

FOCUS ON WINE



RAY & ELEANOR HEALD

Ferrari-Carano makes superior red wines

Ferrari-Carano, located in Sonoma County's Dry Creek Valley, raised the quality bar for white wines when it debuted the 1985 vintage. Red wines were nice, but not among the top varieties.

Today that's changed. Winemaker George Bursick traced the road to excellence for Ferrari-Carano's reds. Vineyard location took top billing among five major viticultural parameters contributing to superior red wines. Added to it are vine age, clonal selections, introduction of new rootstocks and new vineyard management techniques.

The majority of Ferrari-Carano's first red wines came from vineyards on the Alexander Valley floor.

"Soils there are too fertile and heavy to grow great red grapes," Bursick claimed. "Ferrari-Carano's early red wines showed their origin with some valley floor herbalness."

In 1988, Ferrari-Carano was among the first in California to use rotary fermentation tanks. Bursick attempted to make the best red wines using them.

"Rotas" extracted as much flavor as possible from valley floor fruit and made a big improvement in the red wines.

However, owner Don Carano and Bursick admitted that even with this advance, they were not close to where they wanted to be. They also realized they were beating a dead horse growing mediocre red grapes on potentially great chardonnay soil.

Head to the hills

Ferrari-Carano abandoned Alexander Valley floor soils for red wines and headed to the mountains with a purchase in 1988 of a 1,200-acre former cattle ranch between 700 and 1,200 feet in elevation. About 450 acres of the parcel was cleared of some 5,000 cords of wood to create the vineyard. Another 600-acre Alexander

Please see WINE, D2

Wine Picks

■ **Pick of the pack:** 1998 Byron Chardonnay, \$22. This beauty from California's Santa Maria Valley has class and breeding. It boasts chards we've tasted at more than twice the price. Old vines zinfandel is the pride of California and these are among the best: 1997 Dry Creek Vineyard, \$18, and 1997 Montevina Terra d'Oro, Deaver Vineyard, \$22.

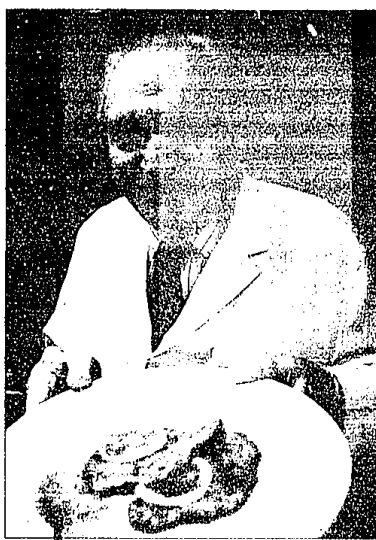
■ **Value reds under \$20:** 1998 Owen's Estate Shiraz (Australia), \$15; 1997 Foppiano Petite Siraz, \$17; 1997 Gwang Shiraz (Goonawarra, Australia), \$14; and 1997 Hogue Borel Select Merlot (Washington state). We keep tasting wines under \$12 to recommend to you. They strike out often, but we hit pay dirt on the following.

■ **Chardonnay:** 1998 Owens Estate (Australia), \$12; 1999 Vina Terapaca (Chile), \$7; 1999 Lindemann Bin 65, \$8

■ **Other whites:** 1998 Deinhard Dry Riesling, \$7; 1998 Deinhard Pinot Gris, \$8, and 1999 Terapaca Sauvignon Blanc, \$7.

COOKING IN THE ITALIAN TRADITION

STORY BY
NICOLE STAFFORD
STAFF PHOTOS BY
JOHN STORMZAND



Chef Aldo Ottaviani

Training: Self-taught; worked in family's restaurant in northern Italy (Umbria region) from the age of 9.

Mentor: Mother

Cooking philosophy:

"The food should be as simple as possible to be good - with fresh ingredients."

Cooking tips:

■ Don't add olive oil to water when you're cooking dry pasta, but do so when the pasta is fresh.

■ Always wash mushrooms despite what recipes say

■ Parboil ingredients before adding to pasta dishes

■ Assemble in a sauté pan

■ Cook with love

Cooking for guests:

A beautiful anti-pasti (appetizer), some good soup, some pasta, a vegetable that is fresh at the market and veal or fish. But,

"it depends on what kind of friend you're having."

Join Chef Aldo:

6:30 p.m. Monday, Feb. 28 at Andiamo Osteria in Rochester to learn more about Contemporary Italian dishes.

The cost is \$39.95 and includes dinner and glass of wine. Call (248) 601-9300.

Chilled

Watching Chef Aldo Ottaviani work - cradling a small bowl of chopped pancetta, tending a pan of sizzling olive oil, talking in his native accent about Italian bacon's saltiness - I couldn't help but imagine I was Italian and sitting in my grandfather's kitchen soaking up our family's treasured culinary secrets.

In reality, a handful of other food lovers - mostly couples in mid-life - and I were sitting in the back of the Andiamo Osteria restaurant in downtown Rochester trying to absorb as many of Ottaviani's masterful ways as possible.

Behind us, a singer crooned "Amore" to the delight of the restaurant's regular dinner guests.

Otherwise known as Chef Aldo or Mr. Aldo, he is the Andiamo restaurant chain's master chef and has long been a part of the metropolitan Detroit food scene. After emigrating from Italy in 1948, Aldo ran two Italian restaurants here, including Aldo's Restaurant for more than 40 years in Warren.

And, while Aldo is simply playing tutor - he holds demonstrations once a month at the restaurant - his food-loving audience cannot help but bring a host of emotions to the table.

That's food for you. And, it's a personal thing.

For some, watching Chef Aldo cook amounts to being in the presence of a food icon.

"An icon up there making something for us," says Ron Waxelle, a Rochester Hills resident attending the class.

"He's the master, the originator of the kind of food they put together here (at Andiamo)," says Lisa Anne Mithen. "It's the professor speaking. And, I like that he broke the barrier that we set."

The barrier is one of respect and awe, just another example of the intense emotions in the room.

However, Chef Aldo will have none of it.

"Leeks," the master calls out, ingredients plain and simple, as if they're numbers.

A pot of chicken broth bubbles before him.

"Chopped," he says of the leeks, then pauses. His dark, heavy eyes slowly pan the room.

"If you don't see it, you come closer," he commands.

Permission granted, the wide-eyed students jump to their feet and head to the demonstration table to eye a



Master at work: Chef Aldo Ottaviani (top photo) demonstrates his techniques in the kitchen at Andiamo Osteria restaurant in downtown Rochester. Chef Aldo's creation of veal piccata (above) is simple, but fresh and delicious.

bowl of chopped leeks.

"Can we ask questions?" one student inquires.

Again, permission is granted.

"The leeks," asks another student.

"Is it just the white? Can you use the green?"

No, the green is just for garnish, we are told.

"Mushrooms," says Chef Aldo, moving on. "Not raw," he says.

"They must be parboiled. Then they are much cleaner. Some books say you don't wash mushrooms, but you gotta wash 'em."

"Oh ... ah," the responses bounce off an exposed brick wall, but Aldo's students continue to scribble down notes on menus and bits of paper, whatever they can find.

Though Chef Aldo has put his students at ease, the note-taking in the room is avid, the anticipation - what will he do next? - is palpable.

The soup's primary ingredients already simmering, we move on to seasoning.

"Thyme," says Chef Aldo.

"In the Italian language, we say 'teem.' It's a beautiful herb," he says, throwing some into the pot like a shaman whose magic broth will save the town from disease.

Dressed in a red turtleneck, Mithen, who is also from Rochester Hills, stands inches from Chef Aldo's demonstration table, writing on a legal pad.

"I wanted to emulate exactly what he was doing, not just his recipe, but his technique," she explains later.

Mithen says she did the same thing as a child, standing beside her Italian mother during dinner preparation.

"When I was up at the table with Aldo," Mithen says, "the musicians sang his Italian songs."

Teary-eyed, she continues: "They were singing 'Mama,' and it was like, ah, like a moment up there. I can't explain."

"It's tradition. Think of your family traditions. Is there one that food isn't a part of? ... Food evokes emotion."

ZUPPA DI CIPOLLA CON PATATA CON CRESCIONE (ONION SOUP WITH POTATO)

- 6 cups chicken broth
- 2 1/2 bunches of watercress
- 2 large onions, julienned
- 2 potatoes, diced
- 1/4 pound butter
- 2 tablespoons flour
- Salt and pepper to taste
- Parmesan cheese and crostons for garnish

In a small soup pot, sauté onions in butter to caramelize to a light brown. Sprinkle onions with flour, add chicken broth and bring to a boil. Then add potatoes and cook until they are tender. Season with salt and pepper and add watercress. Garnish with crostons and Parmesan cheese, then serve.

Our readers share yummy dessert recipes

BY KEN ABRAMCZYK
STAFF WRITER
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Getting back to basic ingredients sometimes makes a dessert that reminds us of life's simple pleasures.

Camilla Watroba of Canton loves preparing poppy seed cake, especially for family members, so she decided to share her recipe with readers.

The recipe is more than 40 years old and one she received from her mother-in-law. It is a simple mix of a standard cake recipe with flour, eggs and sugar, highlighted with, of course, the poppy seeds.

"It's a delicious cake," Watroba said. "It's not real sweet. My sons have loved it since they were little."

Another reader put a new spin on oatmeal cookies, replacing the traditional raisins with Craisins (dried cranberries) and adding cranberry applesauce.

Julie Misaros of Farmington responded with a recipe that her family and friends "really love." She wrote: "I used a regular oatmeal cookie recipe and began modifying it a few years ago and this is the result. I hope you like it."

POPPY SEED CAKE

- 4 eggs
- 2 cups sugar
- 1 cup vegetable or corn oil
- 1 can (8 ounces) evaporated milk
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 3 cups flour
- 4 teaspoon baking powder
- 1/2 cup poppy seeds

Blend the first five ingredients. Add and blend flour, baking powder and poppy seeds.

Bake in a tube pan at 350° F for 1 hour. After it cools, sift powdered sugar on top.

FAT-FREE OATMEAL COOKIES

- 1 1/4 cups brown sugar
- 1/2 cup sugar
- 3/4 cup egg substitute
- 1/4 cup corn syrup
- 1/2 packet (4 teaspoons) butter buds
- 1/2 cup cranberry apple sauce
- 1 1/2 teaspoons vanilla
- 2 1/4 cups flour
- 1 1/2 teaspoons baking soda
- 1 1/2 teaspoons cinnamon
- 3/4 teaspoon salt
- 4 1/2 cups oatmeal
- 1 cup Craisins (dried cranberries)
- 1 cup chopped walnuts

Cream together brown sugar, sugar, egg substitute, corn syrup and butter buds. Add and blend cranberry applesauce and vanilla. In a separate bowl, combine flour, baking soda, cinnamon and salt, then add to prepared mix and beat well. Stir dried cranberries into oatmeal then add to dough. Add walnuts and stir well.

Bake at 350° F on a greased cookie sheet for about 17 minutes until lightly browned. Cool 1 minute before removing to wire rack. Store loosely covered.

Send us your RECIPES

Everyone knows the best recipes are the ones you share. Send us your favorite original recipe, and it's chosen to be featured in the Recipe to Share on the third Sunday of the month in Taste. We'll send you a cookbook.

■ Send recipes for consideration in Recipe to Share to:

Ken Abramczyk
Observer & Eccentric Newspapers
36215 Schoolcraft
Livonia, MI 48150

■ Or fax them to:
(734) 583-7279

■ Or e-mail them to:
kabrancyk@ee.home.com.net

Please include a daytime phone number and the best time to call, so we can contact you about your recipe. Try to be as specific with recipe details such as can and package sizes.

Great tastes: Ferrari-Carano winery in California's Sonoma County is as strikingly beautiful as its wines.

LOOKING AHEAD

What to watch for in Taste next week:

- Winter Grilling
- All About Packer