



Inside
Pickling Italian plums provides long-term pleasure for taste buds. **D3**

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Life & Leisure

► BOX-OFFICE TOP 10

Weekend gross in millions

1. **The Watcher**, \$5.7
2. **Bait**, \$5.5
3. **Bring It On**, \$5.1
4. **Nurse Betty**, \$4.7
5. **What Lies Beneath**, \$2.6
6. **Space Cowboys**, \$2.5
7. **The Cell**, \$2.45
8. **Almost Famous**, \$2.3
9. **(tie) Duets**, \$2
9. **(tie) Scary Movie**, \$2

Hungry for work



Marc Silverstein jokes with Hotel du Pont executive pastry chef Michele Mitchell as they prepare to taste a dessert.

As one of the Food Network's itinerant tasters, a Delaware native finds that the nation is his buffet



The News Journal/ROBERT CRAIG
Marc Silverstein (right), co-host of the Food Network's "The Best Of," interviews Hotel du Pont manager Jacques Amblard recently for an upcoming episode.

By **PATRICIA TALORICO**
Staff reporter

Marc Silverstein always puts his best fork forward.

One week he's sampling the French Quarter Creole delights at Arnaud's famous restaurant in New Orleans. The next week he's biting into cannolis and Italian cream cakes at the beloved Termini Brothers bakery in South Philadelphia.

Silverstein, a Delaware native, snacks at the best tailgate spreads, dines at the best dinner theaters and grazes at the best gourmet groceries.

Trekking across the country and seeking out the nation's finest eateries and eats is this lucky guy's job.

Not too shabby for someone whose own best culinary endeavor is reheating a frozen Ellio's pizza.

Silverstein is one of the hosts of the year-old series "The Best of" on cable TV's Food Network.

In each half-hour segment, Silverstein and co-host Jill Cordes spotlight five culinary spots in five different states. Each episode centers around a varying theme that can include waterfront dining, catering, cheap eats, Latino dining or family-owned restaurants.

Silverstein, 41, was recently back home in the First State to highlight Wilmington's Hotel du Pont for the Food Network series.

See **FOOD** — D2

IF YOU WATCH

WHAT: "The Best Of," a half-hour TV culinary series that highlights five restaurants in five cities. Hosted by Jill Cordes and Delaware native Marc Silverstein.

WHERE: Food Network

WHEN: 1:30 p.m., 9:30 p.m. and 12:30 a.m. weekdays and 2 p.m. weekends

Food: Silverstein returns to put Hotel du Pont in spotlight

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While waiting for a crew to adjust lights and cameras for an interview with hotel general manager Jacques Amblard, Silverstein stands in the Gold Ballroom and marvels at its lavish surroundings.

"Do you think this room is ornate enough?" he says later to Amblard during the taping.

But it's actually a room Silverstein knows very well.

"I went to every wedding and bar mitzvah here," says the culinary journalist, who grew up in Chalfonte and now lives in Baltimore.

The Gold Ballroom was also the site of Silverstein's high-school prom 23 years ago. When prompted by his four-member crew, the 1977 Concord High School graduate says that, yes, in fact, he can recall his prom date's name. (Note to Shirley O'Toole: Silverstein says hello.)

Wilmington's premier hotel will be featured in three "Best of" episodes. One show, which concentrates on Thanksgiving traditions and executive pastry chef Michele Mitchell, will air Nov. 17. A second, centering on holiday food and the du Pont family, is scheduled for Nov. 30.

Patti Power, a "Best of" executive producer, says the third show, focusing on "sinful sweets," likely will air next year. No date has been set.

According to the Food Network's Web site, "The Best of" has traveled to 34 states and Canada since it began airing in July 1999.

The Hotel du Pont taping, which took place in April and again Sept. 8, is not the first time a Delaware location has been chosen by the Food Network. The Brew HaHa! on Concord Pike appears in a "Best of" episode about coffeehouses, and Woodside Farms in Hockessin was on camera for a show about culinary tours.

For Silverstein, the trip to the Hotel du Pont and an earlier visit to Hagley Museum for some background about the du Pont family was a sort of homecoming.

"I haven't been to Hagley since fourth grade," he says.

Silverstein, who moved from Delaware after high school, didn't always want to be a foodie. But he did want to become a journalist.

While attending Concord,

he was sports editor for the school newspaper and an announcer at football games.

He also worked part time in his parent's store, Sheldon's Department Store at the corner of State and Union streets in Kennett Square, Pa. Silverstein lost his closest ties to Delaware after his parents, Sheldon and Marlene Silverstein, closed the store in 1992 and moved from Wilmington to Florida four years ago. His only relatives now in the area are an aunt and uncle in Chadds Ford, Pa.

Silverstein graduated from American University in Washington, D.C., and became a TV news reporter. He worked at stations in Corpus Christi, Texas; Tulsa, Okla.; Columbus, Ohio; and Baltimore. It was during his last stint as a street reporter in Washington, D.C., that his agent got him a contract with the Food Network.

Silverstein says it wasn't a difficult choice to leave TV news. He says when he began weighing the options — whether to cover the latest broken sewer line or a five-star hotel — it wasn't a struggle.

What has been a little tricky is reporting on a subject that he knew little about when starting out. Does he have a culinary degree or background? Silverstein shakes his head no.

"I was a news reporter," he says, but he adds that he learned a lot about food in the past year.

So have other crew members, who are sometimes still being educated.

Steve Sullivan, an audio engineer, jokes, "I still think *al dente* is outdoor dining." And during a segment with Hotel du Pont's Mitchell, the executive pastry chef had to explain to a producer that marzipan is an almond paste that's commonly used in confectionery.

But Silverstein's greatest strengths are his relaxed, easy-going manner and his ability for storytelling.

With Amblard, he coaxes out tales of the hotel, which opened in 1913, as well as of the du Pont family history.

While filming stops so Amblard can pat away beads of perspiration caused by the bright camera lights, Silverstein, who has his back to the camera, jokes, "I don't sweat. It's in my contract."

With Mitchell, after the cameras stop rolling, he teases, "You were, like, afraid of me."

"I'm not afraid," she says. But, later Mitchell says, "I guess you always have the jitters."

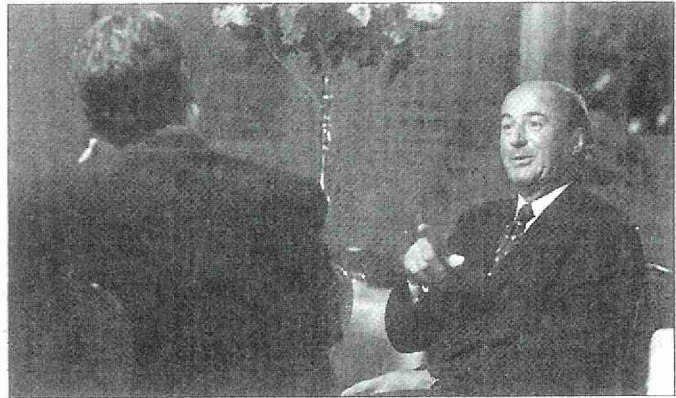
Two days of filming will only add up to about 4½ minutes of actual airtime, Power says. There are five segments per show, and each "The Best of" episode is about 24 minutes long.

Silverstein, who calls the show a "kind of 'Biography' of the Food Network," says it's important to pick places that have a story. "You want to tell people something that they don't know," he says.

That can mean racking up lots of frequent-flier miles, and the traveling can take a toll. Silverstein says he didn't come to the first April taping at the Hotel du Pont because he desperately needed some at-home time with his wife, Kathy, a Baltimore television reporter, and their 11-month-old baby, Spencer.

But for now, Silverstein has to keep his fork handy. He's got many more miles and meals to go before he sleeps. There's another plane to catch. A porterhouse at the Bern's Steakhouse in Tampa, Fla., has his name on it.

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The News Journal/ROBERT CRAIG

Marc Silverstein (left) interviews Hotel du Pont general manager Jacques Amblard in a familiar setting earlier this month. Silverstein attended weddings, bar mitzvahs and his prom at the hotel.