

# Leslie Harlib's Cuisine Scene: Tapas and wine while cruising the bay

Leslie Harlib Marin Independent Journal

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San Francisco from bay to buildings was a study in gray Sunday morning when the USS Potomac docked at Pier E, next to the San Francisco Ferry Building.

The sturdy 165-foot vintage yacht is a former Coast Guard cutter built in 1934 and converted into a private yacht in 1936. She was a floating home away from home for President Franklin D. Roosevelt between 1936 and his death in 1945.

Normally, she's docked at Jack London Square in Oakland. On Sunday, she embarked with 100 passengers from the Port of San Francisco for an elegant brunch on the bay catered by the Left Bank and with wines from California wineries such as Buena Vista, Wild Horse and Wattle Creek. It's the first time the nonprofit ship has partnered with an outside company to offer upscale dining cruises to the public.

Calling these floating food and wine adventures Foggy Bridge Wine Cruises is a good idea.

"It all started with the Napa Valley Wine Train," said Foggy Bridge's founder, San Francisco resident John Kontrabecki. "I wondered why no one had offered a similar experience in San Francisco. After visiting the Potomac, the idea for the wine cruises popped into my head."

Early in 2007, Kontrabecki, a San Francisco commercial real estate investor and developer with offices in Europe and San Mateo, talked to the Potomac's executive director Marti Burchell about his idea.

Once operating costs are met, proceeds from the dinners and brunches, which cost \$130, will benefit the nonprofit ship's ongoing programs of restoration and education.

Potomac's unvarnished teak decks, antique furniture and tight warren of rooms that FDR used for everything from sleeping to state dining to his famous radio-broadcast "Fireside Chats," don't seem to mesh with upscale food and wine.

Kontrabecki planned around that. He worked with Mill Valley residents and restaurateurs Ed Levine and Roland Passot (owners of La Folie and The Left Bank Group) to create a menu of easy-to-eat bite-sized dishes that would be served at the dinner and brunch cruises that will run every Friday night and Sunday morning through November.

White-jacketed wait staff roamed the ship for two hours, bearing endless trays of food, including: caramelized onion and leek tarts, truffled scrambled eggs in vol au vent pastry shells, ribbons of smoked salmon on brioche toast, skewers of grilled chicken with pesto sauce, pearl onion and cherry tomato, coils of roast beef on crostini, escargot in garlic/parsley sauce on toast, raw oysters sluiced in mignonette and horseradish. None of these full-flavored, rich tidbits were much larger than an inch or two in diameter.

"Our biggest challenge has been executing the food on board," said Chris Joslyn, who's been chef de cuisine with the Left Bank in San Mateo for two years and is executive chef for the Foggy Bridge cruises.

In two little galleys no wider than 5 feet, he and his sous chefs prepped and plated a remarkable collation that included desserts such as tiny lemon meringue tarts and ganache-topped brownies.

Someone used to a brunch centered on a groaning plate of eggs Benedict might at first be nonplused by all the little bites. But tapas at sea are a great idea. The dinner menus are even heavier, the chef said.

USS Potomac is a floating piece of living history, complete with upbeat tunes from the 1930s and '40s playing softly over the ship's sound system -just the type of music FDR might have listened to - and docents from the Potomac Association to take people on tours from stem to stern.

If all you want to do is eat and drink, that's easy. And it's particularly fun to top off your sail with a glass of port -drunk port side, of course. For reservations or more information call 650-372-1546 or go to [www.foggybridgewinecruise.com](http://www.foggybridgewinecruise.com).