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Food & Wine Magazine

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EPICUREAN CHARLOTTE

Food & Wine Magazine

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cover image

Courtesy VisitLex.com and
Kentucky Bourbon Trail

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what the presidents ate by kristy toley • images by mike berlin

a white house chef shares savory secrets and historic cuisine

Whether it's Washington's cherry puff pastries or Clinton's "Happy Meal" makeover dish of seared chicken served over roasted sweet potato casserole, Chef Martin Mongiello brings presidential history to life bite by delectable bite. Blending his vast experience in presidential kitchens with his passion for culinary history, this former White House chef and four-tour Navy veteran opened the Inn of the Patriots.

Tucked within the historic hamlet of Grover, NC, the inn was built in 1879 by a descendant of Revolutionary War hero Colonel Frederick Hambricht. Today, it serves as Chef Marti's home base for a thriving bed and breakfast, eclectic cooking classes and an impressive Presidential Culinary Museum.

"We embrace colonial cuisine here," says Chef Marti. "It's difficult to find our type of cuisine anywhere in the Metrolina area, and in few places in the U.S."

Overnight guests wake up to Chef Marti's homemade private recipe breakfast sausage. It's perfectly seasoned with sage and fennel seed and is made locally at Ora Broad River Market with butcher Ervin Price. Also on the menu: fresh blackberry syrup, Hillbilly potatoes and thick slices of sourdough bread served on cast iron skillets.

Overnight guests may enjoy an authentic colonial culinary experience, but slices of presidential history are served up generously throughout the inn for daytime visitors. Mary Todd Lincoln's controversial purple china is displayed prominently in the dining room. Historically, the color purple was reserved for royalty and clergy. Mrs. Lincoln's critics claimed she was celebrating monarchy in America through her china pattern. Other fascinating rarities you'll find include a gold handled cream pitcher from *Downton Abbey's* Highclere Castle and White House menus from various presidents.

What better way to cap off a culinary museum tour than with an enticing meal? After our tour, Chef Marti prepared a savory beef demi-glace vol-au-vents, on which Thomas Jefferson dined during his visit to Paris. This delicate beef tenderloin is sautéed with pearl onions, carrots, asparagus and mushrooms, and served over a flaky puff pastry.

For a hands-on approach to dining, consider the Inn's popular Culinary Arts Food and Fun Institute, with varied classes like farm to table lunches, gourmet pizza making or wine study and tasting classes.

During my visit, I crafted the tastiest pizza I've ever made and gleaned so much from Chef Marti's kitchen tips and historical culinary insights. We used fresh ingredients, and even

incorporated our breakfast leftovers (sausage, fruits and sautéed vegetables) in our recipes. It broadened my culinary creativity and inspired me to reduce food waste by reinventing ways to use ingredients.

Chef Marti's presidential anecdotes are also quite entertaining. We learned President Nixon preferred eating his cottage cheese with a dollop of catchup. Also, President Franklin Roosevelt was criticized for featuring hot dogs on the White House menu during our nation's first visit from King George VI of England.

"We strive to humanize our presidents," explains Chef Marti. "No one usually talks about the trials and tribulations presidents and their families endured throughout history."

The inn's collection of historic treasures isn't limited to the common areas. Each bedroom is akin to sleeping in a mini museum. The Baby Ruth Room, named for President Cleveland's oldest daughter, houses the home's original 1879 fireplace, antique furniture and old photographs. Ideal for history and navy buffs, the Oceanicus Blue Dreams room teems with Civil War Navy memorabilia and love letters between Civil War sailors and their brides.

Whether on a day tour or weekend stay, time at Inn of the Patriots is well spent. Chef Marti's passion for our nation's presidential past through food is contagious. It's a history lesson that will leave you craving more! 🍷

jefferson's beef demi-glace vol-au-vents

ingredients:

- 3 lbs beef tenderloin
- salt & freshly ground pepper
- olive oil
- 1 c pearl onions
- 1 carrot, peeled, julienned
- 2 sticks celery, thinly sliced
- 2 pkgs puff pastry shells
- 1 egg, beaten
- ½ c baby or early green peas, sliced button mushrooms, diced and seeded tomato and asparagus tips
- ⅓ c fresh chopped rosemary, thyme and oregano
- 5 c demi-glace sauce
- beef stock (as needed)

Season tenderloin with salt and pepper. Quickly brown in skillet with oil—do not cook all the way through. Set aside. Peel fresh pearl onions and slather with olive oil and salt. Roast with carrots on top rack in 350° oven until tender. Flip halfway through cooking. Sauté the celery and mushrooms in olive oil on medium high until tender. Add a splash of beef stock occasionally. When tender, add tomatoes and asparagus tips. Turn heat to medium. Splash some stock to cook through asparagus tips. Brush puff pastry shells with egg and bake according to box directions. Set aside. Make demi-glace and add all ingredients together in a large skillet and heat through. Use a metal spatula to loosen heated shells from pan. (Reheat if necessary). Fill shells with hot beef mixture. Use a spoon to create a design onto your plate in a circle around the shell. Decorate with fresh herbs.



the inn of the patriots
and presidential
culinary museum

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