

CAMB

Student Newsletter

Volume 8 | Issue 3 | August 2023

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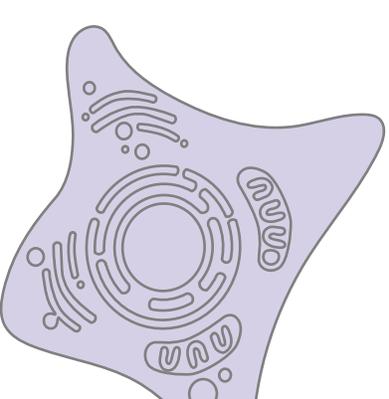
Letter from the Editors

Dear CAMB Students, Faculty, and Alumni,

Hello to all returning readers, and a warm welcome to those CAMB students who have so recently joined us! We're delighted to bring you the August 2023 edition of the CAMB Student Newsletter. In this Welcome to Campus edition, we warmly greet new Wistar faculty member **Dr. Alex Price**, who shares spectacular insight on academia and gave us a neat view of his new lab. We also polled current CAMB students to find out their favorite **Philly Restaurants** in the area (with a handy map to help you find each one)! And to wrap up this tasty and flavorful August issue, we bring back our **Recipe Roundup**, sharing handy how-tos to help CAMBers make a savory summer vegetable soup with pesto and a sweet and tasty lemon lavender crème brûlée.

For additional articles, past publications, and to learn more about the CAMB Student Newsletter team, visit our [blog](#) or follow us on Twitter at [@CambNewsletter](#). The CAMB Newsletter team is always in search of new writers and editors to join our team! Current students interested in contributing to the CAMB Student Newsletter can attend our next meeting on Wednesday, 9/6, at 1 PM, in BRB 701. Come join us to pitch ideas for our November issue over lunch. If you'd like to join but can't attend our next meeting, email co-editors-in-chief James Gesualdi (jamesges@penncmedicine.upenn.edu) and Kay Labella (klabella@penncmedicine.upenn.edu) for more information.

Sincerely,
Kay Labella and James Gesualdi
Editors-in-Chief



Faculty Spotlight

Dr. Alex Price

Amber Abbott

Peer Edited by Kay Labella

The CAMB Newsletter team is very excited to introduce one of the newest faculty members of the Wistar Institute, Dr. Alex Price! Alex recently accepted the position of Assistant Professor in the Gene Expression and Regulation Program and established his research laboratory in July 2023. In an interview with the Newsletter, he shared his experiences throughout his career as a virologist, his perspectives on academia, and some inspirational words for new graduate students.

What does your lab study? Or, because your lab has only been up and running for about a month, what are you excited about getting started in the near future?

My lab studies how cancer-causing DNA viruses hijack the RNA processing machinery of the human cells they infect. These small pieces of pathogenic DNA do not bring any of their own RNA processing enzymes with them, and therefore are entirely reliant on forcing what is already in the cell to do the work for them. What these viruses do have going for them is hundreds of millions of years of co-evolution with vertebrate hosts, so everything they do they do with surgical precision. This means that every research question we ask teaches us about both the virus as a pathogen as well as the fundamental cell biology that they co-opt.

Are you looking for rotation students? What should potential CAMB students know about your lab?

Definitely! Compared to a well-established lab, my lab is very new and actively growing



in all directions. This comes with excitement and challenges, but it means that students will get to do things like establishing protocols, helping us integrate into the community, and other things with the potential to greatly impact the lab. I can also guarantee you will be getting more one-on-one time with the PI as we will be working in the lab together for at least the first few years. Importantly, the lab is truly a blank slate right now, and I will be looking for people that I think can help to establish a supportive lab culture and fun traditions.

What influenced your decision to establish your lab at Wistar?

There are so many factors that went into this monumental life decision, but what really stood out is that Wistar, as a research-only cancer institute, really operates “lean and mean” with the research itself being the driving priority. I am also impressed by their commitment to basic research, which I feel is exemplified by the division of Gene Expression and Regulation (GER) that I joined. I am very excited to get collaborations started with my fellow established PIs in the GER group, as they all seem to have as much passion about RNA-mediated mechanisms of biology as I do.

I also have to say that I am incredibly happy to be able to stay in Philadelphia for this career move. Not only do I love the city, but it was a bonus to not have to uproot my family as we were just getting established.

What did your career path look like? Did you always want to be a PI?

Starting as an undergraduate I didn't even know what Principal Investigators were! As many are, I was interested in biology as a way towards a medicine or genetic health based career, but an early summer research experience really opened my eyes. Even after discovering that research was for me and joining a graduate program, I was still very interested in “alternative careers” such as in government policy or government research support roles. However, success with both graduate and postdoctoral funding opportunities along the way, having supportive and impactful mentors, and my love of research and asking questions made me believe that I could one day lead a research program myself as a PI.

What excites you about your research? Did you always know what area you wanted to focus on?

I have always been intrigued by how DNA viruses, compared to other pathogens, could be such masters of disguise and hide out in a latent form for the lifetime of an infected creature. Most of these latent states are regulated by complex transcriptional programs, which is really what got me into the RNA field to begin with. Right now, I am most excited about the molecular mimicry these viruses use to hide from the cell and how it might be able to be subverted for broadly therapeutic intervention. While the RNAs produced from a DNA virus genome or the cellular DNA genome look identical, there are still emergent properties arising from how viruses are just a little bit different that the cell can use to mount an effective innate defense. I am studying how it is possible for a virus to express hundreds of mRNAs from the genetic space that encodes for only one gene on average in the human genome. My research suggests that

this process looks a bit like a house of cards, and one small perturbation can have the whole thing come crashing down for the virus.

What was the transition like from graduate student to postdoc? What changes do you anticipate for the adjustment from postdoc to PI?

Transitions are hard! From grad school to postdoc I went from being the literal expert in my tiny niche question after six years of hard work to starting all over again and feeling like I understood nothing. I feel like something similar will happen during this transition to an independent research program, but the biggest adjustment will be learning how to guide and mentor an entire group of people rather than a few individuals at any given time while also building my research program.

If you could change anything about academia, what would it be? Do you anticipate any changes occurring in the world of science in the future?

As the amount of time it takes to reach stability and independence keeps increasing in the academic world, it has become increasingly obvious that we need to treat scientists as employees rather than merely apprentices. A graduate career blurs the lines in many ways, but this is the best time in any young person's life to start preparing for a long-term future or family. Salaries are obviously the easy thing to focus on, and I think they will have to increase across the board to compete with industry. Importantly, I think that this is in the best interest of industry as well, as they are entirely reliant on the academic system to train their highly skilled workforce. Making this happen in our field is going to involve overhauling how NIH handles research awards, but that is something I want to be a part of.

Did the pandemic influence your perspective towards conducting research, or academia as a whole?

As a virologist, this question hits close to home,

as it became immediately apparent how little even well-educated people know about viruses and vaccines. Exactly what our role should be in educating the general population is something I find myself constantly thinking about. On one hand, it is amazing for the population to be able to hear things directly from the experts; however, being a good scientist does not necessarily make you a good communicator. More than ever I want to support the people in the trenches of science policy and science communication.

What is your best memory of graduate school, or of your postdoc?

All of my best memories probably shouldn't be put down in writing! In all honesty, I was incredibly close with my grad school cohort, and supporting each other through the thick and thin of everything has led to lifelong friendships that I treasure.

What advice can you share for students starting out in their graduate programs?

Explore new things! New labs, new techniques, new ideas! Even if you are set on studying one particular question you never know if the people you met or the technique you heard about in that one rotation are going to come and save the day. Also, despite the long hours, this is a time in your life where you have an unprecedented amount of freedom so I would take the chance to explore opportunities for personal growth. Mine was applying for every international talk I could and then taking a week after the conference to explore the world.

What excites you about science in general? Any inspirational words for younger, budding scientists?

Science is the best method we have come up with, so far, of learning the "truth" of the universe. Every time you design a really nice experiment and come in the next morning to learn the result you personally know something that no one else has ever observed. An important point is to not wait until you have designed the one end-all be-all

experiment for your entire thesis. All of science is iterative, and a completed middling but well-controlled experiment tells you infinitely more than the perfect experiment that you haven't been able to do yet.

To ask Alex anything else about his career or inquire about a spot in his lab, you can contact him at aprice@wistar.org and/or follow him on Twitter at [@PricelessSci](https://twitter.com/PricelessSci).

"More than ever I want to support the people in the trenches of science policy and science communication."

Interested in learning more about science policy or writing? Check out the [Penn Science Policy and Diplomacy Group](#), or join the team for the [CAMB Student Newsletter!](#)

Special Interest Philly Restaurants

Kay Zabella

Peer Edited by James Gesualdi and Lauren Lee

As a new graduate student, finding delicious dining destinations can end up being a bit of an overwhelming chore, especially in a city as big and full of good grub as Philly. But never fear, foodies, the CAMB Newsletter has your back! We reached out to the CAMB student body for recommendations of favorite local eateries around campus. Next time you're in a pickle (or hungry for one), check out these neat, sweet places to eat!

University City:

1. Dottie's Donuts

Laid-back bakery & cafe known for its many vegan donut flavors & bagels along with coffee & tea drinks.

Location: 4529 Springfield Ave, Philadelphia, PA 19143 and 509 S 6th St, Philadelphia, PA 19147

Price Point: \$

Nominator's favorite dish: Boston creme, Dunkaroos, espresso buttercream, caramel delight

What CAMB students love about this restaurant: "The donuts are some of the best I've ever had. Their menu changes daily, so there's always something new and fun to try, and it all turns out amazing."

2. Food Trucks

Scattered all around campus, these easy-to-find eateries provide all manner of cuisine for a quick-and-easy meal on the go.

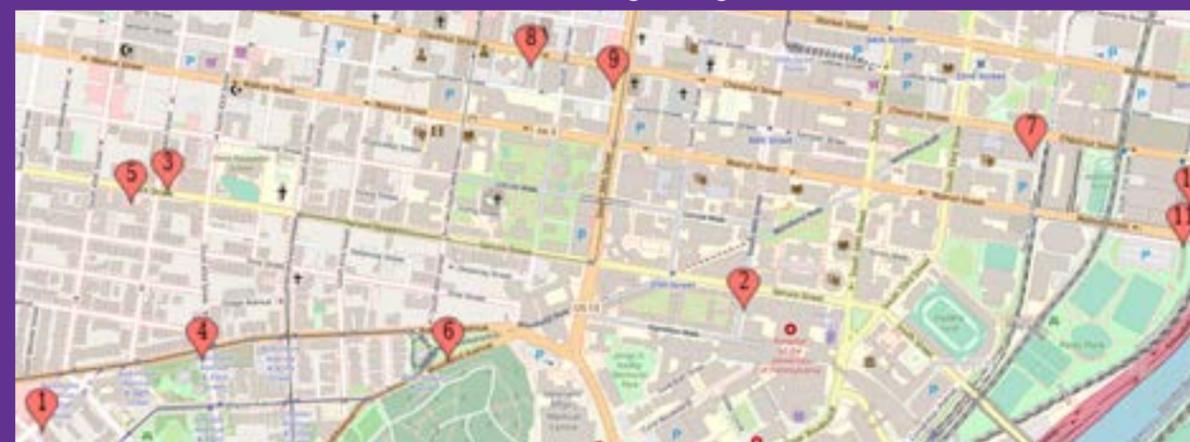
Location: Locust Street, Civic Center Boulevard, 38th Street, Spruce, etc.

Price Point: \$

Nominator's favorite dish: "Too many to pick, but probably any of the Halal dishes from the cart on Locust."

What CAMB students love about this restaurant: "Food carts around campus are the best option for a quick lunch mid-work day! Not a single truck disappoints around campus – plus, they are very cheap. Highly recommend exploring them!" (Tip: bring cash, most places charge an extra \$1 for venmo/card transactions)

University City



3. Lil Pop Shop

Store supplying inventive, small-batch ice pops made with seasonal, locally-sourced ingredients.

Location: 265 S 44th St, Philadelphia, PA 19104

Price Point: \$

Nominator's favorite dish: Strawberry elderflower or raspberry lime pops

What CAMB students love about this restaurant: "They also have great ice cream in amazing flavors like honey lavender shortbread."

4. Clarkville Pizza

This corner bar serves delicious and innovative pizza with wines & beers on tap.

Location: 4301 Baltimore Ave, Philadelphia, PA 19104

Price Point: \$\$

Nominator's favorite dish: Honey Pie

What CAMB students love about this restaurant: "Solid option when you're in the Clark Park area and crave splitting a good fresh pizza pie. Pair with a crisp salad and a cold beer or drink to really hit the spot."

5. Don Barriga

Mexican grill with a casual and friendly vibe.

Location: 4443 Spruce St, Philadelphia, PA 19104

Price Point: \$\$

Nominator's favorite dish: Chicken enchiladas in green sauce, birria quesadillas, horchata, and tres leches cake

What CAMB students love about this restaurant: "You absolutely can't go wrong with anything on

their menu, and their portion sizes are extremely generous."

6. Renata's Kitchen

Buzzy spot serving a Mediterranean menu of light fare alongside homemade desserts & gourmet coffees. An ideal spot for a lab outing!

Location: 3940 Baltimore Ave, Philadelphia, PA 19104

Price Point: \$\$

Nominator's favorite dish: Shakshuka or lemon-poppysed pancakes

What CAMB students love about this restaurant: "Great for brunch! This West Philly classic recently moved to the current location with a nice patio. Renata's draws some crowds during the school year, but it's worth checking out!"

7. The Board and Brew

Coffee, cocktails, dinner, and desserts all await at this large and well-stocked board game café and restaurant.

Location: 3200 Chestnut St., Philadelphia, PA 19104

Price Point: \$\$

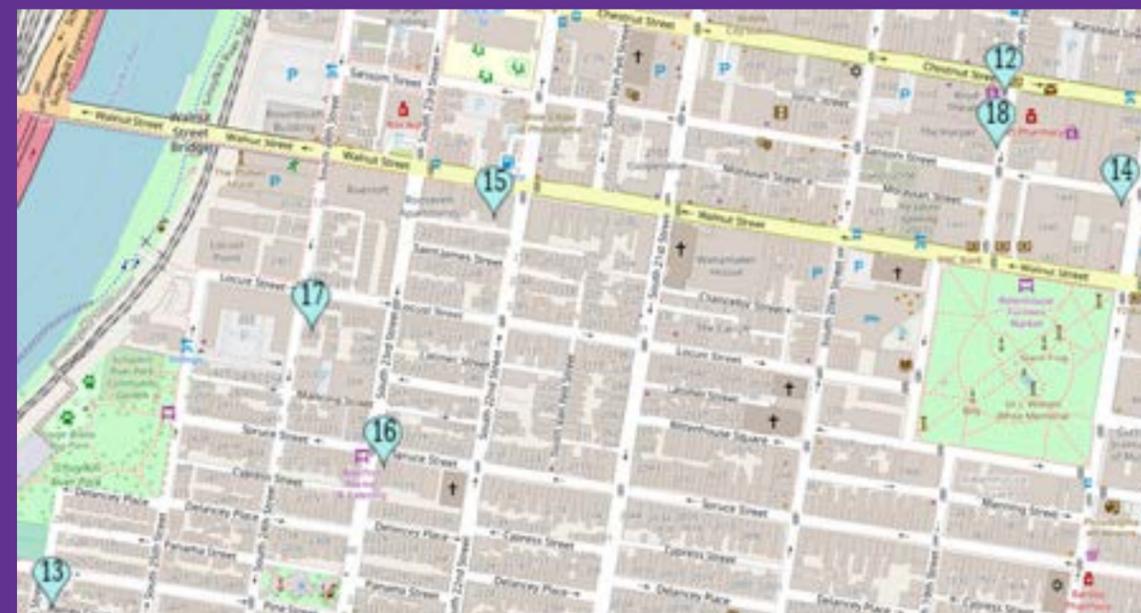
Nominator's favorite dish: Crispy brussel sprouts with chili vinaigrette, the Brew burger

What CAMB students love about this restaurant: "The food is spectacular, and their games library is more than extensive – you'll always have something new to pick from, and there's plenty of space to spread out and play while you enjoy your meal or beverage."

8. Dim Sum House

Atmospheric hangout with pool table and full bar

Graduate Hospital



serving Cantonese- and Shanghai-inspired dim sum.

Location: 3939 Chestnut St, 2nd Floor, Philadelphia, PA 19104

Price Point: \$\$

Nominator's favorite dish: Pork soup dumplings

What CAMB students love about this restaurant: "Dim Sum House is close to campus, and is a great spot to grab food with friends or your lab. They have a large menu that is perfect for sharing and trying different types of noodles and dumplings. They also have a weekly happy hour!"

9. Surreal Creamery

Sweet spot for soft-serve ice cream and bubble tea.

Location: 3818 Chestnut St, Philadelphia, PA 19104

Price Point: \$\$

Nominator's favorite dish: Nom Nom Cookie mason jar soft serve or the taro bubble tea with matcha and taro swirled ice cream.

What CAMB students love about this restaurant: "You get so much ice cream! Definitely enough to share, or save some for later, and it tastes amazing."

10. Sunset Social at Cira Green

Urban green space featuring grassy spots, skyline vistas, a burger joint & outdoor activities.

Location: 129 S 30th St, Philadelphia, PA 19104

Price Point: \$

Nominator's favorite dish: Burgers, breaded chicken sandwich, great cocktails

What CAMB students love about this restaurant: "Great rooftop bar with a view!"

11. Walnut Street Café

All-day New American fare, cafe with pastry counter & cocktail bar in Cira Centre South.

Location: 2929 Walnut St, Philadelphia, PA 19104

Price Point: \$\$

Nominator's favorite dish: "For brunch -- steak and eggs and fig cake! Dinner -- the brussel sprouts."

What CAMB students love about this restaurant: "The restaurant is so cozy indoors, and there's often music playing. The patio outside is also super lovely on a cool night. And the menu changes seasonally, so there's always something new to try!"

Graduate Hospital:

12. Jeni's Splendid Ice Cream

Scooping creative flavors of ice cream & frozen yogurt made from local ingredients

Location: 1901 Chestnut St, Philadelphia, PA 19103

Price Point: \$

Nominator's favorite dish: Honey vanilla bean in a waffle cone

What CAMB students love about this restaurant: "Jenni's offers a wide variety of unique ice cream flavors to choose from, all of which are awesome. They are conveniently located near Rittenhouse Square, so it's very easy to pick up ice cream and enjoy it in the park with some friends!"

13. Rowhome Coffee

Celebrating the unique local comfort food of

Philadelphia and serving it with some of the best coffee from around the world.

Location: 2536 Pine St, Philadelphia, PA 19103 and 2152 N Front St, Philadelphia, PA 19122

Price Point: \$

Nominator's favorite dish: Deli Pretzel Sandwich

What CAMB students love about this restaurant: "Rowhome Coffee is a quaint coffee shop within the Graduate Hospital area! They offer a variety of great breakfast and coffee options, as well as fun morning conversations with friends in a cute area. It's also located near two parks (Schuylkill River Park and Fidler Square Park), which is great for pre- or post-breakfast activities!"

14. The Dandelion

This spot serves craft beers & modern takes on British cuisine in a pubby setting.

Location: 124 S 18th St, Philadelphia, PA 19103

Price Point: \$\$

Nominator's favorite dish: The Dandy Burger

What CAMB students love about this restaurant: "The Dandelion is a British-themed pub in downtown Center City! This restaurant offers amazing food for a reasonable price, as well as offering a fun night out in a great location. If you look upwards from the front entrance of The Dandelion, you'll get a spectacular viewpoint of One Liberty Plaza!"

15. Rosy's Taco Bar

Casual, contemporary venue for tacos, quesadillas & Mexican spirits, plus a happy hour.

Location: 2220 Walnut St, Philadelphia, PA 19103

Price Point: \$\$

Nominator's favorite dish: Chicken burrito with a passion fruit margarita

What CAMB students love about this restaurant: "Rosy's is great because they offer an awesome happy hour special: reasonably priced drinks and appetizers from 3 p.m. – 5 p.m. The food is delicious and considered a staple within the Graduate Hospital area. The restaurant is also a short walk to downtown Center City!"

16. SALLY

Casual, snug eatery specializing in pizzas, small plates & desserts, plus a large wine list.

Location: 2229 Spruce St, Philadelphia, PA 19103

Price Point: \$\$

Nominator's favorite dish: "Their menu rotates, but I loved their sausage and onion pizza!"

What CAMB students love about this restaurant: "Delicious food, great outdoor dining, and friendly neighborhood vibe!"

17. Ambrosia BYOB

Casual option providing homemade pasta & classic Italian dishes in a convivial atmosphere.

Location: 231 S 24th St, Philadelphia, PA 19103

Price Point: \$\$\$

Nominator's favorite dish: Crispy gnocchi

What CAMB students love about this restaurant: "Everything is so delicious. They have specials, which are dishes that the chef seems to be trying out, that are really good. I've been there three times with my boyfriend (and I usually don't go to the same restaurant more than once unless I love it). It's tucked away in a residential part of the city, right

by the Schuylkill, so there isn't much traffic and bustle nearby. The outdoor space is delightful!"

18. K'Far Cafe

Relaxed option serving Israeli-style pastries, small plates & drinks in a polished retro setup.

Location: 110 S 19th St, Philadelphia, PA 19103

Price Point: \$\$

Nominator's favorite dish: Burekas, brown sugar ricotta toast, pressed Jerusalem bagel (marinated labneh and smoked salmon)

What CAMB students love about this restaurant: "Hands-down one of the most unique café and brunch options (don't trust me? bon appétit featured their Jerusalem bagel) with both sweet and savory options. It can get quite crowded on the weekends, so I recommend either going on the weekdays or ordering ahead or at the counter to-go. They don't take reservations fyi."

Elsewhere:

19. Giorgio On Pine

Classic Italian eats & gluten-free options are offered at this unfussy, bring-your-own-wine hangout.

Location: 1328 Pine St, Philadelphia, PA 19107

Price Point: \$\$

Nominator's favorite dish: Prosciutto platter and the gnocchi

What CAMB students love about this restaurant: "Small and homey, and the fresh pasta is absolutely delicious!"

20. Lucha Cartel

Offbeat cantina with beer & tequila.

Location: 207 Chestnut St, Philadelphia, PA 19106

Price Point: \$\$

Nominator's favorite dish: Ceviche, crispy fish tacos, elotes

What CAMB students love about this restaurant: "Great vibe, delicious food, and fancy margaritas! And the dance floor is open after 10pm!"

"Lucha Cartel offers a \$5 happy hour menu every day from 3pm - 6pm, which includes margarita, taco, empanada, and quesadilla options. Not only is the food spectacular, but they also have a dance floor if you're looking for a fun night out with friends!"

21. A La Mousse

Modern, cozy dessert shop serving house-made treats like matcha cake, plus tea & coffee.

Location: 1622 South St, Philadelphia, PA 19146 and 145 N 11th St, Philadelphia, PA 19107

Price Point: \$\$

Nominator's favorite dish: Matcha crepe cake, earl grey cyclone

What CAMB students love about this restaurant: "A La Mousse is a great place to satisfy your sweet tooth. They also have a new location (Maison Sweet by A La Mousse) in University City!"

22. Mom-Mom's Kitchen

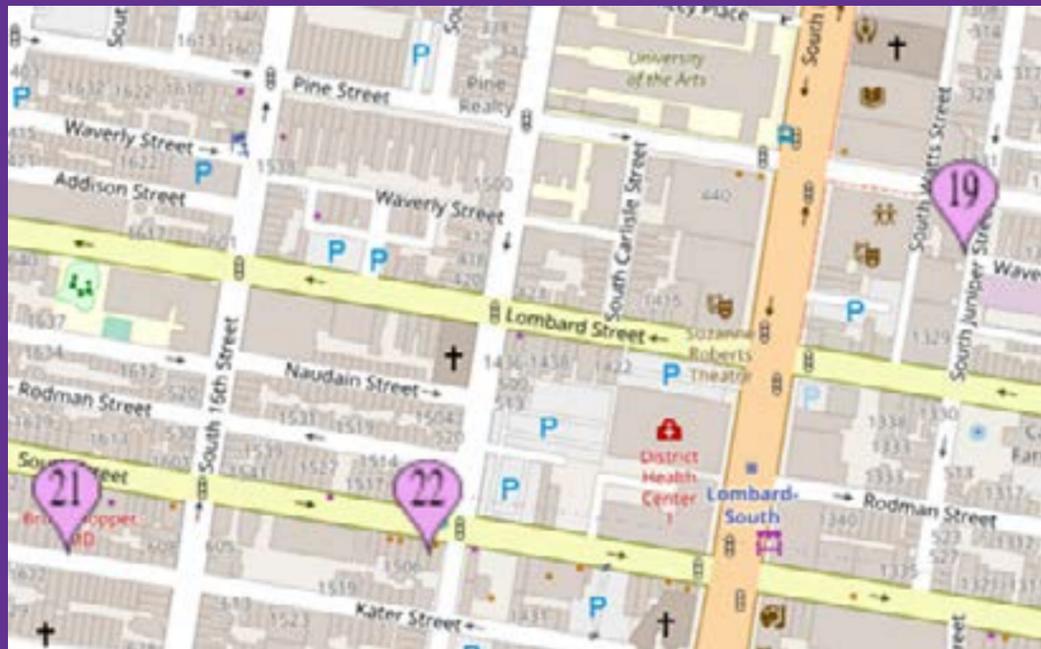
Window-serve nook specializing in homemade pierogi, cabbage rolls, kielbasa & other Polish classics.

Location: 1505 South St, Philadelphia, PA 19146

Price Point: \$\$

Nominator's favorite dish: Potato pierogies

Elsewhere



Recipe Roundup

Kay Labella and Amber Abbott

Lavender Lemon Crème Brûlée

Ingredients:

6 large egg yolks
70 g granulated sugar
480 g heavy cream
1 ½ teaspoons vanilla extract or 1 teaspoon vanilla paste
1 ½ tablespoons dried cooking lavender
1 lemon, zest only
⅛ teaspoon salt

Preheat oven to 300°F and boil water. Pour cream into a medium sized saucepan and heat it to a scald. Add dried lavender and salt and remove from heat. Stir in lavender so it is fully immersed in the cream and cover the pot to infuse a stronger flavor. Let sit for about thirty minutes or leave it to steep overnight for a very intense floral flavor. Taste the cream to ensure it has steeped to your taste.

Strain the lavender from the cream and then add in the lemon zest. If you cold infused your cream overnight, gently rewarm it over low heat until it starts to steam. Remove from heat and set aside.

In a large bowl, whisk together your egg yolks, sugar, and vanilla until they are fully combined. Pour about ⅓ of the warm cream into the yolk mixture, whisking constantly to prevent the yolks from cooking or clumping. Once fully incorporated, your bowls should be at a similar temperature. Pour the remaining cream into the yolks, continuing to whisk until everything is combined.

Place four to six medium-sized ramekins into a large baking dish. Pour custard batter into the

ramekins, dividing it evenly between the dishes. Pour hot water into the baking dish, careful not to splash it into any of the ramekins. Carefully place the entire dish in the oven and bake them low and slow for 50 to 60 minutes, until the custard is set. The very center should wobble when the edge of the ramekin is tapped but it should hold its shape. Let ramekins cool until you can safely lift them from the water bath. Chill the crème brûlée for a minimum of three hours, but overnight is preferred to allow the custards to fully set.

To serve and enjoy, sprinkle about a tablespoon of fine granulated sugar or sugar in the raw onto the surface of the custard. It should cover the entire surface of the custard. Gently torch the sugar with a kitchen torch by slowly passing it over it in circles until it bubbles and caramelizes (or broil for ~1.5 min if you don't have a torch). Allow the sugar to harden before serving and garnish with whipped cream and fresh fruit of your choice.



Morton and Bassett Spices

Roasted Summer Vegetable Soup with Pesto

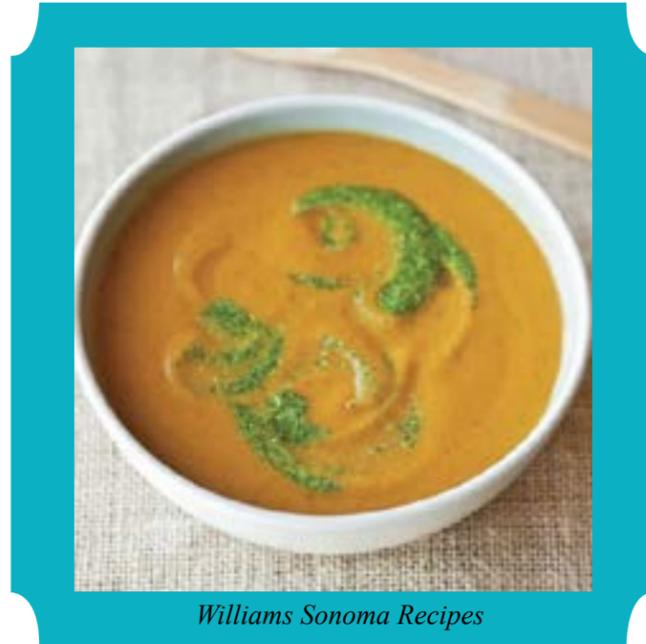
Ingredients:

2 leeks, white and pale green parts, finely chopped
4 carrots, peeled and cut into 2-inch pieces
2 zucchini, cut into 2-inch pieces
2 Asian eggplants, cut into 2-inch pieces
2 large tomatoes, quartered
2 potatoes (about 10oz), peeled and cut into 2-inch pieces
4 ½ cups chicken broth
2 Tbsp olive oil
Salt and pepper
2 Tbsp finely chopped basil
2 Tbsp fresh lemon juice
Pesto of your choice for garnish

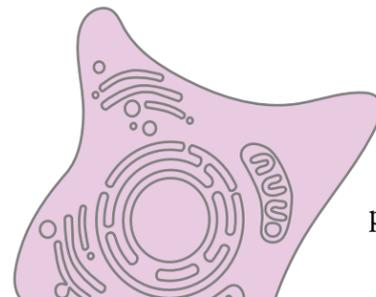
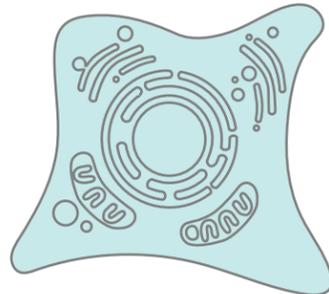
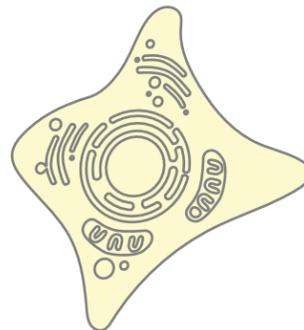
Preheat oven to 425°F. In a large roasting pan, combine the leeks, carrots, zucchini, eggplants, tomatoes, and potatoes. Add ½ cup of the broth and the oil, season with salt and pepper, and mix until the vegetables are well coated. Roast, turning once, until the vegetables are softened, about 40 minutes. Remove the oven and let cool slightly.

Working in batches, puree the vegetables with ½ cup of the broth. Transfer to a large saucepan and stir in the remaining 3 ½ cups broth, the basil, and the lemon juice. If needed, add more broth for the desired consistency. Cook over low heat for 3 minutes to blend the flavors. Season with salt and pepper.

Serve, garnished with the pesto.



Williams Sonoma Recipes



Thank you for reading.

For any questions, comments, concerns, or if you're interested in joining our team, please feel free to contact us at:

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Check out our [blog](#) and [twitter](#) page!

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