

# Foie Gras is



## PHAT

*By Barbara Ann Rosenberg*

**N**ever, not even once, (to my knowledge, at least) has anyone seen it called by its translated name on a menu. The exquisite, luscious delicacy is called foie gras. Who, after all, would order a dish called "fat liver", not too appealing, right?

Make that "Phat liver" however, and everyone can gather that it's all good. Foie gras "in drag", so to speak. A joke in many ways, except insofar as the end product is concerned. It is every bit as delicious, as elegant, as fine as any dish that relies on French nomenclature to make it sound appealing.

So, while no chef in this region (or any other that we know about) has been sassy enough to translate foie gras for a restaurant menu, there are plenty who cook it, love it and eat it themselves whenever they can! Olivier De St. Martin is one of those who is passionate about the product. "But, then", you might wonder, "judging from his name, he's French. Is that fair to include him in a local survey?"

Yes, De Saint Martin is French. He grew up in Picardy, in the northeastern part of France, adjacent to Alsace, where a lot of the intentionally overfed ducks & geese whose extraordinarily large livers are eventually sold and gleefully devoured by aficionados as foie gras are raised. Thus he's well aware of how to transmogrify the natural ingredient into a luxurious menu item as a "special" for his restaurant: Dock Street Brasserie. "In Alsace people marinate the liver in Reisling, a local white wine, before they cook it. At the Michelin three star restaurant Michel Guerard in Eugenie-les-bains, (where De Saint Martin worked before coming to the States), the chef prepares it in three ways". De Saint Martin then adds his personal observation about how to treat foie gras to enjoy it at its best: "The cooking process is key - you shouldn't overcook or undercook it! The simplest way of preparing foie gras is best. Poach it, press it, add a little salad, some thin toasted brioche or good white bread and you're home free!"

Although De Saint Martin is passionately French, he most frequently uses the liver of American Moulard ducks in his preparations. Moulard ducks are a hybrid of Peking and Muscovy breeds. The hybrid was developed by Izzy Yaney, the co-owner of Hudson Valley Foie Gras. His company is now the pre-eminent supplier of foie gras in the United States. It seems the American Moulard ducks are easier to handle in the cooking process. "They don't 'leak' fat as much as the French ones do," says De Saint Martin.

Philadelphia "refugee" chef Alex Cormier from Rebecca's Restaurant in Princeton, formerly of his own little hole-in-the-wall known as Alex on South, also uses Moulard livers, but he uses the French ones, as well. "Often in 20 or 30 different dishes in any given week," he says, "because my customers love foie gras and leave it up to me to surprise them!" The self-taught chef says that his style is "cooking with heart, -or should I say 'liver'."

Michael Ginor, also co-owner of Hudson Valley, agrees. He is a major consumer of his own product, and is writing a cookbook on the subject of, what else? Foie gras, of course. Ginor's book,



"Foie Gras, a Passion", is written in collaboration with Mitchell Davis, Publication Director of the James Beard House, and is due out later this year. "Foie Gras, a Passion" will teach home cooks many wonderful ways to transform the raw ingredient into Nirvana on a plate.

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Olivier De Saint Martin is not the only Philadelphia area chef, French or not, to exhibit his passion for foie gras. Almost every chef who has earned his toque and has a restaurant that will bear the cost, uses foie gras in some form to please the customers who have developed a yen for it.

Acknowledging that the "food police" may exhibit some reservations about its health properties, in the nick of time, along came a revolutionary study called "The French Paradox" that talks about the low incidence of heart disease in Gascony in France. There, the

population drinks plenty of red wine along with their indulgence in foie gras.

In Philadelphia, check out the menus of Fritz Blank at Deux Cheminees, Jean-Marie LaCroix at The Fountain, Georges Perrier at Le Bec-Fin, Bruce Lim at Ciboulette, Francesco Martorella at Brasserie Perrier, Philippe Chin at Philippe on Locust and others with a French dedication or a French fusion and you will frequently, if not always, find some classic or innovative rendition of "phat liver". Quickly sauteed, unadorned or paired with some gorgeous, exotic fruit, like mango, or more ascorbic vegetable, like artichoke, or deglazed with wine or an infused vinegar; or, as De Saint Martin noted, simply poached, pressed and paired with fine toast. Then, exult in the fact that you're living in the '90s where having foie gras in one of its many glorious incarnations is not a once-in-a-lifetime-experience. Not "commonplace", mind you, but available!

Whatever. As long as it is available when we lovers of "phat liver" want to indulge!

*Barbara Ann Rosenberg is a Philadelphia-based food and travel writer. After several years of indulging in delicacies such as "phat liver", she says she doesn't know what shape her foie is in but the gras is apparent!*