

Low Country Cuisine

ABOVE, Chef Matthew Robert is revered among the country's top American Naturalist chefs. RIGHT, Farmer D leads his expertise as the organic farm expert for Hampton Island.

THE WINE CORNER

Q&A WITH ROBERT MONDAMER

HAMPTON ISLAND WILL ROAST A CUSTOM WINE CELLAR DESIGNED BY ROBERT MONDAMER, JR. BY THE EXCLUSIVE HAMPTON HOUSE, A 16,500-SQ.-FT. EIGHT-BEDROOM GUEST HOME DESIGNED BY ARCHITECT BILL POLE.

1. How did you first come to discover Hampton Island, and what prompted you to create a wine cellar on the island?

My wife, Lydia, is creating the spa concept for Hampton Island. After her initial meeting with Wade Skelly and knowing the concept of Hampton Island, she was glowing. She introduced me to it and urged that I speak with Wade as she knew Hampton Island would create something unique and never-before-seen in the South. Soon after, I met with Wade and Bill and visited the property. Once again, the South wrapped around me and Hampton Island's majestic cove and rich marsh drew me in. It was at this point that I envisioned Hampton Island as the ideal "golfing living." I realized it was in need of a special welcoming cellar. For me, wine is the cornerstone of life. "Wine makes food a meal, it warms a room and lightens the spirit."

2. Can you describe the decor and ambience of the design of the cellar?

The more I came to know Hampton Island, the more I felt she needed a magnificent and approachable cellar; a cellar that design honors her style while bringing a few sacred accents that I have been holding onto for years. I have been saving the best wood from oak barrels and century-old oak and redwood tanks. We plan to use local stone and wood in the design to accent the cellar with subtle, using the unattainable wood that has been used to age our wines.

3. How many bottles of wine will the cellar house?

We are still in the design stage and this will change the number of bottles the cellar will hold. Regardless of the size, I think the most important part of the cellar is the inventory. The right inventory is more important than volume. This requires a few staples but most importantly I will build the cellar as I get to know the members. This is their cellar, and they should be able to have reliable wines, as well as wines that will challenge and intrigue them.

Robert Mondamer, Jr. formerly of the Robert Mondavi Winery, recently returned home to Napa Valley, after three years in the southern region of the U.S., to venture with his father, Michael Mondamer, in the creation of an exclusive wine company. Serving as partner and VP of Folia Wines, the company will specialize in the production of custom wines, as well as offer full-service sales, marketing and distribution for select wine regions. As a member of the third generation of the Mondavi family, he enjoys sharing his experience, family stories and passion for wine with consumers, retailers, and distributors around the country.

FROM THE EARTH TO YOUR TABLE

By Ethan Sharrett
Photography by Robin Davis

Newly known everywhere as "Farmer D," Daron Joffe is the heart and soul of the all-organic farm on Hampton Island. He would beg to differ and say that nature is the real heart and soul of the farm, but he is keenly aware of the vital role he plays as an intermediary: from the earth to your table. The freshness of the produce is as close as your own backyard garden. A six-acre community farm, overseen by Joffe, is available to the residents, harvesting and enjoying the all natural, seasonal crops.

Joffe is an expert in Biodynamic Farming, and was named Biodynamic Rookie Farmer of the Year, in 1998 by a farming industry organization.

It may sound like a clinical term, but biodynamic is almost spiritual in its study of nutritious and delicious organic food. Biodynamic farming is a total commitment to listening to the "life giving force of nature". It focuses on when to plant seeds, which foods are good according to season, and how to obey the earth in order to create a productive soil.

More and more people have been turning to organic foods as a way to increase energy, improve health and overall well being. The resurgence is due mainly to education. People are more aware of the benefits of local organic food. This is a credit to teachers like Farmer D, who believes "The Old Farm at Hampton Island provides high quality food and education to the public about organic farming."

Joffe explains organic farming in its simplest terms: growing without the use of chemical treatments. The healthy, chemical free soil promotes and encourages the fruits and vegetables to build their own natural defenses against bugs, disease and decay. Naturally stronger fibers and the ability to hold more nutrients in those fibers is only one of the benefits; more complex flavor is an advantage you will notice more readily.

You can find out how to connect with some organic produce by visiting the following web sites: www.localharvest.org, www.biodymanics.com, or www.wanda.gov.

Luxury, combined with the reverence of nature and the appreciation for simplicity, creates the perfect setting for the cuisine of Hampton Island. Executive chef of the resort, Matthew Robert, works closely with Daron Joffe to ensure only the freshest ingredients will arrive at your table. Robert has said, "The philosophy behind our cuisine is based on utilizing freshly harvested ingredients, local seafood and wild game, that can be acquired on the property or in surrounding areas."

Robert has a rich history himself. Trained at the French Culinary Institute, he was selected for Hampton Island because of his acclaim and his expertise in nutritionally balanced cuisine. He was awarded two stars by restaurant critic Ruth Reichl, of the New York Times, while Executive Chef of Opal Restaurant in Long Island, NY. He was also named one of the "Great Spa Chefs of the Nation", in the New York Daily News in November, 2004.

Joffe's career path is impressive as well. He has owned and managed several farms and farm camp projects, including rehabilitating incarcerated youth in California through hands on horticulture study, which he says is amazingly helpful to troubled youth. To Farmer D, that is the ultimate payoff.