

SPRING 2007

AN ICON SPEAKS

AN EPICUREAN INNOVATOR DISHES ON ALL THINGS CULINARY

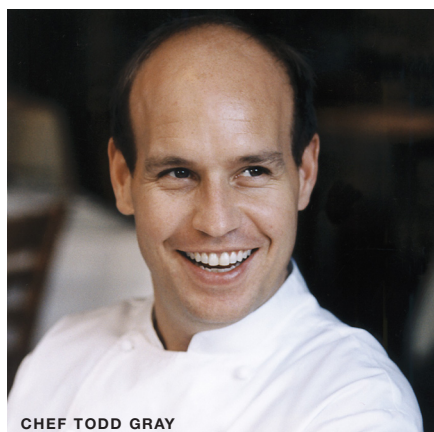
There's more than one way to achieve iconic status, but one thing most icons share is a distinct sense of individuality—and a style that is uniquely their own. That's certainly the case with Todd Gray, executive chef of Washington D.C.'s Equinox restaurant. By adhering closely to his singular vision for great food, Gray struck gold with Equinox—his first restaurant—and has never looked back. Here, he shares insight into what excites him in the kitchen, the sources of his inspiration, and memorable moments from an exceptional culinary career. Read on to get insight the mind of a culinary icon.

How would you characterize the food and experience at Equinox?

Equinox's hallmark is regional and seasonal cuisine with an emphasis on Mid-Atlantic products. The restaurant takes an intellectual approach to food—which is to say the dining room is elegant and straightforward with an intense focus on the food and the wine. We pride ourselves on showcasing small farms and local food artisans, as well as serving certified humane meats, sustainably fished seafood, and locally sourced, organic produce. Fresh yet unpretentious food is Equinox's signature style.

What was a shining moment in your career?

Opening Equinox eight years ago with my wife and business partner, Ellen, was truly the realization of a dream. And, of course, as first-time restaurateurs, we were honored and thrilled by the recognition we received from *The Washington Post* and the *Washingtonian*, as well as multiple James Beard Foundation



CHEF TODD GRAY



EQUINOX

nominations for "Best Chef: Mid-Atlantic."

The success of the restaurant has allowed us to become deeply involved with important charity events, including Share Our Strength's "Taste of the Nation" fundraiser to fight hunger.

Who is your culinary hero and why? How have they influenced your cuisine?

Without a doubt, the seven years I spent working with chef Roberto Donna at Washington, D.C.'s premier restaurant Galileo, influenced my culinary style. Chef Donna imparted in me a deep appreciation for applying a rural approach to cooking. From him I learned to draw recipes from true regional cuisine whether from his native Piedmont, Italy, or my native Virginia. Today, this culinary philosophy not only influences the food I create at Equinox, it also informs my culinary consulting for restaurants and organizations ranging from the Salamander Inn & Spa in Middleburg to the United States Supreme Court and the International Trade Center.

What was your worst kitchen disaster?

Hands down the worst kitchen disaster occurred in September 2006, when a heat sensor went awry on a Saturday night at 5:30 p.m. We had 120 reservations on the books and no heat, no hood, and no cooking was possible!

If you had to make one meal to get into heaven, what would it be?

I would make sautéed soft shell crabs with sweet local corn. It's a meal fit for the gods.

If you were stranded on a desert island, what three culinary items would you want with you?

I would absolutely want a knife, olive oil and a cast-iron skillet. With these tools, desert-island cooking and living could be divine.

What do you absolutely refuse to eat?

I won't touch fast food from large chains. This kind of food is not only nutritionally empty, it goes against everything I believe about building a menu from fresh, local ingredients.

If you could fly anywhere in the world for a meal, where would you go and why?

I would fly to Piedmont, Italy, for the Barolo wine and the white truffles—not to mention the mountains. There is nothing better.

Do you have any advice for up-and-coming chefs?

Many young chefs hop around from kitchen to kitchen, rather than focusing on training with one great chef. I recommend that up-and-coming chefs choose a kitchen they are passionate about—and stick with it to truly learn and become immersed in the experience.

BACON-WRAPPED CERVENA VENISON MEDALLIONS

PEAR ALUMETTE, TRUFFLE JUS AND FOREST MUSHROOMS

Todd Gray shares one of his favorite venison preparations from Equinox.

Serves 6

For the Venison:

2 lb Cervena venison, loin or
Denver leg cut
24 slices applewood bacon,
½ inch thick
2 tablespoons olive oil
Salt and pepper to taste

For the Garnish:

2 pears, cut into allumette shapes
1 cup frisée lettuce
¼ cup lemon dressing
(equal parts lemon juice & olive oil)
12 chervil sprigs
12 oz truffle jus

For the Mushrooms:

1½ cups shiitake mushrooms
1½ cups oyster mushrooms
1½ cups morel mushrooms
1 cup shallots, sliced
3 garlic cloves, sliced
3 oz olive oil

For the Venison | Preheat oven to 350°F. Cut the venison into rectangular log shapes, about 6" x 2". On a flat surface, lay down clear wrap film in a 12" x 12" shape. Lay bacon slices onto film, season venison and lay onto bacon strips. Pull film up to assist in the roll-up process

For the Mushrooms | Heat a large sauté pan to medium-high temperature. Add oil and mushrooms; sweat mushrooms for 3 minutes. Add garlic, shallots and seasoning, and cook an additional 5 minutes until mushrooms are well cooked. (Be careful to not burn the garlic!)



To Assemble | Sauté bacon-wrapped venison in olive oil to render bacon. Place venison in the oven and roast to medium rare, about 12-15 minutes. Remove from oven and allow venison to rest. In a small sauce pot, heat truffle jus over medium heat. In a small bowl, toss together pear allumettes, frisée lettuce, lemon dressing, chervil and salt and pepper; mix well to combine. Heat six large plates, and mound mushrooms in the center of the plate. Slice venison into ½-inch medallions and place onto mushrooms. Top with salad and drizzle truffle jus around. Serve immediately.

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