

by Ron_James

THE CHEF

When dining at The Lodge at Sonoma's Carneros Bistro & Wine Bar, it's not surprising to see executive chef Janine Falvo harvesting part of your meal from the 480-square-foot kitchen garden.

JANINE FALVO - In 2005, Janine Falvo took over Carneros Bistro & Wine Bar in Sonoma, Calif., and was named a 'Rising Star Chef' by Restaurant Hospitality Magazine. CNS Photo. **BERKSHIRE PORK CHOPS AND APPLE FRITTERS** - Janine Falvo's Pork Chop with Caraway Spaetzle, Cabbage and Apple Fritters uses a Berkshire cut of meat. Berkshire is a breed of hog developed over four centuries and valued for superior flavor and tenderness. CNS Photo. Tables with a view of the garden give a glimpse of its seasonal bounty: Meyer lemons, sweet and juicy heirloom tomatoes, fava beans, assorted herbs. Falvo is a fanatic for fresh.

She wasn't always that way. Although the Pittsburgh chef was from a food-focused Italian family who made their own prosciutto and cheeses, year-round fresh produce was not even a dream. In fact, being a professional chef wasn't a dream for Falvo, who majored in architecture in college and worked for her father's constructions company.

While in college, Falvo did catering for showers and weddings. When she decided she liked cooking better than construction, she enrolled and graduated from Pennsylvania Culinary School. The talented young chef was recruited by Bart Hosmer to open Molive restaurant in Chicago's Whitehall Hotel, and when Hosmer joined star-chef Bradley Ogden in opening Parcel 104 in Santa Clara, Calif., he again tapped Falvo to be sous-chef.

At Parcel 104, Falvo developed her passion for fresh - inspired by Ogden and Hosmer's dedication to using finest products from local farmers and growers.

"Bradley not only was great to work with," explains Falvo. "He showed me that you can't compromise on any products in the kitchen. I want to stay on the cutting edge, looking for new flavors, seeking new artisans and small farmers raising their food with the same passion and growing with them."

In 2005, Falvo took over the Carneros Bistro & Wine Bar and was named a 2007 "Rising Star Chef" by Restaurant Hospitality Magazine. Her culinary skills and passion for fresh position her well with her wine country contemporaries such as Hiro Sone, Cindy Pawlson and Douglas Keane. She dreams that one day she'll be in the same league with two of her heroes, Thomas Keller and Julia Child, both of whom she had the honor of cooking for at charity events.

THE DISH

"Don't overcook the pork chop!" exclaimed Falvo when asked about her recipe for Berkshire Pork Chop with Caraway Spaetzle, Cabbage and Apple Fritters.

Berkshire is a breed of hog developed over four centuries. Dubbed the little black pig, it is valued for superior flavor and tenderness.

One proven way to prepare the chops is to heat a bit of vegetable oil in a skillet over medium-high heat. Add the chops and sear for about two minutes per side until golden brown. Then reduce the heat to low for about 10 minutes, turning them frequently. Be sure to place the finished chops on a warm plate to serve.

THE WINE

"I absolutely love to pair wines," say Falvo. "With this dish I would suggest a Robert Sinskey Vineyards 2002 Merlot (\$23). The complex blackberry and cherry flavors and balanced acidity and tannins work very well with this semi-complex dish of flavors and textures."

Dr. Robert Sinskey founded the vineyard and winery in 1982 when he planned to retire and grow grapes on 15 acres in California's Napa-Sonoma wine country. His retirement soon became an obsession, which evolved into a major respected winery with more than 200 prime vineyards in Carneros and the Stag Leap District of Napa Valley. His son Robert now runs the winery.

BERKSHIRE PORK CHOP WITH CARAWAY SPAETZLE, CABBAGE AND APPLE FRITTERS

4 (3/4 inch) Berkshire bone-in pork chops

1 head red cabbage, thinly sliced

1/2 stick unsalted butter

Salt and fresh cracked pepper, to taste

Yields 4 servings.

Sear pork chop on hot grill or cast-iron skillet. In separate hot pan, melt butter and add thinly sliced cabbage. Saute until cabbage is cooked and soft. Add spaetzle (recipe follows). Season to taste with salt and pepper. Garnish with Apple Fritters (recipe follows).

CARAWAY SPAETZLE

1 cup all-purpose flour

1/2 teaspoon salt

1/4 teaspoon ground pepper

1 1/2 teaspoon caraway seeds, lightly toasted

1 egg, beaten

1/4 to 1/2 cup milk

Yields 4 servings.

In mixing bowl, combine flour, salt, pepper, caraway seeds and egg. Add enough milk to make stiff batter. Cover dough, refrigerate and let rest for 1 to 2 hours.

To cook, drop 1/2 teaspoon of batter from a spoon or pastry bag into simmering, lightly salted water, or put batter through colander or special spaetzle maker. Cook for about 1 minute or until spaetzle floats.

APPLE FRITTERS

1 egg, beaten

1/2 cup rice flour

1/2 cup all purpose flour

Pinch of ground cinnamon

Ginger ale (add until the batter thins)

Oil, for frying

2 Green apples cut in small wedges

Yields 4 servings.

In mixing bowl, combine egg, flours and cinnamon. Add ginger ale until thin batter forms. Refrigerate batter until it is ready to be used.

In Dutch oven heat oil to 375 F. Dip apples in batter and place in hot oil until batter is crispy.

Ron James welcomes comments and suggestions. E-mail him at ronjames@perfectpairings.us. Listen to his "Gourmet Club" radio show and see archives of previous columns at www.perfectpairings.us.

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