

# The Dish

**STAFFAN TERJE**  
**CHEF, PERBACCO**



NAJIB JOE HAKIM

**Restaurant:** Perbacco  
**Food Style:** Piedmontese Italian.  
**Wine list:** 150 bottles.  
**Address:** 230 California St., San Francisco.  
**Phone:** (415) 955-0663.  
**Hours:** Mon. - Thurs. 11:30 a.m. - 10 p.m., Fri. 11:30 a.m. - 11 p.m., and Sat. 5:30 p.m. - 11 p.m.  
**Parking:** Valet.  
**Average check cost per person:** \$55 for dinner.  
**Website:** www.perbaccosf.com

**Background:** I grew up on a farm in Sweden, around animals and produce, and it made an impression on me. When I was 14, I worked in a slaughterhouse for a summer job. I read Escoffier's cookbook at 10 years old. I started out cooking traditional French, but when I came to California, I worked at Piatti in Yountville. I switched from French to Italian. I jumped into Italian head first, not feet first, with no fear.  
**Food philosophy:** Having grown up on a farm, I pulled carrots out of the ground at an early age. I learned to clean Baltic fish with my grandmother. Ingredient-driven food is the hardest to cook, but it's the most appreciated. You can't hide, you have to focus on coaxing out (the flavor). Technique has to complement what you cook, not overpower it. My philosophy is keep it simple, understand the ingredient and the history of the dish. Also, I'm trying to make it taste good. That makes it sound easy. It should be easy.  
**What's new:** Roasted octopus with fresh chick peas and roasted meyer lemon. Wolfe Ranch quail with roasted pear salad and quince mostarda.  
**Most popular dish:** The pork shoulder has turned into a little monster. (Pork shoulder cooked in milk with savoy cabbage and polenta.) It's fork-tender, slow-cooked, and it's good and porky.  
**One thing you'll never see on the menu:** Sundried tomatoes in a pasta. They've been overdone. They can be chewy pieces of leather.  
**Most surprising ingredient:** Pig's head terrine. It's not a barn burner, but when people have it they really appreciate it. It's a chef's dish. Also, black sea salt, which we put on the caramel ice cream.

**To wow a companion or client:** I would steer them toward the mixed salame and coppa made in-house. We have our own curing room. We make a lot of things by hand.  
**Dessert recommendation:** Trio of gelati. It has really intense bitter-sweet chocolate gelato, torrone nougat and caramel gelato with black sea salt. It's my homage to the Italian gelato cart you see in the street.  
**Wine list:** About 80 percent of the wines are Italian with French champagne and California wines also. We decided to do mostly Italian because my partner and I love Italian wine. It's very food friendly.  
**Chef inspired by:** Joyce Goldstein. I would have gone to Square One (which closed in 1996) and handed in my resume the day it opened. She comes in here and if we have something new we're thinking about putting on the menu, and she approves it, then I put it on the menu. She's very inspiring and supportive. She's a short, small woman, but she's as tough as any line cook out there and has done what most kids one-third her age whine about.  
**Advice for home or novice cooks:** Goes back to, "keep it simple." Home cooks that try to cook like restaurant chefs fail. You're taking on a task you simply can't do.  
**Favorite culinary gadget:** I love mortars and pestles. I have a giant black marble one that's 200 years old. It weighs 70 pounds. I use it to make pesto. Most people make pesto in a food processors, but when you do it in there, you pound the flavor out of it.  
**Most memorable moment:** I cooked for the king of Sweden. I was an apprentice at a restaurant when I was 16 and we were the only one in the country to serve the king's favorite champagne, Cristal. We did a dinner for the king and queen and we poached turbot in Cristal and served it with Cristal foam.  
**Favorite ingredient or dish:** That's like saying what's your favorite child. Lately, I'm in love with the roasted octopus.  
**Favorite cookbook:** You're asking someone who has close to 1,000 cookbooks. There's one cookbook from a restaurant called Bon Lloc that I've found inspiring.

— Emily Fancher ■