

The Bluffs Food & Wine

June 2014 *gazette*

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A publication of the Council Bluffs Branch of the International Wine and Food Society

President's Comments



Dear Members,

It seems like spring is having a tough time this year. The weather has been cool and slow to warm. When we do get over 90 degrees it's followed by record lows and the latest frost date ever. Despite all this (being the Optimist that I am), my thoughts have already turned to summer. That means grilling dinner and evenings sitting out on the patio drinking a refreshing white wine.

One of my favorite varietals is Sauvignon Blanc. We recently were introduced to **Max Reserva Sauvignon Blanc 2012** from **Errazuriz** winery in Chile. It has a light yellow color and features citrusy lime and grapefruit notes edged with an herbaceous side that recalls green chili pepper. The palate has body and softness with refreshing acidity and a long finish.

Sauvignon Blanc works well with seafood and fish. If you're grilling try some marinated prawns or a simply cooked sea bass with olive oil. This wine should also work well with a light salad with goat cheese.

Summer will come eventually. Give this wine a try. It is available at Hy-Vee for less than \$17.

Enjoy,

Bob Kossow

President

**“He who loves not wine, women and
song remains a fool his whole life long.”**

—Johann Heinrich Voss

Editor's Corner



Dear Members,

It finally feels like Spring, and a wonderful way to kick off the season was with a great meal at **V. Mertz**. Perennially one of the best of the best in the Omaha restaurant scene, this time was no different. My review this time is longer than usual to let our readers know just how imaginative and creative Chef Jon Seymour's recipes are at V. Mertz. Unusual ingredients, such as rye, malt syrup, chamomile, Hakurei turnip, pea tendrils, and alfalfa hay will not be found on your average restaurant or steak house carte de menu. Plus, the restaurant cures most of its charcuterie. It was all served with aplomb and great timing. The wine knowledge at V. Mertz is second to none in Omaha with four certified sommeliers. But we also had a sit down Brandy tasting at this event. All Cognacs and Armagnacs are Brandy, but not all Brandy is an Armagnac or Cognac. Read about our tasting experience with these highly alcoholic wines.

I talked **Chef Jon Seymour** into sharing a portion of his Diver Scallop recipe. I was impressed by the **Rye Porridge**, which was used as a base on which the scallop was placed. Check out his recipe for Rye Porridge and give it a try when having company over for dinner.

John Fischer did a stellar job of describing why the carbonation is so important in the taste of Champagne. Those bubbles completely transform a sour, still wine into something divine. Read about why this happens.

Mary and my wine vacation in Portugal included a stop at the famous **Quinta do Noval**, which was the highlight of our Port Lodge explorations. Noval made its reputation with the 1931 Vintage Port. It so happened that we had a Noval wine for dessert at V. Mertz, although it was the earlier maturing "**Sival**" Vintage Port. Take a look at my description of one of the most famous Quintas in Portdom.

Enjoy!

Tom Murnan



Photo courtesy of hugel.com

Event Report

Cognac vs. Armagnac Tasting @ V. Mertz

by Tom Murnan



What a great event! What was there not to like? An educational tasting on a topic with which most of us are not too familiar, at one of the premier restaurants in town. The staff volunteered to work on their day off to put on our dinner. And we were in good hands with four accredited sommeliers: **Matt Brown, David Eckler, Jennifer Fravel** and **Chris Wolter**. You would have to go quite a ways to find such high powered wine staff in one restaurant. Thirty guests attended, of which nine were guests and three were new members. **Ed Jelinek** and **Gina & Ron Stinn** enjoyed their first event as new members. Welcome aboard!

For starters, we enjoyed **Gruet Blanc de Noirs**, a non-vintage method Champenoise sparkler from, of all places, New Mexico. It was an excellent substitute for the much more expensive French Champagne. A cutting board full of house-made Charcuterie and Artisanal cheeses and sliced baguette made a tasty hors d'oeuvre plate.

We paused for our **Cognac and Armagnac tasting** and before continuing our dinner. After the tasting, the next three courses had not one but two wines to compare. **Matt Brown** led the wine discussions, and **Chef Jon Seymour** provided me with details of the composition of our courses, which included a surprising amount of unusual ingredients.

Our first sit down course was **Jambonneau with Assorted Brassicas, Lentils, and Pork Vinaigrette**. Jambonneau is the front leg of ham, in this case Duroc pork, dry cured (spalla), and aged for 25 months in house. The Brassicas consisted of garlic mustard purée and locally foraged flowers, scarlet Belle radish and baby Hakurei turnip. Grilled green cabbage added an interesting smoky, charred flavor. The lentil salad had lentils and black pepper purée. The Vinaigrette consisted of apple cider vinegar, prosciutto stock, shallot, garlic and chives. It was a wonderful dish of many competing but complimentary flavors.

Matt spoke of our wine pair. **The 2009 Domaine des Baumard Savennières Chenin Blanc from France, and a 2013 Bayten Sauvignon Blanc (SB)** from one of the oldest wine areas in South



◀ Africa near the Cape of Good Hope. The Chenin was high quality and had wooly and oxidized pear flavors with a high acid background. The SB was acid driven and had grapefruit and gooseberry flavors with green tones and green flavors. Both wines were good matches for the pork dish. Some preferred the SB for its assertive flavors. I preferred the Chenin Blanc.

Diver Scallop Duet with Rye Porridge, Asparagus, and Plum came next. This was an imaginative and true gourmet's delight. A New England Diver Scallop was seared on the outside but crudo (raw inside) and flavored with pickled mustard seed, chive, and crème fraîche. This sat on a bed of Rye Porridge, made with brewer's rye and malt syrup and rye crumb. Glazed asparagus and asparagus foam sat on top of the porridge. Red dots of pickled plum purée with black peppers finished the garnishment. The porridge was one of my evening's favorites. It imparted deep earthy flavors, a contrast to the taste of the sea with the scallops, and was slightly sweet. I asked for the recipe.

This time we had a red and a white wine to compare. Our red was a **2011 Domaine Vissoux - Pierre Marie Chermette "Les Trois Roches" Moulin à Vent** (the Gamay grape) from France. The white was a **2012 Hamilton Russell Estates Chardonnay** from Hemel-En-Aarde Valley, South Africa, one of the southernmost growing areas in that country. The vineyard catches the cooling

breezes from Antarctica, and has perfect growing conditions for Chardonnay. 33% was raised in new French oak. Our red hails from Beaujolais, with Moulin à Vent being the most brooding and age-worthy of cru Beaujolais. It was raised in oak barrels that had been used at least five times before so as not to impart much oaky flavor to the plush, ripe fruit flavors. I thought the white wine went best with the scallop, and the red with the porridge.

Smoked Wagyu Beef, Mushroom, English Pea and a Potato Terrine with Puff Pastry made up our entrée course. Wagyu bavette (a French term for a particularly marbled piece of sirloin) came from the **Morgan Ranch** near Burwell, NE. The beef was grilled and smoked with sugar maple wood. Burnt mushroom purée formed a savory addition. A potato terrine formed the second half of this plate. Reminiscent of a Napoleon, there were three layers of Russet potatoes, button mushrooms, pea Béchamel sauce and oxtail beef. The layers were topped by a cap of puff pastry and beef jus. Pea tendrils and snap pea purée dots garnished the plate. Accompanying this were two red Australia wines.

The **2010 Two Hands Sexy Beast Cabernet Sauvignon** from McLaren Vale, was compared to the **2010 Heartland Director's Cut Shiraz** from Langhorne Creek. The two districts are not that far from each other. The dark and broody fruit of the Beast had notes of menthol and leather, while

▶



the Cut had a plush, heavy body with black pepper and noticeable oak. When asked, the group was evenly divided as to their preference. They were both good matches to the Wagyu. The dish was deeply earthy but a bit on the heavy side with all the potatoes.

We finished with **White Chocolate, Strawberry, Chamomile & Hay**. Sliced strawberries were macerated in sugar & pepper as well as pickled strawberry with honey and cider vinegar. A strawberry parfait was made from roasted strawberries. Drops of chamomile gel with Saint Germain liqueur dotted the plate. A meringue was made from alfalfa hay and chamomile. Hay parfait (hay and custard base) with fresh sorrel, and hay and white chocolate crumb completed this dessert of many components and flavors. This was paired to a **2007 Quinta do Noval “Sival” Vintage Port**. The richness and sweetness of the port matched very well the fruit and white chocolate flavors of the dessert. I did not notice so much it’s 20.5% alcohol after the Cognac and Armagnac very high alcohol.

Thanks again to **David Hayes** and his staff for a true gourmet’s meal, and to **David & Patti Hipple** for planning and executing a top drawer event.

Cognac vs. Armagnac

The Tasting

by Tom Murnan



Occasionally, our Branch has a sit down tasting to explore the nuances of the theme selected. This time we studied the top of the Brandy pyramid: Cognac and Armagnac. Four pre-poured glasses held our brandies. The modest pour of about a half ounce was just right for these (compared to wine) alcoholic monsters. Certified Sommelier **Matt Brown** led the group in the tasting. Our job was to distinguish the Cognacs from the Armagnacs in a **single blind** setting.

Armagnac and Cognac are both similar and different, Matt informed us. They are both in the region close to Bordeaux. Cognac is near the northern side of the Bordeaux estuary, important because it was easy to ship product to England in the age of sail. Cognac has had great English influence: English markets and English wine merchants were responsible for creating it. Armagnac is further inland and had more trouble getting their wine to port in the 17th century. Most Cognac sold is 10 years and younger. XO (Extra Old) is aged six years and older, and is the among best of the best. Only one category, Hors d'Age, is higher and older than 10 years. 35 million bottles get exported to their largest customer, the USA. Of this, 40% is produced by one house: Hennessy. Armagnac is not marketed as aggressively, so it is

less prevalent here.

The biggest difference between Cognac and Armagnac is that Cognac is double distilled, so it tends to be clearer, smoother and more subtle, but with a higher level of alcohol, around 70%. Armagnac is distilled only once resulting in alcohol levels at about 58%. Armagnac tends to be made by smaller, family owned firms. There are less expectations for Armagnac, and less government restrictions, so they are more at liberty to experiment. While both Cognac and Armagnac primarily use the grape Ugni Blanc, Armagnac also uses Folle Blanche, which is difficult to grow but high in quality. Both of these distilled wines then are aged in oak for extended periods. Cognac's taste profile is floral, herbal and spicy with dried fruit flavors. Armagnac has more complex flavors of vanilla, maple, toffee and fruits.

The five tables chose a spokesperson to determine which pair was Cognac and which Armagnac. My notes tell me that three out of five tables got it right! Since I was the spokesman for Table 4, which had it exactly backwards, I plead inexperience! Retail prices ranged from \$65 for Armagnac to \$200-\$250 for the Hennessy Cognac XO.

Chef John Seymour of V. Mertz

Rye Porridge

by Chef John Seymour

1 POUND
1 POUND
12OZ
10OZ
2T
4T
100z

BREWERS RYE
BREWERS RYE FLAKE
BUTTER, UNSALTED
MALT SYRUP OR EXTRACT
SALT
SUGAR
WATER

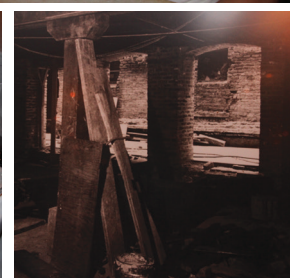
METHOD OF PREPERATION:

- Soak the flake rye in cold water for 20 minutes, strain the excess water. Fill a 5 quart pot with cold water. Add the whole rye and cook over high heat until soft, 30-45 minutes. Drain the rye and add it back to the pot.
- Add the drained flake rye and butter. Heat over medium flame and stir until the butter is melted.
- Add the remaining ingredients (malt syrup, salt, sugar and water). Cook until desired consistency. Stir frequently to prevent scorching on the bottom.
- Adjust seasoning as needed.
- Jon used the porridge as a base for a Diver Scallop at a IWFS CB Branch event 5-18-2014

Yield: 8 servings

Rye, rye flake and Malt Syrup are available in Omaha at: Fermenters Supply, Nebraska Brewing Supply, or Cornhusker Beverage.









Champagne—the Magic is in the Bubbles

by John Fischer



Champagne is a wine with many different faces. It is round, soft, and lush, while at the same time crisp, refreshing, tart, and light. The wine is somewhat aggressive and angular, but is also rich, smooth, and creamy. In your mouth it is very light bodied, yet as the wine expands in your mouth, you get the sensation of fullness and luxury—indeed, a wine with many intriguing contradictions.

Nevertheless, it is exactly these qualities that make it such a wonderful wine to pair with a wide variety of foods. Take for example creamy oyster stew. The oysters clamor for tartness. The squeeze of fresh lemon classically served with oysters speaks loudly for this union. A refreshing glass of light, crisp, dry, Chablis is a perfect match for oysters.

However, Chablis is somewhat wanting when it comes to the creaminess of the stew. Enter Champagne. It is light, tart, and crisp, but also creamy, smooth, and lush. There is no other wine that has this dichotomy of disposition. A still wine that is tart and crisp is not also going to be round, smooth, and creamy.

The other dichotomy regarding Champagne is that it is very low in alcohol, which makes it very light-bodied. One could argue that it is perhaps the lightest bodied of all wines. Its natural tartness (the still wine is unpalatably tart) together with its low alcohol combine to eviscerate the body of the wine. However, it is the creamy mousse in Champagne that rescues its virtue. This perceived creaminess provides a soft, round, smooth, tactile quality that neutralizes the aggressively high acidity. Without the bubbles, Champagne would be dreadful: coarse, harsh, and flawed.

This dual character of the wine is created by the character of its bubbles. High quality Champagne has tiny, uniform, evenly disbursed bubbles that engender it with its luxurious creaminess—like

that of whipped cream. Large, unevenly spaced bubbles attacks the mouth with a “snap-pop-and-crackle” temperament like that of a cheap carbonated beverage. It is the magic of the bubbles that gives Champagne its regal opulence.

Where does Champagne really shine in wine-food pairings? Foods that beg for both tartness and creaminess such as lobster bisque, New England clam chowder, shrimp risotto, lobster macaroni and cheese, or pike quenelles make great matches. Crusty, crispy, and puffed-up foods work wonderfully with Champagne: items incorporating choux pastry (wild mushroom gougères), fried breaded foods (fritto misto, breaded fried oysters), toasted items (toasted English muffins) Foods that are light and cold: dips, crudités, cold cuts, or any of a variety of light appetizers also make great matches with Champagne.

Champagne is a fabulous palate cleanser for foods that tend to cling to the surface of the mouth such as creamy cheeses, thick custards, creamy sauces, and egg yolk. The scrubbing bubbles of Champagne reduce cloying richness, refresh the mouth, and improve the sensation of taste.

Finally, Champagne is the consummate breakfast beverage. It is wonderful with poached eggs on toast, eggs Benedict, bacon, cheese omelets, breakfast casseroles, and toasted English muffins. Rarely will Champagne clash with any breakfast item.

Nevertheless, Champagne is not a panacea and has its limitations; it's not the ideal wine to serve in a chop house—a better choice can be found for beef and other like items.



John Fischer is a member and two-time president of the Omaha Branch of the IW&FS, past director of the Nebraska Chapter of LADV, and founding member of the Council Bluffs Branch of the IWFS. He is the author of two books: *The Evaluation of Wine and Wine and Food – 101*.

Murnan Portuguese Wine Vacation

Quinta do Noval • 6 June 2012: Vol. 11

by Tom Murnan

Today was one of the highlights of our guided trip. We made our way to one of the most famous Quintas in the Port hierarchy: the **Quinta do Noval** (QdN). We met our guide Lilianna, who gave us some facts about the Quinta. It is situated near the confluence of the Douro and Pinhão Rivers in very rugged country. The Pinhão valley creates a special microclimate by trapping humidity inside its walls, which increases the moisture in the soil in this hot, arid, rocky environment. Today the estate consists of 145 hectares, but only 90 are planted in vines. One important legal note about using the word Quinta on the label in Portugal: all the grapes must come from the estate. So if the label just says Noval, the grapes come from other than the estate. QdN's neighbor is also world famous: Taylor Fladgate Yeatman.

QdN was first registered in 1715 after the Prime Minister offered the land to a Portuguese family. Unfortunately, a later owner was more interested in the dancers at the Folies Bergère in Paris than the vineyard, and its quality slowly sank. Finally, the vineyards were destroyed by phylloxera in the 19th Century. In 1884, the estate was purchased by **António José da Silva**, whose last name we see today on Noval's earlier maturing line of vintage port (VP). Besides widening and improving the terraces, Silva replanted most of the vineyard to American rootstock, which was resistant to the root louse. But one vineyard escaped the scourge of phylloxera: the Nacional vineyard. This small plot of 2.5 hectares (7 acres) had ungrafted nacional vines, from which the vineyard gets its name. It is a field blend of Touriga Nacional, Tinto Francisco, Tinto Cão and Sousã.

In 1925 a decision was made to preserve this small portion and not use American rootstock. It was a sort of experiment as this vineyard was one of the most humid areas of the property but was also protected from the northwest wind exposures. They decided to fumigate the soil, not the plants, in this area. It had also not been affected by phylloxera. So, the Nacional vineyard was replanted with these ungrafted nacional vines. Six years later, Noval made one of the greatest VP's ever made: the **1931 QdN Nacional**. Most



producers did not declare a VP that year, but Noval did. The 1931 has always been a scarce wine. Only about 200 cases were produced. The amazing thing is that it was made from vines that were only six years old, proving that you don't always have to have old vines to make great wine.

Today, the 1931 is virtually unobtainable as most of the bottles have been drunk. In 1963 Silva expanded the vineyards. Antonio's son Fernando ran the business, and a cousin to his daughter's husband, **Frederico Zeller** became winemaker from 1927 to 1975. The Zeller name is well known in port circles. In 1993, QdN was sold to the French Insurance Company AXA Millesime, who put an Englishman, **Christian Seely**, in charge. Christian himself has never tasted the Holy Grail of VP, the 1931 Nacional, and it is one of his life's ambitions to do so. From 1931 to 2001, only 30 vintages from the Nacional vineyard have been declared.

QdN wines used to be aged down river at Villa Nova de Gaia, across the Douro from Oporto, but ever since a fire in 1991, the wines are now aged at the Quinta. Replanting the vineyards is a continuous thing, and the Quinta is replanting by grape variety. These include: Touriga Nacional, Sousão, Tourga Franca, Verdelho, and Tintos Cão, Roriz, Amarela, Francisca & Barroca. Noval





makes both table wines and ports, and was the first house to make a **Late Bottled Vintage (LBV)** in 1954. The Quinta still functions as a farm (quinta means farm in Portuguese) and grows oranges, almonds, figs, cherries and pears for visitors' meals. It has two vinification facilities, one of which is modern and raises wine in stainless steel vats.

The VPs begin life being treading by the human foot in granite lagars, in the old facility. A lagar looks like a shallow wading pool. QdN has women pick the grapes as they are more careful not to damage the fruit than men. Picking starts in the morning when it is cool. The men carry the 20 kilo boxes from the field (in the old days it was 70 kilos, or 150 lbs), and crushing typically begins at 8:00 in the evening. In the old days women were forbidden in the lagars, but today both sexes are allowed. It makes for a long and exhausting day at harvest time.

Treading in the lagar is hard work. Consistency is required to crush all the grapes. Typically, a line is made and every one holds on to another by putting their arms over the other's shoulder. About 70 people are needed. A rhythm is developed, bringing up one foot and then the other. It takes about two hours to tread a lagar. So why is this antique practice still used when it could be done by robotics? QdN feels they get better results when done by foot. The human foot is softer than a machine, and the temperature of human skin and its texture as well, helps to oxidize the juice. VP is typically crushed by foot, but not Tawny, Ruby, or still wines. Constant monitoring of the

temperature is required. If it gets too hot, you bleed the juice.

After our tour of the facility, we went to the tasting room where we tasted an incredible number of ports: Noval Black (trying to appeal to the young consumer); LBV 2005; 10, 20 and 40 year old Tawny; 2000 VP; 2003 Sival VP (Sival is designed to be drunk young); 2003 VP; 2004 VP; 2005 Sival VP; 2007 VP; 2008 VP and 2008 Cedro de Noval, a table wine. We also learned that salted Marcona almonds go well with Tawny ports.

Next time: A traditional vigneron field worker's lunch at the Quinta do Noval.



Upcoming Council Bluffs Branch Events

Mark Your Calendars!

June 29, 2014

Cordie Fisher & Deb Tritsch host
a wine and all appetizer event at
Vine & Branch in the Old Market.

July 13, 2014

Hosts: Jon & Jill Panzer and

Patti & Steve Hipple

Come and experience the culinary fusion of Chef Jose Dionicio's Peruvian heritage with the local summer harvest. Taita's (Peruvian for Father) is becoming one of Omaha's top seafood restaurants, but, it is so much more. Please join us on Sunday, July 13, 2014 for a Peruvian inspired meal and some South American wines.

Hosting an event?

Let us know when, where and a little bit
about what's going on!

We would love to include YOUR event on the calendar!
email details to: dmatz@darland.com



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Please notify Club Membership Chairman
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in hosting an IWFS event.

*Purpose: To meet communication and service needs, to broaden participation
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