

# **A Most Imaginative Dinner: V. Mertz Wine & Food Event 2-26-2012**

By Tom Murnan

Twenty members and four guests experienced one of the most imaginative and delicious dinners served for a club event in a long time. IWFS Council Bluffs member and Proprietor David Hays turned his team loose to create remarkable wine and food pairings for our benefit. They started by holding the event on Sunday, their day off, as the restaurant was closed to the general public.



Certified Sommeliers David Eckler, Chris Walter and Matthew Brown worked with Head Chef Jon Seymour, Sous Chef Jacob Newton, and Pastry Chef Greg Pearsall to pair the wines and food courses. It is not everyday that we have Sommeliers selecting our event wines, and every wine matched its course with great precision. Chef Seymour was gracious enough to provide me with his prep sheet, which our knowledgeable servers perused before our arrival so they could answer our questions about the courses. Some of the more technical comments came from this prep sheet. I wish all restaurants were this efficient!



We started off quaffing with a **2010 Case Ibidini Insolia** from Sicily. I know that Sicily has lately been garnering praise for its wines, but that praise is usually reserved for reds. This was a delightful and minerally **white** that set the tone for the evening and nicely matched the hors d'oeuvres. The varietal was Insolia, somewhat obscure, and only something that an insider like our Sommeliers would know about. Very nice choice.





The menu did not break out what the appetizers would be, just citing “Assorted Cheeses and Accompaniments”, but we had a nice spread of **Tomato Confit Bruschetta**; **Goat Cheese Panna Cotta with Beet Tartare**, chopped pepper, and sorrel leaf; **Dried Cherries**; and **Citrus Marmalade**. Also available were four kinds of cheese: **Shropshire** (pasteurized cow’s milk from England), **Manchego** (made in the La Mancha region of Spain from the milk of Manchega bred sheep), **Red Spruce 7 year Cheddar** (aged Wisconsin Cheddar from Roth Kasse cellars) and **Swiss Raclette**. Raclette comes from the French word “racier” which means to scrape. Cow’s milk, it is traditionally a melted cheese, used in fondue. The Swiss is firmer than French Raclette. It formed the base of the bruschetta.







My opinion only, but that bruschetta was one of the best of that ilk I have ever had, and I have had a lot, since wife Mary is Italian! The recipe is easy enough for a home chef to attempt, and the results will be stunning. V. Mertz and Chef Seymour have graciously allowed me to reproduce it for you below. I plan to attempt this one at home as one of the best bruschetta's ever. Delizioso! Bravo!

The base was composed of French bread slices large enough to accommodate a slice of tomato confit. On this was placed garlic confit, the Raclette cheese and the whole piece of tomato confit. Moist and savory.



The soup course consisted of **Snap Pea Soup** with **Brioche Toast** and **Beef Lardo**. This was a modern take on an old warhorse, pea soup. Recall that I said this was one of the most imaginative food and wine events we have had? Well, the beef lardo is just one example. Much care and attentiveness to small details characterized just this small, but important aspect of the dish. **Lardo** is long-term cured meat usually made with pork fat back (but in this case, made with the fatty parts of the Wagyu beef belly). It was cured with thyme, rosemary, garlic, salt, sugar, peppercorns, juniper and crushed red pepper. It was packed in the salt mixture for 2 weeks, then rinsed and patted dry and left to hang for up to 4-6 months. This batch had been hanging for about 2 ½ months. As it ages, the fibrous fat breaks down into a mouth-melting texture. Cut like a piece of thick bacon, it added a lively contrast to the pea flavors.



The soup was made from sugar snap peas, vegetable stock, cayenne, salt and sugar. It was designed to be served warm, but not piping hot. The base of the bowl contained grilled snow peas, and a few more pieces of pearl onion. Not many pea soups contain two kinds of peas.

**The Brioche Toast Point-** was a long piece of brioche that had been toasted to crisp it up. It was set along the rim of the bowl. The toast point had the bulk of the **garnish**

placed on it. There were dots of herbed aioli (chive, parsley, thyme), topped with chive and parsley leaves, thin slices of beef lardo, pearl onion and preserved lemon rind.

Finally, the soup was crowned with **Preserved Lemon** - Lemons cut into disks and packed in salt and sugar, frozen and thawed 3 times, and then rinsed and packed in oil. They were sweet and briny, with a texture similar to a stiff citrus marmalade.



After each course, our sommeliers gave a brief explanation of the wines paired for the course by Matthew Brown and David Eckler, who took turns. A **2010 Alois Lageder Müller Thurgau** from the Alto Adige region of Italy accompanied the soup. Müller Thurgau is a cross between Riesling and Sylvaner. It was once prolific because it was easier to grow than Riesling, but it lost favor as it became mass-produced plonk. Only the good producers survive today.

Our next course consisted of **“Old Chatham” Camembert En Croute**. Camembert was baked in a puff pastry shell. It was served hot with toasted prunes, figs, pecans, and thyme oil in Balsamic syrup. The dish was made to pair with a red wine. The **Prune Compote** consisted of dried prunes cooked with shallot, thyme and red wine. The **Thyme Oil** was made from blanched thyme and parsley (for color) blended with canola





oil. Finally, the **Fig & Balsamic Syrup** was composed of dried figs poached in balsamic vinegar until slightly reduced, pureed and strained. The fruit was a perfect foil to the rich savory cheese melting all over the plate, as was the **2008 Inama Carmenere**, a red wine from the Veneto district in Italy, which also helped mollify the richness of the cheese.



Our salad course was composed of cold **Shaved Asparagus & Fennel Salad**, adorned with Marcona Almonds and a Blood Orange Granité. The course was intended to be a very light and powerful salad, designed to be a refreshing palette cleanser. The component parts of this course are as follows: **Fennel Salad**. Shaved fennel, blood orange juice and zest, apple cider vinegar, salt and sugar were the main ingredients. Here the chef used blood oranges instead of cara cara oranges. Blood oranges are known for their tartness, and of course red color. In addition to the above, we had: **Shaved Asparagus** – Asparagus stalks shaved very thinly and refreshed in an ice bath to make

them curl. They were dressed with a little George Paul Temperia vinegar, salt and GOP, tossed with blood orange supremes. **Blood Orange Granité** was a nice touch as a garnish. It consisted of “Shaved ice” made from glucose, blood orange juice, bottled orange juice and a splash of apple cider vinegar. This was frozen solid and then scraped with a fork. **Whipped Orange Pith Puree** topped all and was composed with orange pith puree (blood orange pith & zest, salt and sugar) mixed with methocel F50 (a hydrocolloid [food chemical that emulsifies/swells water molecules]) and whipped in the kitchen aid to create a meringue/marshmallow like puree. My advice: do not try this at home! I don’t know about you, but I don’t have any methocel F50 lying around in the cupboard. It looks like a lot of work, but was delicious.

The wine went back to a white, which goes to show that you do not have to be bound to a strict progression from white to red on your wine list. The **2010 Domaine Guy Allion Sauvignon Blanc** provided a crisp counter point of acid and slight grassy flavors that married quite nicely with the salad.



**Leg of Lamb** formed the **Entrée**. Savory and forcefully lamb-like, it was a tour-de-force. The prep sheet describes the course thusly: The idea behind this dish was to make a dish that evoked a walk through a coniferous path during the end of winter, hence the pine, juniper, berries, and walnut “twigs.”

**Lamb** - The lamb leg was slow roasted in an oven at 135F for 10 hours. It is crusted with herb and pine salt (fir quills, thyme, rosemary, GOP, parsley). The leg sat on a bed of **Cauliflower** – Cauliflower puree (cauli, salt, butter), florettes (sautéed), and shaved (white and purple dressed with Banyuls vin, and salt). Promoting the forest theme, berries and nuts were used. **Braised Blueberries** consisted of frozen blueberries cooked with fir quills, salt, sugar, GOP and thyme. Also **Fresh Blueberries** were included. These were tossed in oil and black pepper. For the nut, **Walnuts** were selected and a **Praline** made from toasted walnuts, honey, sugar, cayenne, salt and butter. Visually accenting the conifer forest theme, edible **Twigs** formed a garnish. They were made from



a tuile batter of flour, walnuts, egg, salt and sugar, baked, pureed and then piped out into twig shape and baked at 200F until dry.

The wine consisted of a **2009 K Vintners “Sundance Vineyard” Syrah** from Wahluke Slope, Washington. Washington is best known for its Pinot Noirs, but this Syrah had the stuffing to stand up to the powerful lamb and earth and forest flavors. Well-selected and quite good with this course.



Finally, we ended the meal with a **Chocolate “Torchon”** which **was** composed of Brown Butter Ice Cream, Cashew and Smoked Sea Salt. This was paired with a 2009 Domaine La Tour Vieille from the Banyuls area of France. The wine was sweet and reminiscent of a Port.





**In sum**, this was a true **gourmand's** dinner. Delicious, imaginative, meticulous in its detail, I am sure it will prove to be one of the very best events this club will have this year. There are very few establishments that will go to the lengths that V. Mertz and Chef Seymour did: Lardo aged for 2 ½ months; tomato, garlic (see below) and prune compotes; preserved lemon, frozen and thawed three times; shaved asparagus, plunged into an ice bath to make them curl; leg of lamb slow roasted for 10 hours; whipped orange pith puree; brown butter ice cream. Each and every course was carefully thought out, both on the food side as well as the wine side. Service was efficient and unobtrusive. Bravo to David Hays and his expert crew for quite a culinary memorable evening!

We tend to emphasize the wine a little more than the food in this club, so I thought it would be apropos to include a food recipe for our members in the International Wine and FOOD Society, Council Bluffs. As promised, here is the Tomato Confit Bruschetta.

# **TOMATO CONFIT BRUSCHETTA**

**By V. Mertz's JON SEYMOUR**



## **For Confit**

- Tomatoes (Romas or meaty tomatoes) amount determined by number of bread slices required, skin removed (optional).**
- Salt**
- Sugar**
- Olive oil**
- Thinly sliced garlic**

## **For Bruschetta**

- French bread baguette**
- Garlic confit to spread**
- Swiss Raclette Cheese approximately 1/8 inch thick slices**
- Tomato confit slices**

## **For Garlic Confit**

- Peeled garlic sufficient to cover bread.**
- Vegetable Oil**
- Olive Oil**
- Thyme sprigs**

**Make the Tomato Confit.** Remove the tomato skin if desired. Quarter, and remove the core and seeds. Place tomatoes on a lightly oiled (olive oil) baking sheet. Salt & sugar to taste, and lightly cover with olive oil. Place in oven and bake 2 hours at 175° F. Cool.

**Make the Garlic Confit.** In an oven, or on the stovetop, submerge peeled garlic in 90% vegetable oil and 10% olive oil. Add thyme sprig(s) to taste. Bake at 180°F or on low heat stovetop to soften enough so garlic is spreadable, about 1 hour. Remove from oil and pat dry. Mash garlic and place in small container.

**Assemble Bruschetta.** Cut French baguette into approximately 1/4 inch thick slices large enough to hold confit pieces. Spread garlic confit on bread, add slice of Raclette, and top with slice of tomato confit. Bake in 250° F oven to warm through, until cheese just begins to melt, about 10 minutes. Serve immediately while still warm.