

Food and Wine: Steak, scallops and sparkling wine make eclectic mix

by Ron James

THE CHEF

With broiled salted fish, Japanese pickles and rice for dinner one night, and homemade ravioli and monicotti the next, Jeffrey Stout learned the meaning of eclectic cuisine at the family table.

He has his Asian-born mother to thank.

"I didn't really realize that I wasn't eating differently than anyone else until high school," the San Francisco Bay area-raised chef said with a laugh. "My mother wanted to be as American as possible. She would hold elaborate dinner parties using recipes from Betty Crocker and Julia Child. But the day after the party, it was rice and fish again."

This exposure to East and West would eventually shape Stout's culinary career. But like many great chefs, Stout didn't know what he wanted to be when he grew up.

JEFFREY STOUT - Jeffrey Stout, along with colleague J.C. Chen, operates Alexander's in Cupertino, Calif., a grand steakhouse with an Asian twist was an immediate hit with both the critics and the public. CNS Photo.

"I was sort of a computer hacker so I took computer science in college," he explained. "While I was going to school, I worked at a local restaurant. I ended up liking the cooking better than the coding."

Stout graduated with honors from California Culinary Academy in 1988 and went on to work with French-trained chef Matsumoto Yoshida and Philippe Jeanty at Domaine Chandon. As executive chef at California Cafe in Palo Alto, Calif., he moved up the corporate ladder to manage 10 restaurants and train more than 50 chefs, many of whom have also gone on to great success.

But Stout yearned for a restaurant of his own that would reflect his training and multicultural style. In 2005, he and former California Cafe colleague J.C. Chen opened Alexander's in Cupertino, near the heart of the Silicon Valley. The steakhouse with an Asian twist was an immediate hit with critics and the public. It received three stars from The San Francisco Chronicle.

THE DISH

Seared Hokkaido Scallops With English Peas and Smoked Beef is a perfect example of Stout's eclectic fusion style. It's a special occasion dish - pretty, tasty and a bit on the expensive side. If you don't have a wok-type smoker for the beef you can get the desired effect using the backyard grill with alder chips in a metal plate or smoker-dish. If your wallet isn't fat enough for Kobe beef, get the best cut you can afford. You need only 6 ounces - and the flavor and tenderness will be well worth the expense.

While you have your wallet out, make sure to splurge for real Hokkaido scallops. They are the prized sea scallops from the deep waters of Japan. You can get them from fishmongers or order them online from several vendors, including www.great-alaska-seafood.com.

The recipe calls for tobiko or masago, which are fish eggs. Tobiko is the small red flying fish caviar you might find on a California roll. Masago is Icelandic smelt roe very popular in Japan because of its mild flavor and bright orange-red color. You can also find these products online.

THE WINE

A sauvignon blanc or viognier might go very well with this dish, but let's celebrate and pick a California bubbly as the perfect match. Schramsberg's 2003 Blanc de Blancs (\$25) is a highly-rated sparkler scored consistently in the 90s by wine critics and media. It is dry and crisp with bright fruit forward peach and apple flavors that will enhance the many delicate flavors of this complex dish.

Blanc de blancs simply means a white wine made from a white grape. Schramsberg began producing the sparkling wine in 1965. It was America's first commercially produced sparkling wine made from chardonnay grapes.

SEARED HOKKAIDO SCALLOPS WITH ENGLISH PEAS AND SMOKED BEEF

Scallops:

6 Hokkaido scallops

Sea salt, to taste

2 tablespoons olive oil

1 teaspoon butter

Smoked beef:

6 ounces boneless New York Strip certified Angus, or better

Kosher salt and black pepper, to taste

1 tablespoon ground porcini powder (available at specialty-food markets or online)

Alder chips (other wood can be substituted)

Snap pea coulis:

1 pound snap peas

Kosher salt

4 standard ice cubes

2 tablespoons butter

Beurre blanc:

4 shallots, minced

1/4 cup dry white wine

1/4 cup white wine vinegar

2 tablespoons heavy cream

2 sticks unsalted butter, each cut into 4 pieces

Kosher salt and freshly ground white pepper, to taste

For Garnish

English peas shelled

Snap pea halves

1 teaspoon extra-virgin olive oil

Salt, to taste

1 teaspoon masago or tobiko

1 ounce beurre blanc

Dill sprigs

1 tablespoon basil oil

Yields 2 to 3 main-dish servings, or 6 appetizer servings.

For scallops: Season each scallop with a bit of sea salt, 1 side only. Smoke oil in hot nonstick pan and place scallops non-salted side down. Cook for 20 seconds and turn over. Allow pan to come back to full smoke and reduce heat to medium. Add butter and set aside. One side should be brown and the other simply seared. Allow to rest off heat before serving.

For smoked beef: Cut New York strip steak into 3x1x1-inch strips. Rub with a generous amount of salt, black pepper and porcini powder. Sear beef on each side in smoking-hot oil for 30 seconds per side. Set aside and allow to cool.

In tabletop smoker or wok-type smoker, place alder chips and allow to smoke. Place beef on rack and smoke for no longer than 5 minutes, taking great care that the smoker does not continue to cook beef. Steak should be rare in center - not raw, but rare.

For snap pea coulis: Bring pot of water to a boil and add a good amount of salt. Place peas in pot and simmer for 1 minute. Remove from heat and drain. Place in blender along with ice cubes and cold butter. Blend until smooth. Pass through chinois strainer.

For beurre blanc: Combine shallots, wine and vinegar in saucepan and reduce over medium heat until 1 to 2 tablespoons of liquid is left. Add cream and bring to a simmer over medium heat. Increase heat to high and add butter, whisking until butter has melted. Season to taste with salt and pepper.

For garnish: Heat English and snap peas simply by placing in and out of a hot water bath. Toss with olive oil and salt.

To serve: Slice room temperature beef into 3 thin slices and overlap on plate. Place 2 scallops offset on beef and on opposite end of plate, another scallop. Warm snap pea coulis. Spoon a bit in front of scallops.

In small bowl, mix masago with beurre blanc. Spoon into snap pea coulis. Place small amount of masago on top of far scallop. Garnish with peas and dill sprigs. Drizzle plate with a bit of basil oil.

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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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