# WEDNESDAY, MARCH 16, 2011

воок REPORT Slow cookery Two volumes offer ways to do it yearround. E6



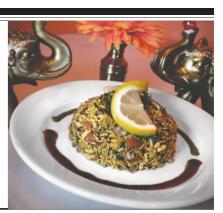
Similar styles pitted against each other forced us to stretch our palates. There were no unanimous decisions."

Greg Kitsock sums up Round 1 of Beer Madness matchups. E5

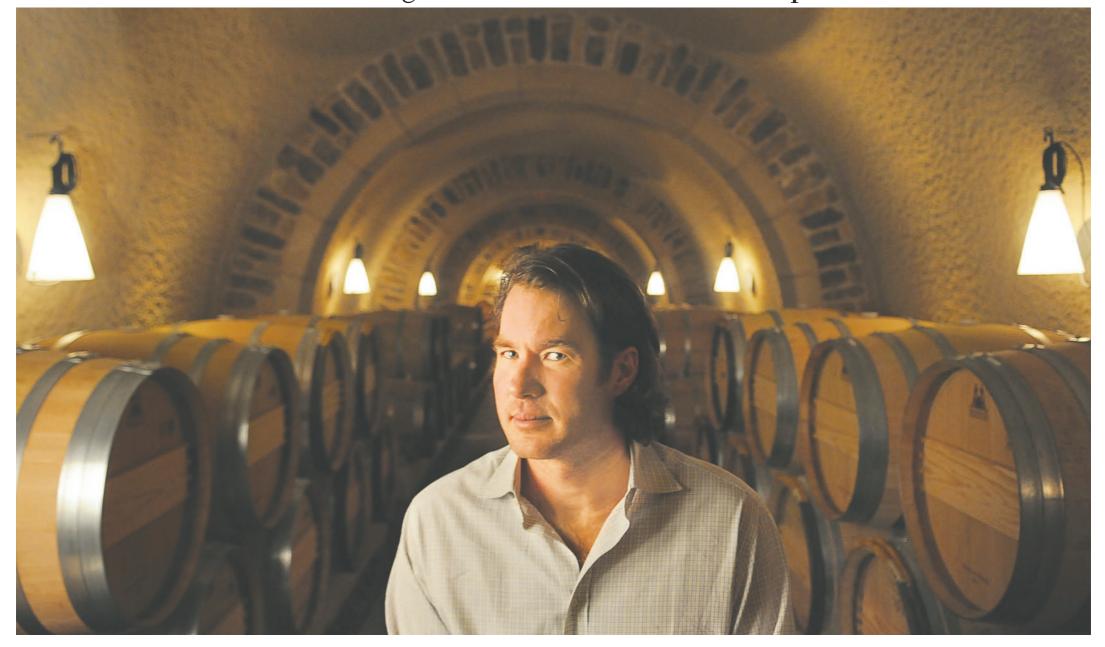
**BLOG** Check out our daily postings: washingtonpost.com/allwecaneat We answer questions at noon today: washingtonpost.com/liveonline

MORE RECIPES Paprika Chicken With Hummus E2 Sweet Pea and Shrimp Saute E2 Slow Cooker Vegetable Broth; Cabbage With Crispy Bacon ONLINE

FIRST BITE **Curry Mantra** Regional Indian specialties are featured at this Fairfax City spot. **E3** 



## Vintner Rutger de Vink, about to make a splash



# New depth in Virginia

BY DAVE MCINTYRE

he wine on your left is Chateau Montrose 2006," said Rutger de Vink. "The middle glass is RdV 2008, and the third is Dominus '07." I tasted the wines in order, beginning with the classic Bordeaux acidity and elegance of the Montrose, a highly regarded second-growth chateau, and ending with the Dominus, a Napa Valley blend brimming with power and finishing with a slight alcoholic burn. Then I focused again on the RdV as de Vink, its creator, looked on patiently. It bridged the gap between Old World finesse and New World power, with a surprisingly lush core of red fruit and a luxurious texture that caressed my tongue with

Could this really be from Virginia? I wondered. There was no hole in the middle where the flavor disappears before coming back for the finish, no green vegetal tastes from unripe fruit. A few Virginia winemakers have solved those problems. But that velvet -Ihad never experienced it in a Virginia wine before.



Top, after 10 years of preparation, Virginia vineyard owner Rutger de Vink is about to release his first wines. Above, oenologist Eric Boissenot of Bordeaux, France, blends wines for RdV Vineyards.

Then I did the math: The Montrose sells for \$90 to \$110 a bottle and received a 94-point rating fromRobert Parker. Dominus sells for \$150, and Parker gave the 2007 a near-perfect 98 points. Is Virginia ready to play in this league?

Jim Law of Linden Vineyards, one of the Old Dominion's most respected winegrowers, had described his close friend de Vink to me as "the next generation of Virginia wine." Tasting the 2008, I understood.

Putting my notebook down, I looked up at de Vink and said simply, "It's really good."

"I hate to use the word 'cult' wine, but we are trying to take the wine to the next level," de Vink replied.

Next month's launch of RdV Vineyards is Virginia's most-anticipated winery opening in years, as word has spread of de Vink's project near Delaplane, in Fauquier County. His ambition, expressed quietly but confidently, is to prove once and for all that Virginia can produce wine that ranks among the world's best. Others have made that claim: Barboursville Vineyards is the most

WINE CONTINUED ON E5

### Taking his 'cue from a venerable Texan

BY JIM SHAHIN  $Special\ to\ The\ Washington\ Post$ 

Marc Glosserman wanders around Hill Country Barbecue Market in his blue jeans and scuffed cowboy boots as if the restaurant, which opened Saturday in Penn Quar-

**SMOKE** ter, were his home. SIGNALS In a way, it is.

More than three years after opening the original Hill Country, in Manhattan, to rave reviews, Glosserman has brought the concept — a love letter to the food of his extended family in Texas - home to Wash-

When the restaurant's founder and chief executive was growing up in Bethesda, he frequently visited his grandparents and other relatives in the small town of Lockhart, Tex., famous for its barbecue. "My aunt [in Lockhart] would sometimes ship up a brisket or sauce to us," recalls Glosserman, 36, who bears a vague resemblance to the mid-1970s Jackson Browne. "As we were eating it, we kept wishing, 'It would be so great if there was something like this in Washington."

Glosserman had what he calls a "real East Coast upbringing." He attended Georgetown Day School (and now sits on the board of directors). He played soccer and lacrosse in high school. He went to sports camp in Maine in the sum-

SMOKE SIGNALS CONTINUED ON E4

## Guess who's coming...

When it's the Obamas. restaurants scramble

BY DAVID HAGEDORN Special to The Washington Post

As a former chef-restaurateur, I always wondered what must go on in Washington restaurants when the Obamas come calling. Not just from the usual angles — What did they eat? Where did they sit? How did they tip? - but from an operations standpoint.

How and when does the management learn that POTUS and/or FLOTUS are coming? Who waits on them? Do they order off the menu? Is there an official food

When I received a tip a few weeks ago that the first lady would be lunching at Equinox, Todd and Ellen Gray's quietly chic farm-totable eatery, I rushed downtown to see firsthand.

This was Michelle Obama's second visit to Equinox. On Jan. 17, 2009, days before the inauguration, she celebrated her birthday there with the president-elect and 11 others. Restaurateurs hoped it was a harbinger that the Obamas, as they famously were in Chicago, would be very good for business

And they are.

One or both of them have eaten in restaurants across the Washington area, at tony spots such as Michel Richard Citronelle, the Source, Rasika and Komi and at more casual destinations such as Good Stuff Eatery, We the Pizza, the Majestic and Ray's Hell-Burger.

DINING CONTINUED ON E4



2009 for their anniversary dinner.

The Obamas arrive at Blue Duck Tavern in October

#### **SPIRITS**

Jason Wilson

#### Hot on the trail of bourbon's holy grail

↑ omeday soon, Buffalo Trace in Frankfort, Ky., will unveil a special batch of bourbon that represents what it calls "the holy grail.

In fact, for about 20 years, the distillery has undertaken Project Holy Grail: its systematic, clinical quest for a "perfect" whiskey. By its own account, it is close. Will this happen in late April? We can't know for sure, since it's all super hush-hush.

Last summer in New Orleans Mark Brown, the president of the Sazerac Co., which owns Buffalo Trace, gave a presentation on Project Holy Grail to a group of journalists. He told us that project workers had already identified 15 variables in whiskeymaking, which can lead to millions of outcomes. They had isolated 125 of the more than 300 chemicals in bourbon. They had rated all locations in Buffalo Trace's vast rickhouses, where its barrels age for decades at a time, for quality.

"We know which aisles in which rickhouses make the best whiskey," Brown told us.

Then he asked rhetorically, "What does the Holy Grail look like?" And answered, "Somewhere between complexity and balance.'

"Yes," he added, "we are being purposefully vague." To date, Buffalo Trace has concocted more than 300 experimental whiskeys, many of which have been released as special editions in the Buffalo Trace Experimental Collection over the past few years. So far, nothing has achieved perfection in the



distiller's eyes. Regardless, most of the ones I've tasted, I must say, have been pretty delicious.

We all know that "perfect" is a slippery term. Several of the journalists in New Orleans wondered aloud: On exactly what basis will perfection be determined? Brown told us he had "dissected" the 10 top-rated whiskeys of a handful of influential spirits writers, among them F. Paul Pacult, who publishes the newsletter Spirit Journal; Gary Regan, the cocktail columnist of the San Francisco Chronicle; and John Hansell, editor of Malt Advocate magazine. Based on the ratings of those writers, Buffalo Trace developed the profile for its holy

Brown said, "We're waiting for that 'Eureka!' moment when Malt Advocate says, 'You did it.'"

In the world of wine, there has been a lot of recent soulsearching about the validity, objectivity and overall worth of

100-point rating scales. What. some ask, do the points mean? Many of us feel overwhelmed by the shelf talkers posted in wine shops, trumpeting 90-something points for this, 90-something points for that. There's evidence that Wine Spectator-style rating scales, which were so effective for baby boomers, are getting less traction with succeeding generations of wine buyers. Translation: More of us are saying "meh" when faced with a score by Robert M. Parker Jr.

Apparently that is not a concern in the world of whiskey. Like the great white whale, a 100-point whiskey remains out of reach, at least for Buffalo Trace. In any case, in the manner of Ishmael I'll be sojourning to Kentucky soon to observe and taste, and I'll chronicle my efforts for you.

Of one thing I am certain: This perfect, holy-grail whiskey ain't gonna be cheap.

Price. Value. Those were not discussed as part of the holygrail algorithm, just as they are rarely discussed in 100-point rating scales. Which is why I'd like to mention a few of the imperfect bourbons I've been enjoying lately.

Bourbon is one of my favorite spirits, and early spring is probably my favorite time of year to drink it. But bourbon is not a spirit I like to spend much money on. Sure, I'll occasionally pay around \$30 for a bottle of something like Evan Williams Single Barrel or Russell's Reserve or Eagle Rare (a Buffalo Trace product). I might splurge on the

new Knob Creek Single Barrel, which will retail for around \$40; it is bold and smoky yet surprisingly balanced for 120 proof. But most of the time, I'm looking for bourbon costing under \$25.

In fact, as I've recommended many times before, Buffalo Trace's basic bourbon, at \$20, is one of the best-value whiskeys in the world. I've even written in this space that it's my desertisland bourbon.

The other night, I compared several under-\$20 bourbons in my cabinet, both neat and then mixed in old fashioneds (I make mine, by the way, with: sugar, two dashes of bitters and orange peel twist, muddled; two ounces of bourbon: two ice cubes, gently stirred.) I enjoyed regular old Evan Williams (\$12), yellowlabel Four Roses (\$17) and even a newcomer from Brown-Forman, Early Times 354 (\$16), which I think has the ideal kiss of mellow sweetness to entice a newbie to whiskey.

But my favorite of the evening was the wheated bourbon Old Weller Antique 107, which sells for around \$20 to \$22. Weller is made by the folks at Buffalo Trace, which raises the question: How far away, exactly, is Weller from the holy grail?

I mean, at least on that particular evening, it seemed kinda perfect.

Wilson is the author of "Boozehound: On the Trail of the Rare, the Obscure, and the Overrated in Spirits" (Ten Speed, 2010). He can be reached at jason@jasonwilson.com

### Beer Madness, Round 1: Squeaking to victory

BY GREG KITSOCK

Strong opinions. Colorful descriptors. And some sharply divided decisions.

Beer Madness has achieved a level of parity that would be the envy of most pro sports leagues. Of the 32 first-round matchups, the winner squeaked by 6-5 in 14 of the contests. There were no unanimous decisions.

That was our design. In previous years, we matched up beers in a category randomly, leading to some real laughers. This year Greg Engert, beer director at ChurchKey, pitted beers of the same style (or a similar flavor profile) against each other in the first round, forcing us to stretch our palates. Three Philosophers from

Brewerv Ommegang Cooperstown, N.Y., scored the biggest margin of victory, trouncing Monk's Blood, a canned offering from the 21st Amendment Brewery in San Francisco, 10-1. It's not that our panel of tasters found any obvious flaws in the latter, an oakaged strong ale spiced with vanilla beans, cinnamon and figs. Ellie Tupper, one of two beer professionals on the panel, found them both sweet, fruity and a little "boozy." After a few swallows she wrote despairingly, "Random pick — too similar." Reader-panelist Duff Gillespie exulted, "I love this pairing. It's a shame that one must be eliminated." The lone dissenting vote was cast by our mixologist, JP Caceres of Bourbon Steak, who praised Monk's Blood's disparate cocktail of flavors: "Spicy, sour, bitter. Me like it."

Three Philosophers, a blend of a strong, dark Belgian-style ale (dubbed a "quadrupel") with cherry-favored Lindemans Kriek from Belgium, measures 9.8 percent alcohol by volume. Monk's Blood clocks in at a slightly less formidable 8.3 percent. However, high alcohol didn't necessarily confer an advantage. In perhaps the biggest upset of the evening, Dogfish Head Palo Santo Marron (our strongest beer at 12 percent alcohol) fell, 6-5, to Breckenridge Vanilla Porter (less than half the strength at 4.7 percent).

Both of these dark, roasty ales are strongly flavored: Palo Santo draws its spicy, incenselike notes from being aged in tanks made from an exotic Paraguavan hardwood. Vanilla beans from Madagascar and Papua New Guinea confer a confectionary sweetness on the Breckenridge. The latter might have been our most polarizing beer of the evening. Sommelier Kathryn Bangs of Komi enjoyed the Vanilla Porter for its notes of "roasted hazelnuts, bitter chocolate and campfire wood. "Would love to drink with a cigar," added Justin Garcia. But Gillespie groused, "Feels like I'm drinking flowers. Sissy drink in porter's clothing."

Most of our samples came from bottles. In four matchups



PHOTOS BY ASTRID RIECKEN FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

Top, Ellie Tupper preferred her own beer; above, Kathryn Bangs had a way with words.

that pitted draft against packaged beer, barrels and bottles split 2-2. "Reminds me of the roasted barley tea which we drink a lot during the summer in Japan," wrote Hiromi Kowaguchi of our lone cask ale, the Dark Horse mild from Oliver Brewery in Baltimore. But she gave the nod to its opponent, Double Bag German-style altbier from Vermont's Long Trail Brewing Co. (as did our entire panel by a 9-2 vote).

Did Tupper recognize the Tuppers' Keller Pils she and husband Bob contract-brew in Hampton, Va.? She didn't say as much in her tasting notes but advanced the Keller Pils anyway, noting that it had "a tad more malt" than the Prima Pils from Victory Brewing Co. in Downingtown, Pa. But our panel as a whole gave thumbs up to Prima Pils, 7-4. Bangs praised it for its "tropical papaya, honeyed pineapple" flavors.

(Bangs, by the way, wins our award for the most vivid vocabulary. She detected nuances of "angostura root" in the Stateside Saison; screamed "Kumquat!" after sipping Exit 4; called Schlafly Extra Stout the "Cote du Rhone of beers"; and blasted Bell's Two Hearted Ale for tasting "like a hair salon.")

Of nine Maryland and Virginia beers duking it out in Beer Madness, the local guys held their own, winning five matchups. New kid in town Port City Porter from Alexandria advanced, 7-4, over Schlafly's strong export-style stout. "Epitome of roast. Not overbearing, dark, smooth, deep flavor," praised Christina Hoffman.

Schlafly Brewing in St. Louis opened in 1991. Port City Brewing has been making beer for one month. Seniority counts for little in Beer Madness.

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on washingtonpost.com We're down to 32 beers, eight in each category.

Vote for your Round 2 favorites

at wapo.st/beermadness.

mouthwatering peach and apple fruit, this

winning number is a terrific Pinot Grigic at a great price. Coming from Argentina in

such a thing), but not at all shy about lettin

success is the complexity added by the flint

**BEN GILIBERTI** 

**W** DIRECTOR OF WINE EDUCATION

#### WINE

#### Will a \$90 Virginia wine be hard to swallow?

WINE FROM E1

credible contender with its Octagon, a Bordeaux-style blend based on merlot. Kluge Estate launched its New World Red at \$65 but could sell it at only \$30 goingspectacularly before bankrupt late last year.

As Virginia's modern wine industry blossomed over the past 35 years, vintners experimented with site selection, vineyard techniques and grape varieties, steadily improving quality as they learned to cope with the region's humid climate. But lessons can be hard to implement when starting over is neither cheap nor easy. Wineries are invested in their initial decisions of where and what to plant. The question remained: What could be accomplished by starting from scratch. incorporating the lessons of the last three decades with the resources and the commitment to do everything necessary to enhance quality?

"I really believe you can make something special here in Virginia," de Vink said as he showed me around his 16-acre vineyard on a hilltop with 360degree views of the Blue Ridge Mountains and their rolling foothills. "If you have a better site, with steep slopes and droughty soils that don't retain water, better plant material, and space the vines closer, you can

make a great wine." At 40, de Vink projects flamboyance without arrogance. A former Marine who saw combat duty in Somalia in the mid-1990s, he stands well over 6 feet tall, with flowing locks, the rugged complexion of an outdoorsman and a movie star's propensity to leave an extra shirt button unfastened. He has run marathons and enjoys climbing mountains in Alaska. He attributes his anything-ispossible attitude to his family: His grandfather, a physician in Amsterdam, was sent to a concentration camp by the Nazis for sheltering downed Allied flyers during World War II. He

After leaving the Marines, de Vink earned an MBA at Northwestern University's Kellogg School of Management and spent a few years working in information technology, helping expand broadband access during the Internet boom of the late 1990s. But a desk job couldn't suit someone so restless for the outdoors, and with the new millennium he decided to make a new start.

He worked the 2001 harvest at Linden, learning winemaking from Law, and traveled to Bordeaux and California to meet with winemakers and viticulturists. In 2004, he bought a hilly sheep farm off Route 17 in Delaplane, using savings and funding from investors he

"You can make an exceptional wine in this part of the world, and he is doing it because of his passion and detail."

Eric Boissenot, oenologist from Bordeaux, France

describes as "mostly family." The vines were planted in 2006 with the help of some of California's leading viticulturists, soil scientists and winemakers, including Daniel Roberts, Alfred Cass and David Ramey. Flouting the conventional wisdom that cabernet sauvignon can't ripen reliably in Virginia, de Vink planted 40 percent of his vines to that variety, plus an equal amount of merlot. The rest are petit verdot and cabernet franc.

From the outside, the new winery resembles a typical Virginia farmhouse, a tribute to the region's agricultural tradition. Step inside the doors, however, and you enter a modernist concrete-and-glass temple to wine. A silo, illuminated from within at night, serves by day as a skylight and centerpiece over a stairway from the entrance to the working level, underground and built into the hillside under the vineyard. There is no tasting room full of winy tchotchkes to welcome the weekend visitor. Radiating outward like spokes in a wheel are a fermenting room with stainless-steel vats, another with a bottling line, a barrel-aging room and one for bottles stacked in bins. It all seems small and rather modest for a winery with grand ambitions

On a warm, springlike afternoon in early March, I joined de Vink and his cellar master, Joshua Grainer (who also apprenticed at Linden), and their French consultants. viticulturist Jean-Philippe Roby and oenologist Eric Boissenot, in the winery's laboratory as they blended the 2010 wines. This was Boissenot's first visit to Virginia, having blended de Vink's 2008 and 2009 wines from samples sent to France. As a "flying winemaker," the shy Boissenot is not a media darling like Michel Rolland or Stephane Derenoncourt, both of whom already work in Virginia. But he is revered in Bordeaux because, along with his father, Jacques, he consults for four of the five firstgrowth chateaux, among a host of other illustrious clients.

The tap of pipette against beaker alternated with the splat of wine spit into the stainlesssteel sink as Boissenot worked intently through 27 bottles coded by grape variety and vineyard block. Then he poured out four samples for his clients to taste. The blend chosen for the RdV 2010 was cabernet sauvignon and merlot; the cabernet franc and petit verdot were relegated to a second cuvee, called Rendezvous. Grainer said the wines will be blended and put into barrels for aging, to be released in two years

Boissenot said that he was impressed with the quality of the 2008s and that the wines have improved each year. "It is important to know that you can make an exceptional wine in this part of the world, and he is doing it because of his passion and attention to detail," Boissenot

A decade after embarking on his adventure, de Vink is about to release his first wines. The 2008 harvest — only the third leaf of his very young vines produced a mere 600 cases. He intends to sell less than twothirds of that, including about 170 cases of the RdV at \$88 a bottle and 200 cases of Rendezvous at \$55. The rest, which de Vink decided was not at the level of quality he wanted, he has bottled to give to relatives and friends. Sales will be by mailing list, in high-end restaurants and via small groups of wine buyers by appointment.

Will the market accept a Virginia wine that costs nearly \$90? De Vink plans to use comparative tastings to win over

skeptics. "Maybe it's the pioneer spirit," he said. "You tell me it's impossible to make a world-class red wine in Virginia, and I say, well, let me show you. I want people to say, 'Look what we have in our back yard: a winery that can compete with Napa and Bordeaux.' I want people to taste the wine against the best of California and France and say

we're in the game." To test de Vink's confidence that a comparative tasting of the RdV against leading wines from California and Bordeaux can build his market, I duplicated the tasting he'd organized for me, using purchased bottles of the 2006 Montrose and 2007 Dominus and a sample he provided of the 2008 RdV. I recruited a high-power lineup of palates: Kathryn Morgan, head sommelier at Michel Richard Citronelle and the area's only certified master sommelier; Jay Youmans, wine educator and the area's only master of wine; Mark Wessels, Bordeaux buyer at MacArthur Beverages; and Panos Kakaviatos, a freelance writer for Decanter magazine and other publications. I did not tell them what they were tasting.

All four tasters expressed a preference for the Montrose, but they agreed that the RdV belonged in its company, and they generally preferred it over the Dominus. Morgan even rated the RdV as probably the best of the bunch if cellared to drink 10 years from now and as most appealing to customers with "New World palates." But the four were also unanimous in their prediction that consumers will have a hard time swallowing a \$90 Virginia wine that does not have a track record, especially when they can buy a classedgrowth Bordeaux for about the same price.

"It's going to be a hard sell," Wessels predicted.

"The wine's worth it, but the question is, will he get it?" Youmans said. "Is this cult-wine quality? No doubt about it." food@washpost.com

What do you think of Virginia

wine? Share your thoughts with Dave McIntyre, who will join today's Free Range live chat at noon: washingtonpost.com/liveonline.

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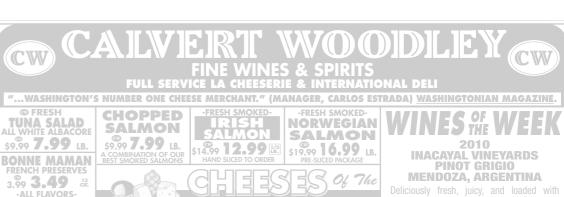
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