

A new face in Falls Church's food scene

By Alexandra Greeley
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When you drive down the tree-shaded Falls Church street leading to the well-hidden and well-manicured property of 2941 Restaurant, you may find yourself wondering what you'll find. Not too far along Route 50 in either direction, in fact, are dozens of ethnic eateries of every stripe. But that's not what you'll discover as you wind up the drive to the restaurant's entrance.

Spacious, elegant and overlooking a tranquil lake — how can this be just inside the Beltway? 2941 is a monument to gracious dining, a destination restaurant not only for celebratory meals but also for those everyday to-die-for food experiences ... and the setting demands a chef with comparable skills and creativity. Well, management picked the right man for the job: Bertrand Chemel, new executive chef, has an imagination fired by his years of cooking experiences packed into this young man's curriculum vitae.

A native of the Auvergne region of France, Chemel feels right at home in the rustic setting, pooh-poohing oth-



A native of the Auvergne region of France, Bertrand Chemel says he feels right at home in the Virginia countryside. "I grew up in a small town, and I have much opportunity here. I can easily go into D.C." — Andrew Harnik/Examiner

ers' concerns that he won't enjoy the Virginia countryside. "I grew up in a small town," he says, "and I have much opportunity here. I can easily go into D.C." Besides, as Chemel points out, he's glad for the peaceful setting: He's done his fair share of traveling, working in several kitchens in France — including in the French Alps at Restaurant Michel Gaudin — London and, most recently, New York City, where he worked for Daniel Boulud at Daniel and at Café Boulud and for a fellow Frenchman, Laurent Tourondel (from Chemel's hometown) at Cello. And for all his hard work, Chemel has earned a vaunted three-star review

from The New York Times, pretty good for someone in his early 30s.

It's not surprising to find out that young Chemel started out early with his culinary training: His grandmother lived next door to a bakery, and at the age of 14, Chemel spent his summer break helping the baker. "That was great for me, and I enjoyed it," he says. "I came back the next summer and started baking bread. It was hard work, but I loved being in the kitchen."

He loved the kitchen so much that after he graduated from high school, Chemel went to work in a small restaurant in the countryside, getting pa-

GOAT CHEESE RISOTTO WITH CHERRY TOMATO SALAD

If you cannot find Acquerello Carnaroli, use regular Arborio rice instead. The chef calls for a French goat cheese called Pouligny-Saint-Pierre, made from Alpine goat's milk and shaped into a pyramid.

- 1/2 medium-sized onion, finely diced
- 3 tbsp. olive oil
- 12 ounces Acquerello Carnaroli organic rice
- 1/2 cup dry white wine
- 2 quarts vegetable stock or water, simmered
- 5 ounces fresh goat cheese
- 2 1/2 ounces butter
- 24 cherry tomatoes
- 1/2 tsp. crushed black pepper
- Salt to taste
- 2 ounces Pouligny-Saint-Pierre, diced

- 1/2 shallot, thinly sliced
- 1 bunch arugula
- 2 tbsp. olive oil

Goat Cheese Risotto

Heat 1 tablespoon oil in a large saucepan, and cook the onion until tender, about five minutes. Add the rice, gently toast for about two minutes, deglaze the pan with the white wine, and cook until almost dry. Gradually add the simmering stock; when the rice is tender, stir in the butter and goat cheese until fully incorporated.

Cherry Tomato Salad

Wash and cut cherry tomatoes in half, and season with the black pepper, sea salt and the diced Pouligny-Saint-Pierre. Gently toss with the shallot, arugula and olive oil. To serve, place the risotto in a bowl topped with the tomato salad.

Serves six

rental support for what appeared to be his burgeoning career. In his next move, Chemel enrolled in a culinary school that required students to attend classes for three weeks, taking one week off each month to work in a restaurant kitchen.

After that, he got plenty of breaks, from cooking for a general during his army stint to getting hired by Restaurant Michel Gaudin, a French restaurant in the Alps. "I answered an ad in a trade newspaper," he says, "and the chef told me to come right away. I packed my bags and left the same afternoon. The chef, Chef Michel Gaudin, put me in the kitchen right away." He admits now that he was a little apprehensive about stepping into a restaurant that had earned Michelin stars.

After four intensive and grueling years there, his boss the chef — who was also his mentor — sent him to a two-star restaurant in the south of France. But Chemel credits his four-year stint as having opened all the subsequent doors in his life. "I learned so much," he says. "He made me read cookbooks. ... We did the washing, the pastry, we did it all."

Looking back over his experience-packed career, Chemel says that he really has had two mentors, Daniel Boulud and Michel Gaudin in France.

"They really guided my career," he says. "The kids today come with a three-page resume, but they have to stay a long time in a kitchen to really learn. It takes time and dedication. You have to love it. ... You have to work hard."