

FOOD & Spirits

Volume 2 / Issue 6 \$6.95 FREE IN OMAHA METRO

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

MAGAZINE | OMAHA EDITION

Omaha's Largest Pizza Review pg. 14

Popping Into Spring pg. 10

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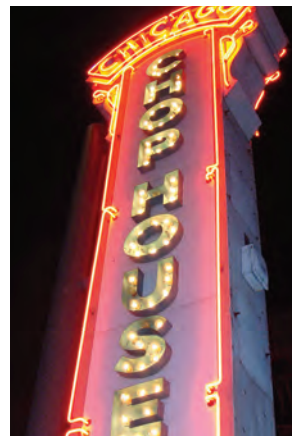
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ON THE COVER

The basic idea behind scratch-and-sniff is to take an aroma-generating chemical and encapsulate it in gelatin or plastic spheres that are incredibly small - on the order of a few microns in diameter. When you scratch the ink, you rupture some of these spheres and release the smell. The smell is essentially held in millions of tiny bubbles, and you break a few of the bubbles every time you scratch the ink. The tiny bubbles preserve the fragrance for years. The reason the smell lasts so long is because of the micro-encapsulation technology used to create it.

Photo by David Ahlquist

LETTER FROM THE PUBLISHER



Welcome to the new issue, our sixth, of Food & Spirits Magazine. We like this issue – a lot. In case you haven't noticed already, it smells on the cover - like buttered popcorn.

Although the technology behind scratch and sniff has been around since the 1960s, it doesn't get used very much except for the occasional children's book (we all remember those) or advertisement (usually perfume). We noticed that and wondered why in the world no food publication had ever used it on the cover. It seems like the two would go hand in hand – great food = great pictures = great smells = happy readers. That being said, it's hasn't been used a lot and, as much as we searched, we really didn't see very many magazines that have ever used scratch and sniff inks, let alone on the cover.

It made me think about the whole “print is dead” conversation that I've had more times than I can count over the last 10 years. It made me think that maybe all of us that work in print publishing, myself included, got so sidetracked on arguing whether or not print is dead, that we forgot that there are still ways to innovate and dazzle our readers. The printers didn't forget. They've continued to improve their technology to make things like this possible and affordable. But those of us in publishing kept looking over our shoulder, rather than looking forward. To me, it's the difference between doing work that's acceptable and doing the best possible work that you can. Both in Omaha and nationally, I hope this gets noticed by my peers and we start moving away from adequate work and start looking for ways to innovate. It takes more than just technology; it's taking a risk that something will turn out well when there really aren't any examples to go off of. Before this magazine printed, we had no real idea of what it would turn out like (as far as the smell goes) but we couldn't resist - we hope you like it – I know we certainly enjoyed creating it for you.

Besides the scratch and sniff cover, we also fine-tuned much of what was in the magazine. While I wouldn't call it a redesign of the entire issue, I would certainly call it a major refining of the design throughout much of the magazine. The table of contents, the expert's panel and our overall concept for design has changed a bit. Our hope was to simplify things while still keeping it elegant and reader-friendly. We also added a number of new writers this issue, which adds depth to nearly every section and, hopefully, again goes towards an overall dazzling experience for the reader.

These changes weren't made because we had complaints about how the magazine looked or read – in fact, we've received loads on compliments (and a few awards) for the work we've done. We made these changes because of our dedication to our readers, and to putting out a national-caliber magazine from right here in Omaha. Although I consider FSM the best publication in Omaha, we won't stop finding ways to improve. Our goal is, and always has been, to give our readers top-notch articles, photos, illustrations and design work while, at the same time, pushing the magazine into an area that Omaha gets some recognition, not only for the fine restaurants, chefs, bars and lounges that we have, but also for the outstanding group of designers, writer, photographers and illustrators that call Omaha home.

We hope you like what you see (and smell). As always, let us know what you like, and what you don't. We're listening.

FOOD & Spirits

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

EXERPTS FROM THE BLOG...

WELCOME TO THE BLOGS

Bill MacKenzie

I would love to hear from the readers some ideas for Sunday breakfast/brunch...other than the chains like Village Inn, Panera and the like. In a metro of over 800,000 there ought to be some choices for eating breakfast at 11 am on Sunday east of I-680, but darned if I am not stumped for ideas. Any ideas for anywhere within 2-3 miles of 72nd and Dodge St.? The Millard Roadhouse and Bailey's out west are great, but there seems to be a dearth of decent options mid-town or downtown for people to go.

PIZZA SHOPPE CELEBRATING 14 YEARS OF BUSINESS IN BENSON WITH 'FOLK YEAH'

Raechel Achelpohl

I would like to extend a heart-felt thank you on behalf of Amy Ryan and the entire Pizza Shoppe crew. Your kind words help support us and all the hard work, community involvement and just plain fun we all get to have working here. We had an incredible time on March 6th with Matt Cox AND Jalan Crossland (a long time favorite of Amy's) and we want to again thank your team at Food & Spirits for helping us promote a truly wonderful business that I feel lucky to be a part of. Cheers!

OMAHA DINING: A 50 YEAR RETROSPECTIVE

Kathi Gouger

Wow! Your article is a real stroll down memory lane for me and many of my friends. You mention the Hilltop House, which was our favorite restaurant for many years. The chef there had a number of fantastic recipes, the most noteworthy of which was Lobster Newburgh. Do you think there might be any way for you to recover the recipe for me since you seem to be such an Omaha old timer?? Thanks a million!

SAHuske

For Italian, I was also enamored of the old Caniglia's on 7th Street. In my high school years, I liked to race down there on the interstate with my buds for a good Italian Meal. It was my wife's favorite, and we always made it a point to make it there every time we visited Omaha. Still, my mind will always say, "Omaha = steak." To that end, Johnny's in South O was a favorite, and the fresh stuff was right next to the restaurant! We also liked the Tomahawk on Maple. Anthony's continues to be a favorite of mine in that regard - especially for the little extras they add to your cocktail.

OMAHA RESTAURANT ASSOCIATION: LIKE AND OLD FRIEND

Benjamin Graber

What an awesome article. Reminds me of a Norman Rockwell painting, of eating at my grandma's, of less complex days when life was like ... well like the article says ... like an old friend.

Mike Ziskey March 20, 2009

As a longtime supporter of Omaha's locally owned eating establishments, I could not agree more.

TAXI TROUBLE

Gerry Hunter

I have driven a cab off and on; for a living and just part-time 30 years. A cab driver doesn't make any worth while hourly wage. It doesn't pay to only work between the hours of 10pm and 1am. Omaha doesn't have enough people who take cabs for a person to make a decent living day in and day out. Plus don't blame drunk driving on cab drivers, people who drink too much are going to drive no matter what!

LIBATION CONVERSATION: DECONSTRUCTING A CLASSIC - 'CORPSE REVIVER'

Bevolonghorn

Love this cocktail! I was skeptical when I heard the ingredients...but when it is prepared correctly...very tasty! Highly recommend them.

EXPERTS PANEL

MEET THE FULLY QUALIFIED PANEL OF INDUSTRY EXPERTS WHO HAVE DEVOTED THEIR KNOWLEDGE TO THIS ISSUE...



1 Jesse Becker

Jesse Becker, M.S., began his wine career at 21 as a clerk with a small wine shop in Lincoln. Jesse lived in California from 2001 to 2004, where he worked in the cellars of Robert Sinskey and Miner Family wineries, poured some of Napa's top wines for Tra Vigne Cantinetta and worked for retailer K&L Wine Merchants. In 2004, he worked the harvest for Burgundy producer Maison Camille Giroud before relocating to Chicago, where he worked as a sommelier for Charlie Trotter's and NoMI at the Park Hyatt. Jesse passed the Certified Wine Educator (CWE) exam in 2006, and is one of just 173 people worldwide to achieve the distinction of Master Sommelier. Just recently, Jesse joined chef Paul Kulik at The Boiler Room in Omaha, Nebraska. He contributes to several publications, including *Sommelier Journal*, *Vintrust SOMMselections*, and *Gastronomic Fight Club*.

2 Michael Campbell

Michael Campbell, former owner of Mick's Music & Bar in Omaha, is a singer/songwriter and humorist. His CD *Used Without Permission* is available in stores, and his weekly essays can be found at PickyMick.blogspot.com. He is the author of *Are You Going To Eat That?*, a collection of fifty humor essays.

3 Dan Crowell

Dan Crowell, cocktail enthusiast and self-avowed "spirits nerd," is the Luxury Brands Specialist for Sterling Distributing Company in Omaha. He talks incessantly (even occasionally to other people) about the virtues of what he calls "investigative imbibement." An eternally fascinated student of the distillers' art, he encourages any like-minded individuals to engage him in spirited discussion at <http://libationassociation.blogspot.com>.

4 Alex Diimig

Alex Diimig is a bartender at Jake's Cigars and Spirits and his tastes cater to the entire wide world of vices. While not necessarily pretentious about beer and spirits he is adamantly particular. He once said that the "best thing you can say about Old Style is that it

is tolerable." Fed up with the drudge of fraternity life and party balls he set out to sample what the world had to offer all from the comfort of his modest home bar (his floor). So from light beer and Pall Malls he quickly found a home among small batch bourbons and 555 Internationals.

5 Dr. John Fischer

Dr. John Fischer is a member and two-time president of the Omaha Branch of the International Wine & Food Society, past director of the Nebraska chapter of LADV, and the founding member of the Council Bluffs Branch of the International Wine & Food Society. He teaches a course on matching wine with food at the Institute for the Culinary Arts in Omaha and is the author of the books, *The Evaluation of Wine—A Comprehensive Guide to the Art of Wine Tasting* and *Wine and Food—101*.

6 Jeremy Hunter

Jeremy Hunter has lived off and on in Nebraska for eighteen years. He has been in the industry for nearly twenty. His experience as a food service warrior spans from starting out as a dishwasher to owning his own pizza restaurant. He has been a part of every aspect of the industry, but loves being a server and bartender above all. When he is not behind the bar or helping customers, he can be found with a nice microbrew and a glass of Grand Marnier.

7 John Larkin

John Larkin, co-owner of Jake's Cigars & Spirits in both Omaha and Lincoln, has been smoking and selling cigars for ten years, having begun his career as a tobaccoist right out of high school in Salt Lake City. John moved to Lincoln in 2002 to run Jake's for longtime friend Alex Roskelley. After returning home from serving a tour in Iraq with the Army Reserve, he bought into the original Jake's in downtown Lincoln. In 2006, John and Alex opened a new shop in downtown Benson where he now resides with his wife. John spends much of his time in business meetings (golfing), smoking cigars, and questing after the best beers, bourbons, and wines he can get his hands on.

8 Marq Manner

Marq Manner is a fan of Americana. He is interested in small town cafe's, roadside BBQ, getting a hotdog from a stand made in the likeness of George Washington, and the grittier eating atmospheres found in out of the way places. MarQ has been writing about the local music scene for The Omaha City Weekly for the past five years and has also written music features for many other rags and blogs.

9 Brian O'Malley

Brian O'Malley is a chef-instructor at the Institute for the Culinary Arts at Metropolitan Community College. As President of the Heartland Chapter of the American Culinary Federation, Coach of the Junior Culinary Competition Team, Board Member of the Nebraska Food Cooperative and the Nebraska Sustainable Agriculture Society, Father of two, and Muse Extraordinaire for Sage student bistro O'Malley spreads his passion for local and sustainable cuisine liberally throughout the community.

10 Brian Smith

Brian Smith and his wife operate Black Sheep Farms, a chemical-free family farm near Bennington. He is a speaker and writer on the topic of local food, and he has a minor food addiction. Wanna go to lunch?

11 Matt Stamp

Matt Stamp is the Wine Director and General Manager of V. Mertz Restaurant. He holds an Advanced Certificate from the Court of Master Sommeliers, and was named a Rudd Scholar in 2008 by the Guild of Sommeliers. Matt is a Certified Wine Specialist through the Society of Wine Educators, and is in general interested in libations and potables of all kinds.

12 Ann Summers

Ann Summers is a writer, amateur naturalist, mother, and cook. She is the author of two children's nature books and a new book on healthy lunch tips and nutrition called *Healthy Lunch, Healthy Mind*. She believes that fresh local food is the best present we can give ourselves and our children.

COMINGS & GOINGS

UPCOMING FOOD, WINE AND SPIRITS-RELATED AREA EVENTS...

FSMOmaha.com

Our website, www.fsmomaha.com, launched in September and it has seen a ton of traffic since then. We recently added a blog section and we invite all our readers to blog away. Just email the publisher for more information. Also look for more recipes and articles to be added in the coming weeks.

Women's Foodservice Forum (WFF)

Women's Foodservice Forum is the premier leadership development community for collective insights and connections that empower women in the foodservice industry to envision and achieve their highest potential. WFF is leading the transformation of the foodservice industry by enhancing the industry's business performance through gender-diverse leadership. We engage the foodservice industry to develop leadership talent and ensure career advancement for executive women. Our goals are bold: to have at least three female members on every foodservice senior team and board by 2010, and to achieve gender parity on senior teams and boards by 2020. For more information, visit www.womensfoodserviceforum.com

Art & Soup Event Raises Funds, Awards Top Chefs and Artists

The Visiting Nurse Association (VNA) hosted the 12th annual Art & Soup event on February 22nd and raised \$140,000 to benefit its Shelter Nursing Program, which provides nursing services to children and adults living in Omaha and Council Bluffs homeless shelters. This year, more than a thousand people attended Art & Soup. Those who attended had the opportunity to sample culinary soup delights from some of Omaha's finest restaurants while they strolled the gallery, purchased art from

local artists and participated in the silent auction. The evening highlighted sixty local artists, who donated a minimum of fifty percent of all their sales to the VNA Shelter Nursing Program. More than \$20,000 worth of art was sold that night. Chefs from 25 Omaha/Council Bluffs restaurants competed in the "Battle of the Soups" with their original recipes. A panel of culinary judges selected the winners.

Chef John Sgourakis from Greek Islands won Grand Champion with Creamy Spanakopita Soup. The second-place winner was Chef Mike Johnson from Vivace with Smoked Salmon Florentine Soup. The third-place honor went to Chef Corey Guyer at Old Mattress Factory Bar & Grill with Hot & Sour Lemongrass Shrimp. Guests had the chance to vote for their favorites in the People's Choice Awards. Best Artist was awarded to Katrina Methot Swanson for her oil artwork; Best Soup went to Greek Islands and Chef John Sgourakis for Creamy Spanakopita Soup; the Best Restaurant Decorations went to WheatFields; Best Artist Exhibit was awarded to Anne Nye for her acrylic and glass artwork. The VNA is the only provider of nursing services in Omaha shelters, and has been since 1987. In 2008, VNA provided care to 764 children, 1,221 women and 1,704 men for a total of 3,689 individuals.

Spencer's For Steaks and Chops Names General Manager

Spencer's for Steaks and Chops has announced that Brad Marr has been named General Manager at the premier Omaha steakhouse. Paul Keeler, President of the Hospitality Restaurant Group which manages Spencer's, made the announcement. Marr has been acting general manager. Prior to coming to Spencer's, Marr held positions at V. Mertz Restaurant and Sullivan's Steakhouse. He holds a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from the University of Nebraska-Omaha. "We're extremely pleased to promote Brad to this position at Spencer's," said Keeler. "He has shown great leadership during the past several months. We know that his background and management expertise, coupled with the quality of food and service Spencer's is known for, will provide an exceptional guest experience." "Spencer's is the place where I can put my professional management skills to work to grow the overall success of the restaurant," said Marr.

Local chef Jennifer Coco announced a Semifinalist for the JBF Awards

Jennifer Coco of the Flatiron Grill (Omaha, Nebr.) was recently named a semifinalist in the Best Chef, Midwest category of the prestigious James Beard Foundation Award. The award has been called "the Oscars of the food world," and is the country's most sought-after award in the culinary industry, coveted by chefs, food and beverage professionals.



For information on listing upcoming events or activities,
contact eriktotten@fsmomaha.com or call 402-203-6145.

Reidel Glassware Tasting Event @ Spirit World (April 17, 2009)

Did you know the style of glass you use can significantly change the taste of the wine? See how at this special tasting event. Join us on Friday April 17th from 6-8pm for our Riedel Glassware Tasting Event. Cost is \$40 per person. Participants get to keep their tasting set of 4 Riedel glasses! Space is limited and reservations are required. Call 391-8680 to confirm your spot. Visit http://www.spiritworldwine.com/event_calendar.html for more information.



Great Nebraska Mushroom Festival (Peru, Nebr., April 25-26)

"A down-to-earth experience". Can you imagine hunting without a gun...and without a limit? Join us April 25 and 26 at the Steamboat Trace Trailhead in Peru, Nebr. for mushroom hunts, a master mushroom contest, food, games, music and more! For festival information and registration, visit www.nebraskathegoodlife.com/mushroomfestival.htm.

"The Thrill of the Grill" Tasting Event & Silent Auction (April 28, 2009)

The Salvation Army Women's Auxiliary teams up with The Greater Omaha Barbeque Society <<http://www.gobs.org>> on April 28, 2009. The groups host "The Thrill of the Grill" - a tasting event featuring barbeque favorites along with appetizers, side dishes, desserts and more. The event and silent auction will be held at the Presbyterian Church of The Cross, 1517 south 114th St. (south of Pacific) from 5-8 pm. The cost is \$30 per person and includes a cookbook or \$50 for two with one recipe collection. For reservations contact: Dee D'Agosto, 15305 Wycliffe Drive, Omaha, NE. 68154. All proceeds will benefit the programs of the Omaha Salvation Army.

Hops for Harmony: Omaha's Premiere Beer Festival (April 30, 2009)

Hops for Harmony is Omaha's Premiere Beer Tasting Festival. Join the Papillion Area Lions Club for an evening of beer tasting, fine food and a great silent auction. Proceeds will benefit Project Harmony and the Papillion Lions Club. The following beer and food partners will make this an evening that you will remember for a long time: Blimpie Subs & Salad, Empyrean Brewing Co., Lazlo's Brewery & Grill, Fernando's, Granite City, German-American Society, Jazz: A Louisiana Kitchen, Lucky Bucket Brewing Co., Miller Brands, Nebraska Brewing Co., Old Chicago, Shadow Lake, Premier Midwest Beverage, Quality Brands of Omaha, Republic National Distributing Co., Spilker Ales and Upsream Brewing Co. The event will be held on Thursday, April 30th, from 5:30-8:30pm at the German-American Society, 3717 South 120th St., Omaha. Tickets are \$30 in advance and \$35 at the door. You can learn more about Project Harmony at www.projectharmony.com. To order your tickets, go to www.projectharmony.com or call Bob Frederick at 402-331-3168.

Spring Wine & Blues Festival @ Soaring Wings Vineyard (May 9, 12-9pm)

Friday Night Music Series begins May 15, 7-9:30pm, \$5 cover.

Ollie's Dream wine-tasting gala (June 6, 2009)

Enjoy an evening of tasting wines from around the world accompanied by heavy hors d'oeuvres, live jazz music, silent and oral auctions. Proceeds benefit Ollie Webb Center, Inc., a local non-profit serving children, youth and adults with developmental disabilities and their families. Sponsorship and advertising opportunities are available. Donations to the silent and oral auctions are appreciated and are tax-deductible. Cost: \$75 per person \$750 for table of 10 guests Phone: 402-346-5220 x16 or visit www.localwineevents.com/Omaha-Wine/event-223206.html <http://www.olliewebbinc.org/> for more information.



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Popcorn:

The American Snack Food

by Brian O'Malley

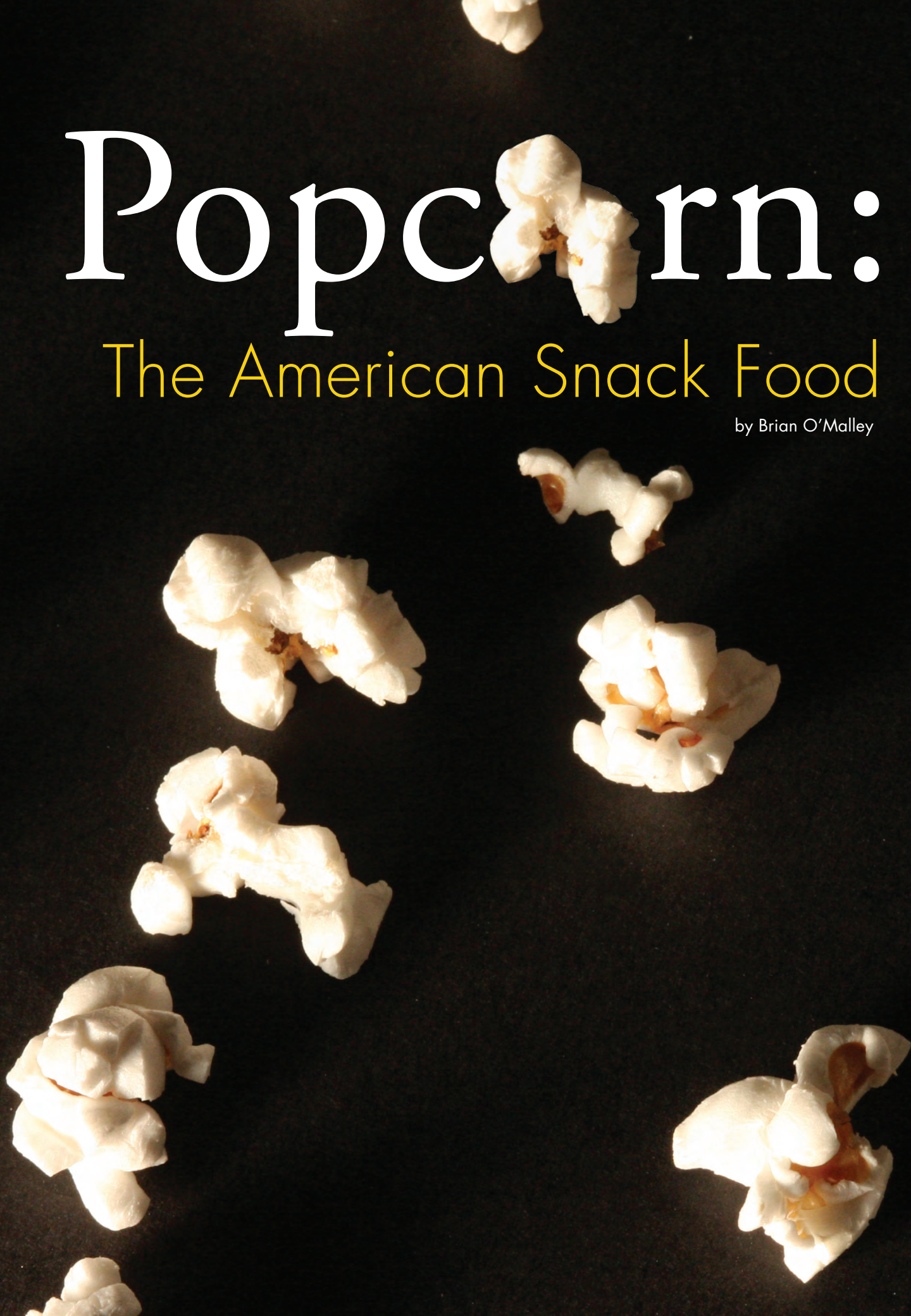
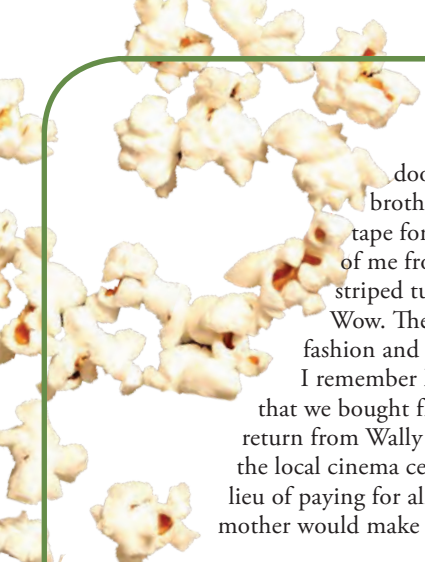




Photo by David Ahlquist



I grew up in the 80's. My sister had hair that would hit the doorframe if she didn't duck, my brother bought me a Loverboy cassette tape for my 12th birthday, and all photos of me from this era include OP shorts and striped tube socks pulled up to my knees. Wow. The 80's were really bad. Not just for fashion and music, but bad for food.

I remember loading up in the family truckster that we bought from the Griswolds after their return from Wally World, and barrelling down to the local cinema center to watch movies all day. In lieu of paying for all of us to have concessions, my mother would make popcorn all morning and then

"There have been many tragedies in the world of food over the years—processed cheese spread, margarine, decaffeinating coffee, etc—but the loss of the in-home, stove-popped popcorn tradition as evidenced by the proliferation of the air poppers is perhaps the most painful."

somehow magically sneak it in the theater (I think she would feign pregnancy like the guy in the new Taco Bell commercial). The terrible thing about this was not the blatant rule-breaking. It was not the ridiculous movies we saw, either. It was the air-popped popcorn. There have been many tragedies in the world of food over the years—processed cheese spread, margarine, decaffeinating coffee, etc.—but the loss of the in-home, stove-popped popcorn tradition as evidenced by the proliferation of the air poppers is perhaps the most painful. The history is a little muddy, but it goes something like this:

All historical seriousness aside, popcorn is wonderful no matter where you get it. Here at school, we sell hundreds of pounds per year through our cafeteria. Our dean rarely shows up to a meeting without a bagful. My dad used to get a bag frequently from the now-defunct filling station by his house. I remember with great nostalgia the huge bags of Vic's that we used to take over to Uncle Duff's house when we would visit. As a kid I was astonished at the

huge handfuls of popcorn that he could eat—I am pretty sure that I have caught up now.

Popcorn is the quintessential American snack food. We love it. I was astonished to discover that we Americans eat almost *seventy* quarts per person per year! Popcorn has spent time as the darling of almost every health-conscious agency in the country, from the American Dietetic Association to the American Academy of Pediatrics. No one in the world disagrees that the aroma of just-popped corn is intoxicating. Popcorn enjoys a life free of religious taboo, suffers very little harassment from the snack food police, and is readily available the world over due to its size and shelf stability. A city council in Ohio even praised a bar that served free popcorn as doing their part to promote sobriety—kind of silly since the level of salt on popcorn is hardly a foil to beverage consumption, but whatever, it's Ohio. No other food in the world is so unanimously received. During my preparation for this article, I asked at least twenty-five people for their opinions about popcorn, and each one of them said they liked it. Wow. Unanimous. I like to think that the popularity of popcorn is due in no small part to the legions of Boy Scouts that take to their neighborhood streets each year to sell pounds of it in a herculean fund-raising effort only outstripped by the moms of Girl Scouts who take their order forms to work. I am a little bitter, you see: I gave up on an opportunity for my first kiss one splendid afternoon in fourth grade in order to fulfill my duty to sell popcorn. Maybe I was just a bit nervous, but we'll blame my loyalty to popcorn and the Boy Scouts.

Despite all this magnificent popularity, popcorn seems strangely absent from the menus of contemporary American restaurants. Sure, you can get it at any gas station, movie theater, grocery store or watering hole, but why not as an *amuse-bouche* at your favorite \$300-a-plate dinner? Simple: popcorn is of the people, for the people and by the people. \$300 a plate is for the crazy rich, or crazy foodies. They either look down on popcorn eaters, or know that popcorn is only worth a couple of bucks a pound and no way will they pay crazy money for it. All that said, it used to be on the menu at V. Mertz, and we played with it a bit at Sage a couple of years ago. My guess is the chef at Mertz at that time discovered what we at Sage discovered: we could only make it about as good as you

"No one in the world disagrees that the aroma of just-popped corn is intoxicating...no other food in the world is so unanimously received."

POPPIN' THROUGH THE AGES: *History of the Quintessential American Snack Food*

15th Century, CE	1612 CE	1621 CE	18th Century CE	19th Century CE	1920's
Angry Native American gods who resided in the kernels of corn would escape, creating a loud popping noise.	French explorers share popcorn, popcorn bread, and popcorn beer at a meal with the Iroquois.	Quadequina brings popcorn to the first Thanksgiving meal at Plymouth, Massachusetts.	Blacksmiths in the early colonial settlements crafted "squirrel cage" poppers for use over in-home hearths.	Popcorn street vendors show up at every possible event, from political rallies to outdoor festivals.	The popularity of movie-going and subsequently popcorn consumption skyrocket.
Oiled, on the cob on a stick over a fire.	Large earthen pots with hot sand on the bottom.	Large soapstone and metal pots placed directly over the fire.	Pseudo-stove-top method.	Steam kettle.	Electric kettle.



could get it anywhere. Popcorn is so democratic, so available, so “of the people” that even the process used to make it is simple enough that the rarified chefs among us, the great Clayton Chapmans or Paul Kuliks, can’t do anything to it to make it elite or refined beyond the grasp of the hoi polloi.

Americans’ love for popcorn is rooted deeply in our sense of place, our love of sharing, and our propensity for over-consumption. It is from here—from America. We love stuff like that. We buy it in huge tubs at the movie theater and then divvy it up among the twelve of us. Or, when we get a bit bigger than we were in those halcyon days of the family truckster, we eat the whole tub ourselves and go back for the *free* refill. That’s something else we love: *free* and *refill* combined together.

If you have been away from the stove for a while, making some “old-fashioned” popcorn is a great way to get back to it. You don’t need to buy any special equipment. You probably need to buy a little popcorn that is not either already popped or prepared to be popped in the microwave. You’ll be pleasantly surprised by the cost and the lack of additional things in the package. The ingredient list will only say “popcorn.” Find yourself a 2-3 quart stock pot. I think that any lid will work, but one with a steam vent on the top will be best. If there is no steam vent, find one that doesn’t fit too snugly, or keep it off-kilter a bit during the popping. Allowing the steam to escape during cooking is essential to preventing chewy and dense popcorn. Before you turn on the heat, add 1-2 tablespoons of oil to the bottom of the pan, being sure that it coats the surface evenly. Then add 1½ cups of unpopped popcorn kernels. Be careful to not add more than will allow all of the kernels to be in contact with the bottom of the pan at once. Put on the loosey-goosey lid. Place the pan over medium-high heat. Shake constantly for 2-3 minutes or until popping slows to two seconds between pops. Remove into a large bowl and immediately toss with warm butter and desired seasoning. Enjoy either one kernel at a time—if you are under the age of four or a Buddhist monk—or in large handfuls—if you are me or the Uncle Duff that I remember.

Omaha Area Locations for Popcorn

Vic’s Corn Popper

All sorts of already popped popcorn, available in grocery stores city-wide.

Complete line available online, and at their three area locations.

Maggie’s Gourmet Popcorn

Broad variety of traditional and flavored popcorns available in grocery stores and online.

Office West Lounge

Free, heavily salted popcorn available nightly.

Rosenblatt Stadium

(While supplies last) Rosenblatt sells the American Classic Cracker Jack.

The new stadium in La Vista is rumored to be moving to the newer, yet equally silly-named, “Fiddle Faddle.”

Taste of Omaha

June 5-7, 2009. They usually have a kettle corn vendor of some type.

Omaha Henry Doorly Zoo

The smell alone is summertime in Omaha. Please do not feed to the fish, peacocks, etc.

Hilger AgriNatural

Local Organic Popcorn (unpopped) available year-round from the Nebraska Food Cooperative: www.nebraskafood.org.



1940's

Extensive research using popcorn leads to the introduction of the Raytheon tube into home microwave ovens.

1950's

A multitude of unique and inoperable methodologies for home production accompany the rise in kitchen gadgetry.

1960's

The Air popper is introduced and touted as a way to return the once beloved snack food to its place as a “healthy” choice.

1980's

Air poppers go crazy, as do packaged popcorn companies like our local Vic’s Corn Popper.

1990's

Processed food companies take the market with renewed vigor as home consumption spikes upward of 20 quarts popcorn per year.

2000's

Whirley Pop™ machines make serious inroads homewards. Properly made popcorn, with actual butter on it, is again attainable.

Microwave era begins.

Mostly useless. Except Jiffy Pop.

Hot air.

Electric air poppers and commercial kettles.

Microwave.

Stove top kettle method.



OMAHA'S LARGEST PIZZA REVIEW ...EVER

by Erik Totten






SI'S PUDGY'S JOHNNY SORTINO'S MANGIA ITALIANA DON
 CARMELO'S CANIGLIA'S VENICE INN SGT. PEPPER'S LA CASA LO
 SOLE MIO FRANK'S MAMA'S ORSI'S PUDGY'S JOHNNY SOR-
 TINO'S MANGIA ITALIANA DON CARMELO'S CANIGLIA'S VENICE
 INN SGT. PEPPER'S LA CASA LO SOLE MIO FRANK'S MAMA'S
 ORSI'S PUDGY'S JOHNNY SORTINO'S MANGIA ITALIANA DON
 CARMELO'S CANIGLIA'S VENICE INN SGT. PEPPER'S LA CASA LO



Jake's Cigars & Spirits during the night of
 the review. Photos by David Ahlquist



"We invited nearly every independently-owned pizza place in town...in the end, we ended up with a list that certainly represents some of the best pizza that can be found in Omaha."

We decided to change up our food review for this issue of Food & Spirits Magazine. Rather than our normal, round-table style restaurant review, we wanted to do something a little bit bigger so that we could try food from more than one restaurant, and so that we could invite the public to share in our food orgy. So, after much consideration, we came up with "Omaha's Largest Pizza Review, Ever." Everybody likes (if not loves) pizza so it was a natural fit and it went over incredibly well.

We invited nearly every independently-owned pizza place in town to participate in the review. Some declined, and some our messages didn't get returned but, in the end, we ended up with a list that certainly represents some of the best pizza that can be found in Omaha. The participating pizza places were asked to send three pizzas, all the same kind, and they were also asked to decide what type of pizza they would send.

The review was held at Jake's Cigars & Spirits (6206 Maple St.) in Benson. We also had Sterling Distributors on hand with samples of Cuervo Silver and Jeremiah Weed Sweet Tea Vodka. Over 130 people showed up and the pizza flinging was fast and furious – we went through 33 pizzas in less than an hour. All those that came were asked to vote for their top three pizzas. Food & Spirits Magazine's judging panel was also on hand to record their expert opinions on the pizza. Our judges this issue were A.J. Swanda, Brian Young, Kelly Schumacher and Derek (from GastronomicFightClub.com). We awarded a People's Choice, a Judge's Choice and the Publisher's Pick.

.....





Participants

La Casa Pizzeria (4432 Leavenworth St.)
Mangia Italiana (6516 Irvington Rd.)
Don Carmelo's Pizzeria (3562 Farnam St.)
Orsi's Italian Bakery (621 Pacific St.)
Lo Sole Mio (3020 S 32nd Ave.)
Pudgy's Pizzeria (16919 Audrey St. # 110)
Mama's Pizza (715 N Saddle Creek Rd.)
Johnny Sortino's Pizza Parlor (7880 L St.)
Frank's Pizzeria (711 N 132nd St.)
Caniglia's Venice Inn (6920 Pacific St.)
Sgt. Pepper's Café Italiana (1501 N Saddle Creek Rd.)

The People's Choice

The People's Choice Award was about as close as it could get. Those voters were asked to pick their top three choices and we assigned every first place vote three points, second place votes got two points and third place votes received one point. There was only three points separating first and second place and two of the top three were somewhat of a surprise. Also worth noting is that every participating restaurant received at least one vote for first place. The winners were;

Mangia Italiana
 La Casa Pizzeria
 Lo Sole Mio





The Judge's Choice

Our judges were asked to rank the pizzas on a ten point scale, with ten being the best. Although there was some overlap in the results from the people's votes, it was a surprise that the judge's votes ended up being fairly different. The judge's choices were;

La Casa Pizzeria (8.25)

Pudgy's Pizzeria (7.75)

Mama's Pizza (7.0)

Sgt. Pepper's (7.0)

Judges Comments:

Mangia Italiana – “Good cheese and lots of toppings. Toppings were flavorful and the crust was nice and thin. I like the spice.” A.J. Swanda

Mama's Pizza – “Medium crust thickness and a decent amount of toppings. Seasoned well and comes across as better than your average pizza.” Brian Young

La Casa – “Yum! Doesn't look like your average pizza since there is more meat than cheese, but it tastes great!” Kelly Schumacher

Frank's Pizzeria – “Looks good. Nice and fresh looking. A lot of cheese on the crust and the chicken isn't dry - unique.” Derek

Sgt. Pepper's – “The white chicken pizza was delicious. Just chicken and white sauce but simple and quite tasty. Just a touch of crispiness on the soft crust – yum!” Kelly Schumacher

Johnny Sortino's Pizza Parlor – “Nice crust, good flavors and a very nice sauce. The cheese also had a good texture and the crust has excellent flavor.” A.J. Swanda

Pudgy's Pizzeria – “The Chicago style deep dish was surprisingly great – I had never had one like this before. Crust is thick and crispy and loads of juicy sauce and toppings.” Kelly Schumacher





"A sentimental pick...it was one of the first food items I fell in love with in Omaha."



The Publisher's Pick

My pick for the best pizza in town, although I love it, is really a sentimental pick. When I first moved to Omaha, I lived at 13th and Pacific so the closest pizza place was Orsi's Italian Bakery. It was one of the first food items I fell in love with in Omaha and I was surprised to learn that so many people haven't heard of them, even though they've been around for, literally, over 100 years. The large pizzas are a full sheet pan at Orsi's so they are massive and loaded down with heaps of toppings and cheese. Quite a treat!

So those are your winners, as voted on by the public, our judges and me. The wide variation between the people's and judge's choice is simply due to the great quality of pizza that is cranked out by so many Omaha restaurants. I didn't hear very many negative comments during the review and, as I mentioned, every restaurant that participated received at least one first place vote from the public. Given the tremendous response, we'll be putting together "Omaha's Largest Pizza Review, Ever II" for next year – see you there!

We're on the web!
www.fsmomaha.com

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Steakation:

Where To Find a Great Steak Out of Town

by John Uhrich

We Midwesterners are spoiled by the options abounding when it comes to finding a thick, juicy cut of beef right here in our backyard. Throw a stone standing on nearly any busy street here in Omaha and you're bound to hit a steakhouse of some sort. Some are good, some great, and some have become unforgettable favorites of Omahans, not only for their mouth-watering cuts of beef, but for the friendly service, the great wine list to accompany a hearty meal, or the down-to-earth atmosphere. Now, taking a step back from your comfortable, familiar surroundings: have you ever taken time to wonder where you would go for a steak in Chicago or Vegas? How about downtown Los Angeles? While there are bound to be some incredible dining options in all three of these cities, here are a few of key interest known not only for their wonderful cuts of beef, but for the experience as well.

BOHANAN'S STEAKHOUSE (San Antonio, Tex.)

Located in the heart of San Antonio's riverwalk and downtown district, this steakhouse was voted #2 in Texas for four years straight. The restaurant itself pulled out all the stops in terms of decor and ambiance. The marble floors and white tablecloths went very far in establishing the high quality of the restaurant. The service was impeccable in terms of knowledge of the cuts of meat, wine list, and attention to detail.

"All major cuts of meat; filet mignon, new york strip, and rib eye were all offered in Kobe/Wagyu beef style."

The characteristic that made Bohanan's Steakhouse stand out from the competition is that all major cuts of meat: filet mignon, new york strip, and rib eye were all offered in Kobe/Wagyu beef

style. While most top steakhouses sell these cuts of meat at an eye-opening \$30 per ounce, Bohanan's was very reasonably priced at \$15 per ounce. The 12-ounce Kobe/Wagyu New York Strip that I enjoyed was the most perfect cut of meat that was perfectly marbled in all the right places.

The only disappointment with the meal was the overpriced and unimpressive wine list the restaurant offered. The typical focus on the list was big California Cabs that have a huge brand name attached. Typically at a place this grand, the wine list will offer more unique boutique wines that do not carry the big name brand label. The addition of a sommelier could take this restaurant up to the next level.

SW STEAKHOUSE (Las Vegas, Nev.)

Located in the new Wynn Hotel Las Vegas, the restaurant is surrounded by the hotel's beautiful outdoor lake.



“Steaks are hand-selected from USDA wet-aged prime beef, cooked in an open flame and topped with SW’s signature sauces.”

When deciding to dine at this restaurant, make sure reservations are made well in advance, as this place fills up fast. For the first appetizer, the seafood platter that contains the king crab, oysters on the half shell, jumbo shrimp, lobster tail and an ahi tuna tartare is a must! The portions are so enormous that skipping the salad and soup course is a great idea. Steaks are hand-selected from USDA wet-aged prime beef, cooked in an open flame and topped with SW’s signature sauces.

When dining in Vegas, there are many great steakhouse options. Although the SW does not have the Kobe/Wagyu beef selection of places such as the Prime Steakhouse at the Bellagio or the Strip Steakhouse at Mandalay Bay, the service, wine list, and atmosphere truly make up for this. Many Vegas restaurants are also known for jacking up wine prices to unreasonable levels. However, the SW contains many great boutique wines from across the world at extraordinarily reasonable prices. The master sommelier does a great job of maintaining and serving a truly great wine list!

THE CHICAGO CHOPHOUSE (Chicago, Ill.)

Located at 60 W. Ontario St., right in the heart of the downtown Chicago loop. After trying several respected steakhouses, the Chicago Chophouse came out on top for several reasons.



“The food and wine pairings that were recommended matched perfectly with the menu options.”

1. The professional service. While dining at the Chophouse, the service was a step above, and separated itself from the competition by the knowledge of the wine list, attention to detail, and the professional attitudes displayed. The food and wine pairings that were recommended matched perfectly with the menu options.

2. The wine list. After having dined at Morton’s, Gibson’s and Gino & Georgetti, the wine list at Chicago Chophouse was far and away the most extensive. The sommelier did a fantastic job of obtaining unique California Cabernets that were extremely difficult and challenging to find.

3. The food itself. Every steak at Chicago Chophouse is dry-aged USDA prime beef. The bone-in filet mignon or rib eye were the

house’s two signature steaks. The wait staff did a great job directing their guests to the perfect steak.

4. The atmosphere. The atmosphere of the Chicago Chophouse truly felt as if you were dining back in the 1920’s. The white tablecloths and ambiance of the place were truly amazing. The walls were filled of pictures that took you back through Chicago’s rich history. This place gave off the truly “old-school” feel of a great chophouse.

THE PACIFIC DINING CAR (Los Angeles, Cal.)

Located in downtown Los Angeles, the Pacific Dining Car was started in 1921 by Fred and Grace Cook. The restaurant is now in its fourth generation of ownership that has continued the rich tradition the restaurant has had for decades.



“The first prime steakhouse I had ever dined at that stayed open until 4AM.”

I stumbled upon this unique gem while attending the Nebraska-USC game back in 2006. It was almost midnight when we arrived back at the hotel, and everyone in our group was starving for a top-notch prime steakhouse that stayed opened late. Sure enough, the hotel concierge did not disappoint in sending us to the Dining Car.

The name really says everything about the atmosphere. You really feel as if you are back in 1920, dining in a fancy box car while traveling on the rail system. Similar to the Chicago Chophouse, the walls of the restaurant tell of the history of Los Angeles, especially during the booming 20’s. The menu was every bit as impressive as what you would expect from nationally-owned chain houses. The wine list was equally impressive, offering unique selections of California’s finest. This was the first prime steakhouse I had ever dined at that stayed open until 4AM. The three-hour dinner, lasting well into the wee hours of the morning, was especially memorable.

Here in Omaha, we should consider ourselves lucky to have so many steakhouses in our reach. Visiting these steakhouses drives home the fact that while a great steak can separate a restaurant from the competition, sometimes it’s the experiences we have at these establishments that make them truly memorable. Maybe it’s the atmosphere, or the wait staff’s attention to detail that lingers with you long after the taste of that perfectly-seasoned steak is gone. The next time you find yourself in one of these cities, try out one of these steakhouses, not only for their cuts of beef, but for an experience you won’t soon forget.



Tiramisu at Anthony's Steakhouse.
Photo by David Ahlquist



Sirloin and Blue Cheese tart, with roasted red peppers
and caramelized onions, from Mark's Bistro - \$7.75.
Photo by Erik Totten

Fixin' for Chicken



by Marq Manner

I decided to go on a quest for some good fried chicken on a cold Saturday morning while driving around listening to the country oldies show on a small town AM station out of Iowa. I had hit a couple of record stores, a few antique shops, and when it was time for lunch I had a craving for some steaming hot fried chicken. I quickly made up my mind to head over toward South Omaha and hit up Ritchie's Fried Chicken at 3528 Center Street.

The thought of sitting in an old-school, greasy café that serves up some of the hottest comfort food around just made the most sense after cruising vinyl and listening to Hank, Willie, and Waylon on the AM radio. Ritchie's makes an attempt at creating a quaint dining space, but it's pretty hard when there is a large open kitchen with appliances chugging away, cooking your food fresh only a few feet away.

I don't go to these places for quaint. It's the gruff men, and sometimes gruff women at countertops talking about the goings on of day, the TV blaring out Comedy Central or bad *Entertainment Tonight*-type shows, and the heavy feeling of good greasy cooking that keeps me going to places such as this. Ritchie's had all three going for it on the afternoon of my recent visit.

I ordered a three piece chicken dinner from a friendly young waitress and sat back and enjoyed the sounds and scenery. Every time I eat at Ritchie's, I feel as if I am ripping them off. During this recent lunch, I got three huge pieces of fried chicken, various breads that were not just standard dinner rolls, chicken noodle soup and fries for the low end of \$5-\$10 range. Everything is served hot—really hot—the breads, the soup, and especially the chicken. All of it was delicious and it felt like a multi-course meal.

While enjoying the breads and thick chicken soup, I had to keep myself from attempting to order seconds by reminding myself that the main event was still on the way. There is nothing like steaming hot

bread and a thick meaty soup on a cold day. I know that my chicken was freshly made and not heat-lamped, as you have little choice but to watch them make it. The bird had a hard, crispy crust that oozed succulent juice from the tender meat as I bit into it. The fries were also hot, crisp, and mostly left on the plate, only due to the fact that there would be no room for them.

That whole experience was so enjoyable that I decided to make a few more Saturday treks to the other “best fried chicken” places in town and compare. The differences between the various “best fried chicken” places in Omaha is not so much in their chicken, but in the atmosphere and experiences that surround these places. Some would say it's the sides that make a difference, but I am not an adventurous eater by any stretch of the imagination. It's potatoes, soup, rolls, or maybe some mac 'n' cheese for me.

I think fried chicken restaurants tend to be different and unique because they have such a deep-rooted history in American culture. Fried chicken is a simple comfort food loved by many, which has allowed for some businesses to build up a rich atmosphere that only time can create.

One of Omaha's most unique dining experiences is of course the Alpine Inn at 10405 Calhoun Rd. The gimmick here, as most of us know, is

that you can sit by one of the big picture windows and watch raccoons, cats, birds, and maybe even Bigfoot eat your scraps after they

are thrown onto the viewing decks in the woods. The real treat here is the huge pieces of juicy fried chicken you will enjoy while scanning the woods for these critters. Your options at the Alpine Inn are limited. It's pretty much chicken, a couple of burgers, and pork tenderloin.

On my recent visit, I attempted the three piece chicken dinner with the Alpine Inn's huge potato wedges, almost a meal in themselves. I really like the old-school roadhouse biker bar vibe of the place, and you know you're getting the real deal when your Coke is brought to the table in a can. I also noticed some signs with some amazing beer prices that I first thought may have been left up there from the 80's. The area around The Alpine Inn offers some of the best lazy Saturday afternoon driving around, as your meal settles in.

When people say fried chicken in Omaha, most chime in with Time Out Foods at 3518 N 30th Street. They do claim to have the best fried chicken in town, and when it comes to getting some great take out chicken, I don't doubt that claim. The Saturday that I ventured into the small dining area at Time Out was one of those sixty degrees in the middle of winter days where the lines at the car wash stretched into the main streets. I expected the place to be a madhouse, because one of the best things to go along with nice weather is some chicken in a box that can be easily taken to a park or porch somewhere.

This is exactly what I did on this day, and when I was given my box stuffed with a biscuit, three large pieces of fried chicken, fries, and slaw, I found myself intimidated by the weight of it all. A similar deal at KFC would have felt like pack of cards compared to this, and it would've been neatly packaged and separated. That was not the case with the Time Out Foods box. I pulled up to the nearest park, walked to a picnic table, and had to work my way around the inside of this box.

The flakey biscuit broke off into the fries, the juices from the chicken worked their way onto the biscuit, and even some of the juices from the slaw found their way onto my chicken. One of my

favorite things about Time Out Chicken is their old-school crinkle-cut fries that remind me of sitting at the drive inn A&W restaurants as a child. Now *that* is comfort food.

Finally, I felt that I should eat some fried chicken while writing this article. I don't think many computer repair persons would recommend this practice, but it just seemed like the right thing to do. So I headed over to the new chick on the block when it comes to fried chicken, G & J's Southern Cuisine at 6109 Maple St. G & J's has been a curse on my waistline since it opened, as I live across the street from the restaurant and they offer up a wide variety of pretty much all of my food addictions. As many times as I have eaten there in the past few months, I have never had the fried chicken.

That changed tonight, and I have to say that their chicken came out with that harder crispy shell that I love, and juicy tender meat of excellent quality on the inside. Like the other fine fried chicken places in town, they serve this up fresh and extremely hot. This is one place where the sides do make a difference to me. G & J's mac 'n' cheese isn't a fancy affair, but it always hits the spot and has become one of my favorite things to eat. One also has to love being able to get Tater Tots to go along with your fried chicken. G & J's also has baked beans, greens, fried okra, and other Southern sides that my friends that eat that sort of thing say are great as well.

The wait staff is very friendly, and there is a real family vibe coming out of the kitchen. The place hasn't had the time to build up that unique atmosphere yet, but hopefully they will be around long enough to do so. I think, given the chance, they will have a place among Omaha's unique dining experiences.

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Wild Food

by Brian Smith

*The magic of Spring
Is in the resurrection of the Earth.
Green life spouts
From under a crust of winter dormancy
While we wait with our forks
For something fresh to appear.*

--

Poetry aside, spring is my favorite season of the year. It holds the promise of warmth after a long Nebraska winter, and it means that our food options are going to expand. All winter, I've been reading seed catalogs, planning my gardens and trying to figure out how I can possibly grow all the plants I want.

Even if you start your seeds in a greenhouse or spare bedroom, there's a lot of waiting involved. Lots of plants take two or three months to produce our food. So even with all the planting, watering and weeding, it still takes time and effort. And patience, a dirty word in our fast food nation.

Fortunately, we don't have to wait for everything. Mother Nature provides us with a variety of spring foods every year. By tapping into our hunter/gatherer past, we can eat all the treasures of the season. And they're free! All free! This is a huge plus since some of these foods command high prices at farmers markets and restaurants.

How can a city dweller possibly find these tasty tidbits? Take heart: even in Omaha and the surrounding areas, there are foods to be foraged. If you do a little planning, you can access fresh, once-a-year delicacies at little or no cost. To do this, we need to know the details about our environment: the who, what, when, where, why and how of the food world.

Let's tackle this, item by item:

Wild Greens — Anyone who likes adding flair to salads or side dishes will love wild leaves like sorrel, dock and dandelion greens. These have more spiciness or bitterness than cultivated lettuces, so add them in small quantities until you get used to them. You can also boil them in a couple of changes of water to remove the bitterness. They're good

"Spring weather brings Mother Nature out of hibernation, and there are tons of little culinary surprises to explore: meats, greens, even fruits."

in mixed salads, mesclun or sautéed. You can find these in your backyard, common areas or on farms, but make sure that there have not been recent chemical applications. They start appearing in April and run until fall, but the smallest, youngest leaves are the tastiest.

Wild Game — If you are into hunting, fishing and trapping, spring is a great time to get out into the wilderness. According to Tom Keith of the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, April is prime time for catfish, and mid-May is the best time to troll the Sandhills lakes for bass, panfish and walleye. Spring hunting seasons for turkey and goose are open during April and May, too. This will require you to get a license from

Game and Parks, but it's an inexpensive trade-off. If you're a newbie, ask to tag along with someone who can show you how it's done. For carnivores, nothing tastes better than something you've killed yourself and cooked over an open fire. (Insert man roar.)

Wild 'shrooms — *Duuuude*. It's not like that, but this is the big score. The number one wild mushroom in the area is the morel. It pops up after rains right around Mother's Day, and mushroom hunters would rather have their fingernails pulled out than tell you where to find their favorite haunts. They grow in the same places every year, but only for about two weeks. Look for shady, wooded areas. Also, take a guide book. Many mushrooms have doppelgangers that will land you in the emergency room.

Foraging requires one big warning: you must have a landowner's permission to hunt or gather. It is illegal and dangerous to go tramping around a farm, even if you can't see any buildings. Seek out the farmhouse and ask nicely. Many farmers don't mind if you explore their land, especially if you offer to share some of your findings or bring a small gift like a bottle of wine. (Or in my case, St. Bernardus Abt 12.)

Spring weather brings Mother Nature out of hibernation, and there are tons of little culinary surprises to explore: meats, greens, even fruits. Buy a field guide to wild foods or print out some images from websites so you know what's safe to eat and where to look. Take a friend out and have a good time hunting for your dinner. Wild foods are delicious and help us reconnect with our past foodways. Plus, it's just good to get outside after a long winter.

The Art of Baking Casually

by Ann Summers



I am an eater who loves to cook, not vice versa. But it's time to 'fess up. I am a lousy baker. You want a rack of ribs? Fresh ravioli with gremolata? A béchamel sauce? *Croque monsieur* or blanched asparagus salad with a poached egg? I got it. But when my friend Laura called, saying she'd ruined her son's birthday cake—"It just crumbles! I can't ice it!"—I told her exactly what to do: "Layer the crumbles in glasses with fruit, pudding, and whipped cream—you'll have trifle!" I knew this because there is a whole line of crumbly cakes, burned cookies, and underdone fruit breads in my history. But there are a few baked goodies so foolproof even a dolt like me can't mess them up.

"There are a few baked goodies so foolproof, even a dolt like me can't mess them up."

Anyway, you were probably wondering what to do with all those luscious local farm-fresh eggs you have, and all that locally-grown-and-ground flour sitting around your kitchen, so you were thinking of baking, but it was too scary, right? If you look too long at glossy pictures of homemade cupcakes with from-scratch icing and cocoa stenciling, and gold-leafed, hand-sculpted miniature marzipan hedgehogs, you're likely to get so anxiety-ridden, you'll go picking fights with people you don't even know. Or you'll start hating friends who call to say that, in the city, they can buy those old things any time of the day or night from the corner eco-ethno-bakery. But take heart, you can bake better things, in a casual sort of way, and still impress all of your friends—even those from glamorous locales like Seattle, or Teaneck, New Jersey. We may not live in a city that never sleeps, but then who wants to go without sleep?

Give your dear ones some fresh-baked gourmet Italian biscotti or some golden scones made with local ingredients and watch the jaws drop. It's the Heartland, people! We have eggs and flour—let's use them!

Ah, biscotti. Forget the butter. Real biscotti doesn't have butter. If it did, it'd be called a cookie. I didn't learn that from Italian friends, but from Lorenza de' Medici



on PBS, and I'm pretty sure she knew what she was talking about. In a big bowl, heap up some flour (about 3 cups), salt, brown sugar (a cup), with some grated orange peel, ½ cup of anise seed (go to Penzeys Spices, they don't grow it much around here), some vanilla, and some grated nutmeg (spice store again), a pinch of baking powder, a cup and a half of ground whole almonds, and mix it. And then stir in about 10 eggs, just crack 'em right in there. Oh, it's okay! Dietary cholesterol has absolutely no effect on serum cholesterol—it's the excess calories and fat you eat. In these biscotti, there's no butter, no oil and no dairy—that's the beauty. Add a little dry vermouth or grappa, and use your muscles to fold it until no more dry flour is left. Or use a dough hook, but never a mixer or processor: over-mixing bad;

lumpy good. Then take this gloppy stuff and scoop it into a line of blobs diagonally across a big sheet pan lined with parchment paper or foil. It should look like under-mixed cookie dough.

Wet your hands, and shape the line of blobs into a flattened log that is only about two inches (or two finger knuckles) thick at the center high-point—this gives you the half-crescent shape when you cut it. Bake it for about 25 minutes in a 375° oven until it is golden on top and sounds hollow when you thump it. Lift the paper and the biscotti onto a rack to cool, then cut it thick for big hunks or thin for dainty slices. The Italians toast the slices (hence "twice-cooked," or *biscotti*) to dry them in a low oven (like those hard things at the coffee shop), but I tin mine up in a plastic tub and toast them as I eat them. Best of all is how you can change the flavors without ruining them. Add cinnamon, white chocolate chips, walnuts (instead of almonds) and you have holiday biscotti. Add semi-sweet chips and cocoa powder and you have choco-bliss. Add rum, pecans and more orange zest, and you have praline biscotti. Add crystallized ginger and pistachios with some apricots and milk chocolate, and you have something really good. Add fresh chopped marjoram and you have something to serve in summer with iced tea or white wine that will put a pound cake to shame. In my family, we leave the fatty, processed granola bars at home and take biscotti as hiking food. It stands up to the rigors of backpacks or daypacks and keeps quite well. If you make too much, cut and freeze them. They knock the socks off frozen waffles.

Can't really identify with biscotti? Maybe



"Scones are the fastest, most rewarding thing you can make for breakfast, and any kids running around your house will gobble them up quicker than you can mispronounce them."

the concept is a bit too *outré* for some; studies do show that touching actual dough with one's hands can lead to dangerously exotic experimentation with yeast breads.... So, picture my Irish and Scots foremothers in the kitchen with heaps of work and kids and no time, and you'll see why they favored the down-to-earth scone. In the home-countries, *scone* rhymes with *John* and not *phone*. But however you say it, scones are the fastest, most rewarding thing you can make for breakfast, and any kids running around your house will gobble them up quicker than you can mispronounce them. I have seen scone pans (fine shops have non-stick heavy-duty ones for as little as \$85!) and I have heard all about rolling them out and wrestling them into round or triangle shapes. But why anyone would take a perfectly nice biscuit (a scone without egg, basically) and add more flour to it, mush it, manhandle it, and wag it around the kitchen is beyond me. My grandmother always said

the more times you touch your biscuits, the fewer people will want to eat them.

Put 1½ cups of flour in a bowl with ½ cup of quick oats, a pinch of salt, 1 tbsp. to ⅓ cup of sugar (depending on how many kids you see running around) and grate in some citrus peel. Or if you make your own candied fruit peels like I do, crumble up some into the flour mixture with 4 teaspoons of baking powder. Cut in about ⅓ cup of butter until it's crumbly (or whiz the lot in the food pro, but only the dry stuff and the butter). Crack an egg onto your dry stuff and schloop in a cup of yoghurt. Then add whatever dried fruits you like: currants, golden raisins, blueberries or cranberries, and fold everything together gently. Very gently. A heavy hand is death to good biscuits and scones. The dough should look like thick mashed potatoes, and while my grandmother used buttermilk instead of yoghurt, she would have used yoghurt if she'd had any, I just know it.

You'll need a hot oven, say 425°, a sheet pan and some silicone-coated parchment. I'm not telling how many of those pricy silicone Le Pat-thingsies I ruined before I finally learned to just buy a roll of baking parchment. Now casually blop out some of your fluffy dough into unshaped (and unmolested) little mounds of whatever size you like and bake them until they are golden brown—about 15-20 minutes. It's hard, but wait until they cool a little and serve them with a bit of butter or *crème fraîche*. If you like, you can glaze the tops half-way through with egg wash, but I don't really see the point. Sprinkling on a bit of white sugar right before they come out of the oven is nice. Anything dried and fruity that you fancy can go into a scone, and they are sweet enough for those who start their day off with sugar, but savory enough to go nicely with eggs or breakfast protein.

These are old recipes for foods that, respectively, Italian and Scots/Irish grandmothers relied on to comfort and feed families like only fresh-baked goodies can. It doesn't take much time, and once you get the hang of it, not much effort to produce something truly memorable. Just take a deep breath, and bake well, but casually.

FOOD SERVICE WARRIOR

WHEN IS OVER-POURING OUT OF LINE?

by Jeremy Hunter

"How many people go to the bar because they know they are going to be over-poured on the drinks they buy? From the people I have talked to it's not very many."

How many people go to the bar because they know they are going to be over-poured on the drinks they buy? From the people I have talked to, it's not very many. Most people like to know how much they are drinking. There are, however, many bars in the Omaha area that will over-pour. Let's talk about who it affects and how it affects them.

I will start out with the ladies. If a group of girls shows up at your bar and are in good spirits, does that mean they want to get wasted? Or if they are gloomy and it looks like one of them has just been dumped, do they need to get drunk? Well, it all depends on them. I would hope that any bartender would have enough common sense to leave it up to the patron. You would not be helping anyone by giving them more alcohol than they ordered. I'm not saying they are not going to order shots and doubles, but let them do it. It's their choice. They should know their limits, and as a bartender it's your job not to over-serve anyone.

What about the 21-year-old college students that just had their birthday? It seems to be the fad to go out and see how drunk you can get your friend on this special day. This has got to be one of the dumbest things I can think of. When you put five or ten friends in the same room ordering shots, mixing wide varieties of liquors including 3 Wise Men, Prairie Fire, Mind Erasers, Cement Mixers or just

straight shots, anyone knows that you're asking for trouble.

Put an extra half-ounce to an ounce in every drink you poured, and it's a recipe for disaster. We all know what the goal is, and it's not safe.

Then there are the regulars. These are the guests that come in every day and drink the same thing. They are usually nice and show you and everyone around you respect. This is where a gray area arises. Is it better for you to over-pour on every drink, or occasionally

"Then there are the regulars...is it better for you to over-pour on every drink, or occasionally buy them a drink on the house?"

buy them a drink on the house? That is more up to the owner or manager on how to handle that. If you know that they are only going to have one or two drinks, it is better to offer a free drink occasionally. They obviously know their limit and over-pouring would be more than they usually have. If they come in to get hammered, maybe pour a little heavy on the first drink or two, then lighten up. In that case they won't notice their third or fourth drink is a normal pour.

What about the establishment owners? A lot of bartenders don't take into consideration that the owners give you a certain amount of freedom to make the right decisions when it comes to over-pouring or a free drink. The owners I have talked to say that, for the most part, they would prefer to see a free drink go out and put on a comp account rather than lose 15 oz. of liquor a day that they can't account for. It also helps out tremendously when it comes to cost control. If you have a guest that requests a stiff drink, let them know that you can pour them a double if they would like. This also

generates higher sales for the bar and results in a bigger tip percentage for the bartender.

Now for the bartenders. When you invite your friends to come see you at your place of employment, do you give them free drinks or do you pour strong drinks? Both are wrong. If your friends are really your friends they will understand that you would if you could, but the bottom line is that it's not yours to give away. Let's say three of your friends show up. You give them three drinks and only charge them for one. Who loses out? You know they are going to tip you more and stay longer. That sounds good, but what about when the owners catch you

"The owners I have talked to say that, for the most part, they would prefer to see a free drink go out and put on a comp account rather than lose 15 oz. of liquor a day that they can't account for."

giving away drinks? A tab that should have been \$12 with a tip of about \$1 per drink turns into a \$4 tab, and you make a \$6 tip. It saves your friends \$5 per round. That's a great deal for them, and you stay on their cool side. How about losing a job that pays \$35-40k/year? Is that really worth the \$4 extra you made off them? Not to me.





Metro Culinary Competition '09

by Moriah Johnson

The timer starts as the students hustle around to get all of their supplies out. Banging and clanging can be heard all around as the pots, pans, dishes, and utensils are being drug out from their moving containers. Then it all begins. The tempting aroma can be smelled all around as the ovens heat up and the foods are beginning to bake. Every last cut and measurement must be made just so if the teams want to win the competition.

The Metro Culinary Competition for the Metro area took place on Saturday, February 29th at Metro Community College. High schools from all across the Metro came together as their different teams prepared several dishes to present in different case studies. The competition has been taking place every year for the past four years. Before the competition was started, the high schools didn't have many chances to compete.



"The competition is aiming to get fifty schools next year, and be open to a larger variety of students."

"We used to just have a career day where the culinary students would come out to the college and get informed about the college and the different scholarships available to them," said Jim Trebbien, the creator of the competition.

When the students would come out they would sit in desks in classrooms and just listen to the different reasons how the college could benefit them and their culinary dreams, and how they could receive scholarships for their talent. They would only sit and listen to this for six hours each day that they went.

"Many people started leaving the program and not returning," said Trebbien. "They were bored from just sitting in a classroom, even though we were trying to show them all that we could offer to help them with their goals."

The group that started the career days decided they need to find a way to keep people interested in the program and help them learn what the cooking career, and higher education for it, was like. That was when the big idea for the culinary competition was formed.

"We were just thinking what we could do," said Trebbien. "Then we thought about having a culinary competition to get the people

out to the college and see what it's like while doing what they really are interested in doing anyway."

The next step in creating this competition was to get teams and schools interested in participating. By doing this, the college could get more students to visit, and the schools could compete more for their culinary skills.

"We started calling up various schools in the area," said Trebbien. "We then asked them if they had a team, and if they said no, then we told them to get one started."

Indeed, the schools did come and participate. This year there was a total of twenty-four schools that competed. The competition is aiming to get fifty schools next year, and be open to a larger variety of students.

With all of the competition and participants, the stakes are high for the teams. Much preparation is put into cooking and being precise as they get ready for the big day.

"The students practice for hours every week trying to get every exact recipe down," said Trebbien. "Some of them even do it every day just so they get extra practice."

Luckily, the students aren't forced to do all of this cooking and learning on their own. The college still participates with the teams and gives them some of the guidance and techniques to cooking that can make their work even better.

"We send out to each school at least one of our students who has had at least one year of culinary classes," said Trebbien. "This way they get their training and they get a chance to help other students improve."

The teams are not just competing for a title, or only a chance to go to state competition. Each team that places also receives scholarships for each member of that team.

"We raise funds all year round," said Trebbien. "Then we award the scholarships to the teams that place the highest."

One of the schools that received the scholarships this year was Omaha Benson Magnet School. They placed first in the case study. Each team member then received a one thousand dollar scholarship. "Most of the participants wouldn't have this kind of chance otherwise," said Trebbien. "So we give them this opportunity."

The culinary competition is not the same year after year. Each year the competition changes a little bit, and it seems to get tougher and more complicated. It is expected to only get better as the years go on.

"The setup never changes, but I think this year the food is a little bit different, as it gets better, more unique and intense," said Trebbien. "We only hope for it to get better."

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A Day in The Life of a US Foodservice Territory Manager & The Chef by Tami Catron

We all know when we walk into a restaurant that we will get seated at a table, be given a menu, select what we want to eat and ultimately pay our dining bill. However, many of us do not realize that before the dishes ever get selected for the menu or served to us at our favorite restaurants, there is a very important relationship happening behind the scenes.

That is the relationship between the chef who cooks our favorite dish and the US Food Service Territory Manager who supplies the food for that dish and helps connect the chef with the most updated concepts and ideas. This relationship is the lifeline for our favorite restaurants, cafes, and coffee houses.

"In challenging economic times, it is vital that my TM is not just an order-taker, but my business partner."

We thought it would be interesting to explore what a typical day is like between a US Food Territory Manager and a chef. We invited Corey Rush, a US Foodservice Territory Manager, and Chef Gary

Hoffman, owner of Upstream Brewing Company, to share how they work together to prepare for a typical work week.

Rush: "Often, my typical work day is very busy, so at the end of a day I begin preparing for my next day by calling back all my customers who had questions, check emails from my company to keep up on the latest food happenings, and look at the route sheet (how our trucks are routed to get the food to our chefs). Then I consider which brokers I might invite to meet my chefs, to help them stay on top of upcoming food trends."

Hoffman: "It is important to strategically prepare for the next day and order the right amount of food for our signature dishes. I compare my projected food sales budget against what we are actually selling to see if I am high or low. Then I use an Order Guide to compare food levels that I already have with my projected food sales. This helps me make sure that I don't run out of a product that goes into something on our menu." Besides ordering, how else does a Foodservice TM help your restaurant?

Rush: "Besides taking the food order from the chef, I take the time to ask if he has any special events or menu features coming up for his restaurant. I help him price any new dishes for his menu, and provide new and creative marketing ideas to help him attract new customers. I care about his restaurant. I take the time to listen and be involved with their success. I am, in many ways, their business partner."

Hoffman: "I not only expect my Foodservice TM to help me with my food orders and pricing, but I let her know what is going on in the marketplace, and I look to her for new and better products. In challenging economic times, it is vital that my TM is not just an order-taker, but my business partner."

What makes a long-lasting partnership?

Rush: "As I said before, the key is to listen. By listening to what a chef's needs are, I can provide him with helpful resources. I go above and beyond the call of duty, but never say I can do something and not do it. I can't tell you how many times I have cooked for a restaurant's grand opening, helped them get a refrigerated truck when their power went out to keep their food fresh, or found a product that no one else could. It is getting your hands dirty, rolling up your sleeves and showing that you care about their success and their restaurant."

Hoffman: "I want a Territory Manager who understands my company's purchasing history, does tastings with me, reads the same periodicals that I do and brings suggestions every time we meet. She needs to know my menu, listen to why I need a specific product, remind me of seasonal items for my menu and help me negotiate a better price with suppliers. I want someone who is willing to go above and beyond the call of duty, and most importantly, always asks the question, "Why"?"

Next time you go to your favorite restaurant for your favorite dish, remember that behind the scenes are two people working intricately together to keep you coming back for more.



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ACF AWARDS

Central Regional Student Team Competition

February 21st-22nd
Elgin, Illinois

Bronze Medal—6th place overall

Culinary Team Nebraska

Margaret Mary Boever
Craig Hoffman
Andy Rager
Lauren Melhus
Mario Ochoa
Jonathon Ahrens
Jen Valandra
Jeremiah Omoto
Stephanie Bloom
Dina Miller
Austin Frees, commis
Brian O'Malley, coach
Kevin Newlin CEC, coach
Vieva McClure, manager

Central Regional Student Chef of the Year Competition

February 21st
Elgin, Illinois

AJ Swanda—2nd place

Central Regional Knowledge Bowl Competition

February 21st
Schaumburg, Illinois

1 win, 2 losses—Certificate of Participation

Dawn Cisney
Cheryl Dawson
Lindsay Phelan
Amy Cohee-Hatfield
Josh Petersen
Michael Roddey CCC CCE FMP, coach

Hermann G Rusch Chef's Achievement Award

*Regional Nominee Finalist
Jim Trebbien CCE CCA*

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Check with us frequently to find dates for exciting new installments of the Professional Development Series sponsored by Hockenberg's.

APRIL

1-4
International Association of Culinary Professionals Convention, Denver Colorado

11
Certification Practical Exam
Denver, Colorado

18
Earth Day Festival
Elmwood Park, Omaha

19
Certification Practical Exam
Minneapolis, Minnesota

MAY

8
Culinary Award Ceremony at the
Institute for the Culinary Arts
Omaha, Nebraska

16-19
National Restaurant Association Show
Chicago, Illinois

JUNE

5-7
Whole Foods Market's Iron Chef Metro
Competition
Taste of Omaha
Lewis and Clark Landing

JULY

11-14
American Culinary Federation National
Convention
Orlando, Florida

Artichokes

by Jo Anne Garvey

When I was ten, we used to rush home from school to watch *Spanky and Our Gang*. Buckwheat and Spanky were sitting on a curb rummaging through a bag of groceries looking for something to eat.

Buckwheat pulls out something and asks, "What is it?"

"It's an artichoke."

"Well, it may have choked Artie, but it's not gunna choke me," and he pitches it over his shoulder.

Ok, I admit it seemed a lot funnier when you were ten. Some of us, at first blush, may have felt as Spanky and Buckwheat. I know I did. Back then I didn't know what an artichoke was either.

A member of the thistle family, it was first introduced to America by the Italian and Spanish settlers. Its season runs from March through May. How you prepare it depends on the desired outcome.

You will want to look for the globe artichoke with tightly closed leaves. The brown spots you may see are usually an indication of frost damage and won't affect the taste. Check the stem

for freshness. It should appear light green without any signs of browning or drying, indicating aging. Bend a leaf back. It should snap back quickly.

Ask any chef how to prepare it and you will get as many answers as chefs asked. Artichokes can be roasted, steamed, baked, or marinated. Most fans treasure the heart in the young, tender ones, or the leaves scraped between the teeth after a dip in sauce, but the bottom is the meatiest part. I have seen them snipped with scissors, hand-turned with a paring knife, a chef knife, or if you are Alton Brown, an electric knife.

One method using a chef's knife is to square off the artichoke after first removing the top third. Once squared off, continue to trim off any excess leaves. Taking a paring knife, round off the bottom and peel the stem. Have acidulated water handy to prevent the artichoke from browning as you work with it. If the stem is too long, trim it. Place it alongside the edge of the table and snap it, which will remove it completely, or use your knife.



Eventually you will come to the center of the choke, known as the heart. It is both the best and the worst part. You will need to remove the thistle inside the heart. If you have kept the choke whole, separate the leaves to expose the thistle. Using a spoon, scoop out all the thorny thistle. It may take a few sweeps to completely remove it. Be patient: the best is near. Rinsing it in acidulate water, work quickly to round out the bottom. Check the stem: if it is too thick, peel it some more.

Quartered, steamed whole or roasted, take heart knowing that once you master the thistly artichoke, it should no longer choke you (or Artie).

Top Chef Junior: MCC Style

by Maybell Galusha

"Students design and create a three course menu, prepared with only the aid of two butane burners and non-electric tools & equipment."

Chef knives flashing, sauté pans sizzling, and whisks whipping in a frenzied blur will all be a part of the action when teen chefs-in-training hit the competition floor at the Institute for Culinary Arts High School Invitational at Metropolitan Community College on February 27th and 28th.

Each year, teams of high school students design and create a three course menu, prepared with only the aid of two butane burners and non-electric tools and equipment.

Plates must be presented to judges for evaluation within sixty minutes to avoid loss of points or disqualification. In addition to the culinary competition held during the two day event, student teams may also participate in a *Jeopardy*-style Quiz Bowl, and a Management Case Study competition. This year, 24 teams will compete from Omaha and surrounding area school districts.

Benefits for the students are huge. Working one-on-one with culinary students and chef mentors while

preparing for the competition creates opportunities to build culinary skills including menu development, costing, professionalism, teamwork, time management and problem solving, as well as a chance to have their menus critiqued by area professional chefs.

The potential to earn culinary scholarships, gold, silver, or bronze medals, and a trip to the State ProStart competition in Hastings in March are prime reasons for teens to participate in the Invitational. Parents, students, and educators alike have high praise for this annual event and the opportunity for success that ICA faculty and students offer to teen culinarians.

The Joy of Cold

by Jennifer Valandra



Following in the style of his classic masters, Antonin Carême was famous for his grand banquet displays, highlighting his love for architecture and art and enhancing culinary finesse with his new variety of symmetry and order. His magnificent *pièces montées*—pastries assembled to resemble great architectural masterpieces—along with his highly decorated buffets of fish, fowl and game, became his trademark, as he was known to some as the “cook with an architect’s eye.”

Although he received some criticism from contemporaries, Auguste Escoffier insisted on carrying this tradition forward, further promoting the theory that atmosphere is as important to a meal as taste. This tradition is long-standing, as cooks from many areas of the world have forever known the value of enveloping dining participants in the visual radiance of a refined menu.

That being said, am I thinking of Carême and Escoffier during practice every Friday as my teammates and I prepare components for the late-

February Cold Platter competition in Chicago? Sometimes. But there are times, however, that I’m cursing bubbles. Not only does each version of the same menu item need to be identical in size, shape, and color, but each must host a glass-like glaze of gelatin to preserve its appearance for display. (Bubbles in this glaze cause said bubble-cursing.) The menu must be realistic, even if only for display, and rooted in classical preparations. The completed platter must exhibit extreme attention to balance, composition and detail. It’s a long process, but the end result of hovering over a cauldron of warm gelatin for hours produces the reason for our discipline—watching our love for the beauty of

charcuterie come to life.

The joy of cold? Connecting to the great masters of our craft, extending the sensory experience of food, creating life-long friendships through teamwork, and delighting in the art of flawless terrines and canapés. All, hopefully, bubble-free.



Omaha Standard: *Upstream Root Beer*

by Brian O'Malley

"I have no idea the magical chemistry required to concoct this brew, but I know this—it contains love."

There are only a few places in the world that get to lay claim to being the spiritual home of an entire beverage segment. Kentucky has bourbon, France has wine, Atlanta has Coca-Cola—heck, Hastings even has Kool-Aid. We here in Eastern Nebraska and Western Iowa, however, are decidedly dry in our association to a given beverage. I would like to place an elixir into nomination for that role: Upstream Brewing Company's Root Beer. I have no idea the magical chemistry required to concoct this brew, but I know this—it contains love. Therefore, it must be

shared with love.

I shared my first sip of an Upstream Root Beer from the frosty glass belonging to my mother. I was trying to be cool and drink a more spirited beer during a lunch we had there several years ago. I was a fool. It was midday, warm, we were beat down from jockeying a stroller through the farmer's market. We ducked into UBC to have lunch and talk about the rest of our day. She twinkled with excitement when the server reminded her that they had "housemade root beer" and I knowingly nodded along as I ordered a Dundee 90 Schilling. It was almost noon on a Saturday. My beer was delicious, if a bit alcoholic for the hot day. I was definitely sipping. My mom however, took a gulp of her root beer so big that she could have placed in a fraternity chugging contest. I had never witnessed such consumptive

prowess from my mother. I had to try it. I asked for a taste. She sneered! I knew that it had to be good; my mom is the consummate sharer. So if she was willing to be a little over-possessive, it had to be delicious. That, or she just hates that it is not refilled for free.

She reluctantly slid her half-gone glass across the table. I took a thoughtful double-sip, relaxed, let the sweet and heady flavors swirl into a tingly bitter finish, and then slammed the rest of it like I was the anchorman in the chug boat race.

I bought the next round, and assured my mother that I was sorry for making her wait for another taste. The next round arrived. We raised our glasses to salute this newly discovered gem of artisan craftsmanship, this young yet stalwart member of the family of products so valiantly setting, then upholding, the Omaha Standard.

in·teg·ri·ty: *as experienced on the line at Bouchon Bistro* by Brian Young

Integrity? As the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* puts it, "firm adherence to a code of especially moral or artistic values; the quality or state of being complete or undivided." At Thomas Keller restaurants, it's also one of our strict core values.

"When you screw up, being the bigger man or woman and admitting it, that's integrity. No one in the kitchen is exempt, from the dish steward to the sous chef to the chef de cuisine."

So what is integrity? In each kitchen this will vary by each chef, and the chef who trained him or her. In Chef Keller's kitchen it has many meanings: not taking the last sheet of parchment paper, and going out to storage to grab a new box before taking that last sheet. When food is not cooked correctly, whether it is over- or under-cooked, don't serve it—and for that matter let everyone know about your mistake so that you don't screw up the entire pick.

When the fish cook screws up, keeping your head down and not throwing him under the bus, that's integrity. When you screw up, being the bigger man or woman and admitting it, that's integrity. No one in the kitchen is exempt, from the dish steward to the sous chef to the chef de cuisine. This right here is one of the

most important lessons you can teach in your kitchen: no matter who you are, everyone screws up. Being honest and facing your mistakes is a part of having integrity.

"Being honest and facing your mistakes is a part of having integrity."

In everyday life, integrity is knowing the obvious right thing to do, and then actually doing it, regardless of the sacrifice to make it right. It is the simple concept of knowing right from wrong. It is listening to that little voice inside your head that tells you, "Wash your hands," or "This isn't right, I can't send it out."

WHAT'S IN A NAME?



by John Larkin

Macanudo, Punch, Romeo y Julieta, Hoyo de Monterrey, Partagas, Montecristo, Cohiba. If you've ever smoked a premium cigar in your day, you've probably tried one of these brands. Unless you frequent cigar shops, these might be the only brands you've ever heard of. There are a few reasons these famous names still get so much recognition. With the exception of Macanudo, which is manufactured in Jamaica, all of these brands make up Cuba's flagship cigars. After Fidel Castro nationalized all Cuban businesses from 1966-68, many of the owners of

"There is a world of wonderful cigars that may not have the same brand name caché as the big boys, but blow them away in many other areas."

these brands fled the country only to reestablish their companies in places like the Dominican Republic, Nicaragua, and Honduras. With the Cuban trade embargo in full effect, these cigar makers were able to manufacture cigars and sell them to the U.S. under the names that had been in their families for generations.

While I haven't smoked any pre-embargo Cubans—I'm only 27 years old, for hell's sake—I have had the opportunity to smoke all of these brands in their more recent incarnations, and can honestly say they all make a great cigar. Unfortunately the majority of their offerings don't go too far off the beaten path in taste. Early on, before deciding to broaden my horizons, these were the only cigars I'd smoked. I can tell you now, though, that through the smoke

I have seen the light, and there is a world of wonderful cigars that may not have the same brand name caché as the big boys, but blow them away in many other areas. I have to admit that I have a certain bias toward some of the newer up-and-coming cigar makers, such as C.A.O., Rocky Patel, and Drew Estate. They have made their product much more accessible to smaller smoke shops, and don't charge an arm and a leg for a brand name. They also continue to push the boundaries of traditional cigar



making by innovating in areas such as size, strength, and composition. The amount of new product coming out of these companies eliminates the need to smoke the same old cigars produced by the establishment.

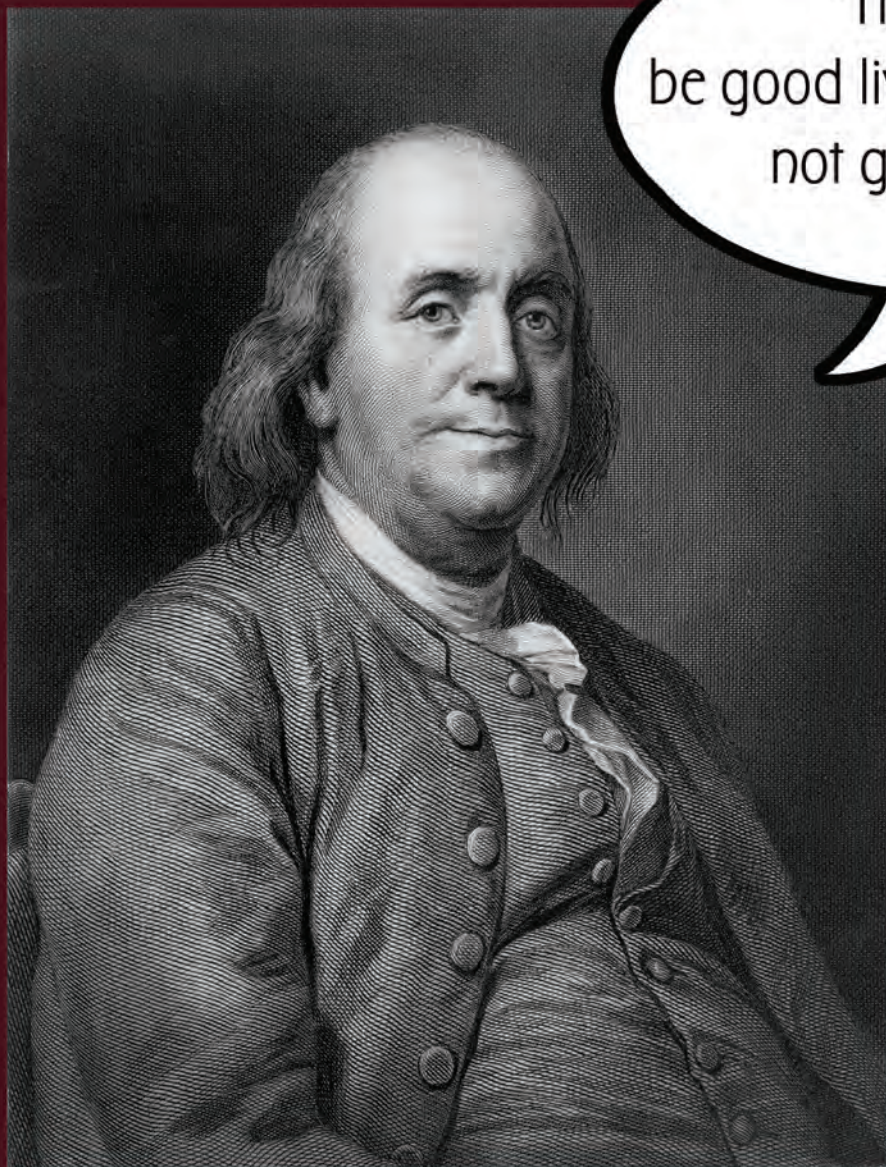
Rocky Patel has proven itself to me time and again to be on the cutting edge of the strong-as-hell cigar category. Using tobacco from both Honduras and Nicaragua, they've managed to blend some of the spiciest cigars I've ever had the pleasure of lighting up. The greatest example of this would be their Edge series. Coming in both a sweet and rich maduro as well as the Cuban-esque corajo wrapper, these cigars, as the box states, are for professional smokers only. Be prepared to drink a little extra Scotch when smoking

an Edge, just to keep the spice from overwhelming your delicate palate.

Cigar maker C.A.O. is another of my favorites. They make a wonderfully spicy cigar in their Anniversary Maduro, a smooth, creamy, and mild offering in the C.A.O. Gold line, as well as a great middle-of-the-road option, the Anniversary Cameroon. But the coolest things they've got going are their Brazillia and Italia lines. As their names suggest, they offer tobacco from the little-used countries, as tobacco growing goes, Brazil and Italy. The Italia combines tobacco from Honduras, Peru, and Nicaragua, as well as the Benevento region of Italy, to make a bold, earthy, and sweet smoke that won't blow you away. With rich Nicaraguan filler and a bold Brazilian wrapper and binder, the Brazillia is a full-bodied and full-flavored smoke that carries a long and spicy finish.

Acid cigars made by Drew Estate have found a way to bridge the gap between traditional and flavored cigars. Instead of using the usual flavorings such as vanilla, chocolate, or fruit, Acid infuses their cigars with all natural herbs, essential oils, and floral botanicals. This imparts delicious aromas and flavors without overpowering the high-quality Nicaraguan tobacco they use to construct these cigars. While these smokes don't sit well with everyone, they are a prime example of taking the path less traveled and being rewarded kindly for it.

While you might be content smoking the same old bland Macanudo the rest of your life, I'm not. As long as I can find something new and original to smoke, I'll give it a try. I suggest you do the same; you'll be surprised at how far cigars have come. If not, well, Jake's still carries all the time-tested favorites, Cuba be damned.



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be good living where there is
not good drinking"

Benjamin Franklin

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Beer *&* Food Pairings:

Delighting the Senses

by Paul Kavulak

For some of you, the perfect food to pair up with a can of your favorite suds would likely be something in the realm of a hotdog at the ballpark. To be honest, I started out thinking that I was going to poke fun at that, but the more I thought about it, the better it sounded. Frankly, that's the point of this article.

When it comes to beer and food pairings, the brewing world has for years embraced the palate. Of late, beer and food pairing dinners are all the rage in the inner circles of some of the top chefs and culinary professionals. Why? What could possibly drive a dining public that has been so enamored with ordering up the perfect wine toward beer instead? Well, for me at least, it's a journey of discovery.

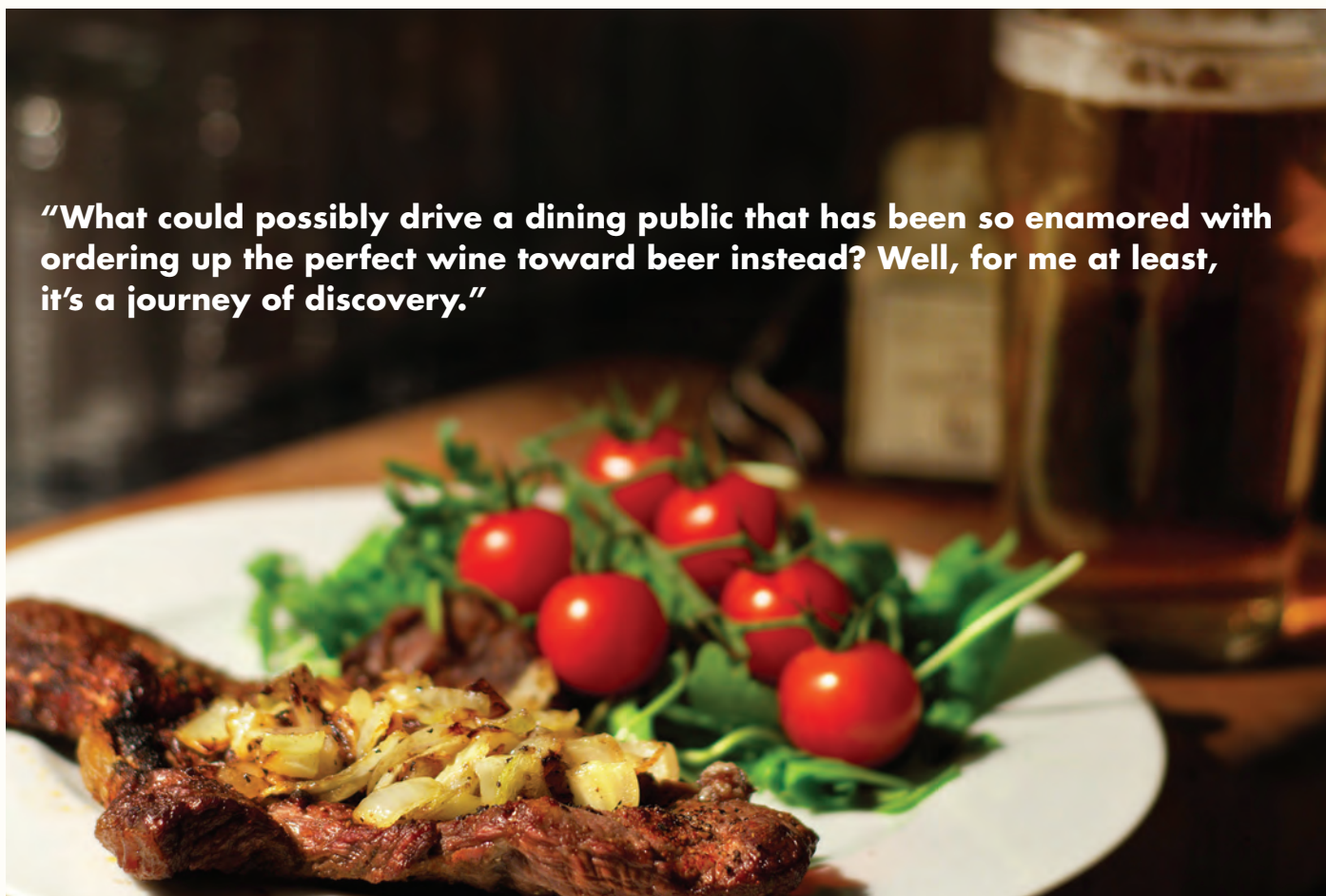
These articles have always been about slighting the status quo and this one will be no exception. To break away this time, it isn't enough to merely read these words and file away their deep and valued meaning—this time around, you'll need to take action.

First, some background. Beer and food pairings have burst upon the scene due in large part to the introduction of the myriad tastes and flavor experiences within the craft beer scene itself. Gone are the days when the selection of yellow fizzy stuff was essentially all

the same—different labels and marketing plans, possibly, but very nearly identical in taste experience when you finally got down to it. Over the past decade, craft beer brewers around the world have created a landscape that is extremely broad and quite lush. It seems, in the quest to explore whatever boundaries may exist at the time, the brewing envelope gets pushed further and further away from what was considered the norm the day prior. And in doing so, a consumer's flavor possibilities are drawn with it.

In that vein of great diversity, we find that little analogy with the familiar where the lightbulb usually begins to glow. Think of wine for a moment. When seated in some of the finer dining establishments, it's quite common to have a list of wines available that is both broad and, unfortunately, sometimes quite expensive. We've grown accustomed to this expectation of choice—at least in wine. What you may not know is that a similar breadth of choice exists in beer. And here's the hidden gem: you'll find that wine typically outpaces beer when it comes to expense. Spot a great wine on that list but can't afford it? Probably. That interesting little financial barrier doesn't exist with a world-class craft beer. For the

"What could possibly drive a dining public that has been so enamored with ordering up the perfect wine toward beer instead? Well, for me at least, it's a journey of discovery."





“Four and five course meals where each course is individually plotted and mapped into a craft beer are the promised land for many of us.”

unenlightened, I’ll bet you’re thinking that’s simply due to the fact that we’re talking about beer—something better relegated to that hot dog accompaniment mentioned earlier. Guess again.

Beer and food pairings can have many goals. We can find themed evenings built around foods as specific as cheeses alone, or chocolates, or possibly even desserts. While these can be, and are, incredibly entertaining and palate-expanding, we find that many of the more diverse menus take a broad swipe at a truly intense culinary evening. Four and five course meals where each course is individually plotted and mapped into a craft beer are the promised land for many of us. Pairings perfectly tailored to bring about taste sensations not normally associated with either the food or the beverage alone. Believe me, this is exactly where the eye-opening, life changing moments begin.

To truly develop an exemplary beer and food pairing, of any sort, is to drive those experiencing these tastes into a universe of the unusual. Take, for example, two items that could possibly fall into the mental slot labeled “Been There, Done That.” Blue cheese and German Wheat (or Hefeweizen). Blue cheese by itself may be a little salty and dry to the taste and a tad pungent in the nose, while a good German Hefeweizen may have aromatics heading in the opposite direction. A banana character, some vanilla, and a taste that may tilt to the lightly sweet, somewhat bready side. Combine these two items and you’ll find that both the cheese and the ale become moderately sweeter. The aromatics combine to subdue both the pungent and the banana while creating a pleasant overall shift to light pastry. But that’s just me—you may find something entirely different. The simple fact is that the new reality is there, a combination that has created something entirely new. This is the epiphany that opens the heavens, or the palate in this case, and moves us in the direction of why these pairing experimentations have been gaining so rapidly in popularity. Sure, wine has its place—more often as an accompaniment than a palate shifter—but craft beers not only have their place in the presence of elegant food, they appear to excel at the task of delighting the senses.

Craft beers have a depth of complexity that we’ll likely never encounter completely in our lifetimes. At its very core are some of the best brewers in the world, with most of them constantly striving to take yesterday’s norms and destroy them.

I’ve cited but one small example in a superset that has no boundaries. To experience your own small slice of Beer & Food nirvana, you must experiment. Will you find your perfect match today? I doubt it. Will it come tomorrow? Possibly. But believe me, you will find some truly extraordinary taste sensations if you simply find a few unusual bottles and work your way through a meal. Don’t stop with what logically comes to mind—an amber with lamb, a stout with dessert—attempt the absurd. Take the leap and you’ll

“Craft beers not only have their place in the presence of elegant food, [but] they appear to excel at the task of delighting the senses.”

grow.

To make it even easier for you, seek out your local beer and food pairing evenings. The chefs and brewers work long and hard to weed through losing combinations, to find those that are truly stunning.

How to find them? A great place to start is simply by calling your local brewpub or enlightened restaurant to chat. To get a feel for the larger universe that is beer and food, head to BeerAdvocate.com and look in their events calendar. When you find your own personal set of mini-revelations, you’ll wonder how you ever managed to live with wine alone.



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YEAST INSPECTION:

Beers Reviewed by Alex Diimig



Lucky Bucket Lager

ABV: N/A

Average Rating: B

Lucky Bucket is the newest brand taking to the local market, and upon sampling their Lager I have nothing but high hopes for their next batch. The Lager features a copper hue, and the experience is in fact similar to sucking on a greasy penny. While these may seem at odds to the palates of some, I find it to be a comforting little experience. While surely it won't be a go-to beer for most, it will definitely be delightful for those looking for a curious beer.

Appearance: B+

As mentioned the copper color sets the beer apart as something different than the pale yellows and swirling stouts we are used to. A nice bold white head with dense lacing.

Aroma: C+

I find it akin to a wet haystack, may be off-putting to some.

Taste: A-

A subtle malt flavor is quickly brushed aside by a wallop of hop to the tongue. I can't shake the less-than-subtle floral flavor, but I'm not complaining.

Drinkability: B

A little coarse on the tongue. It tended to settle too long, but the beer has a nice depth and isn't too hard on the palate. If you enjoy it the first time around, it's sure to bring you back.



Smithwick's Irish Ale

ABV: 4.5%

Average Rating: C+

Not by any means a new beer, but with St. Patrick's being around the time of publication, I found it imperative that I force the average beer drinkers hand into selecting something a little less mundane than the usual domestics foisted upon the public. It's in no way an Epicurean delight, but it is full tasting, smooth and well suited for the tepid beer drinker who wants to try something more fitting for the holiday.

Appearance: C

As mentioned, the copper color sets the beer apart as something different than the pale yellows and swirling stouts we are used to. A nice bold white head with dense lacing.

Aroma: C-

Appearance: An adequate enough red color with a disappearing-act lacing.

Taste: B

The profile can easily be written off as earthy cereals and a nice pairing of caramel and chocolate, something a lot of good ales can be described as possessing. What is nice about Smithwick's is that these descriptors aren't overpowering or too complex so as to muddle the simple pleasure of having a beer.

Drinkability: C+

The ale doesn't boast anything, special but it certainly is a good table beer well suited for any event.



Heileman's Old Style

ABV: 4.5%

Average Rating: D+

As you may be tragically aware, Old Style is rebranding due to diminished sales. Gone will be your nights of grasping the cool, gritty can with its stamped-on patriotic colors that it trumpeted long before the Chinese could do it for thirty cents on the dollar. Goodbye Old Style. Hopefully your next incarnation will be better. The best thing I can hope for your afterlife is that your cans are recycled for Ska Brewing's Special ESB.

Appearance: D-

With practically ethereal legs, Old Style should never be served in a glass. Its fetid, apple-drink pale color is, to say the least, unpleasant.

Aroma: D

No detectable nose over the typical set-in smells of a bar. For this, it barely passes.

Taste: D+

It is even, and with a metallic-tinged taste. As best I can describe, it has a bit of citrus sprinkled liberally from can to can.

Drinkability: C+

This aluminum-tasting mouthwash is as cheap as other, more-abhorrent beers out there, but goes down without unsettling the stomach. I pity it.



Westmalle Tripel

ABV: 9.5%

Average Rating: A+

I would break up any relationship I may ever have if it came down to her or this beer.

Appearance: A+

A gorgeous alabaster sea foam, with lacing that seems almost rigorously placed, to match a pleasant honey color.

Aroma: A

A rich blend of zested hops, coriander and other spices.

Taste: A+

Light bodied but wonderfully complex, a sugared lemon taste pervades over cinnamon hops and an exquisite caramel aftertaste.

Drinkability: A+

I try to keep a bottle around at all times, but it's a herculean task. The first wash over the mouth is like an angel's breath. The dainty presence on the tongue allows one to concentrate fully the impeccable taste.



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Bar Chat: The Dundee Dell

by Dan Crowell

The Dundee Dell, a true Omaha institution, is celebrating its 75th anniversary this year. I sat down recently with Monique Huston, general manager of The Dell, for a peek behind the curtain of this legendary pub.

FSM: Describe the restaurant. What is its history?

MH: We've been around since 1934. Pat (Gobel) is just the fourth owner of The Dell in the 75 years it's been around. We've basically done a lot of the same things. We've done the same fish and chips. The recipe hasn't changed. The batter is the thing people always want the recipe for, and that's the thing we're not going to let go. We always use North Atlantic cod. That's what we've always done. We're the only restaurant in the United States that continues to use North Atlantic cod because we signed a contract two years ago for ten years out, but other than that it's all been fished out. So most other places that do fish and chips use haddock or other white fish, but that's just not what we do. We will always find a way to continue to do what we've been doing.

FSM: The Dell has the largest single-malt Scotch whisky list of any bar in the world. How did the Scotch thing get started?

MH: All I know is that when I started here in 2000, we had 60 scotches and now we have 720 scotches. Now, that's my baby. That's what I took on. Pat loves it and he's very supportive of everything that I do. My mother is an antique dealer, so if I find something unique, if I know something is rare, if I know that something is really special, I want it. I want to have it and I want to be able to expose other people to it. That's what happened with the Scotch collection. It's weird. We're better known nationally than we are locally as the best whisky bar in the country. I can go to Chicago and meet people who know The Dell better than

someone in west Omaha knows The Dell. We've had people make pilgrimages from Ireland just to try a particular Scotch that we have. Many people in Omaha don't really know or they just don't believe it.

FSM: What is your philosophy in terms of the overall bar and cocktail profile?

MH: If there's a new vodka or if there's a new flavored rum that comes out, we'll take one, try it out on some people, have it in a tasting and figure out if we like it and want to continue to stock it. But we're not going to serve some random kind of schnapps or these Pucker things or

blah, blah, blah. We're not doing any of that. We're not going to compromise quality to make a sale. We don't serve malt beverages either. Yeah, Smirnoff Ice might taste great, but we've got trained bartenders here with years of experience behind them. Why don't you let them do their job? Tell them what you want something to taste like and they'll create something based on what you like. Fresh juices, good ingredients and some things you've never heard of. You can go anywhere and get a Bud Light, but you're going to come here and get something that's got some thought behind it, some energy behind it and some passion behind it. We like to try to be a center for people to come and be educated on good cocktails, old-school cocktails. People call me all the time and they're like, "What's in a gimlet?" And I think, "Really?" We actually still serve those all the time. We have manhattans and sidecars go out across the bar all the time. I understand those things are having a bit of a renaissance, but Pat is very old-school. He remembers the time when a martini was a martini and had two ingredients; either vodka or gin and vermouth. That's a martini. A cosmo is not a martini just because it's in a martini glass. A lot of people just don't get that.

FSM: How do you approach staffing?

MH: Pat is wonderful at recognizing, maintaining and growing talented people throughout the staff. We have no turnover. We've had no kitchen turnover in the

"You can go anywhere and get a Bud Light, but you're going to come here and get something that's got some thought behind it, some energy behind it and some passion behind it."





"We're better known nationally than we are locally as the best whisky bar in the country. I can go to Chicago and meet people who know The Dell better than someone in west Omaha knows us."

last ten months. Not a dishwasher, no one. We've had no wait staff turnover in over a year. You come in here and you know the wait staff every time you come in. Pat's very generous, but what he really does is that he allows input from everyone. If a chef has a great idea for a tasting, done! We're going to make it happen. If a dishwasher has a great idea for a new appetizer, done! He's willing to sit down and listen to everyone. Give them a lot of space. Give them wings. I always say it's definitely a sign of how happy people are where they work when they're all sitting at the bar after they get off, just hanging out. That's very common. To see people come in on their off days and eat and drink and bring their families in, and long after they've left here, to come in and still feel very welcome.

FSM: Describe the response you've received from customers.

MH: In this economy, people are going to stay at home because they don't want to spend a bunch of money. When you come out, come out and drink a good cocktail, come out to a tasting and try eight different rums. Find out what you really like and really get excited about it. We're seeing a lot of that here. We've been really blessed by an amazing amount of support. Local people, people who want to support neighborhoods, people who want to support independent businesses. Here in Omaha we're very fortunate that people consciously will do that. We live in a city where a Chili's and a Macaroni Grill closed. That just doesn't happen. And independents are thriving. Everywhere I go, I just feel so grateful. I don't like to go to another town and have somebody say to me that their neighborhood bar is an Applebee's. Really? Because that's how they bill themselves. They told you that. Did you decide that? Do you know these people? You can't just call yourself that. You have to develop that kind of reputation, and it's really worked for us. We're very blessed.

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Libation Conversation: *The Aviation Cocktail*

by Dan Crowell

The Aviation Cocktail. The name possesses many of the qualities I love in a good cocktail moniker. It says everything and nothing at the same time. It provides intrigue and fuel for the imagination. It conjures images in the head of goggles, silk scarves and wing-walking. It creates its own set of expectations that can't be confirmed or refuted until one ventures out of one's comfort zone and into the vast unknown. Looking further into the cocktail itself, more mystery and intrigue awaits. What is the actual recipe? What are its origins? What the heck is Crème Yvette?

While it may not be a staple on cocktail menus locally, the Aviation has been used very effectively in other parts of the country

to lure cocktail consumers into the realm of "classic cocktails," those cocktails whose origins can be traced to a period from the first appearance of the "cocktail" in 1806 to the beginning of Prohibition in 1920. The Aviation qualifies, but it is a relatively late entrant into the classic cocktail field, having first seen the light of day in Hugo Ensslin's 1916 publication, *Recipes For Mixed Drinks*.

As is typical with classic cocktails, the original Aviation evolved into a number of differing Aviation recipes as well as other descendant cocktails, including the Blue Moon. Ensslin's original recipe called for Gin, Maraschino Liqueur, Crème Yvette and lemon juice. As we've done in previous columns, let's look at the elements of this

wonderful cocktail, beginning, as many worthwhile endeavors begin, with gin.

Gin — Even a cursory look at the universe of classic cocktails reveals that gin is found at the heart of a significant number of these revered old drinks. Its complexity and depth of character form the perfect backdrop for a wide array of complementary flavor additions. But gin is hardly a homogenous category of spirits. Significant differences exist between one gin and another, and an understanding of these differences (and of your tastes and preferences) is critical when deciding which gin is going to grace your next classic cocktail adventure. All gins are influenced to some degree by the juniper berry, which is used to flavor the spirit and lends gin its distinctive "pineyness." Some gins are relatively sweet, with more pronounced citrus and subtler juniper notes, while others are drier with a pronounced juniper presence and hints of coriander. Some Dutch-style jenever (gin's earliest form) have an intriguing maltiness to them. Finding a gin with a flavor profile that lines up with one's personal tastes and preferences can be a time-consuming process, but in the end your enjoyment of gin cocktails will be greatly enhanced—and it's a lot more fun than determining your favorite brand of dental floss.

Maraschino liqueur — If you've read previous Libation Conversation columns, you are probably at least familiar with Maraschino liqueur, even if you have

"The name possesses many of the qualities I love in a good cocktail moniker. It says everything and nothing at the same time. It provides intrigue and fuel for the imagination."



not had the pleasure of tasting it for yourself. If this is your first Libation Conversation, allow me to welcome you and to shed a little light on Maraschino liqueur. This liqueur bears no resemblance to the neon goo that bar cherries float in. Invented by Girolamo Luxardo in 1821, and still produced today according to his original formula, Maraschino is distilled from Marasca cherries and aged in ash vats. Maraschino possesses fascinating depth and a unique, delicate floral note. It is somewhat difficult to come by but well worth the search. It is also the critical ingredient in the original Corpse Reviver, which was also examined in a previous Conversation.

“The fact that Crème de Violette is still difficult to find leads to its being regularly slighted in today’s Aviation recipes.”

Crème yvette — This element of the original Aviation has the highest potential to confound. Crème Yvette was a proprietary version (produced by Charles Jacquin et Cie until being discontinued in the 1960’s) of Crème de Violette. Crème de Violette is a liqueur whose flavor and color are derived from a maceration of violets in un-aged grape brandy. Crème de Violette is also somewhat difficult to find, but it too is well worth the search. Rumor has it that Jacquin may be reviving Crème Yvette liqueur, so stay tuned. It has been suggested that Marie Brizard Parfait d’Amour, yet another elusive-but-worthy-of-search liqueur, can be substituted for Crème de Violette. While this certainly violates no laws or international treaties with which I am familiar, the two products are not interchangeable from a flavor perspective.

Lemon juice — Use the real thing. Classic cocktails are no place for substitutes, especially when it comes to fruit juices. Cocktail mixes, lime juice cordials, and “juices” that hide out in plastic replicas of actual fruits are, for the most part, loaded with artificial ingredients and sweeteners that can guide your cocktail to a dark and foreboding place. Perhaps even more offensive is the idea that through the use of cocktail mixes you, the eventual consumer of your cocktail creations, have been robbed of the ability to determine for yourself the balance between the sweet and acidic elements of your carefully crafted libation. Insufferable!

The cocktail — As was mentioned, there are a number of recipes out there for the Aviation Cocktail. While most seem to agree at least on the elements of gin, Maraschino liqueur and fresh lemon juice, the proportions of each are apparently of some dispute. The five cocktail recipe books I checked each had a slightly different recipe. In fact, only two of them even mention Crème de Violette. How could this critical ingredient become such an afterthought? It turns out that one of the most revered publications in the history of cocktails, *The Savoy Cocktail Book* (1930), published a recipe for the Aviation that omitted the Crème de Violette. For many years, this was taken to be the original recipe, and it wasn’t until the original was discovered some years later that Crème de Violette was once again afforded its place in the cocktail. The fact that Crème de Violette is still difficult to find leads to its being regularly slighted in today’s Aviation recipes. Nevertheless, the enjoyment of a true Aviation is impossible without it. After all, the name Aviation itself refers to the sky-blue tint that Crème de Violette gives the drink.



RECIPES

Aviation Cocktail
(from DrinkBoy Robert Hess)

2 oz. gin
1/2 oz. lemon juice
1/2 oz. Luxardo Maraschino liqueur
1/4 oz. Crème de Violette

- 1) Combine all ingredients in an ice-filled shaker.
- 2) Shake and strain into a chilled cocktail glass.

Aviation Cocktail (The Original, from Hugo Ensslin’s Recipes For Mixed Drinks, 1916)

1/3 lemon juice
1/3 El Bart gin
2 dashes Maraschino
2 dashes Crème de Violette

- 1) Shake well in a mixing glass with cracked ice.
- 2) Strain and serve.



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The Sommelier:

Your Tour Guide In The World of Wine

by Matt Stamp

As a cliché and a rule, men have an aversion to asking for directions. We are willful creatures, near-malicious in our callous disregard for help when it is clearly and most urgently needed. Signs along the road, yes, these objective beacons we can understand, but the actual offer of help from another human being is anathema, best deterred with scorn and dogged self-determination. At least until we run out of gas.

"A good sommelier combines a wealth of knowledge with the ability to intuit and translate what a customer really desires in from a bottle of wine or other libation."

And so it is with restaurants and wine. In America, we have emerged as a wine-loving public somewhat differently than our forbearers abroad. Wine's role here is more uncertain; variously it is a

cocktail substitution, a symbol of status, an alternative to beer, and—finally—a companion to food. One can certainly argue that more pleasure may be gained by drinking what one likes, rather than trying a more harmonious pairing of less personal interest. Either one looks at wine as a component of the meal, or approaches it as a separate entity to be enjoyed on its own merits.

For those on the latter half of the equation, wine scores can easily be accessed by cell phone. With the push of a button, one can readily discover which wine exerted the most power, swagger and influence

over a roomful of critics flying through about 20-30 wines an hour. The 90+ score will reflect that you can enjoy your super-extracted red with steamed turbot, and your date will be tremendously impressed that you've spent the last five minutes tooling around with your Blackberry.

The rest of us, thankfully, can ask for directions. The directions are not the wine list, which can be small and tightly focused or large and varied. Large lists, especially, can be their own form of censorship. For directions, we need someone who bridges the culture of wine with the culture of food: the sommelier. A good sommelier combines a wealth of knowledge with the ability to intuit and translate what a customer really desires from a bottle of wine or

"We want to remind our guests of the human element behind every meal, the labor and land and love behind every wine or component of any dish."

other libation. The sommelier's role in the restaurant is to make good choices, whether selecting wines for the list in advance or tailoring a range of choices to a particular customer's preferences at the table. In order to make good choices, we have to think about the food. The perfect balance of food and drink? Well, that's where the magic happens.

The sommelier's goal at the table is not simply to select a wine, but to ensure that the entire dining experience is well-rounded and thoroughly enjoyable for everyone. We aim to talk effortlessly about the dishes in our restaurants, and speak passionately about even the most trivial aspects of the wines on our lists. We want to remind our guests of the human element behind every meal, the labor, land and love behind every wine or component of any dish. We want our guests to be relaxed and to remind them, almost subconsciously, of the real connection between food, wine and treasured company. When everything at the table works, when the food and wine speak with one another in subtle, round fashion, when our guests are engrossed in their own enjoyment without interruption, when everything moves at just the right pace, then we have done our job well. We make sure that you never have to send back another glass for last night's lipstick smears. We pour just the right amount of wine to get



"A good sommelier combines the disciplines of tasting and theory into service at the aid of the customer, who can be confident that his or her wishes will be respected."

you all the way through dinner. We fill in the cracks when your waiter is really, really busy. We make sure your beverage, alcoholic or otherwise, is served at the appropriate temperature. And we decant. Without being asked.

In Omaha, the inclusion of a sommelier at fine-dining restaurants is a newer trend, and still not commonplace. The outdated perception of the snobbish, tastevin-wielding sommelier persists, and as the general knowledge of the wine-drinking public has risen dramatically, wine stewards may seem less relevant. So to shed a little light on exactly what a sommelier can offer, some background on a sommelier's education is in order.

Clearly, there is a copious amount of drinking, buttressed by an equally copious amount of spitting wine. Sommeliers must learn to effectively taste wines blind—not with a blindfold, but without any foreknowledge of the liquid in the glass. Once proficient, one can deduce the varietal or blend of grapes used to make the wine, the region in which the wine was produced, and the vintage. More fun than Parcheesi, and a really fundamental way of objectively judging wine solely by its merits and faults. Blind tasting forces a wine taster to think about the components of wine, how they

interact with one another, and ultimately answer that one most difficult question: is this a good wine?

In order to pass the challenging examinations of the Court of Master Sommeliers, one must have a thorough command of the theory behind wines and spirits. As we recognize and value the relationship between earth and glass, the sommelier must also demonstrate sound knowledge of the wine-and spirit-producing regions of the world. The goal of the Master Sommelier in this respect is to be able to confidently and correctly answer any conceivable question on any liquid served in his or her establishment.

A good sommelier combines the disciplines of tasting and theory into service at the aid of the customer, who can be confident that his or her wishes will be respected regardless of budget or conflicting personal tastes. After all, we represent a profession evolved from medieval poison tasters: a modern customers' dissatisfaction may sting less viscerally, but it stings nonetheless.

Next time you go out for a great meal and a good bottle of wine, leave your cell phone at home, don't be intimidated, and ask for directions.

We're very happy to help.



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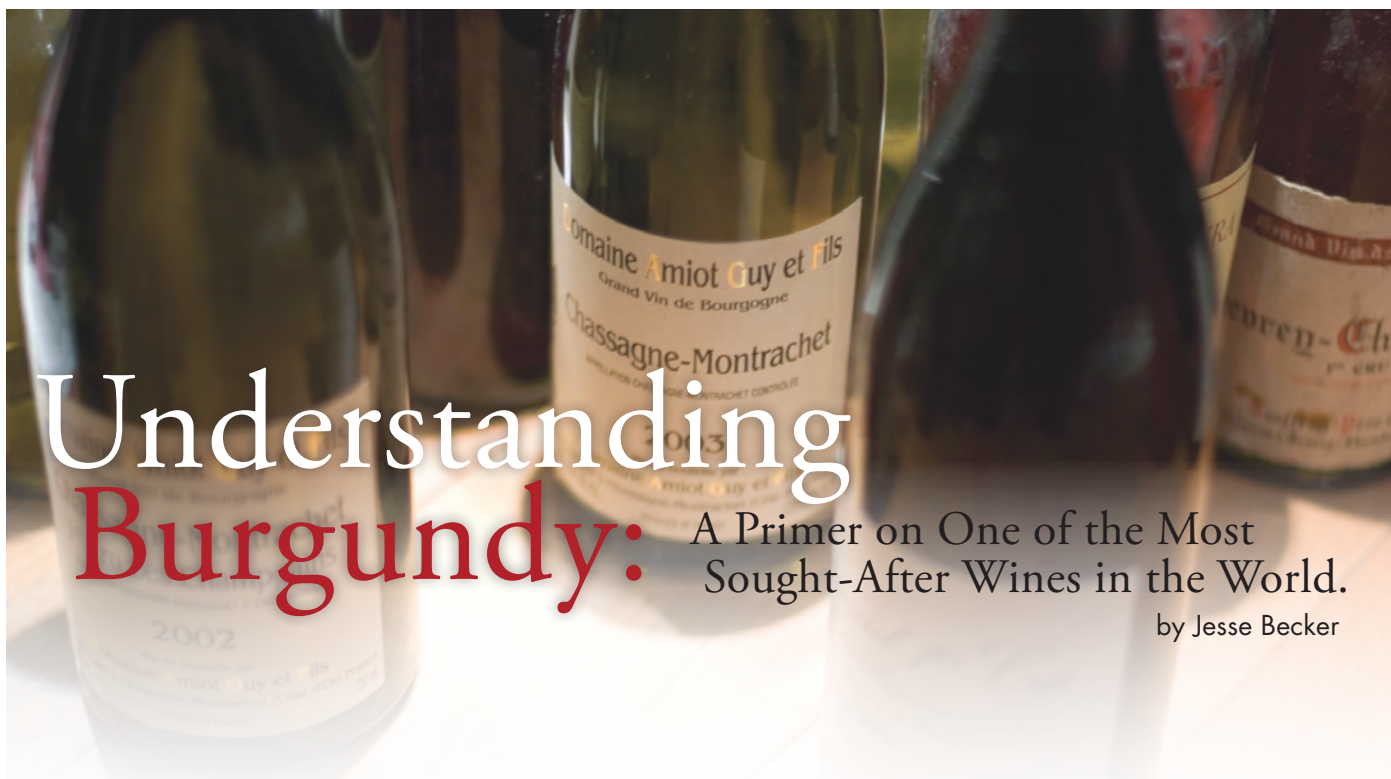
Urban Wine Company is Omaha's casual, contemporary and affordable wine bar experience for the enjoyment of fine wines, brews, spirits and tasty foods.



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Downtown Old Market in Omaha, Nebraska



Understanding Burgundy:

A Primer on One of the Most Sought-After Wines in the World.

by Jesse Becker

“When national wine retailer K&L Wine Merchants offered me a sales position in San Francisco, I confidently told them I could handle Burgundy, one of the most complicated wine regions in the world. It did not take me long to figure out how wrong I was.”

My desire to have a career in wine began over ten years ago. I impulsively headed to Napa Valley to work the harvest and then a tasting room. Afterwards, I foolishly felt like I knew everything there was to know about wine. So when national wine retailer K&L Wine Merchants offered me a sales position in San Francisco, I confidently told them I could handle Burgundy, one of the most complicated wine regions in the world. It did not take me long to figure out how wrong I was.

Primarily, “Burgundy” refers to a geographical place, a wine-producing region in central-eastern France. The word Burgundy is similar to Chianti, Rioja, or Napa, because it’s both a reference to the place as well as to wines typical of those regions. Burgundy can seem simple because nearly all of its white wines are made from the Chardonnay grape, and nearly all of its reds from Pinot Noir. Furthermore, these grapes are familiar to producers across the world who have experimented with Chardonnay and Pinot Noir, making them truly international varieties planted everywhere from Northern Italy to Argentina.

While I thought I knew everything about wine, K&L kindly sent me to France for a Burgundian education. I quickly learned that Burgundy is far more than just Chardonnay or Pinot Noir. Burgundy is an intricate patchwork of ancient vineyards, each with subtle differences and stories, making it home to some of the most desired, celebrated, and expensive wines in the world.

Burgundy education starts best with a map. It is a long and narrow region about two hundred miles southeast of Paris, starting

with Dijon. Dijon acts as Burgundy’s commercial hub and most populous city. It is an inland region with a climate best described as “northern continental,” meaning cold winters, hot summers, and moderate temperatures throughout the growing season. Temperatures are similar to the Midwest, but not quite as extreme. Also, Burgundian precipitation is similar to Nebraskan weather in that it experiences a rainy autumn, which threatens to bring rot to the vineyards.

Geographically, the region is divided into the five main sub-districts, each with notable identity. From north to south, it starts with Chablis, then Côte d’Or, Côte Chalonnaise, Côte Mâconnaise, and finally Beaujolais. Northernmost Chablis is mainly known for producing clean, minerally white wines from Chardonnay. The mineral flavor and texture in these wines comes from the limestone-rich soil and relatively cool weather which produces wines with high acidity and distinctive crisp characters.

Next, the Côte d’Or, original home of Chardonnay and Pinot Noir, runs along a fault line, meaning soil types are extremely

“Burgundy is an intricate patchwork of ancient vineyards...making it home to some of the most desired, celebrated, and expensive wines in the world.”

varied in composition and age. Along the fault line, you can see the hillside of the Côte d’Or planted with hundreds of vineyards running like a wave. The planting angle maximizes sun exposure, creating some of the ripest and most desirable plots of land in the world.

Notably, Côte d’Or is further subdivided into Côte de Nuits in the north, and Côte de Beaune in the south. Côte de Nuits is known for its red wines, while Côte de Beaune is known for its whites. Côte d’Or is the recognized “Heart of Burgundy,” with the greatest number of Premier Cru and Grand Cru designations.

The three sub-regions south of the Côte d'Or produce some of the best value wines of Burgundy. Côte Chalonnaise produces good quality reds and whites, typically made for drinking young. Reds from Mercurey and Givry have the best reputation in Côte Chalonnaise, while whites from Rully and Montagny are good bets, although somewhat difficult to find.

Côte Mâconnaise produces quality white wines, particularly from Pouilly-Fuisse, which sub-region is in all of Burgundy, which produces a rich, full-bodied style. And lastly, Beaujolais is (in) famous for its super-fruity Beaujolais Nouveau, which is worth trying at least once, preferably just after its November release date. Beaujolais also has wines of greater interest and refinement, such as those from Chiroubles AOC, Brouilly AOC, and Chenas AOC, all made from the Gamay grape.

“Terroir is more than soil and weather; it is also the character of a place and the person who tends the grapes. It is the feeling and experience of a place.”

The five geographic sub-regions of Burgundy are further divided into a system of sub-zones or *appellations*, formally called Appellations d'Origine Contrôlée (AOCs). These AOCs represent a delimited area of agricultural production where laws govern everything from what varieties of grape can be grown to when to harvest. Interestingly, even the various zones of cheese production in Burgundy have their own AOCs.

The AOC system of Burgundy owes its creation to monks who spent their time recording the different soil-types, microclimates, and qualities of Burgundy. Over hundreds of years, these monks created a detailed vineyard map which isolated individual parcels and classified them by quality. These monks also experimented with different types of grapes to determine which would best express each Burgundian *terroir*.

While *terroir* has no literal translation in English, it might best be simply described as the essence of a place. *Terroir* is more than soil and weather; it is also the character of a place and the person who tends the grapes. It is the feeling and experience of a place. The monks believed that Burgundian *terroir* favored Chardonnay and Pinot Noir because those were the most sensitive to the



subtle Burgundian soil variations. The monks' zealous studies and classifications became the basis for the modern AOC system in 1937.

But ever since the inception of AOCs, there has been great debate about how much power AOCs should or should not have. Regardless, the intent behind their existence is one that wine lovers from around the world should appreciate: preservation of traditional wine styles of AOCs. More emphatically, without wine laws of AOCs, free-market forces no doubt would have destroyed the great Burgundian traditions.

The AOCs are not just divided geographically; they are also divided by pyramidal quality. At the base are “Regional” AOCs which will always have the word “Bourgogne” on the label, informing the buyer that the grapes could come from anywhere within Burgundy. For example, a Regional label might say “Bourgogne Blanc.”

Next is the “District” AOC. Grapes for these wines must come from a single district within Burgundy. Instead of “Bourgogne,” the buyer will see the name of the district. For example, a bottle with “Macon” on its label must be produced from grapes grown exclusively within the Macon district. Next are “Village” wines which must be produced within the limits of a specifically designated village area. The name of the Village will appear on the label, such as “Macon Village.”

The next tier represents a huge step up in class: the “Premier Cru.” To be a Premier Cru, all grapes must come from a single vineyard. Premier Crus are of superior quality and character, and have longer aging potential. The words “Premier Cru” are sometimes abbreviated as “1er Cru.” Note that multiple landowners or producers can produce a Premier Cru, all growing grapes within one vineyard. Thus, several producers might make a wine labeled “Chassagne-Montrachet 1er Cru Les Caillerets.” This means the wine is Premier Cru from Les Caillerets vineyard, produced by Chassagne-Montrachet.

Finally, “Grand Cru,” the highest classification, comprises only about one percent of Burgundy's wine output. Only thirty Grand Crus exist, all well known by name. Their reputations are so well established that their labels read very simply, with just the name of the vineyard. Examples are Chambertin or Les Bonnes Mares. These high-quality wines need time to age in the bottle before drinking.

It should be apparent that Burgundy can seem simple at first but is quite complex. However, it is worth the time and effort to learn Burgundian wines because they offer insight into the important concept of *terroir*, and represent some of the greatest wines in the world.



A view of the Cote d'Or: Burgundy, France

Oak Aging *and its* Effect on Wine

by John Fischer

Aging a wine in oak barrels can complement and contribute to the character of a wine. Oak enriches a wine and makes it smoother, richer, and sweeter. If used judiciously, it adds to the complexity of wine and imparts a round, soft, viscous feeling on the palate.

New oak barrels impart the strongest flavor to wine. With reuse, the wine extracts progressively less oak flavor, and after about five seasons of usage, the barrel is practically depleted of its oaky, flavorful extract. Wine aged in small oak barrels has a greater surface contact to the wood than those aged in larger ones and therefore leaches out more oak flavors (and tannins).

Another reason for aging wine in wood is that it allows the wine to receive small quantities of air, which produces a slow, controlled oxidation. This helps in the evolution of the wines and enhances its ultimate quality.

The toasty character found in many oak-aged wines is due to aging them in charred oak barrels. This so-called “toasty oak” is very easy to identify once you have the descriptive term in mind. Oak has a soft, round, rich, woody smell, and the toasty character is similar to the smell of toasted bread. Toasty oak flavor is fairly common in Chardonnay wines.

You wouldn't think that the way the barrel is made would have any effect on the wine that it contains. However, the construction of the barrel is an important and often overlooked item. There are several types of oak, and there are different techniques employed to make barrels. Barrels built using the classic French coopering process are most suitable for aging wine. Air-dried, hand-split staves are better than kiln-dried and sawed, and slow toasting of the oak staves over a small fire is superior to steaming the wood. Many wineries have come to realize the importance of barrel construction, and oversee the coopering process themselves.

The type of oak is also an important part of the equation. The slower-growing oaks impart a finer and subtler oak flavor to the wine, and are considered superior. American oak imparts the strongest oaky scent. Limousin oak (French) is less strong, but still imparts a strong oaky flavor that can dominate the character of the wine. Wine makers are cautious using either of these types of oak

for fear that they will overpower the more delicate flavors in the wine, thereby decreasing the degree of complexity. Nevertheless, the more flavorful oaks do have their place.

Many wineries use American oak barrels when aging Sauvignon Blanc in order to help mitigate the strong, racy, green character of the varietal. Other wineries age their Cabernet Sauvignons in American oak, but these are usually age-seasoned barrels that have already lost a portion of their oak scent. Beaulieu had a long history of aging their Cabernets in seasoned American oak.

“You wouldn't think that the way the barrel is made would have any effect on the wine that it contains. However, the construction of the barrel is an important and often overlooked item.”





The use of Limousin oak in California Chardonnays has many proponents, but others favor the use of the more restrained, tighter-grained oaks.

The tighter-grained French oaks impart a more muted oak character to wine. This type of wood is the most popular type in use, being especially suited to both Chardonnay and Cabernet. There are several different varieties that are derived from specific geographic regions: Nevers, Alliers, Vosges, and Tronçais. Each of these imparts subtle but distinctly different nuances to the flavor of the wine.

Excessive oak flavor in a wine is a taste distraction. A well-made wine will have just enough oak to give it added complexity without subduing other subtle flavor elements. Too much oak will snuff out the more delicate scents and flavors, and actually make the wine less complex. Excessive oak gives the wine a big, ponderous, clumsy feel. Such wines lack refinement, sophistication, and charm. More than a hint of oak flavor is too much.

Of course, there is the school that supports the belief that oak has no place in the vinification of wine. They argue that wine should derive its flavors from grapes, not trees. To some extent, I feel they are correct. If oak is dominating the wine, you do taste trees. But a little dab of oak is very complementary to many wine styles. Think of it this way: the slight touches of make-up that women use can have a dramatic effect on their appearance; however, when the same make-up is piled on in excess, the results are disastrous.

The excessive use of oak is more common in white wines. Over-oaked wines develop a strong vanilla-like sweetness, and they become so top-heavy and rich that they border on cloying. Never use this style wine with light, delicate dishes, as the wine will assuredly overpower and subdue the food's delicate flavors. What's more, matching such wines to full-bodied dishes makes the combination excessively heavy and ponderously cloying.

When matching white wine with food, use wines such as New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc, Pouilly Fumé, or Chablis. These wines never see oak. Although unoaked Chardonnay and Sauvignon Blanc are available from many wineries worldwide, they are often not labeled as such.

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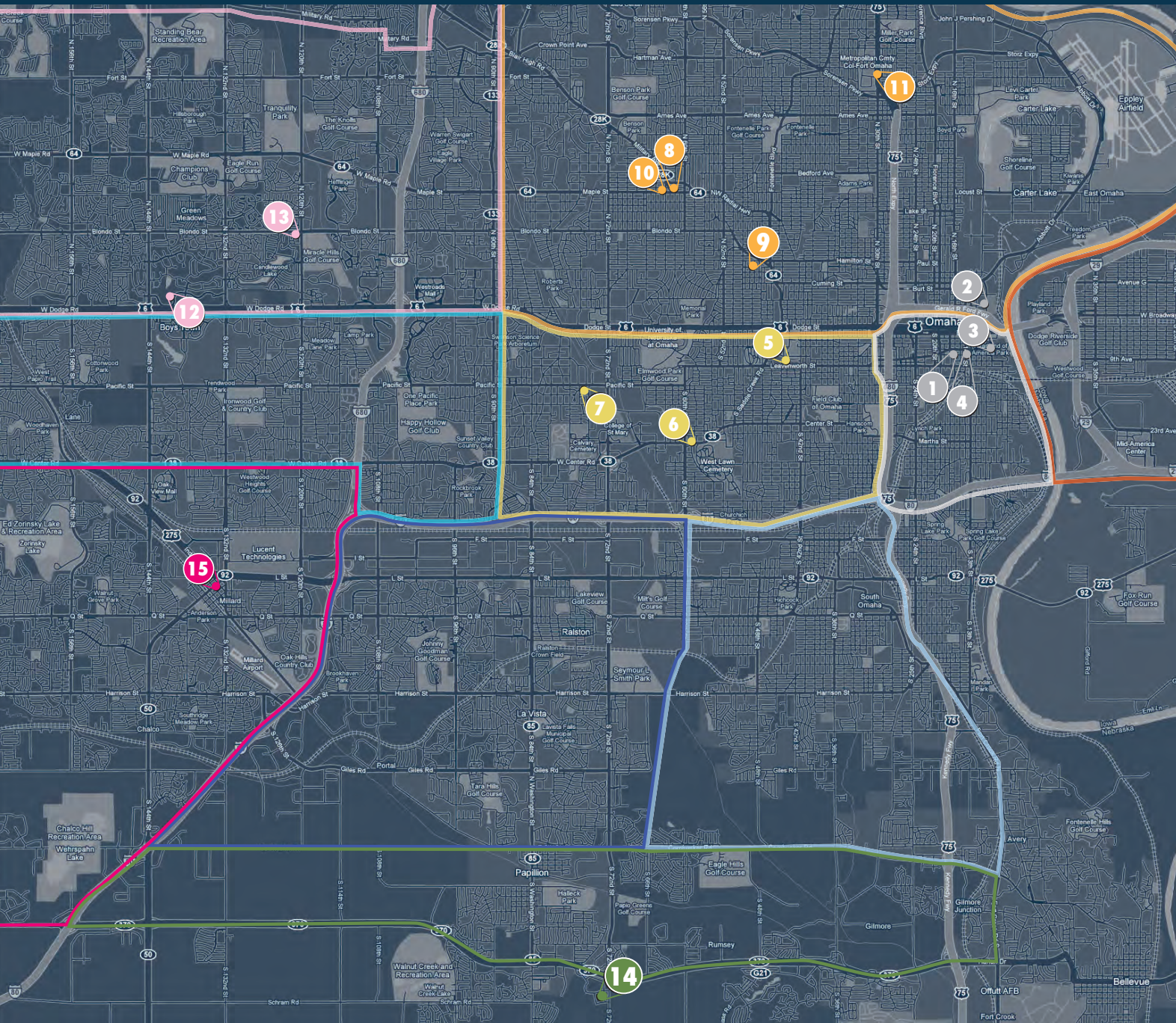
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- Downtown
- Central Omaha
- North Omaha
- Northwest Omaha
- South Omaha
- South Central Omaha
- Bellevue
- South West Omaha
- West Omaha



1 Cubby's Old Market Grocery

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3 M's Pub

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1110 Howard St



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5 La Casa

402-556-6464
4432 Leavenworth St



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6 Petrow's

402-551-0552
5914 Center Street



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JOE BANANA'S	402-342-9902
MR TOAD	402-345-4488
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NOMAD LOUNGE	402-884-1231
ROSE & CROWN	402-346-8242
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WELCOME INN	402-341-4473
11-WORTH CAFE	402-346-6924
ETHNIC SANDWICH SHOP	402-422-1040
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LEO'S DINER	402-553-2280
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7517 Pacific Street



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11 Sage Student Bistro

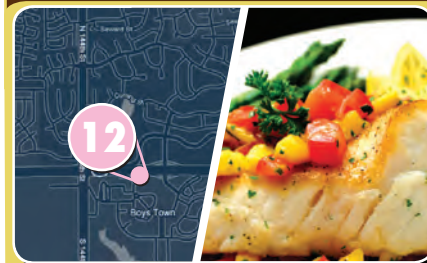
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30th and Fort Streets



Providing guest-centered learning experiences, Sage Student Bistro is an integral force for the Institute for Culinary Arts at Metropolitan Community College (MCC). Each visit is an opportunity for our faculty to create a training exercise for the benefit of instruction. Customer feedback and gratuity provide valuable support to the learning community at MCC's Institute for the Culinary Arts. www.mccneb.edu/bistro
Bistro Hours - Mon. - Thurs. 6 - 8:30 p.m.

12 Charleston's

402-431-0023
13851 1st Natl. Bank Pkwy



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13 Taxi's

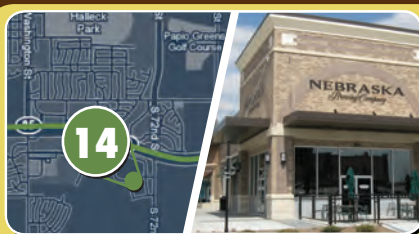
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14 Nebraska Brewing Co.

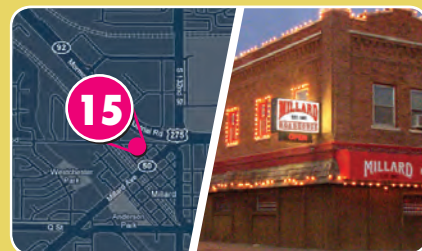
402-934-7100
7474 Towne Ctr Pkwy



Locally owned & operated, the Nebraska Brewing Company is located in Papillion's Shadow Lake Towne Center. Nebraska Brewing Company offers fine American cuisine in a casual dining atmosphere. Nearly 60 items in a selection-rich menu are guaranteed to satisfy any hunger – confidently backed by the finest Hand-Crafted Beers available anywhere.

15 Millard Roadhouse

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The Dumpster:

Molding Opinions

by Michael Campbell

Before the dawn of refrigerators, back when humans made ice cubes by banging chunks of glacier against their foreheads, food storage options for leftovers were simpler. You either 1) ate it, 2) it rotted, or 3) it rotted and you ate it anyway. This is how we invented cheese.

Today, milk comes in handy take-home jugs, so it's hard to remember that at one time the jugs were made of leather and were attached to cows. The next time you are at the grocery store dairy section and you open the cooler door to the bright white array of milk options, try to imagine a row of teats instead.

"The live mold that makes bleu cheese blue is *brevibacterium livens*, the same bacteria that makes your feet stink, which should come as no surprise."

It is no longer our instinct to reach between a half-ton animal's legs, grab whatever dangles there, and with a yank squirt what comes out into our mouth. That was probably a dicey idea even then. Drinking cow milk probably started, as most things do, with a fraternity challenge. "I dare you to drink that, Og. Go on! What are you—chicken?"

"Og no chicken!" Og reply in huff. "Og show you!" Og narrowly avoid kick to flat forehead. Og win bet. Hey...Og *like* milk! Surprise! Og famous.

Not long after Og discovered we could

drink cow's milk, some kid squeezed himself more than he could finish. His mother yelled, "Cows don't grow on trees, y'know," which the kid was pretty sure he did know. He couldn't put the leftover milk in the refrigerator because there wasn't one yet, and it took the boy only one kick in his flat forehead to learn he couldn't put milk back in the cow.

So his half-full glass of milk sat on the counter, where it fermented, festered and foamed, until vein-blue tentacles of mold grew over it. By some quirk of fate, a little bit of rennet drooled into the mix. Rennet is a nice word for stomach mucus. It is beyond me to guess how stomach fluid got into his milk—one can only suppose the boy was under sixteen. The mother, to get rid of the growing stink, moved the festering blob of coagulating milk-fur into a nearby cave, where it continued cheerfully to rot.

The furry milk continued to clot in the cave, and in a fit of starvation—or upon another frat-boy dare—someone took a bite of it. To everyone's astonishment, he did not die.

Any food that you could leave out for weeks and still eat was a valuable commodity—just ask the guys who make Twinkies. Nonetheless, furry, rotten food is hard to sell,

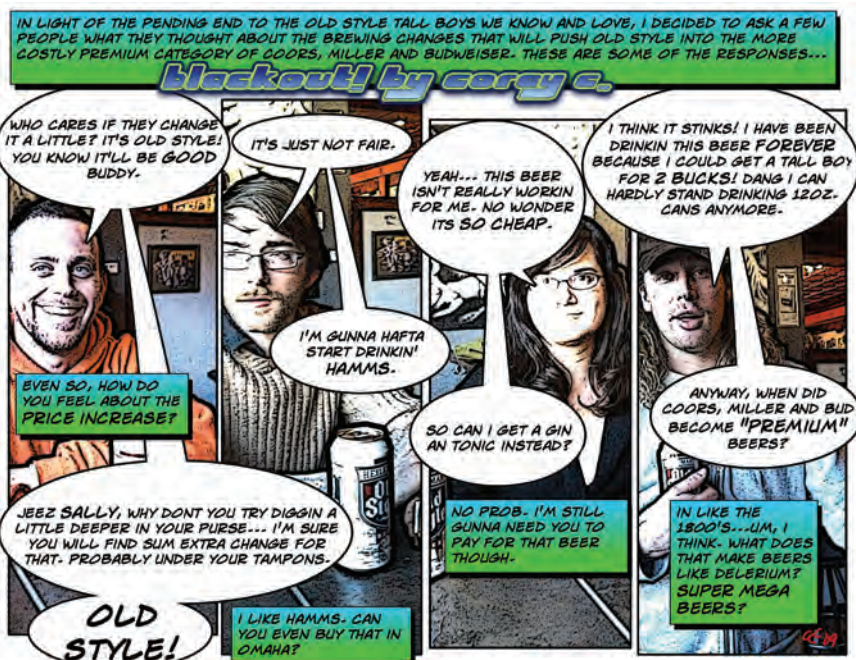
something Og learned when he tried to pawn off his dead cat as a hat.

The live mold that makes bleu cheese blue is *brevibacterium livens*, the same bacteria that makes your feet stink, which should come as no surprise. Og couldn't call his new invention "toe cheese" because that name was already taken. He went with "bleu cheese" because things seem fancier when they stink in French.

Sauerkraut was discovered pretty much the same way as cheese. There was always a lot of leftover cabbage, because, well, it tasted like cabbage. Like the bleu cheese, it too sat and fermented in its own mold and bacteria until someone got so hungry—or his frat brother taunted—that he took a bite, and decided it tasted better than starvation. Because Germans name things literally—*volks wagen* = family car, *sauer kraut* = rotten cabbage—it grew popular only among the Germans. The rest of us might have tried sauerkraut sooner had they named it *bleu chou*.

The importance of attractive food labeling is especially evident in Korea, where traditional *dim sum* delicacies include "White Cloud Phoenix Talons," which don't sell as well when you call them by their German name, "Steamed Little Chicken Toes." An exception is the recent rise of yogurt sales, with the fanciest brands baldly bragging about "Live, active cultures!" So far this has only worked with yogurt, a food we already expect to be bad. The beef industry, by comparison, has yet to figure out how to sell meat with the slogan, "Crawling with live, active bacteria!"

Today, Americans prefer their food mold-free, made under the most sterile conditions. Pasteurized, wrapped in tamper-proof safety foil, vacuum-sealed, boxed, shrink-wrapped and refrigerated, American cheese is aptly named. We like the packaging of American cheese because it keeps mold out. The French like our packaging because it keeps our cheese in.





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