

The Brothers Mattison

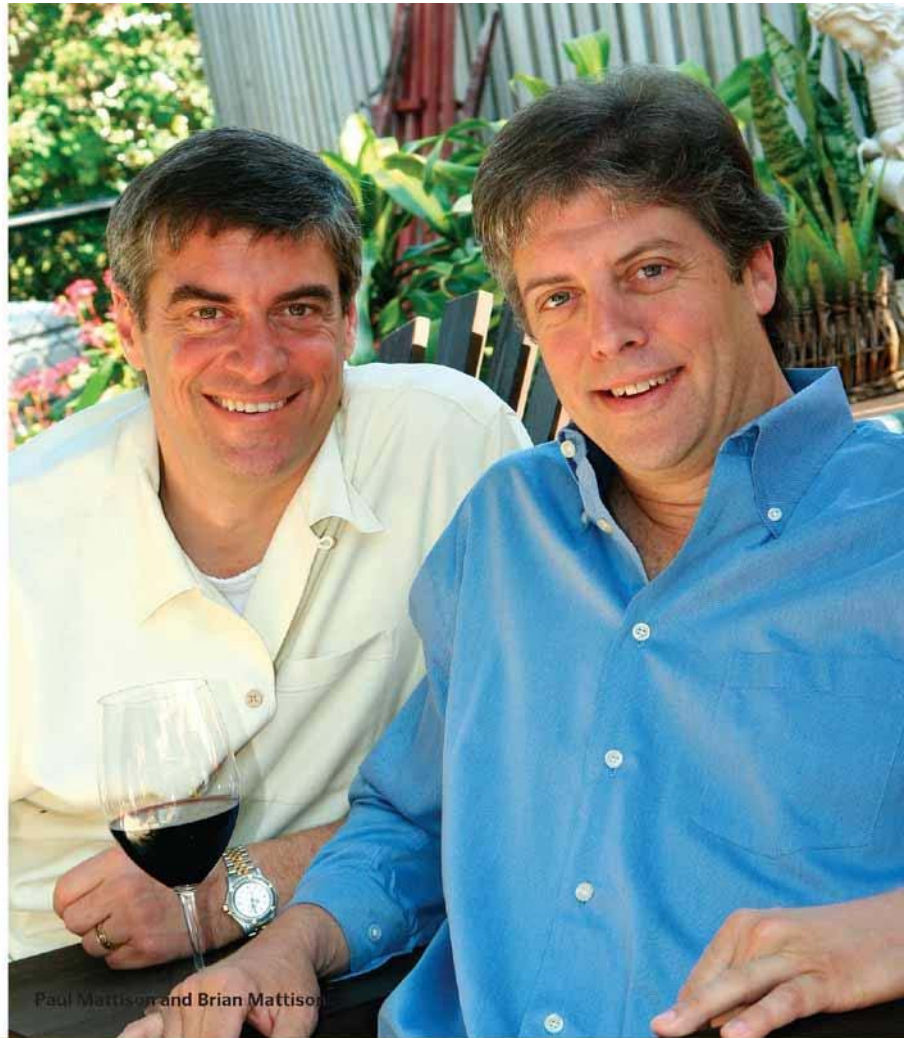
Brian Mattison likes to say of his brother, "Paul's got this whole Nonna-in-the-kitchen thing going on."

Food may be the metaphor for Italian life, but for Paul Mattison, it's much more than that. As anyone growing up in an Italian family knows, this is a heritage that can't be denied, one that will provide a narrative thread throughout life. For the Mattison brothers, this thread began early, in their grandmother's kitchen in Utica, N.Y. Nonna Esther would babysit the boys and put them to work grating cheese, running up and down the stairs from the second kitchen in the basement, and working the grinder during sausage making.

"You had to earn your stripes," says Brian, indicating that Nonna would not let them in on the more creative aspects until they had perfected the menial chores. But they did learn from her: making sausage, making pasta, baking bread — the downstairs kitchen had a brick bread oven. Indeed, the cavatelli with sausage that Paul serves at the Plaza is strictly Nonna Esther, as are the crispy artichokes with lemon and capers served at the Siesta and City Grilles.

"When she made the artichokes, she wouldn't eat them herself. Instead, she fried up the scrambled egg they had been dipped in for a snack," says Paul, describing the self-denial that's endemic with Italian mothers and grandmothers.

Later on, in their teen years, the brothers began working in restaurants, starting as dishwashers and quickly moving up the ladder. Brian, the older of the two, eventually ran a country inn in Marlton, N.J., The 1841 House, which specialized in wild game, had a smokehouse out back, and, of course, the homemade sausages — elements now found at the Plaza. "Brian taught me how to cook," says Paul. "I learned a lot from him."



Paul Mattison and Brian Mattison



Wild boar chops with caramelized apple polenta, wilted greens and a rosemary demi glace

Ingredients

3 wild boar chops, marinated in a red wine and garlic vinaigrette
 1 bunch rainbow swiss chard
 1/2 tsp. garlic, chopped
 1 c. stoneground polenta
 1 Granny Smith apple, sliced
 1 Tbsp. clarified butter
 1 small Spanish onion, sliced
 1 c. heavy cream
 1 c. whole milk
 1 Tbsp. fine herbs, chopped
 2 sprigs fresh rosemary
 1 c. demi glace
 2 bay leaf
 Salt and pepper to taste
 1/2 c. white wine
 1/4 c. grated Romano cheese
 1 Tbsp. extra virgin olive oil

Method

In a saucé pan, caramelize apple, onion and bay leaf in clarified butter. Add white wine and reduce by half. Add polenta, milk, cream, salt and pepper. Simmer slowly for 30 minutes, covered. Add more cream if needed. Finish polenta with fine herbs and romano cheese.

Dry boar chops, seasoning with salt and pepper. Grill to desired temperature (medium recommended) and let rest 5 minutes. Steep 1 sprig rosemary in the demi glace for 10 minutes. Sauté garlic and olive oil with rainbow swiss chard until wilted, season with salt and pepper.

Serve boar chops over sauce, polenta, greens, and garnish dish with rosemary sprig.



Cavatelli and Sausage

Recipes created by Chef Ben Christopher, Mattison's Steakhouse, Longboat Key. The key to these recipes is to use all homemade pastas, sausages and sauces.

Ingredients

1 lb. homemade Cavatelli pasta (frozen will do)
2 tsp. chopped garlic
1 tsp. chopped shallots
2 c. fresh roma tomatoes, diced
1 c. chicken stock
1/2 c. dry white wine
4-6 c. homemade marinara sauce with basil
1/2 c. creamy ricotta
1/2 c. ricotta salata, chopped
4 links Italian sausage, seared, then braised, in red wine, large dice
Salt and pepper to taste
Fresh basil tips

Method

Cook pasta in salted, boiling water until al dente. While pasta is cooking, in a large sauté pan, sweat garlic and shallots. Add sausage and roma tomato. Sauté 30 seconds then deglaze with white wine, reducing by half. Add chicken stock and marinara sauce. Stir in the creamy ricotta to the mix. Toss in cooked pasta and ricotta salata.

Garnish with fresh basil leaves and crumbled ricotta salata.

And then there is the influence of the Old Country. It all began with an invitation to visit some Italian wineries offered to Paul by his distributors. The wine trips led to cooking classes and tours throughout the country. "I fell in love with Italy," says Paul, who now conducts yearly tours. Last year's tour took him to Crispiano, Puglia, the home of Nonna Esther. "I met a lot of relatives, and saw pictures of my grandmother as a girl." Next year's tour will feature Treviso, Sarasota's newest sister city. Each visit brings new ideas, ingredients and friendships to the Mattison's table.

"All American cuisine is an evolution of other influences; for example, methodology from France or ingredients from Italy," says Paul. "We've modified it with local ingredients and our own creativity — it's a neat blend."

Brian sums things up on a more fundamental level. "Paul and I used to play trucks; now we play restaurant."