



TABLE HOPPING

# Full family circle

Chez Sophie chef, wife and kids are returning to his mother's French roots, literally



PHOTOS BY HANS PENNIK/SPECIAL TO THE TIMES UNION

Forty years after a French immigrant with no formal cooking experience opened Chez Sophie, a restaurant that came to define French cuisine for decades of Capital Region diners, the chef's son and his family are moving to France late this fall. They intend to open a cooking school at



STEVE BARNES

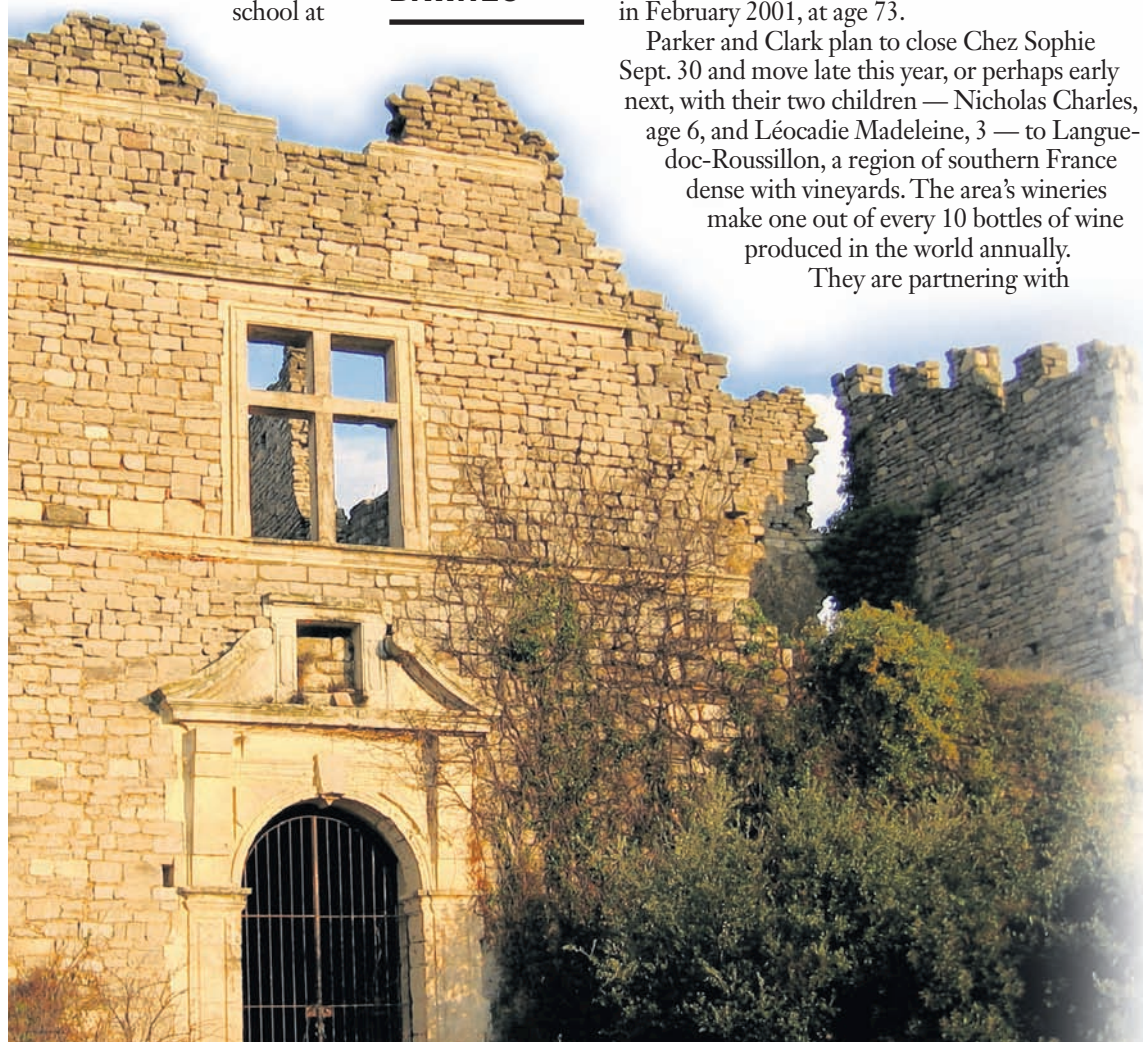
a small winery in the South of France and help market the property, anchored by a great ruin of a castle, as a dining, wine and vacation destination. Between now and then, a long, festive goodbye is in order.

"The plan is to have a gloriously celebratory summer" featuring the best of Chez Sophie's food and bargains on wine from the restaurant's 6,000-bottle cellar, promises co-owner Cheryl Clark. Her chef-husband, Paul Parker, learned to cook from his mother, the eponymous Sophie, and took over the restaurant's kitchen after her death, in February 2001, at age 73.

Parker and Clark plan to close Chez Sophie Sept. 30 and move late this year, or perhaps early next, with their two children — Nicholas Charles, age 6, and Léocadie Madeleine, 3 — to Languedoc-Roussillon, a region of southern France dense with vineyards. The area's wineries make one out of every 10 bottles of wine produced in the world annually. They are partnering with



THE FAMILY of Chez Sophie, in the lounge of the Saratoga-area institution: Chef Paul Parker, sommelier/general manager Cheryl Clark and their children: Nico, left, and Léocadie. At left, grilled elk with spring vegetables. The restaurant plans a summer celebration to say goodbye to 40 years' worth of customers before the family moves to France late this year.



Michael C. Belanger and Robert Davis, businessmen living in Saratoga Springs, who for the past two years have been developing Monte Lauro Vineyards around Chateau de Montlaur. The former castle — located in Montaud, a small farm town near Nîmes and Montpellier, the capital of the Languedoc-Roussillon region — has

**Inside**

E4 ▶ One last summer.

been a ruin for almost 400 years and has been in the Montlaur family since the middle of the 10th century. According to Belanger, it is the oldest continuously owned vineyard on the planet. The property includes vineyards, a farm and 15th-century stone farmhouse, various newer buildings and, in addition to the chateau destroyed by a cannon attack in 1621, other ruins that date to the Roman era.

CASTLE PHOTO COURTESY ROBERT DAVIS

THE RUINS of Chateau de Montlaur are the heart of a property in the South of France that the owners of Chez Sophie in Saratoga Springs will call their new home next year.

Though Parker and Clark's new roles aren't yet fully defined — they've been planning this huge next step in their lives for less than two months — their general mandate is to help make the vineyard, farmhouse and chateau a destination. Long-range plans call for the castle to be restored, which could take decades. In the near future they will help restore the farmhouse, with Parker designing a kitchen that can be used for classes, to feed guests and to serve large events.

"We'll be the hosts of the party," Parker said, envisioning a future of cooking for and with guests, arranging tours of some of the 300 vineyards within 20 miles of the chateau, or just making sure visitors know their way to the azure Mediterranean that's but a 20-minute drive from the property.

They also will be involved in Belanger's operation of a "micro-lease" winery on the site. The arrangement, also called a subscription winery, seeks shareholders to pay about \$3,000 for a three-year lease on a small percentage of the vineyard's vines; in return, shareholders receive a case of wine annually per share and a host of benefits including visiting privileges and the opportunity to work on

Please see SOPHIE E4 ▶

INSIDE

**GARDEN PARTY ▶**

Making strong trellises can be inexpensive./E5



COMING SUNDAY

**ORDER UP**

If there's bread involved, they know how to cook it at Mike's Diner./Unwind

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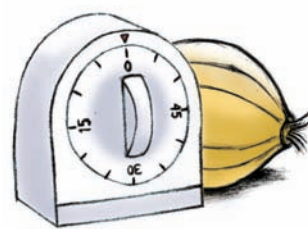
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# Recipe box

Your space for sharing your best dishes in print and online

## READER FAVORITES: MUSTARD

Make your own mustard then use it in the rest of these recipes to give your summer cooking a little zip.

### English Mustard

Makes 4-5 cups

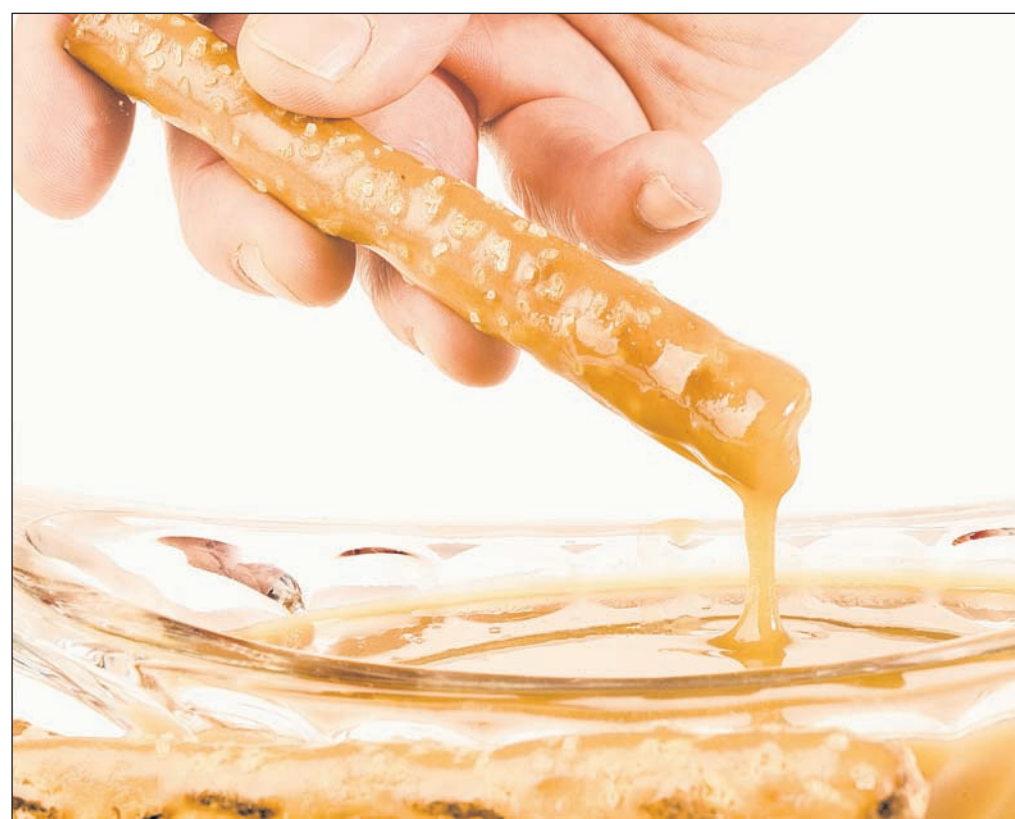
Eric Pepper writes, "This has some heat, like it has horseradish in it. I found this in a newspaper years ago and give it for Christmas presents sometimes. I've adapted it over the years but friends still keep requesting it!"

- 1 cup brown mustard seeds
- ¼ cup yellow mustard seeds
- 1 cup dark beer such as Guinness
- 1 ¼ cups white-wine vinegar
- 1 cup mustard powder
- 1 cup water
- 1 teaspoon sugar
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon ground allspice
- 1 tablespoon granulated garlic
- 1 tablespoon onion powder
- ¼ teaspoon turmeric
- ¼ teaspoon mace or nutmeg

► Combine mustard seeds, beer, and vinegar in a non-reactive container. Let sit 48 hours

► Transfer seeds and liquid to a food processor, add mustard powder, water, sugar, salt, allspice, garlic, onion powder, turmeric and mace or nutmeg. Process until creamy and smooth, 4 to 6 minutes. Transfer to clean jars and keep refrigerated.

► Allow to mature 3 to 4 weeks before using.



PRETZEL MUSTARD DIP is a savory way to entertain for a small group. Multiply it several times for a crowd.

### Pretzel Mustard Dip

Makes about ½ cup or 4 servings

From Taste of Home magazine

- ¼ cup mayonnaise
- ¼ cup prepared yellow or Dijon mustard
- 2 tablespoons finely chopped onion
- 1 tablespoon ranch salad dressing mix

2 ¼ teaspoons prepared horseradish  
**Pretzels**

- In a large bowl, combine the mayonnaise, mustard, onion, salad dressing mix and horseradish.
- Cover and refrigerate for at least 30 minutes. Serve with pretzels.

### Hot Mustard Fruit

Makes 6 servings

"This was designed to be served with baked ham, but it goes very well with pork chops, baked tilapia, or roast duck. In fact, for tilapia, I just pour the uncooked fruit and sugar mixture over the fish in a baking pan and cook it all together. (It's) from the 1973 edition of 'The New McCall's Cookbook' — a present from my late mother as I was heading off to join the Army," wrote Eileen Frame.

- ¼ cup melted butter
- ½ cup light brown sugar, firmly packed
- 3 tablespoons prepared grainy style mustard
- 1 (1-pound) sliced peaches, well

- drained**
- 1 (13.5-ounce) can pineapple chunks, well drained**
- 2 large medium-ripe bananas, peeled and sliced in 1-inch pieces**
- Heat oven to 325 degrees.
- In small bowl, combine butter, sugar and mustard, mixing well. Reserve ¼ cup for topping.
- In a shallow 1-quart casserole, combine fruits and remaining sugar mixture. Toss to combine. Spoon reserved sugar mixture over top. Bake uncovered 40 minutes.
- Serve warm with baked ham, grilled pork chops, etc.

## SAVOR & SHARE

If you try to talk **tofu**, there are still people who go "Ewwwww." But the fact is, tofu adds texture to foods and absorbs flavors like a sponge. Tell us how you make it delicious for our June 25 Recipe Box. Mail your recipes to Recipe Box, Times Union, P.O. Box 15000, Albany, NY 12212, or add them online at <http://blogs.timesunion.com/recipebox/>. If we use it in our print edition, we'll send you a cookbook. And don't forget to send us your favorite recipe using graham crackers for June 18.



PAM SPAULDING/  
(LOUISVILLE, KY) COURIER-JOURNAL

### Mustard Soup

Serves 4 to 6

Jean Dearstyne writes, "When I crave the lovely pungency of mustard, I make my favorite mustard soup." From Bon Appetit magazine.

- 4 tablespoons butter
- ½ cup flour
- 4 cups chicken or vegetable stock
- 3 tablespoons Dijon mustard
- ½ teaspoon turmeric

**1 cup light cream or half-and-half Salt and white pepper**

- In a large saucepan, melt the butter. Using a whisk, stir in the flour and cook for a few minutes. Slowly add the stock stirring to make a smooth soup. Stir in the mustard 1 tablespoon at a time. Add the turmeric and the cream or half-and-half. Simmer for 5 minutes. Season with salt and pepper to taste.

# SOPHIE: After 40 years, restaurateurs decide it's time to say farewell

▼ CONTINUED FROM E1

the farm, the vineyard and the restoration of Chateau de Montlaur. To date, 45 subscribers have signed up. Clark, a former journalist, will use her computer savvy, research skills and wine knowledge to sell the micro-leases and promote the property.

"The idea is to market the lifestyle. Besides having a sense of ownership of the vines, people can engage in all the activities the owner of a vineyard in the south of France might engage in," said Belanger.

As exciting as their plans are, even if they haven't yet visited Chateau de Montlaur, Parker and Clark confess a measure of sadness about ending the 40-year run of Chez Sophie. When they moved the restaurant to the Saratoga Hilton, in spring 2006, they signed a five-year lease; after a decline in business in the past eight months as a result of the economy, they renegotiated the lease this past spring and will close Chez Sophie at the end of September. The hotel is in talks with another operator to take over the former Chez Sophie location, according to Clark.

Founded in May 1969 in a dormant

restaurant space next to the Parker family home in the town of Hadley, in northern Saratoga County, Chez Sophie retained a following of devout diners despite moving among multiple locations over the years, being open only seasonally and even closing for a couple of years in the early 1990s. Its current home, at the Hilton, is the largest and busiest in Chez Sophie's history; this incarnation followed 11 years in a restored silver diner in Malta.

Parker, 46, and Clark, 42, who had long believed they could not have children, became parents after 17 years as a couple. The small diner location, which Clark said provided "a charming hand-to-mouth existence" for two people, would not support a family of four. Moving to the hotel was a leap, in size and scale: They went from serving dinner an average of five nights a week at the diner to being responsible for three meals per day, seven days a week, at the Hilton.

"We're very proud of what we've done with the new restaurant location, but the economy has changed dramatically since 2006," Clark said "We find that in order

to survive we are working so many hours that we never see our children. ... I've been there to catch every single one of my son's teeth when they fell out. If we'd kept going the way we were, I know I would have started to miss some of them."

They'd begun contemplating what to do in the fall, after the restaurant was to close, when, earlier this spring, Belanger introduced himself. He was trying to interest Chez Sophie in carrying wines from Monte Lauro Vineyards, the first of which are due to reach the American market this summer. As it happens, Clark, as Chez Sophie's sommeliere, had developed expertise in, and strong appreciation for, the wines of Languedoc-Roussillon, a complement to her husband's interest in the wines of Burgundy and Bordeaux.

They met with Belanger and Davis, dined and drank wine, and talked and talked; a recent meeting of the like-minded new friends lasted until past 3 a.m.

"They're intense, passionate and creative, but what I really like about them is they're driven," said Belanger. "They're

## Chez Sophie

The final summer

- **Address:** 534 Broadway, at the Saratoga Hilton, Saratoga Springs
- **Hours:** Serves breakfast, lunch and dinner daily, through Sept. 30.
- **Phone:** 583-3538
- **Web site:** <http://chezsophie.com>
- **Note:** For information about micro-leases of Monte Lauro Vineyards, visit <http://www.experience-wine.com>.

not just going to pick up the ball and run with it — they're going to do new things with it, change the ball and even change the game. They have the capacity to energize. That's exactly what I wanted for the property."

"It was one of those serendipitous happenings, this opportunity coming along at this time," said Parker. "It feels like I've been getting ready to do this for my entire life."

Added Clark, "For 15 years my

husband has been bothering me while I tried to sleep. He'd be on the Internet looking for castles and wake me up to say he's found one in the South of France for cheap and thinks we could go live there. And that's what happened."

Parker said his father, Joseph, now 85 and still a working artist, has some nostalgia about the loss of Chez Sophie after 40 years. But, said Parker, "Our family didn't like to see us missing every holiday and working ourselves to death."

And there is symbolic coincidence too great to ignore: In 1969, Joseph Parker, then 46 and living in New York City, uprooted his family, including 6-year-old Paul, and moved to the woods upstate for the chance to find a better, more peaceful and settled life, albeit in an alien place. Forty years later, Paul Parker is 46, his son is 6, and their family is headed for the adventure of the unknown.

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