

# A Subtle, Sweet Balance

Lamb, risotto and Greek wine are full of flavor, but not too full **By Pam George**



Chef Thomas McMullen  
of Longwood Gardens'  
1906 Restaurant.

**C**hef Thomas McMullen didn't think long about what to serve with a Greek red wine. From kebabs to gyros to moussaka, lamb is an integral part of Greek cuisine. McMullen, however, opted not to prepare a traditional Greek dish to match a Gerovassiliou 2007 Avaton. His pairing is a little French, a little Italian and a little Chester County.

McMullen is the executive chef of 1906 Restaurant, located in the Terrace Restaurant complex at Longwood Gardens. The refined restaurant underwent a redo in 2009, at which point it received its own name. (Pierre du Pont purchased the property in 1906.)

The 78-seat dining room, which opens to a 50-seat patio with a woodland view, is outfitted with white linen and sparkling chandeliers. The change has been happily received. "Overwhelmingly, our Open Table comments are consistently great," says Tijs Wolters, general manager of Restaurant Associates, which manages the food service.

The menu still includes Longwood's famous mushroom soup – the No. 1 seller – and crab cakes, but it also pays homage to seasonal, local ingredients. Take, for instance, the Chester County golden beets that McMullen tossed into the risotto that accompanies the lamb. The beets' subtle texture and earthiness make the creamy, toothsome rice dish all that more comforting.

When placed on the risotto, the lamb becomes an elegant dinner party dish. You can do the risotto in advance. "Undercook it and add broth when you heat it up," McMullen suggests. Both pair well with the wine's very berry flavors. But it is the cherry jus that really makes the marriage work.

McMullen uses Amarena cherries, small, slightly sour cherries grown mostly in Bologna and Modena and packed in syrup. "They're really vibrant, with a nice flavor to them," he says. "They're subtle, sweet."

Not too sweet, however. As with the wine, this is a dish that packs a flavor punch, yet boasts a perfect balance.

PHOTOGRAPH BY JENNIFER CORBETT

Chef Thomas McMullen's

## Grilled Colorado Lamb Rack with Golden Beet Risotto and Amarena Cherry-and-Minted Lamb Jus

Serves 4

### GOLDEN BEET RISOTTO

2 large yellow beets

Olive oil

Salt and pepper

1 cup of water

1/2 stick of unsalted butter

1 large onion, small dice

1 1/2 cups Arborio rice

1/2 cup of white wine

5 cups of vegetable broth

1/2 cup grated parmesan cheese

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Wash the beets and place in an ovenproof casserole pan. Toss with olive oil – enough to cover – and salt and pepper. Add enough water to cover the bottom of the pan. Cover with foil and roast for 45 to 55 minutes. Remove from oven and peel while still warm. Cut into medium dice. Set aside.

Melt butter over medium heat. Add diced onions and rice, and lightly toast. Deglaze with white wine and reduce by half. Add vegetable broth one cup at a time until risotto is al dente, stirring frequently. Gently fold in beets and parmesan cheese. Salt and pepper to taste.

### AMARENA CHERRY AND MINTED LAMB JUS

3 tablespoons of unsalted butter

3 tablespoons of flour

1 can lamb or beef broth

1 cup of Amarena cherries (or substitute dried cherries)

1/4 cup of mint cut into long strips (chiffonade)

In a heavy pot, melt butter and add flour while whisking. Reduce heat when mixture thins. Cook until there is a "toasty" aroma. Add broth and cook for 30 minutes. Add cherries and mint, cook for another 15 to 20 minutes

### LAMB RACK

3 racks of "Frenched" Colorado lamb

Olive oil

Salt and pepper

Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Season lamb with salt and pepper and rub with olive oil.

Grill lamb until marks appear on each side. Finish in the oven until lamb reaches the desired temperature, about 25 minutes for medium rare. Let rest for 10 minutes and cut into two-piece sections.

To assemble: Place beet risotto in the plate's center. Put the lamb chops over the risotto. Finish with the jus.



## WINE

# A Toast to Greece's Wine Renaissance

Avaton's blend of indigenous red grapes a perfect match for rich meats

By Roger Morris

Over the past two decades, we have been fortunate to witness the re-emergence of several wine regions of Europe that had either been forgotten or were never well-known, but that are now producing wines that compete with such classics as Bordeaux, Burgundy, Barolo and Rioja.

Many of these regions, located in Spain, Italy, Hungary and Austria, also had indigenous grapes that were also not very well known, such as albarino, kedarka, gruner veltliner and aleatico to name a few.

Now we are witnessing a special viticultural re-emergence with the wines of Greece.

Greece is special because it is arguably the cradle of winemaking in Europe after vines were brought there from Asia Minor.

However, for the past few centuries, little of note has happened in Greece as that Mediterranean nation suffered from its own Dark Ages of winemaking. Those of us who first experienced Greek wines years ago thought little of retsina and the overly sweet, clumsy white wines.

We are still at the forefront of Greece's wine renaissance, because even though there was a flash of interest during the 2004 Olympics in Athens, it is still difficult to find a fine Greek table wine outside of the eastern metropolitan areas.

Now, some importers, such as the Canadian-based Cava Spiliadis, are trying to correct that deficit by searching out top winemakers who understand how to create quality in the vineyards and in the winery and who have a passion for growing both local grapes and for international varieties.

I recently had the opportunity to visit three such producers in Macedonia in northern Greece, where the mountains tumbling out of the Balkans meet the Aegean Sea. One particular vigneron whose wines and

whose story intrigued me is Evangelos Gerovassiliou, who has a winery in his hometown of Epanomi, a delightful seaside village less than 30 minutes southeast of Macedonia's thriving capital city, Thessaloniki.

Gerovassiliou started as a researcher, and one of his early projects was to take dozens of cuttings from uncultivated vines that grew wild or ornamentally in residential pergolas and decide through plantings and small-batch winemaking which varieties showed the most promise.

Two of those that made the cut are now almost-famous white wine varieties – assyrtico and malagousia – but perhaps even more promising is the work that he has done with indigenous red varieties, which he often uses in native blends or with more familiar vines such as syrah and grenache.

One such blend that is reaching iconic status is the delicious Gerovassiliou "Avaton," which sells for about \$55 and which you may have to special order through your wine retailer.

The 2007 Avaton is a blend of three native Greek grape varieties – 40 percent each of limnio and mavritragano and 20 percent of mavroudi – and, if

you look at the words carefully, are not that difficult to pronounce and remember.

The wine is textured and layered with flavors of tart blackberries, dark cherries and succulent cranberries with a tangy, gamy finish that hints of sour cream. It has moderate tannins that make it pleasant drinking now and good acidity that will allow it to go well with rich, but not heavy, meat dishes such as lamb, steak and pork stews. For vegetarians, eggplant dishes and chunky soups with a dollop of sour cream or crumbled feta cheese also will match perfectly.

