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Smyth at the Iron Horse Hotel

As a chef, Tom Schultz draws on his Midwestern roots for the food he's creating at the Iron Horse Hotel in Walker's Point, particularly in its restaurant, Smyth. He describes his menus as "kind of like the personality of Milwaukee: strong and bold, with a very clean and true foundation."

Schultz's food philosophy is pure and simple: "You need to maintain the integrity of the ingredient." He's disparaging of food trends like "fusion confusion."

Noting that there is some nostalgia on his menu, Schultz says, "While items are not too foreign, dishes are executed in a bold new way. It's approachable but with a slightly different spin." Like the lavish twist he gives a humble dish in his savory duck confit potpie.

Schultz altered his recipe for the home chef, reducing the steps and days — yes, days — noting that a proper duck stock requires a three-day reduction. The first day, he'd roast the bones to get a nice caramelization. Next he'd add chicken stock and Bordeaux, and simmer 24 hours. He'd then strain out impurities, add rosemary and more Bordeaux, "maybe a demi-glace for richness," and simmer that another 24 hours before skimming out impurities and adding cream or herbs, "depending on how I want to raise the dish."

While not yet on the menu at Smyth, Schultz says he envisions variations on a theme: braised venison potpie with Madeira and tomatoes and a potpie with braised shredded lamb shank.

"Winter dishes are meant to warm the heart and soul," says Schultz — a reminder to celebrate the season by raising a glass in thanks for being driven indoors again to find comfort in a savory dinner pie.

— LAURA KEARNEY



Smyth's Savory Duck Confit Potpie