

# chef

by Dana Lord Photos by Annalou Vincent

Recipes by Justin Wills/Restaurant Beck

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The spectacular coastal scenery surrounding Depoe Bay, Oregon's Restaurant Beck is certainly enough in itself to induce a bit of euphoria. From every dining table's vantage, gourmands can peer out over the cobalt blue waters and craggy caves defining the mystique marine refuge of Whale Cove.

One might think a restaurateur could depend on such a coveted location to fill tables. In this case, they'd be wrong. "I want the food to be better than the view," said Restaurant Beck's chef and co-owner Justin Wills, who was sought out by the proprietors of the Whale Cove Inn to craft a restaurant on par with their luxurious hotel. On June 16, 2009, Wills and his wife Stormee opened Restaurant Beck, affectionately named after their 19-month-old son, Becker.

Born and raised on the south side of Des Moines, Iowa, Italian-blooded Wills fell in love with cooking at an early age. After graduating in 1997 from the Culinary Institute of America in New York, he cooked his way across the country dazzling diners in Manhattan, Dallas, Denver, Portland, Bend, and Pacific City, Oregon.

Having the opportunity to run his own restaurant has catapulted this visionary chef to the top of his game. Since Restaurant Beck's inception, Wills has garnered an impressive following including faithful fans who travel from Salem and Portland, in part to tuck in to his latest creations, and out of curiosity to see what's on the menu that night. "I definitely cook not only with the seasons, but with the days because I can do that. [Depoe Bay] is such a small place; I live a mile down the road so I can open up the blinds in the morning and know what to expect. I try to go with the weather that day for what I'm cooking," says Wills.

What *you* can expect with every visit to Restaurant Beck are hand-selected, flavor-rich, seasonal ingredients—the majority of

which are locally sourced—and a revolving selection of wine and craft beer. In addition to using ingredients with integrity, Wills prefers to keep things simple, or as he says, "Doing a lot with a little." Most often his dishes consist merely of a handful of items organized in a way that highlights each ingredient's essence. To continually refine his own skills, he follows the work of top chefs like Charlie Trotter, Mario Batali, and Thomas Keller. He hopes to someday make it to Alinea in Chicago to see what Grant Achatz is up to, and wants to visit the famed El Bulli restaurant in Spain.

Wills has received numerous honors throughout his career including having Toscana Restaurant in Dallas, where he headed up the kitchen, named "One of the Top Ten Places to Dine Italian in the U.S." by *USA Today*; and becoming a two-time winner of Oyster Cloyster, a culinary extravaganza held annually at the Oregon Coast Aquarium (noteworthy considering Wills is allergic to oysters). He is rewarded most, however, by his customers' reactions. Wills says, "The moment you think you do something great in execution and your customers or guests think the same thing and they are excited about it... that's awesome."

For *Beer Northwest*, Wills prepared a beet salad with grilled pears, house-made ricotta cheese, micro greens, black Hawaiian salt, and... wait for it... Centennial hop-candied bacon (made from hops supplied by Hop-works Urban Brewery). This insanely tasty combo gets even better when paired with an IPA, pale ale, or a Bière de Garde (French

farmhouse-style ale). Next, we savored succulent Duck Confit with blood orange brown butter and potato cauliflower gratin, which Wills recommended pairing with a porter or Belgian-style ale, his favorite being Rare Vos by Brewery Ommegang. Dessert left us swooning: imagine chocolate mousse dusted with sea salt and cinnamon Pop Rocks enjoyed with a porter or stout. To contrast the dense texture of the mousse, Wills created a whipped-honey-Sherry-vinegar-chili foam you had to see—and taste—to believe. (You have to visit the restaurant for this dish and, if you're lucky, Wills may divulge the recipe.)

Although Wills doesn't cook with beer for every menu, he does consider it a part of his ingredient repertoire when he looks in his pantry and asks, "What do I feel like using today?" It was during his time cheffing at Pelican Pub and Brewery in Pacific City, Oregon that he was truly inspired to explore beer-and-food fusions. "I wouldn't say every style of beer is food-friendly, but I would say a lot of it is," says Wills. When pairing to suit his personal taste, he favors IPAs for spicy fare, saisons with seafood appetizers or salads, and stouts for coffee and chocolate combinations.

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When **Dana Lord** is not writing, she can be found dining out in one of Portland's many fine restaurants or at home making her husband bacon in bed—his latest meaty treat being Chef Justin Wills' hop-candied version!

# pasta chef

inspired dishes from depoe bay, oregon



# Red Beet Salad with Grilled Pears, Hop-Candied Bacon, and Mustard Vinaigrette

Serves 4

## Grilled Pears

1 Bosc pear, cut into thin slices lengthwise, seeds removed  
1 tablespoon grape seed oil  
Kosher salt and cracked pepper, to taste

In a bowl, season pears with grape seed oil, salt, and pepper. In a sauté pan, grill pears over medium heat until just tender. Set aside.

## Hop-Candied Bacon

4 slices smoked bacon  
1 teaspoon Centennial hops  
4 teaspoons brown sugar  
1/8 teaspoon cayenne  
1/4 teaspoon kosher salt

Preheat oven to 350°F. Place bacon on baking sheet. Combine hops, sugar, cayenne, and kosher salt and rub between fingers until hops are same size as salt. Season one side of bacon and bake until golden brown and crispy; about 7 minutes. Set aside.

## Mustard Vinaigrette

1 tablespoon Dijon or whole grain mustard  
2 tablespoons malt vinegar  
1/2 teaspoon sugar  
1/3 cup grape seed oil  
Kosher salt and cracked pepper, to taste

Combine all ingredients in a blender or food processor.

## Salad

8 ounces red beets, roasted, peeled, quartered  
1/4 cup goat cheese  
1/2 cup micro salad greens

Place beets in small bowl and toss with just enough vinaigrette to coat. In a separate bowl, toss grilled pears with just enough vinaigrette to coat. Place beets and pears on plate. Drizzle with leftover vinaigrette from each bowl. Cut or crumble candied bacon and place on top of beets and pears. Sprinkle with goat cheese, and top with micro arugula or bitter salad greens.



## Pasta alla Chitarra with Lamb Ragu

*A Chitarra is a traditional Italian kitchen instrument used to cut fresh pasta. For this recipe, any fresh pasta will work.*

*Serves 4*

### Ragu

1 pound ground lamb  
1/2 cup carrots, peeled, small dice  
1/2 cup celery, small dice  
1 cup yellow onion, small dice  
3/4 cup tomato puree  
1/2 cup red wine  
4 cups veal or beef stock  
1 sprig fresh thyme  
2 each laurel leaves  
Kosher salt and cracked pepper, to taste  
  
1 pound thick spaghetti, preferably fresh  
1/2 cup fresh Ricotta cheese

Brown lamb in large saucepan over medium-high heat. Add carrots, celery, and onions and lightly caramelize with lamb. Add tomato puree and caramelize until mixture just starts to stick to the pan. Deglaze with red wine and reduce mixture by two-thirds. Add veal stock and herbs. Simmer over low heat for about 2 hours. Season to taste.

### To serve

Cook the pasta according to package directions. Toss with just enough ragu to coat pasta. (You don't want your pasta swimming). Place in bowls and top with cheese.

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## Coriander-cured Duck Confit with Blood Orange Brown Butter

Serves 4

### Duck Confit

4 Moulard duck legs  
3 tablespoons Kosher salt  
2 tablespoons ground coriander seed  
1 teaspoon black pepper  
4 garlic cloves, rough chopped  
3 cups duck fat or vegetable oil

Place duck legs, flesh side down, in high-sided glass dish. Combine salt, coriander, and black pepper and season skin side of legs with spices. Cover with plastic wrap and place in refrigerator for one to two days.

Pre-heat oven to 275°F. Place duck legs in high-sided stainless steel pan. Pour warm duck fat or vegetable oil over the legs until just covered. Cover with tight-fitting lid and place in oven for 3 1/2 hours. Remove duck legs from fat and set aside.

### Brown Butter

2 blood oranges, segmented, juice reserved  
3 tablespoons unsalted butter  
2 teaspoons Glace de Veau (reduced veal stock)  
1 tablespoon scallions, green part, thinly sliced  
Kosher salt and cracked pepper, to taste

In a saucepan over medium heat, slowly brown the butter. Once butter is brown and has a nutty aroma, add orange segments and juice. Reduce by half and then remove from heat. Stir in Glace de Veau and scallions. Season to taste.

### To serve

Heat oven to 400°F. Place duck legs on a baking sheet and cook until skin is dark golden brown and crispy; about 9 minutes. Place confit and starch of your choice (like the potato cauliflower gratin pictured below) on plate, and drizzle with blood orange brown butter.

