

The Bon Vivant Diary

Chapter 1 - October 2011

Tidbit #1

Amazing story in the May issue of Vanity Fair Magazine...it seems someone tried to poison the most valuable vineyard in the entire world...La Romanée-Conti. Burgundy is three hours southeast of Paris and the Côte d'Or is the prize growing region...some say it is the greatest piece of real estate in all of winedom. This vineyard is centuries old and in January of 2010; someone tried to extort 2 million Euro from proprietor Aubert de Villaine by threatening to poison the entire vineyard. He was captured and the plot was thwarted, but two vines were killed to prove the point. What a story....It's a Morley Safer 60 Minutes piece if there ever was one...maybe he's working on it? Read it for yourself: <http://www.vanityfair.com/culture/features/2011/05/vineyard-poisoning-201105>

Tidbit #2

One of the most delicious dinners I've experienced in many a year....the Northern Nevada Wine Association monthly at Jazmine on Double R Blvd. in south Reno....It was where East meets West...oriental food paired with German Wines.

The reception wine was a 2008 von Buhl Riesling Sekt Brut...a sparkling, dry white that was soft, nice fruit and pretty much bone dry. Good way to prepare the palate for what was about to dazzle your socks off!

First course Ahi Tuna Tartar with an X.O. Sauce served in a stack of "chips" making it finger food and the 2006 Becker Laissez-Faire Riesling. The Tartar was excellent and the wine is exceptionally pure and very clean...lovely opulence but also nice acidity and great purity. The fruit is more on the apricot/peach side. The minerality is present but this is a wine about fruit, and exuberant fruit at that.

Course two...Maine Lobster Shumai Dumplings with a ginger and scallions sauce...rich and so flavorful...mouth-watering with every bite! Paired with the 2007 Wirsching Silvaner a white...On the nose, kind of a stony fruit and white flowers, a little like some pinot blanc. On the palate quite dry and minerally with pear flavors. Good acid. Kind of a focused and pure wine. Short finish

Course three...Maine Diver Scallops pan seared with sautéed pea sprouts and basil butter sauce...they were so moist and the sauce kept your mouth bursting with flavor...an almost mustard yellow Riesling was paired with this...2003 von Buhl Spatlese Dry Riesling....Quite thick and a bit sweet, the flavors were nice, but not terribly complex. A bit more acidity would have added to my enjoyment of this wine and helped the flavors pop even more.

Course four...5 Spice Braised Short Ribs with garlic noodles...the spices...cinnamon, anise, clover, fennel and ginger and a pinch of white pepper...the meat fell apart with a fork and a rich, almost sweet flavor but still very savory...the wine, my favorite of the evening...a classy wine... 2009 Becker Pinot Noir...elegant with a profile that lands somewhere between Oregon & Burgundy. Bright Cherry, touch of minerality. Oak influence is modest... very European style and with grapes bought from the French...how could you go wrong...the pairing spot on!

And there was more....Grilled Asian Herb Marinier Lamb Chop with mini-Demi-glaze from the meat drippings....so much flavor...so tender...melts in your mouth with some ginger and hint of orange...and still a savory note to please any palate...2008 Schnaitmann Lemberger. The late-ripening Lemberger probably originated in vineyards on the lower stretches of the Danube River. Extremely dark in color...complex...the bouquet reminiscent of blackberries, sour cherries, plums, currants, gooseberries, bananas and chocolate, as well as vegetal aromas, such as green beans or green bell peppers. Noticeable tannins and a long finish. A wine drinker's wine!

At last, dessert...Mandarin Orange Cheesecake...light, but I couldn't finish it paired with an Eiswein...grapes for ice wine have to be picked and crushed at a bone-chilling 17°F (-8°C) or below...2003 Bert Simon Herrenberg Beerenauslese...Medium gold color; honeyed, baked apricot, pear, lime nose; luscious, unctuous, honeyed, apricot nectar palate, lacking acidity; long finish...thick and sweet.

Hats off to Chef Quoc and his staff for an amazing repast. Also, to Mark Baldwin of Encore Beverage for coming up with the idea and finding the right restaurant to pull it off. The wines were from Rudi Wiest and one of the true highlights was having its Vice President of Sales Laura Williamson there to present the wines. She also happens to be a Master Sommelier and Certified Wine Educator. Folks, that Master Sommelier is a major feat. There are only about 186 MS IN THE WORLD...and ONLY 17 women so you can see how fortunate we were to get Laura. She was a delight, informative and spoke the "common man's language" when explaining the wines. Everyone enjoyed her presentation and personality. And let me tell you, the difficulty to achieve this level of wine knowledge is evident on how few MS there are!

Tidbit #3

Restaurant and Wine Director Philip DeManczuk and Chef de Cuisine Neil Campbell at Sterling's Seafood & Steakhouse in the Silver Legacy put on a very unusual dinner....serving Absinthe as the paired drink. This green, highly distilled, high alcohol (about 120 proof) beverage is an anise-flavored spirit derived from herbs including the leaves and flower..."grande wormwood", green anise and sweet fennel. It has a psychoactive effect and can become addictive. So much so that in 1915 it was outlawed in the US and wasn't allowed back until 2007. It's produced in France, Switzerland, Spain and the Czech Republic.

We started with the "Hemingway"...a shot of Absinthe in Champaign...fun, the anise flavor was right there in the bubbly for sure.

First Course...house cured Pine infused Gravlax of Salmon with baby greens and Dijon drizzle. Light, lovely, fresh salmon..."The Czech Absinthe Ritual" was presented with this

course...a cube of sugar soak in Absinthe placed on a special spoon then placed over a glass with more Absinthe in it and then lit...and it did burn...allowing the cube to caramelize dropping into the glass below...it created a cloudy mixture...then some water to cool it down a bit, then bottoms up. Wow...sweet and strong!

Second course...Pot-au-Feu...beef and vegetable soup with a hint of tarragon. A simple, hearty with a savory broth with nice chunks of beef and root vegetables. With this, we had "green tea"...a shot of Absinthe, two parts cranberry juice, tonic water and a slice of lemon...it was sweet-tart with the ever-present anise flavor!

The Main Course was roasted filet on a bed of braised fennel and artichoke bottom puree with potatoes and red wine sauce. The meat was perfect medium rare and the accompanying was some salt with anise and a sweet, hearty taste. "Traffic light" was the concoction...two parts cranberry, Absinthe and one part orange juice...a lot of acid in the mouth with a sweet-tart flavor again.

Dessert was Hidden Valley Honey Panna Cotta, Fennel Breton and Fraises des bois...this was a custard mold with an almost savory anise sauce and a strawberry..."Van Gogh's Ear"...(maybe drinking too much Absinthe cause him to lob off the ear?) Absinthe, three parts grapefruit juice and a dash of grenadine, lemon slice...no we're talking tart with a hint of sweet...pucker power lives!

Thanks to Brian Szatkowski of Southern Wine & Spirits for the commentary and walking us through the adventure in green. And to Philip and Chef Neil, thanks for trying something different and bringing another level of culinary achievement to *The Biggest Little City*...

Cheers!

Tidbit #4

Tom Young, Nevada's Barron of Beer and owner of the Great Basin Brewing Company, has reached another mile-stone...he's a baker. Using a wine versus beer tasting with cheese, he introduced his new Artisan "Icky" Bread. It was inspired by his legendary "Icky" IPA. He uses the barley left after the brewing process which adds strength and fiber to the loaf. A little local Hidden Valley Honey to take away some of the bitterness from the beer and it really had a great flavor. It's nice, solid bread that reminds me of the old soda bread but with complex flavors...a little molasses, hearty grain and a solid texture with a hint of sweet as it passes over the tongue. What I did note was that the beers he selected and the more hearty cheese paired extremely well with the bread. He tasted against a Cabernet Sauvignon...I one of these imbibers who feels it's either beer or wine...and never the twain shall meet. The bread will be on the menu in the restaurants and the loaves will sell for \$4. Bravo Tom!

Tidbit #5

The second annual South Lake Tahoe food & Wine Festival at Harrah's Harvey's was a great success. They've really found a great formula to treat the locals and bring in some folks from out-of-town. It was easily a weekend of feasting...My old buddy Martin Yan,

who has done 3000 TV broadcasts and written 30 cookbooks, prepared a dinner Friday night and did his always entertaining demo during the Saturday sampling extravaganza...Beyond the Fork. Chef's from all the Harrah's properties nationwide come together with sampling of signatures dishes. There's plenty of wine to pair with these tastes and spirits, as well. Jimmy Russell, the Master Distiller for Wild Turkey, was his jovial self always ready with a great story as you sip his golden goodness. And he did his Bourbon & Steak Dinner to rave reviews. The highlight of the event has become The President's Dinner and this one no exception. Michel Richard of Central in Caesars Palace in Las Vegas put on a culinary show paired with Stag's Leap Wines that blew the roof off 19 Kitchen atop Harvey's. He was also kind enough to do a demo for the folks on Saturday showing his skills and, I might add, wit...funny Frenchman who can cook! John Dupont III, the McCallan Ambassador also poured...he told me they were releasing a 60 year McCallan Scotch...I can't wait to hear the price point of that quaff! Think about attending next year, well worth the \$60 ticket for the whole day full of memorable food and drink!

GURU ALERT: Martin Yan is opening his new restaurant in San Francisco, MY China, about April of next year. Check it out at: www.MYChinaSF.com

Carpe Diem!