

Food Network show tastes Tampa



[Times photo: Stefanie Boyar]

Tampa chef Marty Blitz, left, prepares a dish for Marc Silverstein, co-host of The Best of ..., a Food Network show, during filming of an episode called "End Zone Eats."

By BABITA PERSAUD

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TAMPA -- The camera never lies, so when the Food Network glides through Tampa this week, hopping from restaurant to restaurant for a special to air in January during Super Bowl week, what do you think the nation will see? How about the Dogwater Cafe off Hillsborough Avenue, where gumbo comes served in a plastic, blue dog dish and sandwiches have names like Rabid Reuben, Old Yeller, German Shepherd (a weiner dog with sauerkraut). Now, cut to Mise en Place on Kennedy Boulevard, where chef Marty Blitz is preparing his version of a Super Bowl party meal: barbecue-glazed salmon, avocado salad with black-eyed pea vinaigrette and potato hash with tobacco onions.

"We're covering the spectrum here in Tampa," said Marc Silverstein, witty host of the Food Network's The Best Of show.

Across the country, the hit Food Network show treks, seeking the best hot dog, the most decadent dessert, the best dives. Each half-hour episode centers on a

topic. Super Bowl XXXV brought them to Tampa for "The Best of the End-Zone Eats."

And so began their search for Tampa's finest.

"We have researchers who work with the chamber, who look on the Internet and in newspapers and magazines," said Silverstein, a former television reporter.

Of course, the crew is making a stop at Bern's today, touring its phone-book sized catalog of wines.

The weeklong stint includes a stop at Busch Gardens and Chidi Ahanotu's new place, Sack's Seafood Grille & House of Jazz on Kennedy.

Dogwater Cafe, where the crew was Tuesday, was chosen by local viewers, who sent in letters saying "you have to see this place," Silverstein said.

Mise en Place, also the stop on Tuesday, was chosen for its reputation.

"It's a little dream come true for a restaurant in Tampa," said owner Maryann Blitz. She and husband Marty Blitz rushed around the already bustling kitchen filled with racks and hanging pans while boom and camera followed. Except this was a cleaned up Marty. His apron is never that white.

Fifteen years in the restaurant and catering business and the husband-and-wife team have only done a couple handfuls of Super Bowl parties. For the Food Network, Marty, who's a big fan of the show, came up with the menu.

In addition to the glazed salmon, there is tenderloin dusted with chili and pecan bourbon sauce. The grits -- yes, there are grits -- are mixed with three cheeses and black pepper.

Dessert: Plant City strawberry shortcake with grand marnier chantilly.

On Friday, the camera crew will film the meal being presented in a home off Old Tampa Bay.

What viewers will see: new Southern barbecue served in a modern, artistic kitchen overlooking the water. There are going to be guests and mingling, said Maryann Blitz, and everything will look like a real Super Bowl party.