customers wanted to see an extension of Flatiron. That was my comfort zone, too. I knew how to cook that style of food."

Having her own branded place in J. Coco meant quite a leap for her.

"After spending 20 years hiding in the kitchen to now having my name on the wall has been different. People expect to see me when they come. They want to talk to me. So, now I split my time half and half between the kitchen and the front of the house. It was difficult at first. But if people can't put the face to the experience, they're not coming back. They like that connection. They like you to remember their name or their favorite drink or entree, and that's nice, too, because people have been supporting me for so many years. It's just a small gesture to be able to thank them face to face."

She's out front more, too, because she's overseeing construction of the second restaurant, which she expects to open May 1 or after.

Another reason her kitchen time's reduced these days is that she has a capable cook in **Pedro Garcia**, who was with her many years at Flatiron before following her to J. Coco. Another member of the kitchen team she led at Flatiron also followed her to her restaurant.

"They're just blossoming and that was my goal. At Flatiron I got to

"I don't mind being in a little pond if I can be a little bit bigger fish."

spread my wings and experiment and teach myself and that's the kind of kitchen I want here. While I might not be cooking every day, I'm a resource. But mainly it's their turn and they're taking the ball and running with it. If I'm there blocking their rise, then what's the point."

She said whether cooking in the back or meeting-greeting up front, it's evident how much more sophisticated diners' palates have become.

"The Food Network and Food Channel have brought a great education to everybody," she said. "People are more engaged with what they're eating. They want to talk it about more. They want more



explanation. People want to know what they're eating, where it's from. They want to feel involved, where years ago I think they just wanted to be told what to eat. They just don't want to be told anymore."

She said diners want farm to table food that showcase fresh, local, organic, sustainable products, which are the same things Coco strives to provide with the help of area small growers and producers. While she

"I want to be here for the long haul. We don't have to be top of the heap – we just want to be part of the heap."

said ingredients once difficult to find here are now available, more work needs to be done to cultivate farmer-chef relationships in order to take full advantage of Nebraska's vast arable land.

Coco said the restaurant business isn't for everyone because of the long, crazy hours that mean missing family events.

"I know what I've given up," said Coco, who's married with two step-daughters.

Knowing that her artistry satisfies patrons makes it all worthwhile.

"When people love it, well, what could be better? I have a talent, a gift and I want to share it and when people love it that's pretty amazing. When the room's humming, it's a pretty awesome feeling, it really is. There's no better feeling."

Coco's never been tempted to try her hand outside her hometown.

"I don't mind being in a little pond if I can be a little bit bigger fish."

Now that J. Coco's going on five years, she wants it to be an institution.

"I want to be here for the long haul. We don't have to be top of the heap – we just want to be part of the heap. Slow and steady wins the race. We're here to finish."

Business is good.

"I think we're doing okay. Our weekends are always booked. You always need reservations."

Frequent parties and a brisk catering trade boost revenues.

Though several blocks south of the hot Dundee food strip that has **Mark's, Dario's, Avoli, Pitch, Paragon, Amsterdam Falafel** and others, J. Coco's benefits from the foodies those places draw,

"Dundee had paved the way. They were already bringing people to the area when we opened. That was a big thing. We need more. That's what makes it all work."

J. Coco

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HEART OF SPAIN

by Ann Summers



MEMORIES OF OLD ESPAÑA

My love of tapas and Spanish cooking began when I went to my first Spanish restaurant in a large city about 20 years ago. When I moved to Omaha, I found **España**, a much-loved Spanish restaurant that was a **Benson** neighborhood anchor for many years. The first time someone there offered me a fruity garnacha blend and some bacalao fritters with aioli, I felt happy. I felt like I had come home. España did a good thing, bringing the Mediterranean to

Omaha. And part of its success was due to **Carlos Mendez**, who began as a server and bartender there, and later became chef-owner. But he didn't stop there.

TAPAS FOR LUNCH, MEANT TO BE SHARED, FOR MIDWESTERN PALATES

España is gone now (more on this in a jiff), but there is a mini-version of it in **Rockbrook Village**. **Little España** has been there since 2009, when it opened. Señor Mendez intended it to focus on tapas,



rather than entrees, and rotate through a seasonal menu. It's a beautiful space, with a spacious patio, and warm but modern dining spaces that feel like a living room in a really cool friend's house. He talks about his restaurants as if they *are* homes, "I want people to feel comfortable, to enjoy the time, the food, as if they are my family."

SHARING OUR HISTORY WITH FOOD

I only had to watch Sr. Mendez talking about his mother and his grandmother's food, to know that he gives his family's love of food and memories to everyone who comes through his restaurants' doors. Coming from the food-centric South, I asked if he felt that when we prepare food and drink for others, if we are always trying to relive something, and help others experience that. "Oh, definitely," he says, "Here in Rockbrook we have a wonderful community, diverse, friendly. It's a beautiful space, it's convenient to so many places for lunch or dinner." It is close to Dodge and 680, but I think there's a better reason to eat there. "Our passion for the food has to come out," Mendez says, "My grandmother made cakes, it was her business, so of course, when people ask me what the best dessert we have is, I tell them tres leches, because that is the one that was *her* cake." That kind of love, you don't get in just any restaurant.

THE MOTHER OF ALL DISHES

Sr. Mendez is from Venezuela, a country for whose people I have great admiration. Nominally, I taught many Venezuelanos business English. In reality, they taught me Spanish mixed with goofy good humor, a crazed work ethic, and above all, a storm surge of passion for their families, their culture and its food. Spanish food is the mother of Latin American food, with each country offering its own regional produce and history, celebratory dishes and endless riffs on corn-based staples. Cuisina Latina is also responsible for introducing the spicy and sweet pepper to the world, the tomato to the Italian, the potato to the German, *le chocolat* to the French, and the avocado to the Californian.

Fact is, Spanish flavors are the weft and warp of Latin cooking, the ancient heritage of Gauls, Romans, Basques and Moors, and it lives on in homes from the pointy tip of Argentina, through the narrow waist of Panama, all the way to North America, and islands in between. That's what we students of anthropology call "a crap ton" of food culture.

EVERYTHING OLD IS NEW AGAIN

Asked what the essential heart of Spanish food is, Sr. Mendez doesn't pause, "The sofrito. It's the base everything is built on: the garlic, onion, peppers, sometimes tomato." And just like Spanish cooking uses Old World basics and New combined, Little España, brings together the best of Spanish cooking to the Midwest. "People are different, we have a very diverse clientele here. Some come from LA or New York and want a traditional paella, some want to just try the dish and are not used to the really traditional one. We learned after many years in España that most Midwesterners don't care for the *soccarat*, the crunchy rice at the bottom of the paella, so we adjusted. We make it however you want. But the real paella is a seafood dish, and we use good products and real saffron. It takes time to make each dish by hand, and it takes authentic ingredients to make this dish well, so it's a little expensive and our customers don't always see why they have to wait."

TO BURN OR NOT TO BURN?

A little clarity here if you don't speak authentic Spanish cooking. *Soccarat* means a crust on the bottom of the rice where the dish is purposefully toasted from below, as if in a reverse salamander oven. The word comes from *soccare* in the old language of Cataluna, and meant "burnt." But that is an insult to those who appreciate the history and the crunch, and in Spain, it's the part of the paella people fight over. Having recently seen the madness that ensued as French people fought over the heel-ends of freshly baked boules and baguettes at a resort buffet, I get it. But many Midwesterners don't, and, as Mendez told me, sent the paella back because it was "burned." Well, scoff if you will,



but it just makes you look boorish and ridiculous. Who are you to tell people a “Husker” beef and cream cheese roll isn’t *real* sushi? Restaurants are about serving people well, and Sr. Mendez changed the way he presents his paella to suit his diners. You can request it either way, sans or with *soccarat*. And no one is offended. The great Spanish chef, Jose Andres, who believe me, is Señor Traditional as

“We make it however you want. But the real paella is a seafood dish, and we use good products and real saffron. It takes time to make each dish by hand, and it takes authentic ingredients to make this dish well. . .”

Mendez reminded me, once vowed he would never stop until there were tapas in every city and town in the US. Even he once said that his mentor cautioned him to stay true to his roots but to learn from mistakes and change with them, that to do otherwise would mean stagnation and failure, “We

don’t import Spanish fish to Washington DC,” he said about his gorgeous restaurant, **Jaleo**, “that would be crazy. Some of the best producers are right here, and they don’t produce traditional varieties of produce, but they are the best, and we adapt.” And Carlos Mendez bootstrapped Spanish food here in Omaha, stayed true to its essence, and made it enjoyable for everyone.

A LOVE OF EUROPEAN FOOD

Somewhere between making España a household word and refining Little España into a tapas-centered lunch powerhouse, Sr. Mendez met chef **Benjamin Maides**. They worked together, became life-long friends, and then Maides went off to make his bones and get some serious cred. And boy, did he ever. *Savez-vous* the **French Laundry**? If you don’t know what that is, and who its chef, Thomas Keller is, well, you haven’t watched enough cooking shows on cable. FL is closed now, but Keller isn’t. He is one of those luminaries in the food world; great chefs hold their breath when they say his name. And, moving on, Maides hunted up his Swiss roots and took himself to Europe, where he worked his tail off and ended up in a 3-star Michelin restaurant in Italy. Then if you please, he comes back to the Big O, sits himself down for a cigar and a Cuba libre preparada (with Venezuelan rum, of course) and picks up right where he left off with his buddy Carlos Mendez, “We’d always wanted to do something, so we sat there and said, what can we do? And you know, everything starts from dreaming.”

A NEW PIGGIE AND A WELL-TRAVELLED CHEF

“We were proud of what we’d done at España, but we felt it had done what it needed to do. We helped draw new blood and revitalize Benson,” said Mendez, and now it was time to refine those Spanish flavors at Little España, and do something



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9 Years In A Row



new. They decided to gut the old España, redo it totally, and do a distinctly European menu. Not the pretentious kind where the waiter rolls his eyes when you try to say the wine name, but the delicious kind, with as much local produce as Nebraska farmers can grow and raise, and with pork. Did I mention pork? The logo of his new venture features a pig. Before you knew it, Chef Benjamin Maides put himself into the fray and was designing pop-up restaurant menus with **Lot 16**, and sanding hardwood floors in the new restaurant.

A NEW BISTRO IS BORN AND IT IS AU COURANT

Au courant means “of the moment, current, chic (or if you will) dank.” It nods its French head to Maides’ Swiss roots, but looking at its pilot pop-up menu, I can smell Spain. The skeleton of Spanish food is still there: pork, hints of spice (not hot but savory), and the sofrito, and the Mediterranean love of vegetables. “The new menu will be small, with four or so amuse bouches to start. We want everyone to be able to sample things, have a bite to share with friends when they

“When Carlos Mendez says “old-world-wines,” he gets the same look on his face his did when he told me about his father and his grandmother”

drop by for a drink at the bar,” says Sr. Mendez, and then we will have some appetizers, eventually pastas, and then mains.” Knowing that Italians consider pasta a *primo piatto*, or first course, this makes sense. At **Au Courant**, you will then be able to pick from meat and vegetable courses, choosing either, or, if you’re me, both. There will be several

opening days for the restaurant, in several sittings, so if you can do social media, I recommend you seek them out or watch the papers. It’s going to be tasty, folks.

“NEVER DRINK ... UNLESS THE DAY ENDS IN THE LETTER Y”

Wonderful advice from one of the great dames of acting, Helen Mirren. And Omaha likes a good hard day’s slog followed by a good hard-earned grog. In Benson’s newest restaurant, you’ll find not only bites to amuse the palate, but supper and an excellent bar. Sr. Mendez’s favorite cocktail is the Cuba libre preparada, of course, it was his father’s favorite (Venezuelan rum, muddled with lime.) “Au Courant will have eight signature drinks, which we designed, and good wines, nothing over \$50.00, good small batch, some Californian, but mostly European Old World wines.” When Carlos Mendez says “old-world-wines,” he gets the same look on his face his did when he told me about his father and his grandmother. And you can see his passion for food, his desire to translate it into something wonderful, and his goal of sharing it with anyone who looks hungry or thirsty. “His favorite wine?” I asked. “Priorat,” he said. I began Googling on my phone. Briefly, it is a high altitude Catalan wine from the appellation and county of Priorat. There, it is exposed to freezing north winds and warm mistral breezes as it digs deep into volcanic soils laced with mica and quartz that give it a unique mineral-like quality. A blended wine, it is accompanied by neighboring grapes of the grenache, carignan, syrah or merlot varieties, and long-aged in barrels. It’s on order at **Spirit World**, so I’ll let you know, but I think, since I am a fan of similar styled Bordeaux-type French reds, it’s going to feel like another step closer to the heart of Spain.

It's a fine day for a Corn Dog!



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A close-up photograph of a red tomato being sliced by a mechanical slicer. The slicer has a series of curved blades that are currently cutting into the tomato, creating a series of parallel slices. The tomato is positioned on a white plastic base. In the background, there is a metal shelving unit with various items on it, including what looks like a yellow container and some boxes.

MY NEWEST LOVE: Tomato Slicer

by Eddie Morin

Ok, so I've been working in the kitchen at **B & G Tasty Foods** for about 15 years now. I never had any culinary training before that, and have never worked in a different kitchen, so my experience is pretty limited. I'm sure I do things my own way, which might be a good thing, but probably not. I'm wrong a lot. For 15 years I've been slicing tomatoes by hand, once slice at a time. I just accepted it, but it doesn't have to be that way! I just learned about *tomato slicers*. Life has been great ever since. I'm absolutely sure I have your attention now, and this part of my article is done. Moving on to phase two.

Okay, okay, okay. So, we do this thing now at B & G where we provide sandwiches for high school kids, who go down to watch movies at **Film Streams**. These are educational movies and stuff with merit. Not just like, *Jennifer's Body* or something. Then, they have a discussion. The kids are working, right? It's not like they just wanted to get out of school to go see a movie. Yeah, so we are making these sandwiches, and there are a TON of them. I don't get out a lot, so I thought there would be about 100 high school kids or something along those lines. Well, as it turns out, there are more like 17 million high school kids in Omaha.

Slicing these tomatoes just got pretty serious, right? So there I am slicing millions of tomatoes and one of our other cooks, **Eric Shew**, says to me, "Hey, my brother said we should get a tomato slicer." At first, I was like, well screw your brother. You see, I used to work at **Gamers** (the video game store) and, Mike Shew, Eric's older brother fired me for selling defective merchandise back to the

store. I didn't know it was defective because I kind of stole it, and I had never tested it out. But it wasn't really stolen, my manager said I could just have the stuff in the repair room because our repair guy quit and so that stuff was just going to rot back there. So, with permission, I took the games and systems that were back there, and I'm kind of dumb and didn't realize that stuff was probably back there because it was broken. I worked at the 72nd Street location, but the Brentwood location has this Japanese game called Pepsi Man that I really wanted, so I took the newly acquired stuff

"For 15 years I've been slicing tomatoes by hand, one slice at a time. I just accepted it, but it doesn't have to be that way! I just learned about tomato slicers. Life has been great ever since. "

over there and traded it in for Pepsi Man. I was excited. Then, the next day I get a call from Mike Shew saying I was fired because all the stuff I traded in was broken. Now, I know I got permission to take the stuff, but I didn't want to get my manager in trouble, because at that point, I'm thinking maybe he didn't have the right to give all the stuff to me. Plus, I felt like an idiot because, of course, the stuff was broken, it was in the repair room. I was

temporarily blinded by Pepsi Man. So anyway, Mike Shew fired me. Since then, Mike has been great and even helped me out with some jobs more recently. He was just doing what he was supposed to be doing. But really, if someone fires you, even if it is your fault, you are kind of like, “screw that guy,” right?

Alright, well back to the part where Eric’s brother, Mike, said we should get a tomato slicer. My initial reaction was “screw Mike Shew,” but then right away I thought, “oh yeah, that was my fault. Maybe we should get a tomato slicer.” Right in the middle of cutting 700 slices of tomato with a knife, I decide to go over to **Hockenbergs** and look for a slicer. I was imagining a little plastic thing for about 30 bucks. I get there and Ray is right at the counter. Ray is great, by the way. Super helpful dude. So I say to Ray, “Ray, I think I might be in the market for a tomato slicer.” Ray shows me the slicer and it is way more intense than I imagined. I knew this wasn’t going to be \$30. I ask Ray how much it is, and he says about \$250. Holy smokes. That’s a lot of money. Can I afford a \$250 tomato slicer? Tune in next issue to see how this ends up...

“But I could tell they were just using her. They didn’t love her like I did. I asked them what they thought and everyone was really impressed, but then they quietly got back to their other tasks. They weren’t smitten like I was.”

Haha, just kidding. I’m going to do it all right now.

Ray can see I’m pretty uncomfortable about this whole expensive slicer thing, so he tells me that they are really nice and totally worth it. So, I angrily pointed my finger right at him and said, “Oh yeah? How do you know, Ray? How do you even know if it’s worth it?” Ray then calmly told me about how he managed a **Little King** restaurant for six years. In fact, he said, “I managed a Little King for six years.” I’m no expert on what it takes to manage a Little King for six years, but I’d have to imagine it involves slicing a lot of tomatoes. Six years is a long time to manage a Little King and not learn anything about slicing tomatoes. So, I curled my still extended finger back in and said, “Ok. Box her up.”

Back at B & G, I opened up the slicer. It is a Nemco 56600-1 3/16-inch model. Top of the line, baby. Here are a few facts to get you up to snuff on your slicer knowledge.

The Nemco 56600-1 features:

- Labor and time saving
- Cleanly slices even over-ripe tomatoes
- Consistent cut size for portion control
- Easily replaceable cartridge blade assembly
- Compact, portable and simple to use
- Smallest footprint
- Accommodates a 4 1/2-inch diameter tomato
- Life test of 25,000 pounds of tomatoes and still cutting
- Nemco makes the best cartridge tomato slicer!

Those features are right off the manufacturer’s website, so you know they are true.

Ray said we should also get a tomato corer and a drain shelf too, but I don’t want to lose you on all this lingo, so I’ll leave that stuff out. We got the whole setup, ok. I don’t want to get any fan mail telling me I did it all wrong.

I throw my first tomato in the slicer and push the handle, and just like that, 11 perfect slices come out. I almost fainted. Technology! I had to have more. I ended up slicing about 40 more tomatoes. I made all my staff come back and slice tomatoes. That’s when I realized I was in love. As Dan, or Eric, or Joey sliced, I looked on jealously. I smiled and said they were doing a good job, but I could tell they were just using her. They didn’t love her like I did. I asked them what they thought and everyone was really impressed, but then they quietly got back to their other tasks. They weren’t smitten like I was. I read the manual. I took it apart. I showed Eric how to clean her properly. I installed the table hook so you could slice more effectively with one hand. The slicer and me, we are a team now. I have to leave her at B & G when I go home though, because I’m married.

That’s pretty much it. You should go talk to Ray and get yourself a slicer if you want to improve your life. After all, he did manage a Little King for six years. Oh and my manager at Gamers name was Matt Duncan. He was actually a really great guy, but what happened, happened, and he isn’t blameless in the above documented situation.



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AN OSSO BUCCO TO REMEMBER

story by Charles Schlusell
photo by Jacob Herrman

The leaves are falling, there's a chill in the air, your breath is visible and every step crunches the leaves underfoot releasing the aromas of fall that fill your nostrils with memories of the past and a longing for all the traditions of the holidays that will soon follow. I don't know about you, but the cool temperatures, combined with the smell of autumn in the air, triggers a physical thrill of anticipation of all the joys of the season to come. If you're like me, you're also scrambling for fun, festive and delicious ideas for your get-togethers.

If you'd like to pull out all the stops for a real show stopper of a dish, this is it. Osso buco is a classic Italian meal that has its roots as a humble dish prepared with veal shanks that were, in times past, a low cost cut of meat that becomes amazingly delicious with slow and low braising in the oven. Osso buco has become increasingly popular over the last couple of decades, and so the shanks that were once almost a throw away cut of meat in years past, have become a decadent dish featured on many upscale eateries. For good reason, braised in

white wine and aromatics the shanks become meltingly fork-tender delectable morsels. I like to serve the veal on top of velvety smooth Yukon gold mashed potatoes liberally sauced with the thickened

"Osso buco is a classic Italian meal that has its roots as a humble dish prepared with veal shanks that were, in times past, a low cost cut of meat that becomes amazingly delicious with slow and low braising in the oven."

braising liquid. As if that isn't enough, the hot osso buco sprinkled with gremolata releases an intensely scented, explosively flavored mix of Italian parsley, garlic and lemon zest.

I originally served this recipe when I headed up the kitchen at **Nick's Main Street Grill** where it was an all-time favorite of many of the regulars. I hadn't made it for many years and decided it would be the perfect dish to share with my **Food & Spirits Magazine** family. In reworking my original restaurant recipe for a home cooking application, I couldn't resist a little tinkering to see if I couldn't take it from a nine to ten.

After tweaking the recipe a few times, I needed some tasters. What better reason for a party than testing a new recipe? I'd recently run into my friend Kerry who I hadn't seen in years and I thought a meal would be a perfect way to reconnect and catch up. After having an Old World-style, slow-paced repast and some great conversation, we ended our Italian-themed dinner with of 'buca from the bottle of Sambuca he'd brought as a gift. Sharing a meal together is so much more than just eating. It's sharing our lives, laughs and loves, and a chance to relax and unwind in a way that is rarely allowed us in our modern fast-paced, instant-everything society.

Osso Buco

Serves 6

INGREDIENTS

6 veal shanks 2 – 2 1/2" thick. About 5 - 5 1/2 pounds total (tied around the center of each shank with kitchen string)
3/4 cup all-purpose flour
2 tbsp. extra virgin olive oil
4 tbsp. unsalted butter
2 cups yellow onions, 1/4" dice
1 cup celery, 1/4" dice
1 cup carrots, 1/4" dice
1 tsp. kosher salt and fresh ground pepper
3 cloves garlic finely chopped
1 Tbs. tomato paste
1 Tbs. anchovy paste
2 cups chardonnay or other dry white wine
1 cup canned chopped tomatoes with juice
2 cups chicken stock (plus extra if needed)

Bouquet Garni (herbs tied in a bundle for easy removal later)

5 - 6 sprigs of thyme
1 sprig rosemary
1 bay leaf
Zest of 1 lemon

Place in a 7" square of cheesecloth tied with kitchen string with enough extra length of string to tie to the braising pots handle.

Gremolata

4 tbsp. chopped Italian parsley
2 tsp. finely chopped garlic
2 tsp. grated lemon zest
Mixed together in a small serving dish and covered with plastic till ready for use.

DIRECTIONS

Heat the oven to 300 degrees

Put the flour in a dish. Liberally season the veal with salt and fresh ground pepper. Lightly dredge the shanks in the flour and shake off the excess.

Heat the olive oil and 1 tbsp. of the butter on med-high in a large Dutch oven or a roasting pan that can fit all the shanks in a single layer. Heat until the oil is shimmering and almost smoking. Brown the shanks in batches, careful not to crowd the pan, about 4 - 5 minutes per side or until well

For readers that have qualms about veal, let me reassure you that, although in days past consuming veal meant the young calf may have been treated in a less than compassionate way, these days it's possible to get great quality veal that has been humanely raised at a reasonable price. I hadn't visited **Just Good Meats** in a while, but was delighted to find that they not only had their wonderful selections of Choice beef and many other meaty goodies, but also had humanely raised veal available. The manager **Killian** was more than accommodating in helping me find exactly what I needed for my soiree.

One last note: please don't be afraid of the anchovies in the recipe! They will import absolutely no fishy flavors to the dish, but along with the tomato paste, give the osso buco a subtle but important punch of umami flavors that greatly enhance the overall depth of flavor in the recipe. I promise you that if you don't mention them, no one will ever know they are in the sauce.

caramelized. Place the browned shanks on a plate and set to the side.

Pour off excess fat and add the rest of the butter. Once melted add the onions, celery and carrots along with 1 tsp. of salt and a few grinds of pepper. Stir and cook until the vegetables are softened and slightly browned, about ten minutes.

Stir in the garlic, tomato paste and anchovy paste, stirring for about 30 seconds and then add the white wine to deglaze the pan. Simmer until the wine is reduced by almost half, about 10 minutes. Add the chopped tomatoes and the chicken stock. Tie the bouquet garni to the pan or pot handle and submerge in the pan. Bring to a boil then add the shanks back to the pan, adding additional chicken broth if needed to cover shanks at least half way. Bring back to a strong simmer and seal with heavy duty foil if there is no lid. If there is a lid, place parchment paper on top of pot with a little overhang and then cover with lid. Place in the lower part of the oven and then check after about 20 minutes to make sure the liquid is only at a light simmer. If boiling drop the temperature 10 degrees, check every 45 minutes or so to make sure it's just at a light simmer and add more chicken stock as needed to keep at the half way point on the shanks.

Check at the two hour mark, meat should be fork tender, if not continue to braise for another 30 minutes or until a fork meets little to no resistance when meat is pierced. Remove the shanks carefully with a large spatula onto a large platter and cover with foil.

Place the pan on the stove and remove the bouquet garni and discard it. Bring the sauce to a boil, reducing until it's slightly thickened. Add 2 tbsp. of the gremolata to the sauce and stir in. Season to taste with additional salt and fresh ground pepper. Turn off the heat and cover.

Serve one shank per person, carefully cutting the string on the shank after placing it on a plate with mashed Yukon gold potatoes made with lots of butter and cream. Spoon some of the sauce over shanks and potatoes and then sprinkle with the remaining gremolata.

You may make the osso buco a few days in advance. After braising the veal let it cool at room temperature for an hour and then place in the fridge uncovered until it is completely cool, then cover and reheat within 2 - 3 days. For reheating, place the tightly covered pan in an oven preheated to 300 degrees for approximately 30 - 40 minutes until heated through.

THE SUPPER CLUB

Modern French Baela Rose

story and photography by Cathy Curtis



*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.*

Baela Rose is a new restaurant in **Dundee** exploring modern French cuisine. The building was originally used as storage space for the neighboring Max I. Walker. Its old-style exposed layered brick,

"The food at Baela Rose is locally sourced with farm-fresh ingredients and we couldn't wait to sit down together and begin our evening with them."

brought up with a simple modern construction and design, makes the atmosphere of the restaurant feel cozy, warm and upscale-casual. The

décor has a rustic look to it, with local art hanging on the walls and industrial lights hanging from wires on exposed farm wood beams. The natural light from the large windows adds an open airy environment. The food at Baela Rose is locally sourced with farm-fresh ingredients and we couldn't wait to sit down together and begin our evening with

"The result of classic techniques of modern French cuisine encountering a family-owned restaurant is spectacular."

them.

The first course was roasted beets. It was nicely seasoned with simple orange supreme and paired with a beet aioli. The puree was a nice balance of sweet beets with the creamy sauce. When you bit into the orange, you got a nice burst of freshness, paired with a salty local Rosa Maria cheese.

The second course was locally sourced steelhead trout from Blue Valley Farms. It was, put simply, absolutely delicious. The trout filet had a nice golden sear on the skin and was complimented by another large piece of crispy fish skin and fresh peaches with confit spring onion. The almond mouse was a sweet tribute to the flavors of the fish.

Our third course came to us in the form of crispy duck breast, with a cold kamut wheat salad, roasted sweet fingerling potatoes, fresh kale



and a smooth, hearty rhubarb puree. All these flavors flowed so well together. Every bite was a new presence of French complexity. This dish's many components complimented each other very well.

The last course made the room settle down a little bit and enjoy the elegance of the simple dessert. The blackberry panna cotta was smooth, rich and creamy, with crunchy spiced nuts, fresh lemon thyme, sweet buttermilk spread and berry compote. This dessert, although simple, was the most impactful of our four courses. It was a flavorful and satisfying way to end our dining experience. It was a light, elegant, delicious and flavorful. The colors of this dish added even more to this plate. I would go back to Baela Rose just for this dessert.

Our time at Baela Rose was remarkable. Our guests left with smiles on their faces and full stomachs. The result of classic techniques of modern French cuisine encountering a family-owned restaurant is spectacular. **Kyle and Rose Anderson** have started something unique in Omaha. They are exceeding the expectations of farm-to-table and setting a new standard in the Dundee area.

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12 TYPES OF GIVING

For foodies in Omaha

by Kent Cisar

It's the end of the year and in Omaha that usually means cold temperatures, snow and holidays full of good cheer and good company. If you have foodies on your gift list and are struggling to find that perfect gift, or are just looking for a change of pace, something local, or something unique, I've created several local gift giving categories for you to choose from

(1) OMAHA ITALIAN KITCHEN CLASSICS

For those on your list who may not be keen on cooking but enjoy entertaining, **Lo Solo Mio's** catering menu is extraordinary. It's diverse, flavorful, and oh so filling! **Amato's** in **Aksarben** is famous for their ricotta pancakes, but they sell a bread crumb mixture and jars of peppers that are excellent additions to the pantry. As a stocking stuffer, **Orsi's Bakery** at 6th and Pacific has a biscotti cookie that I will drive across the city just to grab a fresh baked bag, Get there early as they won't be there late, and buy an extra bag for yourself.

(2) SOUTHERN/CAJUN

One of my favorite holiday past times is for my Mom's birthday. Since its right after Christmas, I make sure she doesn't have to cook by taking my parents out to dinner, but I don't tell them where we're going until we get there. Have some fun with your friends/family that love New Orleans style food and offer to pick them up on a Friday after work and take them out to dinner, but you can't tell them where. They still may be confused when you pull up at **Mall of the Bluffs** in **Council Bluffs**, but the smell of **Simply Nola** will make it feel like the French Quarter. Whether it be the gumbo, jambalaya, etouffee, or my favorite, the crawfish pasta, the flavors transport you instantly to New Orleans. Upon arriving back at their living quarters, hand them a gift basket with a gift certificate to **Mouth of the South** in **Florence** and a batch of homemade baked goods, canned goods, and even cornbread mix that you can find at **Big Mama's Travelling General Store**.

(3) BAKERY TOUR

I've got a sweet tooth weakness, especially one for fine pastries, and Omaha is full of terrific choices. **Gerda's** near 52nd and Leavenworth has the best peanut butter roll I've ever had. **The Bagel Bin** just south of 119th and Pacific has excellent bagels and cream cheese, but their pecan rolls are devastatingly good when warm. Any **Wheatfields'** location can provide breakfast, dessert or a glorious afternoon snack. If your list has a classic donut lover, head to the **Donut Stop** on 1256 S. 13th Street. The best apple fritter in the city resides at any of the **Donut Professor's** local locations, and if interesting and amazing is your preference, a stop at **Sweet Magnolia's** at 813 N. 40th Street is necessary. You're sure to see a big smile when an envelope full of gift certificates to these Omaha bakery Icons is opened.

Homemade angel food from Big Mama's General Store



(4) MEAT LOVER'S MADNESS

The first step to satisfy the meat lover in your life is to buy an appropriate sized cooler for high quality local meats. Step two is to visit **Just Good Meat** at 4422 S. 84th Street and pick up some terrific steaks, pork chops or other meats of your choosing. Step three is to visit a **Stoysich House of Sausage** (2532 S. 24th St or 2502 S. 130th Ave) and choose any number of the best bratwursts or sausages around. Step four is to head to **Harvest Valley Foods'** farm store at 15303 S. 36th St. to pick up a couple packages of bacon and sausage for breakfast, and racks of ribs for the smoker.

"If you've got a group of friends that you'd like to do something nice for but can't find the right surprise for them, try an afternoon happy hour where you pick up the check."

(5) MEXICAN/CUBAN:

For those who enjoy Mexican food, head to **Jacobo's** at 4621 S. 24th St. to pick up a pound of carnitas pork, burritos, a jar of their fresh salsa and a bag of their freshly made tortillas and tortilla chips. If your gift list recipients can't use their tidings in a timely manner, head north to **Erick's Enchilada's** storefront at 1702 N. 13th Street. Their enchiladas are easy to freeze and reheat for a quick weeknight meal. To add another layer to this Latin gift, grab a bottle of **Gusto Cuban Café's** Mojo sauce at 7910 Harrison Street. It's top notch on pork, sandwiches, rice, plantains and more.

(6) ASIAN

Do you have someone on your list that loves all types of Asian cuisine, but has no idea what restaurant would be a good choice for them to purchase a gift card? Stop by the **Asian Market** on 321 N. 76th Street and pick up a basket full of Asian specialties that they can create in the kitchen. The market recently expanded and you can put together a kitchen cooking basket of different types of rice, noodles, sauces and other Asian specialties. You can find foods from China, Vietnam, Korea, the Philippines and other international locations.

(7) MEDITERRANEAN

The Asian basket of goodness works well in a wok for some, but you may have another person who prefers Mediterranean. To please this palate, shop at the **Mediterranean & European Grocery** on 8601 Blondo Street. It's remarkably easy to put together a basket of dates, kalamata olives, and all the components for wonderful gyros. To give your Mediterranean basket a personal touch, pick up the ingredients for hummus and make a homemade batch.

(8) CAFFEINE AND COMPANY

Do you have a coffee aficionado in your midst? If so, create a little IOU for a weekend morning coffee house tour of some of our best local coffeehouses. It's the perfect way to incorporate conversation and caffeine, and Omaha has excellent choices throughout the city. Take them to one of the many **Crane Coffee** locations, **Fox Hollow** on 1919 Papillion Parkway, **13th Street Coffee** in Downtown, **Legends Comics and Coffee** on 52nd and Leavenworth, **Dundee Double Shot**, and **Aroma's in Benson**. All will offer ambience, a good cup and a nice place to talk.



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(9) HAPPY HOUR

If you've got a group of friends that you'd like to do something nice for but can't find the right surprise for them, try an afternoon happy hour where you pick up the check. I'm not much of a spirits man, so my happy hour choices focus on food. **Roja** (Downtown or Shops of Legacy), **Blatt Beer and Table** (North Downtown and Shops of Legacy), **Plank** in Downtown, and **Jimi D's** in Aksarben are my favorites for food happy hours in the city. Their prices, portion sizes and choices can appeal to a cross section of palettes within your friendship group.

(10) SPIRITS

Clear a late afternoon or evening with the beer connoisseur on your list and take them on a Benson and **Blackstone** brewery tour. Start out in one of Omaha's newest revitalized areas with **Farnam House** and **Scriptown** between 35th and 40th Streets on Farnam. It's a short designated drive into Benson. With stops at the **Benson Brewery** and **Infusion**, you'll taste the flavor and enthusiasm of a historic and now vibrant neighborhood. Both areas have several food options to keep the consumption reasonable and responsible. Farnam House's pretzels are a show-stopping good appetizer and both Farnam House and Benson Brewery have excellent fare that can be a meal or a morsel to help you enjoy your evening.

"Give a little change-of-pace gift certificate by going with a smaller amount and tell your recipient they can only use them for desserts. They can be used as the last course on a dining tour or for a little night out after an evening in."

(11) SPORTS FAN SAMPLER

Sometimes people need a night out to watch a game and eat good food with good company. You can pick up an assortment of gift cards to any number of local establishments to watch a big game. If it's one of the **Varsity** locations for their pizza, **Barrett's Barley Corn** on Leavenworth for their Phillies or patty melt, **Ice House** on Maple Street for nachos, or **DJ's Dugout** for big TVs and better hot wings, there's an ample array of local sports establishments to share a sporting event with friends or family.

(12) DESSERTS

Lot 2 in Benson, **Mark's** in Dundee, and **J. Coco** on 52nd and Leavenworth have terrific all-around menus. Their dessert selections are divine. Lot 2's chocolate donut holes will leave you speechless, Mark's Smores brownie is sitting by a campfire in the middle of the city, and J Coco's tiramisu tastes even better than it looks, which is a tall task because it looks delicious. Give a little change-of-pace gift certificate by going with a smaller amount and tell your recipient they can only use them for desserts. They can be used as the last course on a dining tour or for a little night out after an evening in.

Our metro is full of fantastic foodie gifts, gift certificates, and quality times in excellent establishments with those that make you the happiest. From a stocking stuffer to a seafood special, you're sure to make those on your list happy with gifts that have the ability to keep on giving.

SODAS IN WHICH YOU MAY NOT BE ENTIRELY AWARE OF



Moxie Soda

by Eddie Morin

Moxie Soda proudly boasts that it is 'Distinctively Different.' This is probably true, unless you drink dirt a lot. Then it is probably a normal flavor for you. One time, while playing soccer in elementary school, I was curious about how dirt tasted. So, I ate some. Moxie tastes pretty similar to that. To be fair, the initial taste isn't too bad, but when the aftertaste begins clawing its way up your esophagus, you'll regret your decision. Of course, you can come on down to **B & G Tasty Foods** and try one for yourself seven days a week!

THE ANSWER IS YES

Unless the answer is NO

by Jill Cockson

For many in hospitality, **Danny Meyer** is a legend. His book, *Setting the Table*, has become the equivalent of a syllabus for many aspiring restaurateurs. At the core of his philosophy on hospitality is a general commitment to the mantra, “The answer is yes... now, what’s the question?”

Danny Meyer writes from an extremely accomplished perspective, which often results in advice that takes the starting place of his readers for granted. I have written before about the distinction between ‘service’ and ‘hospitality’. The abridged version of my previous work is that the word ‘service’ tends to imply ‘servility’ or ‘servitude’, while the term ‘hospitality’ tends to be more effective in maintaining the more powerful imagery of a host figure. If you strive to provide mere service, you seek to be a servant. If you are concerned with hospitality, you are concerned with choreographing an experience. The latter is a far more perceptually powerful position.

“Identification of a target demographic is vital to a successful business plan, precisely because it helps shape brand identity, and draws the line between why we say yes or no.”

We all know the saying, “If you try to please everyone, you will certainly please no one.” So, how does this truth hold up to the notion that the answer should always be, “Yes”? The key is to understand the question within the parameters of brand identity. The idea is not to be a ‘Yes Man’ to *everyone*, but rather a ‘Yes Man’ to *a very specific target clientele*. Identification of a target demographic is vital to a successful business plan, precisely because it helps shape brand identity, and draws the line between why we say “yes” or “no”.

To hospitality professionals such as Danny Meyer, it is all but a given that a service environment has a specific target client in mind, and a developed ethos, logos and pathos directing operations for that client. There is a hidden, implied clause that, when exposed, reads, “*Within the scope of the brand*, the answer is yes now, what’s the question?” This



more robust understanding of our beloved mantra is the key to strategic brand development, and the creation of brand loyalty.

This revised interpretation can put hospitality professionals at odds with their personal nature. At the core of hospitality is a sincere desire to please; we enjoy seeing people happy with products and services we provide. Perhaps, then, one of the most difficult issues is accepting that, just like junior high, not everyone is going to like us. As successful brand ambassadors, we must know, and be proud of, exactly who we are. In order to maintain the success of our brand, we must know when, *and why*, to say, no.

Brand identity should be expressed in clear, concise mission and vision statements that effectively sum up the values driving a brand. Those statements serve as an infallible guideline for every decision

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from the top, down. The mission and vision function as an operations gatekeeper: If what you are about to do is consistent with the mission and vision, then proceed; If not, don't. This simple piece of operational structure helps to maintain brand integrity and consistency on every level. It also allows employees to be valued as autonomous thinkers, who can now be empowered to make decisions with something consistent to tether those decisions to. Every guest request will either fall inside, or outside, of your mission and vision. When asked why you do X, or why you don't do Y, the answer should quickly turn into an in-house ad campaign for that mission and vision.

To illustrate, a guest at a local beer-driven bar communicates the following: "I just want a domestic beer...why don't you carry any?"

Step 1: Smile.

Step 2: Empathize with the guest, but DO NOT apologize (the only time for an apology is when an incident has occurred that does not positively and/or accurately represent your brand.)

Step 3: Combine that empathy with a pitch for your brand; i.e. acknowledge their request as valid, but politely explain why you do things differently. For example, "I can appreciate that domestic options are common, and that those brands have a loyal following, but we are committed to supporting local brewers who are producing great products. I'd be happy to make a suggestion based on what you like, and bring you a sample. Note that this response accomplishes a few things. First, you did not discount their request, which communicates understanding and opens the door to talking about your brand. Second, you convey your mission and vision in a positive, explanatory, engaging way. Third, you invite the guest to understand their experience in the context of your brand. Fourth... congratulations...you said, "No."

Too often, a guest leaves a venue dissatisfied without truly understanding why. We have seen this play out on Yelp and social media countless times. It is okay if a guest leaves dissatisfied, as it's simply a possibility that the guest is not a member of your target audience. Again, you can't please everyone. A guest, however, should never leave unhappy without fully understanding their experience. This could mean the difference between a review that is negative in the misunderstood sense, and quasi-positive review as a result of being more informed. ("This place sucks." Vs. "This place is not for me, but if you are looking for great service, and craft beer, this is your spot!"). Not everyone who walks in will be your target consumer, but you certainly want to invite them to become one. Hospitality is about making everyone feel welcome to join the club, not about adapting the rules of the club to everyone's desires.

"Again, you can't please everyone. A guest, however, should never leave unhappy without fully understanding their experience. This could mean the difference between a review that is negative in the misunderstood sense, and quasi-positive review as a result of being more informed."

The moral of the story is that it's okay to say, "No," to requests that fall outside the scope of your brand identity. It is brand identity, after all, that establishes your place of distinction in the market. Of all of the business advice in books, articles, journals, podcasts, etc., the most important element of success can be reduced to a simple ancient Egyptian aphorism: "Know thyself." Know your brand. Know when to say, "No."

HAVE YOU BEEN ARRESTED FOR DUI? GET OMAHA DUI DEFENSE TODAY!



It is important that you acquire knowledgeable Omaha DUI defense due to the severity of DUI charges in Nebraska. There are two ways to be convicted of driving drunk in Nebraska. The first is to register a blood alcohol content of .08% or higher through a breath or blood test. This establishes a violation of per se law.

However, an officer can initiate an arrest based only on a perception of physical or mental impairment due to alcohol, drugs or a combination of both. Usually field sobriety tests, driving violations and your physical appearance during the traffic stop will be used as 'evidence' against you in court.

Your driving skills may not have been affected and your arrest may even have been based on subjectivity. This gives Douglas County DUI attorney Nick Glasz

the opportunity to question the probable cause for the traffic stop, challenge evidence, review equipment maintenance and calibration records and review the arrest record for errors in procedure and policy.

The goal is to make the prosecution prove its point beyond a reasonable doubt. If it cannot, there is a chance of getting your charges reduced, or your case diverted or even dismissed.

WILL YOU LOSE YOUR DRIVER'S LICENSE AFTER A DUI ARREST IN OMAHA?

After an arrest for driving under the influence in Douglas County, Nebraska, the Department of Motor Vehicles has the authority to suspend or revoke your driver's

license. This is an administrative action and different from the criminal case. It is still important to have legal representation, as evidence and testimony will be presented with the intent of taking away your license.

You can petition for a hearing in an effort to keep your driving privileges. You must request a hearing within 10 days of the date of your arrest or your license will be automatically suspended.

Having legal guidance can help. For immediate help with your license, contact Omaha DUI attorney Nick Glasz and ask him to petition for a hearing and represent you. You only have 10 days after an arrest to schedule a hearing so call now.

PENALTIES FOR A DUI IN DOUGLAS COUNTY, NEBRASKA

If convicted of driving under the influence in Nebraska, a first offense can result in fines, potential imprisonment, loss of driver's license for three months to one year and loss of auto insurance that will have to be replaced with very expensive, high-risk coverage. The fines and penalties increase with each subsequent conviction, with a third aggravated offense being filed as a felony.

A conviction for DUI in Douglas County would mean having a criminal record, which could lead to loss of existing job and difficulty finding future employment. You may be kept from renting a car or opening a credit account. Canada restricts entry to those with a criminal history, even if it is for a misdemeanor and especially if it involves drunk driving.

Each case is unique and results cannot be guaranteed, though Douglas County DUI lawyer Nick Glasz will fight your charges and try to keep your record clean. Protect your future and call Omaha DUI attorney Nick Glasz today.

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Nebraska's craft beer
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Part two of two

by Jason McLaughlin

Part two of our story on Nebraska's burgeoning craft beer culture will give us a sneak peek into a couple more of the current breweries in planning that happen to share a common starting point.

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

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

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.

KROS STRAIN BREWING COMPANY (La Vista, NE)

Like many others, it all started as just a hobby in the garage for **Bobby Kros and Scott Strain**. But **Kros Strain Brewing Company's** story truly started when they left their careers to start making beer for **Nebraska Brewing Company**. Although the two did not know each other before turning pro, they quickly realized that they had similar ideas and worked well as a team. While sharpening their teeth gaining experience brewing on both of NBC's brewhouses, a 10-barrel system at the Papillion brew pub as well as a 30-barrel monster at their new production facility in La Vista, Scott says, "After a year or so we began looking at the market and realized there was a real need for more packaging breweries putting out quality beers in Nebraska."

Working long days in a hot brewery are usually exhausting enough to suck the desire for homebrewing out of even the most eager of hobbyist, but Bobby and Scott kept up with their recipe development and creativity on their home rigs in their spare time. It should be mentioned that these guys are good at it. Last October the two came away winning Best of Show at the **Sower's Cup**, Nebraska's largest homebrew competition, beating out a field of nearly 350 other beers of every style imaginable. Scott also didn't exactly just waltz into becoming a professional brewer. Prior to Nebraska Brewing Company,



he got a leg up by completing the Associate Program in Brewing Technology through Siebel Institute of Technology, which is the oldest brewing school in the country founded in 1872.

In order for the duo's dream to become a reality, the first big hurdle was raising all of the capital needed for their venture. Scott shared, "We knew we had some people that would likely support us but we had no idea how much support we could get. If you don't come from a wealthy family that is willing to fund you, and you don't have a lot of personal assets, it's not easy." And he added, "Luckily we've got a good group of people supporting us now, and have been lucky enough to find a bank that has been willing to work with us too."

After the financial side was completed, a seldom thought of dilemma for aspiring brewery owners is what would seem to be the simple process of coming up with a name. The problem is with the head spinning rate that breweries are opening across the country and all the new ones that are still in planning, finding a clever or fitting name that has not already been trademarked can seem like an impossible task. While the thought process behind Kros Strain may seem obvious, they also took the clever route, as Scott explained, "We went through a lot of options for the name but ultimately decided the combination of our own last names was a great option. We'll also be making sour beers as soon as we can and we'll work to develop a house cross strain of yeasts and bacteria for those beers."

"In addition to barrel aged beers and sour beers, we have a long list of specialty beers to keep things interesting."

Locked and loaded, Bobby and Scott recently signed a lease for their brewery that will be located south of 108th and Giles in La Vista (just off the **Cabela's** exit). Scott shared, "We are really happy with this location as it is directly off of a main road, has other businesses in the plaza, and a really large parking lot." He added, "It also backs up to the newly paved **West Papio Trail** bike path. It's a great spot to park and ride as far as you want and return for a drink after."

Kros Strain Brewing Company has its sights set to open the doors as early as spring of 2017. The production facility will include a 15-barrel, 3-vessel brewhouse from **Alpha Brewing Operations** in Lincoln, with focus on packaging in 12 and 22 ounce bottles as well as kegs. They plan to produce an array of beer styles that should regularly include a variation of a lager or two, some hop forward styles, and some lower alcohol Belgian styles, to name just a few. For the more limited releases they have up their sleeves, Scott said, "In addition to barrel aged beers and sour beers, we have a long list of specialty beers to keep things interesting. As homebrewers we like to experiment with new ingredients and try new things. We feel this keeps things fun for us and for our customers."

GET LOST BREWING COMPANY (Lincoln, NE)



Lincoln is looking forward to adding another brewery to its ranks with **Get Lost Brewing Company** and its creator **Sam Riggins**, who just so happens to also be a Nebraska Brewing Company alumni and former head brewer at NBC's Papillion brewpub. For Sam, it all began when, "A guy walks in to a bar is how this all started. Seriously. In 1993 I started college at the University of Kansas, and my family and I went in to eat at Free State Brewing. I had never been in a brew pub before. You could see back in the brewery and there were a couple of guys working. I remember thinking, "Whoa, this is actually a job?" I think I knew then that this was what I wanted to do."

After college Sam started out at **Nebraska Book Company** where he worked with **Matt Dinges**, now owner of **Good Life Provisions LLC** (Get Lost's future distributor). His friendship with Matt helped nudge Sam into brewing his first beer at home in 2007. During this period, Sam was also somewhat of a "beer geek" who enjoyed seeking out and enjoying great beers from around the world while keeping a cellar at home to age some of his rare gems that improve with age. A few years later, in 2010, Sam found himself temporarily jobless without knowing what he would do next, when, "I ran into Paul and Tyson from Nebraska Brewing Company and found out they had an assistant brewer position opening up. I bothered them until they gave me the job a few weeks later," said Sam. Over the course of the next several

years Sam took part in NBC's rise to becoming an award winning and nationally recognized brewery.

In 2014 Sam left the brewery to begin planning for his own. Since then he has managed to balance his time between brewing at home, working with investors and property owners, collaborating with other breweries on special release beers all over the country and being a Dad. Sam says, "The two biggest challenges for me have been investment and finding a location. Our location search has been difficult for a couple of reasons. It's difficult to find a place with the right rent in the right area. We want a big portion of our business to be in our tap room. While it's not so bad to pay higher rent for the tap room, you have what is essentially a factory in the back that needs lower rent. Finding that balance is difficult." As for the all-important money side he added, "Investment in the brewery has been difficult too. A lot of people that have approached me just don't have enough to invest. While I would love to take their money and have them be part of the brewery, I don't want to see 50% of their investment go straight to legal fees. I need to have the investment work towards the brewery so that investors get a good return."

"I had never been in a brew pub before. You could see back in the brewery and there were a couple of guys working. I remember thinking, "Whoa, this is actually a job?" I think I knew then that this was what I wanted to do."

With the real estate and financial requirements finalizing, he has been able to take some time doing what he misses most, professionally brewing. After taking the plunge to start off on his own, Sam has had the opportunity to slide back into his rubber boots and collaborate with several of his old compatriots at their breweries, while spreading the Get Lost name throughout the craft beer community before he ever opens his doors. "I've brewed beers at Free State in Kansas, and Metropolitan in Chicago. In Nebraska, I've been out to **Scratchtown** twice and also just did a three-way collaboration with **Kinkaid** and Scratchtown," said Sam. He also hinted at a few more coming up that we can look forward before he gets his doors open.

In the meantime, all he is revealing now about the future location is that, "We are looking away from downtown. I feel that downtown Lincoln is already saturated with bars and breweries, while most of Lincoln is underserved from a 'craft beer' standpoint." With an eye on being open around March of 2017, Sam plans to start with selling as much beer as possible from the taproom while keeping production focused on kegs and special release bottles otherwise. "People want a wide variety and selection, and it's easy to get bored brewing the same beers over and over again. Part of this ties back into the name. Always pushing forward, always trying something new. That being said, my loves are pale hoppy American beers and Belgian or French farmhouse beers. You'll probably see more of these styles than anything. As the brewery grows, we'll expand into more barrel aging and start a sour and blending program as well." Sam said.

When Sam looks into a crystal ball at ten years into the future, his daughter Olive will be at college age, so some of his plans will wait and see if she wants to be involved in the family business. Otherwise, Sam hopes for small manageable growth that will allow him to stay in the breweries operations, and not stuck at a desk. Sam finished with, "Maybe by that time we'll have grown enough to open a second brewery out in the country that only does funky wild beers. Who knows, I'm not making beer to be on every shelf of every store."



PORTRAIT OF A BARTENDER: Mary K. Gross

I sat down with Mary K. Gross for this issue's bartender portrait. I've known Mary for a while and have always appreciated her cozy 'bar-side' manner. She also makes some great cocktails (or in my case, pours some great shots).

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

Mark K. Gross: I work at **Jerry's Bar**. It is a cozy little neighborhood establishment located at 63rd and Military, just north of the **Benson Business District** on Maple. **Rob Rutar**, owner of Jerry's, gave me the distinct honor and pleasure of working with and for him nearly five years ago as a daytime bartender. Since then, he called upon me to manage his business while working four nights a week.

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

Mary: I have been a bartender for nearly a decade. I started bartending right after high school at **La Fonda's** Mexican restaurant, which used to be located at 123rd and Center Street, where I was also employed as a server. I don't know if bartending at 18 was exactly legal, but I was given the opportunity, and I could not say no. I bartended and served there on and off during my breaks from college to help pay my tuition. I can still make a mean margarita to this day!

"I don't know if bartending at 18 was exactly legal, but I was given the opportunity, and I could not say no. I bartended and served there on and off during my breaks from college to help pay my tuition."

Other than Jerry's, I have two very formative bartending experiences which shaped the way I serve people to this day. I was one of the only female members of the bar staff at **Brewsky's** in the **Haymarket** in Lincoln. I chose to work 17 hour doubles on Husker game days. Serving drinks to that many people really tests your endurance, speed and patience as a bartender. I learned a lot by pushing myself as well as inserting myself into a world which was very male-dominated. The second very formative experience was bartending at **Mark's** in **Dundee**. I learned about wine, high-end liquors and cocktails, how to pair booze with food, but mostly, how to take time and care when interacting with a guest or making a specialty cocktail.

FSM: When did you know you wanted to be behind the bar?

Mary: I decided to make bartending my career when I was working for **Joe Goodman** at **The Old Dundee Bar and Grill** on 50th and Dodge. During the first year working there I had so much fun, met so many good people, created lifelong connections and enjoyed my lifestyle so much that, not only did I know I was to be a bartender for the rest of my life, I also made it my goal to own a bar of my own someday.

Being behind the bar is a way of life for me, probably since I was 23 years old.

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

"Not only did I know I was to be a bartender for the rest of my life, I also made it my goal to own a bar of my own someday"

Mary: Rob Rutar is my mentor and also a dear friend. Not only did he invite me to work at his bar at the beginning of his tenure at Jerry's, he has entrusted me with caring for his business on a day to day basis. He challenges me to serve people to the best of my ability, to always be cognizant of changes in industry standards and to be creative behind the bar. I learned from him that bartending is not just about preparing and serving a drink to someone, but it is about being a good steward of the relationship I have with that patron on a personal, real level. He taught me to love the people I serve as well as really liking my job.

FSM: Where do you find inspiration?

Mary: I have a job that fits my life perfectly. I have the freedom to travel, go out to eat/out for drinks, go to shows, hang out with my friends and write. All are experiences I can share with my friends and patrons who share their lives with me at Jerry's. It is a really beautiful relationship and one I do not take lightly. The people who come to Jerry's are the reason I love my job so much. They are family to me.

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

Mary: The best part about being a bartender at Jerry's is definitely the opportunity to make meaningful, lifelong connections with the people I serve. We have laughed, cried, partied, mourned and lived life together. Being the facilitator of a community connection like that is the best job ever.

The worst part about my job, hands down, is stocking. I'm sure my co-workers can tell you that I always slack off a little bit in that department. At the end of the night, the last thing I want to do is jump back in a super-cold fridge to throw bottles onto a shelf for 25 minutes. It's the worst!

FSM: Do you think bartending will be any different in 20 years?

Mary: I hope every profession can change and evolve for the better over a 20-year span, especially bartending. In the last 20 years, I think we have seen a trend of more women becoming career bartenders, such as myself. In the next 20 years, I hope we see more women owning and operating bars.

FSM: What makes a good bartender?

Mary: I think it depends on what kind of bar you work at. Since I work at a neighborhood bar and choose to frequent other neighborhood establishments, I know what I like to see; someone who is attentive, friendly and takes the time to make a real connection with the guest. Anyone can sit at home and pour their own drinks. People choose to come out to interact with their bartenders and other patrons. A good bartender is a steward of that environment.

FSM: What is your favorite drink to make?

Mary: My favorite drink to make is a Manhattan. It is something my father has always loved to drink and also the first drink I ever made. He usually takes his with bourbon and on the rocks. The Manhattan can be such a versatile yet classic option for a drink. When I drink Manhattans, I like them up and with rye.

FSM: What do you drink?

Mary: I drink shots and water. For the longest time, I was partial to Irish whiskey, but over the last couple years, I have transitioned into being a reposado tequila drinker!

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

Mary: Being a bartender usually means being a night-owl. We stay up late, after the bar is closed, to clean and prepare for the next day. At 3 am, when we finally leave work, we usually don't go home and go straight to bed. We watch TV and have something to eat. We don't

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work the typical schedule. As a result, you'll almost never get me for a 10 am brunch. Try a nice, 1 pm lunch, and we have a deal.

FSM: Describe the perfect cocktail?

Mary: I think the perfect cocktail is whatever the guest wants to drink when she orders. Whether it is a shot and beer, a martini, a neat pour of whiskey, I celebrate the diversity of my guests' palates. Jerry's has a lot to offer and I love encouraging people to try new things.

FSM: Where in Omaha are some of your favorite places to go out for drinks?

Mary: My favorite bars in Omaha are **The Homy Inn, Leavenworth Bar and The Elbow Room**. I frequent those three establishments because they have fantastic staffs, as well as being comfortable and fun.



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PERFECT POUR:

A craft cocktail competition

by Binoy Fernandez



What comes to your mind when you envision a fundraiser? I'm used to charity events where there's a silent auction, sometimes a live one, and a standard meal consisting of overcooked beef, steamed vegetables and a starch of some sort. It's all pretty routine. Now, don't get me wrong, I'm not out to put these events down, and I admire people who dedicate themselves to causes that make a difference in our community. It's all too often that we just skate on by, and don't step up when we can to help build something.

The reason I describe these events in such a drab, unendearing way is because it's true; if you've been to one, then it seems you've pretty much been to them all. Last year, that changed. Last year, a group approached me with an interesting proposition: let's change that paradigm. You see, our community was ready for something new, something which would get young professionals engaged and interested, and something beyond the luncheons, the 5Ks, the galas. That something was **Perfect Pour: A Craft Cocktail Competition**, featuring Nebraska bartenders pitting their skills against each other for the benefit of the **Nebraska Children and Families Foundation**.

Nebraska Children is a nonprofit organization which creates positive change through community involvement. It plays a critical role in building programs that support development in children and preserve the place and role of the family. It's for this foundation that the **Friends of Nebraska Children (FONC)** was created as an outreach arm. FONC is different from most groups I've worked with in that its membership and leadership consist of young professionals wanting to make a unique and lasting imprint on our community. Last year they approached me with a novel kind of idea: let's do a cocktail competition which will bring the young professionals of our city out. Let's do away with a night of speeches and have the sort of celebration this kind of event should be. It immediately grabbed my attention, and FONC linked up with the **United States Bartenders' Guild** to make it happen.

The cocktail, more than a beer or a glass of wine, is truly something special. Invoking the romantic ideal of history, cocktails conjure images of times gone by: wearing a tuxedo to dinner, spending a night out with Gatsby or sitting with Hemingway on a veranda, sipping on a daiquiri somewhere in Havana. It's a civilized drink in these less-than-glamorous days, where the appreciation of the nuanced blending of flavors brings out something sophisticated in all of us. It's the sort of thing that encourages us to get out and about, dressed to the nines, to celebrate something special and something proper.

So this year, we invite you to purchase a ticket to a truly unique experience. Friends of Nebraska Children and the USBG have partnered up again in a benefit for Nebraska Children. Brugal, maker of premium Dominican rum, is our feature ingredient, and we'll have the best bartenders in the state competing against each other, presenting you with some of the best cocktails around. The second annual Perfect Pour: A Craft Cocktail Competition will be held on Feb. 25, 2017. Come dressed for Cuba, because it is going to be a night in Havana.

More information including sponsorship opportunities, ticket sales and how to get involved as a competing bartender available at www.perfectpour.org





7 HABITS OF HIGHLY EFFECTIVE WINE AFICIONADOS

by John Finocchiaro

On a recent flight home from Chicago my wife and I were seated next to a very nice, pretty young lady. Hunched forward in her seat with highlighter pen in hand, she was completely absorbed in the pages of her book. Her read was none of my business. Still, I couldn't help but wonder what it was that had her so captivated. With a quick glance I saw the title: the famed *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, by Stephen R. Covey.

'Effective' has been defined as, "successful in producing a desired or intended result." The usual desired result for the lover of wine is, quite simply, maximum enjoyment. While there are many obvious guidelines to abide by in order to achieve this result (first and foremost, do not purchase insipid wine), here are 7 perhaps not-so-obvious rules, which even the wisest and most experienced oenophile would do well to remember.

Man does not live on ratings alone. If your cellar, wine rack or refrigerator contains only wines with high ratings, well, Houston, we have a problem. Ratings are useful as a guide, but they are not the end-all. No individual can predict with 100% certainty what you will like. Only you know that. Do not underestimate your own taste buds. There

are thousands of wines in the world and all of them are different. Do not narrow your search to the relatively few that garner published ink. Try new things. Listen to the waiters in your favorite restaurants and inquire of the staff at your favorite wine shop. Taste and decide for yourself.

"Man does not live on ratings alone. If your cellar, wine rack or refrigerator contains only wines with high ratings, well, Houston, we have a problem."

Do not save the best for last. Some experts call it palate fatigue. I call it the Taco Bell effect. After a couple of belts, most party people are rather indiscriminate with what they consume later on. Good and cheap, or maybe just cheap, usually soothes the masses just fine late in the evening. Granted, the highlight vino of the evening may justifiably be saved for the main course, but don't wait too long before pulling

the good corks. Later on, the masses won't know the difference, nor will they care. Quality becomes a lower priority the longer an evening or social event lingers on. And this explains the long lines late night at Taco Bell.

Do save the best for those who know the difference. This tip will not be found in Dale Carnegie's *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, but I'm sticking to it anyway. Do not waste the great stuff on those who couldn't care less. Have you ever opened a special and expensive bottle of vino that you have been saving for years, poured a modest three or four ounces each for yourself and maybe one other fellow wine lover, and watched sorrowfully as the rest of the bottle is glugged by those who have little to no interest or appreciation whatsoever of fine wines? Do this a couple of times and you will see my point. I admit it, I have occasionally poured terrific wine secretly from a bottle in a paper bag hidden in a closet for my parents whilst serving the everyday stuff to the masses. Before you gasp at such a tawdry practice, let it be known that I did, in a hushed voice and within a quiet circle of friends, confess to this recently at a tasting and luncheon for the release of the new vintage of Opus One wine. Much to my relief, others present had done the same thing and my guilt dissipated rapidly.

"Quality becomes a lower priority the longer an evening or social event lingers on. And this explains the long lines late night at Taco Bell."

Be a consumer, not a collector. When it comes to wine, do not be a hoarder. Paintings are meant to be viewed. Music is meant to be heard. Food is meant to be eaten. Wine is meant to be drunk. If you are buying precious and expensive wines simply for show, never intending to pop the cork, well that's just plain silly. Idea: pull that cork, drink the wine and put the empty bottles back in your trophy case... I mean, cellar. That way you can enjoy your wine and still show off your precious purchases, ego intact. Great wine is meant to be enjoyed, not enshrined.

Skip the exhibitionism. Unless you are at a formal wine tasting, skip the dramatic poses, audible sniffing, gurgling, gargling and gagging. A few gentle swirls of your glass are quite appropriate. But we're not roping cattle here, so skip the elevated entire-arm lasso motion. A gentle whiff or two of the wine's aroma is a wonderful way to enhance your appreciation of the wine in your glass, but go easy. There's no need to nasally vacuum the contents, and for Chrissake, once the wine has entered your mouth, drink it. Sustained swishing and sloshing is kind of gross. Save that for your morning Listerine. Bottom line: We

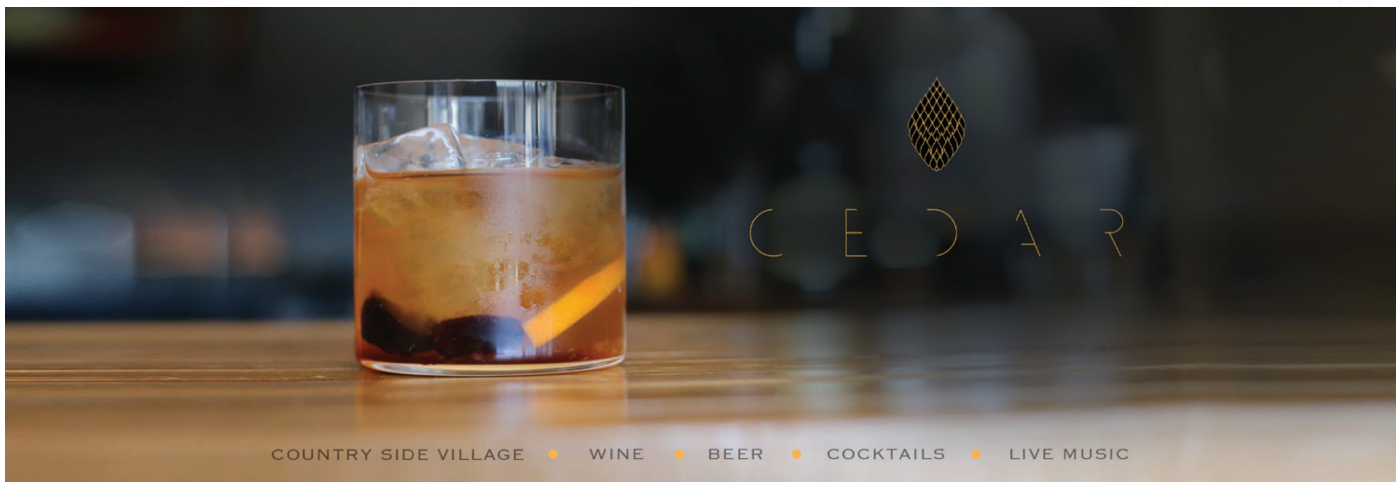
already know of your passion for all things wine. If not, you wouldn't be drinking it. Quit trying so hard to prove it.

Good wine, bad glass. Quality stemware can have a dramatic effect on the taste of wine. There is a science behind this, and it is true. If you don't believe this theory, test it yourself by pouring the same wine in two very different glasses, then taste. The difference can be dramatic. Believe me, the quickest way to immediately lower the quality of any good wine is to pour it into a goblet with ¼ inch thick glass or one with a tiny bowl. We don't want that. Now, you don't need to immediately run out and buy a different glass for every type of wine varietal you may consume, but do buy yourself a set of nice quality stemware. Good wine deserves a decent glass. It will more than pay for its self over time and, most importantly, your wine will taste better.

Do not be a unibuyer. If you love wine but tend to stick exclusively with the same one or two varietals, then you're missing the boat. The world is awash with good wines, from all corners of the earth. Go find them. Many a California cabernet lover hit a new level of enjoyment once they discovered Italian brunello and Barolo, or Argentine malbec. Many California chardonnay drinkers have had their eyes opened by an elegant, complex white burgundy from France. Pinot noir aficionados would do themselves a favor by trying Italian Veronese ripasso wines, or perhaps a nice Spanish garnacha. The vibrant process of discovery is one of the wine world's greatest attributes. Don't skip it.

Well, there you go, seven habits to effectively increase your enjoyment of wine. I'm sure you have a few of your own. Perhaps the greatest rule would simply be to not have too many of them, but a few can go a long ways.

Enjoy!





THE GREAT AMERICAN CAB REVIEW 2016

by Mark Gudgel

Outside my window, a massive silver maple looms over our house, threatening to one day penetrate the attic in a storm, and serving as the bane of my existence during what I've come to think of as "helicopter season." But this mighty tree, far older than I am, also signals for me the change of seasons in a way so beautiful that any thought of cutting it down has long since vanished from my mind. The autumnal turn of leaves from green to all shades of red, gold, and brown triggers in me a response one part neurological, one part nostalgic, that grows more insistent as each year passes. Fall means raking, which I loathe, and football, which I adore. Fall is when I mourn the passing of summer's warmth and freedom, and when I celebrate the birth of my firstborn son. Fall reminds me ever so subtly that winter is coming and of the impending cold that awaits all of us here in Nebraska. And all of this, of course, I can read in the leaves.

"I have come to equate winter with Cabernet Sauvignon, that boldest of red wines that can warm the heart and soul even when the fierce elements outside have chilled you to the bone."

But the looming period of cold is not without its purposes, not completely devoid of benefit. For one thing, there's sledding, and for another, the warmth of a fire. Most wonderfully, however, I have come to equate winter with Cabernet Sauvignon, that boldest of red wines that can warm the heart and soul even when the fierce elements outside have chilled you to the bone. Cabernet on a winter evening is a chance to reflect upon the day, perhaps even the year, to warm up and prepare for the coming of yet another winter's day.

Over the course of this past year, I'd estimate that I've tasted something like 400 Cabernet Sauvignons, give or take. Not all of them were good, of course, but I've taken this opportunity to share with you what I found to be some of the best, the most interesting, and the ones that hold the fondest memories. Many of these wines were tasted in tasting rooms, and many were submitted as samples for this article. All of them I've tasted, and all of them I recommend.

The wines recommended vary widely in price, and before we commence with the recommendations, I want to pass along one crucial piece of advice to anyone who drinks wine: treat a \$100 bottle of Cab Sauv like a \$100 bottle of Cab Sauv, storing it properly, decanting it for a while prior to serving, drinking from crystal when possible, and pairing it with good food and better company. And treat a \$10 bottle the *exact same way*. It will bring out the best in the wine and help it to

enhance the experience, I assure you. Ultimately, "good wine" is little more than a matter of personal preference.

For each Cab listed, I offer the average price in order that you can look for those that fit your own budget. If the wine is not readily available in the Omaha market, I've given you the web page of the winery so you might order it directly. So here we go, fourteen truly terrific Cabs that I recommend to help keep you warm this winter, and a few of my own memories to go along with them. I hope you enjoy these wines as much as I do, and that the stories they help you create will bring a smile to your face as you retell them for years and years to come.

"Ultimately, "good wine" is little more than a matter of personal preference."



Alpha Omega Era 2013, Napa Valley

\$150

I've seen it in Omaha at Omaha Wine Company

Jean Hoefliger, who makes this wine, is one of my new favorite people in all the world. Jean is one of those rare characters who can command an entire room with his personality, his demeanor, his charm. We spent an evening together in the Napa Valley this past summer, imbibing and dining and talking about life. It was originally for an interview I was doing, but in the end, it ended up being the vehicle that introduced me to a new friend. A Swiss-born immigrant to the United States, Jean makes wine all over the world, and is quite famous for doing so. Jean and I share the belief that wine brings people together, tears down walls and opens the doors to conversation, civility, and growth. Jean explained to me that he believes wine has a vital, social role to play in the world, especially in our currently contentious society, and I couldn't help but to agree with him. For this reason, I recommend his wines always to be paired with conversation around a table.

Era is the flagship wine of the Alpha Omega Winery, and that's saying something. Dark, well structured, and perfectly in balance, it's a terrific blend that offers the very best the old world colliding with the new. Bold and robust, black fruits mingle with baking spice and notes of graphite to create a wine that is sophisticated, complex, and perfect for a celebration or conversation. Decant this one, or cellar it in favor of drinking a slightly older vintage. Either way, you won't go wrong.

Buehler 2014, Napa Valley

\$30

I've seen it in Omaha at Wohlner's and Brix.

John Buehler is one of the funniest sons-of-bitches I've ever met in my life. In June, I spent an afternoon with him, two hours after landing in San Francisco. We tasted wine, shared stories, and toured his facility, laughing the entire time. John's not only one of the earlier pioneers of Napa Valley's historic rebirth, but he's a knowledgeable, candid, thoughtful man who can more than hold up his end of any conversation and will let you in on secrets if you're willing to listen. It was one of the most enjoyable visits of the year for me, and John's wine isn't half bad either.

Of all the different Cabs made at Buehler, I chose the one that's most readily available in the Omaha market for two reasons. First, I actually want you to be able to find it without organizing a search party, and second, in my opinion it has one of the best QPR's (Quality to Price Ratios) of any Napa Cab on the market. Young enough to drive a Porsche (pardon the inside joke), this wine is tight yet opens up nicely into a body of terrific fruits skillfully crafted into the sort of Cab I'm always looking for. You could keep it around for as long as you want, but this wine was made to drink. Enjoy!



are the beneficiaries of good fortune for having recognized a gem. A complicated blend that includes Malbec and Petit Verdot, this is a robust yet balanced terroir-driven wine with beautiful hints of gingerbread and baking spice coexisting with lush, dark fruits that open up with time. With his delightful wife, MaryLee, Randle finds himself in Omaha on a regular basis. I'd encourage you to seek them out, to learn from them, and to buy their terrific, small-production wines. You won't regret it.

Columbia Crest 2014, Columbia Valley

\$10

I've seen it in Omaha at literally every HyVee I've ever been in.

This is my go-to budget bottle of Cabernet. There's no cool story here, sorry. I just really like this wine, and when you can get it on sale for \$8-\$9, it's pretty tough to beat. It also ages fairly well – I found a dusty bottle of 2010 vintage in my mom's pantry over the summer, and it was delicious. So if you're on a budget but looking for Cab, this is my number one recommendation. It's also utterly ubiquitous in the Omaha market. Enjoy!



Burly 2012, Napa Valley

\$70

I've seen it in Omaha at Omaha Wine Company.



Hank McCrorie was a college football player dubbed "Burly Bear" by the local papers. The nickname stuck. Today, you can regularly find Hank at trade shows in the area, sharing the wine whose label bears his nickname and an oak tree homage to the "burly" yet balanced flavors that oak barrels lend to his beautiful product. Still burly, Hank is a kind, warm person who never seems to tire of discussing his passion for producing tremendous wine.

Winemaker Massimo Monticelli, in Hank's employ, creates a smooth, balanced Cab that's as big as any I've had, and has rapidly become one of my favorites. A skillfully woven tapestry of flavors, tannins, and acidity, it's a wine that easily lives up to its name. I could drink this every night (if I could afford it). I was recently talking to Hank, and admitted that if I had my way, I'd probably drink Cabernet most nights. He smiled warmly and replied "I do have my way, and that's exactly what I do."



Euclid 2012, Napa Valley

\$100

Available at: www.euclidwines.com

"We can have tacos at my place." That was the last email Mike Farmer sent to me as we arranged for me to visit the famous vintner in his Napa home. My friend Laura had recommended I try Euclid wines, and I had reached out to Mike, who in turn offered to make dinner while we tasted. What ensued felt more to me like a family gathering than a wine tasting, as Mike, his lovely wife, their dogs, my friend Zach, and I spent a wonderful evening together, eating tacos, discussing life as we understood it, and sharing some of Mike and his son Lucas's truly phenomenal wines. After just one evening, I'd consider Mike and his wife friends, and I look forward to introducing them to my family the next time we're out in Napa together.

Mike made wine for Robert Mondavi for three decades, first at the Robert Mondavi winery, and later at Opus One for twenty-two years. Today, along with Lucas, Mike produces small batches of cult Napa reds. This Cab, limited to 222 cases, is one of the very best I had all year. When Zach, who traveled with me to Napa this summer, touched it to his lips, he reflexively blurted out "Holy shit!" in the middle of an otherwise civilized conversation. "That's perfect," he muttered to himself, staring into the glass, and I had to agree. Mike just smiled. At a Benjamin a bottle, it may not be a daily drinker for most of us, but when you can have this at that price, there's surely no reason to purchase another bottle of Opus One in your lifetime. Seek out Euclid wines. You won't regret it.

Calafia La Reina 2012, Napa Valley

\$70

I've seen it in Omaha at Corkscrew and Omaha Wine Company.

"What's in a name?" asked Juliet, and though she unmistakably was making a profound point, in some instances there's more to a name than one might realize at first blush. Such is the case with the wine that bears the name "Calafia," Randle Johnson's signature wines. Calafia is the mythical warrior queen who ruled the island of California and was featured in Garci Rodriguez de Montalvo's acclaimed sixteenth century novel *The Adventures of Esplandian* (sorry if you knew all that already).

The winery that bears the name of the warrior queen is the pet project of Randle Johnson, the talented and renowned winemaker at The Hess Collection. Where he finds the time to do it I'll never know, but we lucky few who know about this wine (production is limited to 125 cases, or around 5 barrels)



G.B. Crane MMXIII Cabernet 2013, Napa Valley

\$225

Available at www.thecraneassembly.com

The news hit me harder than I might have expected. Dave Phinney had sold Orin Swift. Of course he did, I reasoned. How could he not? It was worth so much money. I tried to understand, but deep down part of me still struggled with the news that the wines of one of my favorite vintners would henceforth be produced



by, well, by someone else. I emailed his assistant to confirm the news, and she did, adding that he would stay on with the E&J Gallo company to consult on the wines that bear his label. Then, almost as an afterthought, she mentioned that he did have one other project he was working on, and that I ought to reach out to the person in charge of it.

I emailed Ryan and simply said that I had heard he and Dave were working together, and that I'd like to know more. We corresponded for a bit, and Ryan eventually sent me a bottle of this wine, a Cabernet being produced with fruit from the historic G.B. Crane Vineyard by none other than Dave Phinney. Upon its arrival, I turned the bottle over in my hands several times, as if I had just picked up a treasured antique and was inspecting it for damage. Satisfied, delighted even, I tasted this with a sommelier friend and we agreed that it may very well be some of Dave's best work ever. I took a page and a half of notes while sampling this wine, jotting down every new spice and fruit as it appeared upon my palate. That said, this is one of the best wines I've ever had, and I want to leave the pleasure of discover for you to experience, so just this once I'll keep my mouth shut about what flavors I got and leave you with just one piece of advice: Pair this with good company, and be ready to have your mind blown.



John Anthony 2013, Napa Valley

\$75

I've seen it in Omaha at Omaha Wine Company.

I had just finished taking my WSET I exam at the Napa Valley Wine Academy after a daylong course, and had stepped out into the warm summer breeze of early evening in the town of Napa. My pocket buzzed; it was my friend and traveling companion, Zach.

"Hey man, what's up?"

"I'm running a little late. I'm afraid we're not going to make it to dinner. Can I call you an Uber?"

Zach had our car. He had made a pilgrimage to SLO that day, while I had taken my class in Napa, not far from where we were staying.

"No, that's fine. That would cost a ton of money. How long do you think you'll be?" I inquired.

"Hard to say. Traffic isn't moving and I'm at least an hour drive from Napa still."

I told him not to worry about it, and that I would contact the people we were planning to have dinner with. Then I struck out on foot to make the short walk to Napa's downtown. I hadn't even made the river yet when I saw my favorite Mediterranean place, which I knew from Sonja and my previous trip had good wine and affordable entrees. I was just about to step in for a bite when the building next door caught my eye. "John Anthony."

I'm a huge fan of John Anthony Truchard's painstakingly crafted wines, and with fellow Husker football enthusiast Rick working the

bar that night, I had the best time waiting for someone to get unstuck from traffic I have ever had. This Cabernet is a gorgeous hue of dark purple surrounded in a ruby rim. The youth of the vintage takes on the persona of an excited raspberry, exploding out of tight French oak notes of nut and saddle leather. The finish dusts my mouth the same way that a walnut might, dry, leaving me wanting more. A terrific wine, it's certainly age-worthy, though it's clearly eager to be imbibed right now. Drink it while you wait for a friend.

Optima 2013, Sonoma Valley

\$40

I've seen it in Omaha at Corkscrew and The Winery.

I met Nicol Duffy years ago at Corkscrew out in Rockbrook, and immediately took a liking to her. Intelligent, amiable, kind, Nicol and I sat at the high stools at the counter and talked wine, life, and Nebraska for a good hour, and we've remained in touch ever since. I haven't had the pleasure of visiting the winery that she and her husband Mike run yet, but I plan to. The wide array of beautiful, artisan wines that they produce, ranging from late harvest to Gewurztraminer to this incredible Cab are all evidence of why my interest in this winery only continues to grow with time.

This Cab exhibits a gorgeous nose of dark fruits and pipe tobacco. It's beautiful upon the palate, with bursting red and purple fruit flavors. Medium tannins, some smokiness on the finish, it's a terrific example of Sonoma Cab, in my opinion. Mike and Nicol spend significant time in Omaha, which Nicol confessed to me in a recent email is like "a second home" to her. I suggest that the next time they're here, be it for Vin Nebraska, a tasting, or another reason, you seek them out.



Pellet Estate 2013, Napa Valley

\$95

I've seen it in Omaha at Corkscrew and Omaha Wine Company.

On a sunny Friday morning, with a gentle breeze drifting in lazily off of the Mayacamas to our west, I arrived at the Pellet Estate and, along with Lucy and Eric Risch, took a long stroll through the vineyards with a glass of Cab Rose' in hand. Eric, himself one of the most knowledgeable and personable folks I've met, tutored me at length about the history of the Napa Valley, a history that Pellet Estate is indeed a significant part of, while Lucy, named for Lucille Ball, trotted happily along next to us, just as enamored with the pleasant morning stroll. Zach from Corkscrew was again along, and it was on this visit that Pellet Estate became one of our mutual favorites. Shortly after our return, Corkscrew started carrying their Cabernet, and Zach began making plans to include the terrific Cab Rose' in their bi-annual Rose' Week festivities.

Tom Rinaldi, himself a storied, multi-decade veteran of the wine industry, crafts this and the other wines from the estate in small-bordering-on-tiny lots. This Cab, still young, is full in body and laced in massive dark fruits, graphite, spices, and other flavors traditional of California Cabernet. This is easily a thirty-year wine. You can certainly drink it now, but the patient will be rewarded. Incidentally, this wine will be officially released at The Omaha Wine Company tasting coming up in November, an event that is always very worth attending. Hopefully I'll see you there.





Pine & Brown 2013

\$65

I've seen it in Omaha at Corkscrew and Omaha Wine Company.

Winemaker Tom Rees, a native to Nebraska, is an extremely talented winemaker and a truly laid-back man. His winery in the town of Napa, on the corner of Pine Street and Brown Street, is actually just a repurposed, well-insulated two-car garage with a double-stack of French oak barrels, various chemicals and supplies, and a classic jukebox in it. This makes for a terrific experience if you're tasting wine with Tom, as you stand around pulling the dark purple nectar from the barrels with a thief and chatting about whatever comes to mind. If you are visiting the Napa Valley (and aren't one of those terrible people who has to be surrounded by leather and granite to be happy) then I highly recommend you reach out to Tom for a chance to visit him at his facility, and to try his terrific wines.



High on Diamond Mountain, on the border of Napa and Sonoma, sits Pride, an impressive winery that is architecturally well suited to the high mountain views. On a recent tour, I marveled at the crush equipment on wheels that rolls back and forth over the Napa and Sonoma county lines in order to operate within the complex laws that govern the industry, their special labels proclaiming "XX% Napa County, XX% Sonoma County" with the percentage of each varying widely from wine to wine based upon the preferences of winemaker Sally Johnson.

Great wine isn't uncommon in Napa, even wine as great as that being made at Pride. What will stay with me about my visit forever, however, was the flag flying at half staff. More than a week had gone by since the shootings in Orlando, so much time in fact that I inquired about why the flag as positioned as it was, hoping to God that I hadn't missed another horrible event because I was traveling. "It will be like that for 49 days," explained our guide, herself a member of the Pride family, "one day for every victim in Orlando." My eyes filled with tears. On the far side of the country, a beautiful tribute, by beautiful people.

Pride's Cab remains among my very favorites. Dark, almost inky in appearance, it has a beautiful nose of deep purple fruits and vanilla, with subtle notes of pepper and rosemary in the background. Juicy, ripe, and vibrant red and purple fruits dominate the profile – a beautiful medley of gorgeous flavors. The finish, too, has staying power. A blend of Napa and Sonoma, this may be the perfect example of what California Cab is all about.

Tamber Bey 2013, Napa Valley

\$50

I've seen it in Omaha at Corkscrew and Omaha Wine Company.

As Nebraskans, I think we often think of wine country as this sort of lofty, fancy place where rich people drink rocket juice. If that's the image in your head, I want



Tom produced a mere 200 cases of this wine, a wine that earlier this year I ranked first out of a field of around 70 Napa Cabs. This is a bold, rich, deep purple wine that's just about as good as they get in my opinion. In 2013, Tom made 8 barrels of wine, around 200 cases, aging it in 55% new French oak for 22 months. The result is an outstanding Cabernet, with a great fruit profile and that unmistakable "Rutherford dust" of Napa Valley lore. Still young and tight, it drinks great now, and will probably continue to do so for at least a few more decades.

Pride 2013, Napa and Sonoma Valleys

\$74

I've seen it in Omaha at Omaha Wine Company and The Winery.



you to visit Tamber Bey. The long-term project of equine enthusiasts Jennifer and Barry Waitte, Tamber Bey is named for Barry's first two Arabian horses, Tamborina and Bayano. Once known as the "Sundance Ranch" and frequented by Robert Redford, today the 22-acre horse ranch in the up-Valley district of Calistoga serves as a place for Barry and Jennifer to keep the horses they race, as well as housing a horse-rescue operation, all while producing some truly fantastic wines as well. I visited Jennifer late this past June, and couldn't have had a better stay. We chatted for some time, and I got to pat a horse on its long soft muzzle with my right hand while holding a glass of wine in my left. It doesn't get much better than that.

Tamber Bey's Cabs are excellent... *all* of their wines are excellent. In particular, the 2013 is fast becoming a favorite of mine for its character and potential. I've tasted back through a library of older Tamber Bey wines and been impressed with how they age. This Cab, sturdy and bold, is sure to age as well as any. Bold fruits such as blueberry mellow as it opens up, giving way to flavors of gentle wood smoke, cassis, mild spices, and more. An excellent wine, I'd be sure to seek it out.



**Volker Eisele Family Estate
2012, Napa Valley**

\$50

I've seen it in Omaha at The Winery.

I first learned about Volker Eisele from James Conaway's books on the Napa Valley, in which Volker appears on several occasions. A German immigrant who resurrected an ancient winery, Volker was a passionate conservationist who farmed organically because he knew it was the right thing to do, and who worked hard to protect the Napa Valley from predatory forces that would parse it out into quarter acre lots if given the opportunity. Though Volker passed away a few



years back, his legacy lives on, both in the work he did to protect the beautiful Napa Valley, and in the incredible wines that bear his name.

Sonja and I had the chance to taste these wines with Volker's son, Alexander, at the historic winery Volker made his own back in the 1970's. Set high in the mountains that run along the eastern side of the Napa Valley, the peaceful environs, coupled with Alexander's intelligent, reserved demeanor put us at ease and ensured that we had a terrific experience. Together we walked the grounds and spoke at length about whatever came to mind. It was one of the best experiences that Sonja and I have ever shared in wine country, and that's truly saying something. This Cab, quite reasonably priced for a wine of its quality, boasts a powerful, aromatic nose that you can smell from a distance. Subtle spice appears on the palate before mellowing into the fruit, as well as notes of refined leather, more like a ladies gloves than a cowboy's saddle. Delicate, elegant, balanced – I tell anyone who will listen that this is among the very best \$50 Cabernets available on the market today.

So there you have it: the fourteen best Cabernets

"I hope you find, drink, and enjoy as many of these as possible, and that you do it safely and with close friends."

I tasted during yet another year devoted in large part to tasting Cabernets. I hope you find, drink, and enjoy as many of these as possible, and that you do it safely and with close friends. So much of wine is personal preference, and I hope that my suggestions are of use as you continue to try new wines, making your own memories along the way. As always, I would value the feedback of my readers. Oh, and if you visit any of these places in the process of making your memories, be sure to tell them I sent you, and please be equally sure to let me know what you thought of your visit. In that way, we'll share these things together. Cheers!

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THE DUMPSTER

Hot Stuff

by Michael Campbell



Mary Avery grew up on a prehistoric dome of salt in the middle of the Louisiana marsh. It was huge: six miles around and with caves 50,000 feet deep. It belonged to her parents, so naturally she wasted no time in escaping it.

In the early 1800s she was happily swept away by the handsome Edmund McIlhenny, a promising young banker who promised her a life of excitement in racy New Orleans. Soon things got exciting indeed when New Orleans was invaded by Union soldiers in the 1860s. Buildings were burned, businesses failed—as Donald Trump might say, it was a disaster, except this time that was the truth.

“The only thing Union soldiers left alone was a tiny plot of brutally hot Capsicum peppers Edmund had once planted. . . .”

Like many others, Edmund and Mary ran home to Mom and Dad Avery and their hill of salt. It was now called Avery Island—her parents had exploited it into a very successful salt-mining business. The Avery salt mine became so successful that the Union army found out about it. Salt is a vital ingredient in preserving meat, and the Union army preserved a lot of meat. Soon the salt mine was confiscated for the war effort, and the McIlhennys were on the run again, this time to Texas. They had no love for Texas, but they were happy to be alive.

The war ended. Edmund and Mary returned to Louisiana to reclaim their family property only to find it—the mansion, the farms, the mines, everything—pillaged and destroyed. The only thing Union

soldiers left alone was a tiny plot of brutally hot Capsicum peppers Edmund had once planted, from seeds given to him by a childhood friend. The peppers made for a fun prank on unsuspecting guests who were brought to tears by the spicy heat. The Union army was tough, but not that tough. Made mostly of Northerners, they liked their food bland and white, and left the peppers alone.

There were no jobs for Southern bankers. Edmund was growing broke. Hands on his hips, he surveyed the Avery mountain of salt and his puny patch of potent peppers.

“A creative guy with no money, McIlhenny designed and printed his own labels, naming his new brew after a river in the hottest part of Mexico. . . .”

He recalled a recipe he had toyed with prior to the war. He mixed his salt and peppers with vinegar, then aged the brutal blend in leftover whiskey barrels for a few weeks. He strained the results into reclaimed cologne bottles he found on the cheap. A creative guy with no money, McIlhenny designed and printed his own labels, naming his new brew after a river in the hottest part of Mexico, mostly because he just liked the sound of it: Tabasco.

In 1868 he sold 350 of his little bottles to adventurous, hardy Southerners who had a taste for heat. A year later he sold a few thousand at \$1 each. Northerners had no use for it, but Edmund soon opened an office in London to manage the huge European demand. Today the McIlhenny Company cranks out 720,000 2-ounce bottles per day using peppers descended from that same original patch, into the same style cork-topped bottles, sporting the same label. Tabasco is included in soldiers’ rations and is one of only a few American companies certified as a supplier to the Queen of England.





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