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MARK DUFRENE/STAFF
From left, Pickled Turnips, Bread 'n' Butta pickles and Asian Box Pickled Vegetables.

Power to the pickle

Sparkling preserves dress up menus

By Gina Gotsill
Correspondent

When Grace Nguyen was a kid, her family ate *do chua* with every meal. Mustard greens, cucumbers, carrots, bamboo and eggplant were dropped into her grandmother's big pot, and they emerged as savory, refreshing complements to every dish.

It wasn't until years later that Nguyen connected *do chua*, the Vietnamese word for sour, with its American translation: pickle.

Today, Nguyen, the executive chef at Asian Box in Palo Alto, is among the growing number of Bay Area chefs who use house-made pickles and preserves to brighten their dishes and add texture, flavor contrast and even a touch of nostalgia. And, like generations of cooks before them, they've discovered that once you have pickled vegetables in the walk-in or preserves on the shelf,

QUICK PICKLE TIP

Quick and easy to make, these fresh pickles don't require canning equipment or water processing. That also means that they are not shelf stable. Keep your quick pickles refrigerated in jars or a covered bowl for three to four weeks.

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PLANT CAFE ORGANIC

Dungeness crab cake with an avocado-creme fraiche is one of the America's Cup-inspired dishes at the Plant Cafe Organic.

Seaworthy savories set sail

By Jackie Burrell

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When America's Cup takes to the white-capped waves this summer, the Bay will be aflutter with sails (actually, not "aflutter" so much as "tautly stretched atop a heeling racing machine"). No matter, once the races start July 4, there's little doubt the San Francisco waterfront will be quite the scene.

If you're wondering where to

watch the competition, which runs through Sept. 21, San Francisco's America's Cup Village at the Marina Green and America's Cup Park at Piers 27/29 are the obvious choices.

But if you were hoping to enjoy the action with a cocktail in one hand — and perhaps a lovely nosh in the other — here are a few more possibilities.

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Bubbly match made in heaven



BODKIN WINES

Winemaker Chris Christensen holds a glass of sparkling sauvignon blanc, which was inspired by his travels in New Zealand.

You know when you taste a wine — or anything, for that matter — and it rocks your freaking world? Your palate giggles, your inner tap dancer shimmies, and all is right in the world. That's what happened to Chris Christensen the first time he tried sparkling sauvignon blanc.



JESSICA VADEGARAN
CORKHEADS

It was May 2011 and Christensen, a Stanford grad and former rower had just worked his first harvest in Australia when he packed up his vine clippers and headed for Christchurch, New Zealand, a region known for mouthwatering, frizzante-style sparkling sauvignon blanc. Two sips and his thirst was quenched.

"I don't want to say peanut butter and jelly, but sauvignon blanc and bubbles were made to go together," says Christensen, the 32-year-old owner and

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WINESTOCK SF

Chris Christensen is one of 20 California winemakers pouring small-batch, artisanal wines at Winestock SF, an inaugural consumer tasting and educational wine event on July 20 and 21 in San Francisco. Take a class with Master of Wine Liz Thach, enjoy a three-course lunch and wine pairing, and sample specialty chocolates from local purveyors. Tickets start at \$50. Firehouse 8, 1648 Pacific Ave., San Francisco. <http://winestocksf.com>. Visit Bodkin Wines at www.bodkinwines.com.

ONLINE EXTRA

Sparkling sauvignon blanc not enough? Find five more reasons to attend Winestock SF at www.mercurynews.com/food-wine.

DINING SCENE

Top toque: We finally caught up with Erik Romme, the new executive chef at the **Menlo Grill**, at **Menlo Park's** Stanford Park Hotel. He's Colorado-raised but brings a Peninsula pedigree to the role, with Marche, Madera and Left Bank on his resume. Romme favors seasonal, local produce: arugula salad with peaches and cherries; pan-seared scallops with corn and tomatoes; strawberry-rhubarb cobbler. He dabbles in molecular gastronomy also, with a lemonfish crudo appetizer in which he "spherifies" the Meyer lemon vinaigrette into a capsule that spills over the sashimi-style local halibut. But Romme says there's one thing diners won't let him take off the menu: the house-made guacamole. Details: Open daily for breakfast, lunch/brunch and dinner. 100 El Camino Real, Menlo Park. 650-330-2790; www.menlogrill.com.

Blackbird's menu: As colleague Sal Pizarro reported, the **Blackbird Tavern** aims to succeed at a downtown **San Jose** location where so many others have failed. The opening menu, created by executive chef Curtis Valdez (formerly of Seven restaurant on The Alameda) is an eclectic mix of bistro, diner and gastropub dishes that includes steak frites, shrimp and grits, fried chicken, house-smoked trout and deviled eggs. As fans of Valdez's short ribs at Seven, we're eager to try his riff on puttine: Potato wedges with short ribs braised in a red curry sauce. Open Tuesday-Sunday for dinner. 200 S. First St., San Jose. 408-278-1050; www.theblackbirdtavern.com.

Top chowders: Chef Willi Franz and his **Monterey Marriott** restaurant team won the coveted Best of Show and Best Clam Chowder awards in the Monterey Wine Festival's annual chowder cook-off. Cilantro and a drizzle of Cholula hot sauce gave their chowder a Mexican flair; a fried clam garnish added interest. Other top winners were **Louie Linguini's** on Cannery Row for Best Seafood Chowder, and **Sysco** of San Francisco for Most Creative Chowder. **LouLou's Griddle in the Middle**, located on Monterey's wharf, scored the People's Choice award. Doing some cool molecular tricks was chef Jeremy Tummel of **Stillwater Bar & Grill** at Pebble Beach. He created a whipped, chilled clam chowder that was piped into a shell and topped with geoduck sashimi. Perhaps a new category for Most Refreshing Chowder?

Send restaurant tips to Linda Zavoral, lzavoral@mercurynews.com.

A LA CARTE tips, tastes, tools

Modern milkshake manual

Summer means swimming pools, sunshine and frozen treats — ice cream, popsicles and, especially, creamy milkshakes. Autumn Martin's new cookbook, "Malts & Milkshakes" (St. Martin's Griffin, \$17.99, 128 pages), aims to slake that thirst with 60 recipes for frosty, creamy treats. Yum.

Martin, a former Seattle chocolatier and pastry chef at that city's famous Canlis restaurant and Theo Chocolate — has assembled a tempting array of summer-perfect desserts.

The recipes range from homemade ice creams, including nondairy versions, to syrups, toppings, pocket pies and, of course, malts and milkshakes. You'll find soda fountain classics here, as well as new wave shakes, including a Bacon-Oatmeal Raisin Cookie Shake, Earl Grey Shake, and a Salt and Pepper Malt with generous lashings of black pepper and kosher salt. (Yes, really.) Or you can unleash your inner Girl Scout with a S'mores Shake. Here's just a taste:

S'mores Shake

Serves 4

Note: Toast the marshmallows over an open flame or use a broiler.

2 tablespoons unsalted butter
8 marshmallows, roasted until very dark



1/4 cup milk
8 scoops vanilla ice cream
1/2 cup crumbled graham crackers, plus more for garnish
2 tablespoons melted chocolate ice cream

1. In a saucepan over medium heat, melt the butter. Add marshmallows and stir until they melt and the mixture is smooth.
2. Remove pan from heat; pour in milk, stirring until smooth. Cool completely.
3. Blend marshmallow milk with vanilla ice cream. Stir in crumbled graham crackers. Gently swirl the melted chocolate ice cream throughout.
4. Pour into glasses; garnish with crumbled graham crackers.

— "Malts & Milkshakes"

Foodies to flock to SF Chefs

If you haven't already grabbed tickets for this summer's SF Chefs, San Francisco's monumental foodie fest, you might want to hurry. More than 200 restaurants, bars, distilleries and wineries will be pouring and serving their wares in the Grand Tasting Tent on Union Square from Aug. 2 through 4, and special classes, chef demos and after-parties abound in the days ahead. Some events — including the Aug. 1 "Bar Bites: Sips and Tastes from the Best Bars in the Bay" — have already sold out. But there's still time to get in on events like these:

Rollin' with the Red Carpet: Every big event needs a big after-party, right? Party with the chefs at the big Red Carpet After-Party at the E&O Asian Kitchen, just a block from the Grand Tasting Tent action. Enjoy dancing, cocktails and bar bites starting at 10 p.m. Aug. 2. We went last year, and Hubert Keller — chef and erstwhile deejay — was the guy spinning the dance-floor tunes. Tickets: \$52 and up.

Saturday Tasting Tent: The Grand Tasting Tent is open Aug. 2, 3 and 4, but Saturday's festivities include an homage to the five tastes — bitter, sour, salty, sweet and umami — with chefs from 1300 on Fillmore, E&O Asian Kitchen, Chaya Brasserie, Hard Water, Copita and more. Word to the wise: The tent festivities offer an overwhelming spectacle of beautiful foods, wines and liba-

tions, but you will be a very unhappy foodie if you embrace the day with completely unbridled enthusiasm. Pace yourself. Get a glass of wine or a cocktail, then stroll the tent to get an idea of what's where. Your stomach will be much happier if you do not give it oysters, ice cream, spicy curries and creamy sweets — or at least not in that order. Details: 12:30 p.m. Aug. 3 in the Grand Tasting Tent. Tickets \$112 and up; a portion of the proceeds benefit La Cocina.

DIY Cocktail Mixers: You may never buy bottled simple syrup or mixers again after taking this mixology class, taught by three San Francisco cocktail experts, including Alcademics' Camper English. Learn to make infused spirits, flavored syrups, DIY tonic water and more. Details: 11:30 p.m. Aug. 3 at the Grand Hyatt. Tickets \$28 and up.

Brunch by the Bay: The festival's first brunch offering promises a wide range of breakfasty and boozy delights, including spicy bloody marys, Lavazza coffee demonstrations, and edibles from Brown Sugar Kitchen, Coco5000, AQ, Mayfield Bakery & Cafe, Martin Yan's M.Y. China — dim sum! — and many more restaurants. Ditto on the need for pacing. Details: 11 a.m. Aug. 4 in the Grand Tasting Tent. Tickets \$112 and up; a portion of the proceeds benefits Meals on Wheels of San Francisco.

Find the complete schedule and ticket details at sfchefsfoodwine.com.

FOOD & WINE events

Release Party: Visit McGrail Vineyards for an afternoon of music, food and the release of their newest reserve cabernet. Gerard Z Honeybees will offer samples of their local honey and gourmet wood-fired pizzas will be available for purchase. Noon-4:30 p.m. July 6. 5600 Greenville Road, Livermore. \$10. 925-215-0717, http://mcgrailvineyards.com.

Bartender bash: Hosted by Straits and Sino bartenders on the first Thursday of each month, this cocktail event features a custom menu of their most innovative beverage creations. Straits Restaurant, 333 Santana Row, San Jose. 408-246-6320, www.straitsrestaurants.com.

The Art of Juicing and Smoothies: Learn how to create delicious juices and smoothies with food educator Jesse Warschauer. 6:30 p.m. July 9. New Leaf, 150 San Mateo Road, Half Moon Bay. Free. Reservations required. 650-726-3110, ext. 101. www.newleaf.com.

Breastfest Beer Festival: This benefit for the Charlotte Maxwell Complementary Clinic is a great opportunity to sample and compare hundreds of microbrewed beers from more than 50 breweries plus food from the Marin Brewing Co., Moylan's Brewery and Restaurant and Three Twins Ice Cream. 2-6 p.m. July 13. Festival Pavilion, Buchanan Street and Marina Boulevard, San Francisco. \$50 in advance. \$60 at the door. 415-461-4677, www.thebreastfest.org.

A Life In Sake: Taste an assortment of sakes while learning about sake styles, rice varieties, pairing recommendations and more. 11 a.m.-2 p.m. July 13. International Culinary Center of California, 700 W. Hamilton Ave., Campbell. www.internationalculinarycenter.com.

First Fridays: Nottingham Cellars will offer wines by the glass along with cheese and fruit platters during its First Fridays event from 5 to 7 p.m. July 15 at 2245 S. Vasco Road, Livermore. http://nottinghamcellars.com/wine/events.

Food & You film series: The Santa Cruz libraries will be hosting a free summer film series showcasing documentaries about food and the environment on Tuesday evenings through July. Catch "King Corn" at 7 p.m. July 9 at the Aptos library, 7695 Soquel Drive.; get "Vegucated" at 7 p.m. July 16 at the Santa Cruz downtown branch library at 224 Church St. www.santacruzpl.org/events.

Taste of the Valley: Visit San Jose's History Park for an evening of wine, food, art, music, dancing and Latino culture. 6 p.m. July 12. Tickets are \$60 in advance or \$80 at the door. Benefits social and educational services. 408-658-8884, www.sabordevalle.org.

Dinner with the Brewer: Enjoy a five-course prix fixe tasting menu paired with select Palo Alto Brewing Co. beers. 5-9 p.m. July 17. Palo Alto Grill, 140 University Ave. \$55. 650-321-3514, www.paloalto grill.com.

To list your event, go to <http://events.mercurynews.com>, click "add to our listings" and follow the instructions under "Food & Wine" events.

Pickle

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the possibilities are endless.

"They're like jewelry," says Amy Murray, executive chef at downtown Berkeley's Revival Bar+Kitchen. "They give you a way to accessorize."

She and her crew pay homage to life on the prairie with accessories, er, preserves, that add sparkle to the menu. Cubed and pickled rhubarb adds a zingy touch of acidity to the duck confit Murray serves on flatbread with roasted beets and pecorino cheese. Later in the summer, Murray will roast and can San Marzano tomatoes for pasta dishes and sugo, a stew made from leftover meat trimmings, onion, garlic and carrots.

And then there are Revival's Bread 'n' Butta pickles. Sliced thin and served with the restaurant's signature burger and appetizer platters of house-cured meats, Murray's pickles are quick and easy; no canning equipment is needed. She keeps them in the walk-in refrigerator, and they go fast. Brown sugar and turmeric, mustard seed and celery seed make it a sweet pickle, but Murray ups the ante with toasted coriander, nigella seed and a surprising touch of whole allspice and clove.

Of course, just like jewelry, there's no accounting for taste.

Nguyen used to make daikon and carrot quick pickles to serve with her boxes of rice, noodles, meats and an array of homemade sauces. But when some customers complained about the strong smell emanating from the daikon, Nguyen conceded and stopped making them.

"When daikon hits vinegar, it releases an odor," Nguyen says. "Since we are such a small restaurant,

Asian Box Pickled Vegetables

Makes about 4 pints

Note: Pickling cucumbers may be substituted for the daikon.

3 cups water
1 1/2 cups white vinegar
1 1/2 cups sugar
1/4 cup salt
1 pound carrots, julienned
1 pound daikon, peeled, quartered and sliced 1/2-inch thick

1. Mix water, vinegar, sugar and salt, stirring to dissolve.
2. Add the carrots and daikon. Let mixture sit for 24 hours in the refrigerator before using. These pickles will keep, refrigerated, for 3 to 4 weeks.

— Executive chef Grace Nguyen, Asian Box

people would walk through the door and say, 'Hey, what's that smell?'"

Then other customers started crying foul: They wanted their daikon back, and even scolded counter staff, saying it was the best part of the meal. "We couldn't win," Nguyen says with a laugh. "We substituted cucumber for the daikon — and we cut it thick — but it doesn't have the texture of the daikon."

You'll find the controversial recipe accompanying this story. The choice of daikon vs. cucumber is up to you.

Experimentation is the name of the game, says Matthew Colgan, executive chef at A Cote in Oakland's Rockridge neighborhood and Rumbo al Sur in that city's Glenview district. Colgan recalls how he and his staff used A Cote as their laboratory when Latin American-themed Rumbo al Sur was coming together in 2007. Here, he perfected a pickled chipotle pepper that he purées and adds to salsas, refried beans and a light cream sauce he serves over battered, fried lingcod.

"If you have them on

Pickled Turnips

Makes about 4 pints

1 beet
2 cups red wine vinegar
4 cups water
1/4 cup salt
1/4 cup sugar
4 cloves garlic
1 1/2 teaspoons allspice

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Cut off the beet's top and bottom, and place it in a pan with about 1/2 inch water. Cover pan with foil and roast until the beet is easily pierced with a knife, about 1 hour. Cool to room temperature. Peel the beet; cut into quarters.
2. In a large pot on the stove, combine vinegar, 4 cups water, salt, sugar, garlic, the quartered beet, allspice and peppercorns. Bring to a boil; let boil 2 minutes. Add turnips, turn off heat, and allow to cool.
3. Once cool, these quick pickles are ready to eat and will keep in the refrigerator, stored in a covered glass container, up to 3 weeks.

— Executive chef Matt Colgan, A Cote

Bread 'n' Butta Pickles

Makes about 4 pints

2 1/2 pounds cucumbers, sliced
2 medium yellow onions (about 2/3 pound), julienned
1 large red pepper (about 1/2 pound), julienned
1/2 cup salt
1 quart cider vinegar
4 cups light brown sugar
1 1/2 teaspoons ground turmeric

1. Place vegetables in a colander set over a bowl. Salt the veggies; let sit at least 3 hours, chilled.
2. Rinse the vegetables; drain well. Transfer to a large, heatproof bowl.
3. In a large pot, mix the vinegar, sugar and turmeric; bring to a boil.
4. In a cast-iron skillet on the stove, toast the cloves, celery seeds, allspice, mustard, coriander and nigella seeds until warm to the touch and fragrant. Use a square of cheesecloth and kitchen twine to bundle the spices into a sachet. Add the sachet to the boiling liquid.
5. Pour the boiling pickle liquid (and sachet) over the vegetables. Weigh down the vegetables with a dinner plate to keep them submerged. Cover and store in the refrigerator for up to 8 weeks.

— Amy Murray, Revival Bar+Kitchen

hand, pickled vegetables are so versatile, and they add complexity with salty, sweet and spicy flavors," Colgan says.

Back at A Cote, Colgan serves pickled turnips, dyed pink from roasted

beets, with crusty fava bean falafel and tahini sauce.

"I like to mix pickles with rich foods," he says. "Sometimes you need a spark of sourness to balance everything out and make that perfect bite."

Cork

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winemaker for Sonoma's Bodkin Wines.

Christensen knew he wanted to make a California version of the refreshing bubbly. But first he needed to find grapes, and upon returning home, he noticed that the late fall rains had squashed much of the 2011 vintage.

"There wasn't much of a crop, and I didn't know where to find good fruit," he recalls.

Then a friend pointed Christensen to Lake County's prized Sandy Bin Vineyard, a 30-acre vineyard planted in 1996 by veteran grower Larry Rogers. With shade from the mountains in the mornings and warm summer nights, the grapes reach flavor maturity at their own pace.

According to Christensen, this slow, even ripening process allows the grapes to hold their "tangerine-melon-Meyer-lemon flavors" as their sugar content creeps toward pickworthiness.

"It really jived with what I was looking for," Christensen says. He made 77 cases that first year, selling most of it to friends and family, including his "96-year-young" grandmother, Sarah, who lives in his native Cedar Rapids, Iowa. "First and foremost, I wanted to make a universally approachable, quaffable wine that (everyone) would enjoy," he says.

How does he get the bubbles? From carbon dioxide, a natural byproduct that occurs when yeast converts sugars to alcohol in the fermentation process. "Once the yeasts have consumed all the sugars in the juice, a small amount of more sugar and yeast is added to the wine before bottling to create a secondary fermentation, which produces the trademark effervescence we know and love," says Christensen, who

makes his wines at Medlock Ames winery in Alexander Valley.

This isn't Champagne. Christensen says he isn't trying to reinvent the sparkling wheel or even attempt to take on Roederer Estates, Schramsberg or other serious California sparkling wine producers. Still, he wants to show people what sauvignon blanc is capable of.

"It is more than lemonade for adults," says Christensen, whose wines cost \$15 to \$32 and are available at www.bodkinwines.com and at The Wine Steward in Pleasanton. "Genetically, it's the mother of cabernet sauvignon. In this crazy night of passion in the 18th century, a cabernet franc vine and sauvignon blanc vine mated to form cabernet sauvignon."

So he treated it like cabernet sauvignon, he says. In addition to still and sparkling versions, Christensen made a skin-fermented "orange" wine in 2011 from grapes grown on Medlock Ames' organically farmed Bell Mountain Vineyard.

The grapes were destemmed and whole-berry fermented in two half-ton bins. Two days after fermentation, the juice received its first (and only) racking of its 11-month aging, sur lies (on its sediment), in neutral oak barrels. In order to maintain the wine's nuances and textures, it was not fined or filtered.

"To me, it's like an albino red," he says. "A lot of times these orange wines oxidize and lose some of their freshness, but sauvignon blanc naturally retains its zest and freshness. I think it has great aging potential. I look forward to tasting it in five years."

And we look forward to more sparkling sauvignon blanc-induced tap dancing.

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