

Food and Wine: California cabernet goes well with Piemontese pasta dish

by Ron James

THE CHEF

For young Swedish apprentice chef Staffan Terje, the decision was a no-brainer. During a cold, dark, Stockholm winter, his boss asked Terje if he wanted to help open a restaurant in Florida. Terje quickly bid his friends and family farewell, saying he would return in a year or two.

That was nearly 20 years ago, and Terje has yet to return. After extensive work at some of America's finest restaurants including Scala's Bistro in San Francisco and Piatti in the Napa Valley, the chef opened Perbacco, his first fine dining restaurant, in San Francisco in October 2006. But this Swedish chef's cuisine is not smorgasbord - it's Italian.

AGNOLOTTI DAL PLIN - Agnolotti dal Plin is a very traditional Italian dish, says chef Staffan Terje. It consists of cabbage, parmesan cheese and bits of meat wrapped up in a pasta dough. CNS Photo.

STAFFAN TERJE - Staffan Terje's passion for fine Italian food led him to open Perbacco, his first fine dining restaurant, in San Francisco in October.

"I love Northern Italian food," Terje laughed. "Italian food is the food that talks to me. You don't choose what you fall in love with. It just happens."

Terje's passion developed at Piatti. "We were doing some of the most authentic Italian food in the area," he said. "Being in Napa brought back memories of my childhood on the farm. The first Meyer lemons I ever used came from a neighbor's tree!"

On Saturday mornings you can find Terje at San Francisco Ferry Plaza's famed farmer's market, just two blocks from the restaurant. "Our dishes will highlight the seasonal produce available from the farmers' market, supporting the local growers," he said. "On any given Saturday I run into 10 or so chefs doing the same thing."

THE DISH

Agnolotti dal Plin is a traditional Italian Piemontese dish, Terje said. "It is basically cabbage, parmesan cheese and bits of meat wrapped up in a pasta dough."

Perbacco's savory Agnolotti dal Plin was picked by the San Francisco Chronicle's Michael Bauer for his

"Personal Pasta Hall of Fame."

This dish has ancient roots, suggests Terje. "There's a story that there was a fierce ancient battle in Northern Italy. And after the battle all the food the army cook, whose name was Agnolotti, could find to eat was a cabbage and a bit of meat. It proved to be a hit with the troops and became a regional classic."

Terje says you can make the pasta dough using a food processor or a mixer with kneading attachment.

THE WINE

Perbacco's Sommelier Mauro Cirilli suggests an affordable and easy-to-find Peter Paul 2002 Cabernet Sauvignon (\$35). "This wine is of medium weight and very well-balanced," explains Cirilli, "And it really allows the flavors of the Agnolotti to shine, without overpowering its rich flavors."

Peter Paul Winery was established as the Grove Street Winery in Healdsburg in Sonoma Valley. Peter T. Paul purchased the winery in 1999. He changed the name and made it a mission to produce great wines at affordable prices. The cabernet is well balanced and has a host of complex flavors and aromas including bright berries, cherries, cloves and a bit of honey vanilla.

AGNOLOTTI DAL PLIN

Pasta dough:

3 cups Italian "00" flour or all-purpose flour

5 large eggs, plus 5 egg yolks

Filling:

2 tablespoons butter

1 garlic clove, thinly sliced

1 sprig fresh rosemary, leaves only

2 pounds roasted veal shoulder or breast, chopped in food processor

2 cups savoy cabbage, cut into 1-inch pieces

1/2 cup reduced veal or beef broth

1 1/2 cups freshly grated Parmigiano-Reggiano

1 pinch freshly grated nutmeg

Salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste

Yields 8 servings.

To prepare pasta dough: Sift together and then mound 3 cups flour in center of large wooden cutting board. Make well in middle of flour and add eggs. Using fork, beat eggs and begin to incorporate flour, starting with inner rim of well.

Push flour up from base of mound to retain well shape. Dough will come together when 1/2 the flour is incorporated.

Knead dough with both hands, using palms, about 15 minutes, adding any remaining flour to create a cohesive mass. Remove dough from board, scrape off and discard leftover bits. Lightly flour board and knead, 6 minutes. Dough should be elastic and a little sticky. Wrap dough in plastic and allow to rest 30 minutes at room temperature.

To prepare filling: In 12-inch saucepan over high heat, add 1 tablespoon of the butter and heat until hot but not smoking. Add garlic and rosemary, cook until garlic is light golden, about 5 minutes. Add veal, cook for about 8 to 10 minutes. Season to taste with salt and pepper. Let meat begin to caramelize.

In suitable pot, melt remaining butter. Add cabbage and 1/4 cup water. Cover and cook until very tender. Chop in food processor until almost smooth.

Let veal cool to room temperature, then place in large mixing bowl. Stir in cheese, cabbage, broth, nutmeg, and salt and pepper, to taste. Use wooden spoon to mix until well combined. Set aside.

Cut dough into 3 equal pieces. Wrap 2 pieces in plastic and set aside. On lightly floured work surface, use floured rolling pin to roll out dough to 1/8-inch (or use pasta machine on thinnest setting).

Lay pasta sheet on lightly floured surface with long edge facing you. Trim edges straight. Using tablespoon, scoop equal spoonfuls of filling and place along bottom 1/2 of pasta, leaving 1 1/2-inch border at bottom and sides; each dollop of filling should be about 1 1/2-inches away from the next. Pull top edge of pasta over filling. Dough should form 1 large pocket over filling. Seal agnolotti by gently molding pasta over filling and pressing lightly with index finger to seal edge of dough. (Don't drag finger along dough to seal, or you risk tearing dough.) When sealed, there should be about 1/2-inch of excess dough visible along bottom of filling mounds. Be certain to seal tightly while pressing out any air pockets. Seal left and right ends of dough.

To shape agnolotti: Starting at 1 end of dough, place thumb and forefinger of each hand together as if to pinch something and, leaving about 1-inch of space between hands and holding fingers vertically, pinch filling in 1-inch increments, making about 3/4-inch of "pinched" area between each pocket of filling. It is important to leave this much "pinched" area between the agnolotti, or when the agnolotti are separated, they can come unsealed.

Run sharp knife or crimped pastry wheel along bottom edge of dough, separating strip of filled pockets from remainder of pasta sheet. Don't cut too close to the filling, or you risk breaking seal.

Separate individual agnolotti by cutting center of each pinched area, rolling pastry wheel away from you. Working quickly, place agnolotti on baking sheet dusted with thin layer of cornmeal to help prevent sticking. Don't let agnolotti touch each other. Repeat with 2 remaining dough balls until entire bowl of filling has been used. Let shaped agnolotti rest for 24 minutes.

Bring 6 quarts water to a rolling boil and add 2 tablespoons salt.

Place agnolotti into water and cook until tender, about 4 minutes total. Drain well and toss with sauce or ragu of your choice, or a combination of beef broth and butter. Sprinkle with Parmigiano-Reggiano and serve.

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