



The International Wine & Food Society

Miami Branch

THE CAPITAL GRILLE
Welcomes
The International Wine & Food Society

Tuesday, March 25, 2003

Champagne Reception
Norwegian Smoked Salmon wrapped with Asparagus
Lanson, Brut Champagne

Lobster and Crab Cake
served with Corn Relish and topped with Tartar Sauce
Joseph Drouhin, Mersault-Genevrieres, 1er Cru, 1995

Petite Lamb Chops
Crusted with Rosemary Garlic served with Roasted Potatoes
Pahlmeyer, Napa Valley, 1994
Cain Five, Napa Valley, 1991

10 oz. Filet Mignon
or
14 oz. Dry-Aged Sirloin Steak
served with Wild Roasted Mushrooms and Fresh Creamed Spinach
Chateau Gruaud Larose, Saint-Julien, 1990
Chateau Langoa Barton, Saint-Julien, 1982

Selection of Cheeses
served with Grapes
Muga, Grand Reserva, Rioja, 1985 (Magnum)

Flourless Chocolate Espresso Cake
Warre, Vintage Port, 1970

IWFS Miami Branch
Boys Night
March 25, 2003
The Capital Grill
Reported by Christopher Zoller

The oak paneled walls, plush carpeting, high ceilings, open bar and rich atmosphere made for a great venue for a gents-only dinner. From the private elevator to the private wine and cigar storage lockers, the Capital Grill succeeds in catering to gourmet and gourmand alike. The restaurant devoted their entire lounge area to our group of 28 lucky members and guests as we sipped Lanson Black Label NV Brut and munched on simple but delicious asparagus spears wrapped in smoked salmon. We were still in the midst of a very busy night for the restaurant and bar, but had no lack of attention from the waitstaff. The champagne was crisp with tight acids but also creamy on the finish, with a lovely nose of toasted nuts and a slight hint of tropical fruit, and classic tiny bubbles.

After much convivial catch-up and greetings, we were ushered into the private dining room, where two long tables were set amidst a glass-enclosed wine collection. What a great setting! With no further ado, host Suhel Skaf welcomed us all and explained the format of the evening. At a setting like this, with simple well-prepared food, the atmosphere was primed for fun and friendship. Aply assisted by the equally ambidextrous Bob Dickinson, the first wine of the evening was poured, a Mersault-Genevrieres (1er Cru) 1995 by Joseph Drouhin. It was served with a Lobster and Crab Cake with corn and red pepper relish and topped with Tartar Sauce. The relish had a slightly spicy bite tempered a bit by the sauce and the cake was dense, moist, pure seafood and delicious. The wine benefited nicely from a little warming in the glass, starting off very crisp and acidic and opening up to show a great expanse of tropical fruit and a shellac-smooth finish. Some tasters felt it was classic Mersault, others got a Corton-like buttery finish. Either way, it was superb. White Burgundy shines with shellfish.

The second course was Petite Lamb Chops, crusted with Rosemary Garlic and cooked to order. Two perfect chops served with roasted potatoes were beautifully paired with two outstanding California "Bordeaux Blends". There ensued much discussion about the word "meritage", but the ingredients in the glass were classic Bordeaux varietals. These two wines show the inspired genius of Bob and Suhel. Both were blends of Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Merlot, Petit Verdot, and Malbec, all quickly identified by the Chairman of the Board of Governors of the Americas, Joe Garrigo. The first was the 1994 Pahlmeyer Proprietary Red Wine. Pahlmeyer tends to use more than 75% Cabernet Sauvignon, sometimes as much as 85%. The wine showed sweet, well-integrated tannins and gorgeous black currant fruit, some toast, and licorice on the nose. It had a great texture and an extremely smooth and long finish. It has aged slowly and gracefully and is still in perfect, youthful balance. The rich mouthfeel

included luscious concentrated black fruit flavors coating the midpalate. It should drink well for another decade, if it has been properly stored.

The second wine is also a blend of the same five grapes, the aptly named Cain Five, 1991, from Cain Cellars. Cain usually uses less than 60% Cabernet Sauvignon aiming for a slightly softer wine. At our end of the table we started with a bottle that could only be described as "off". Not corked nor vinegar, but it was clearly thin, weaker than a subsequent pour from a different bottle. As we have noted before, there can often be bottle variation within the same lot, or even the same case of wine. This can happen anywhere from the winery to the last place the bottle was stored. Fortunately there was plenty of this great, richly concentrated wine to go around. It showed hints of black cherry and herbs on the nose and a slight spice in the smooth, ripe flavors. It had low acidity, a good amount of alcohol, and a lush finish and may be closer to it's peak than the Pahlmeyer. That fact may have influenced those who felt it was superior. The beauty of these dinners is the free flow of comments and multiple discussion amongst the members, and Bob and Suhel reveled in the very animated comparisons of these two great wines. Much of the debate concerned the differences between the '91 and '94 vintages, and the obvious comparisons of style. The lamb chops were a perfect background for comparing this pair.

Our next course was classic steak house cuisine: our choice of either a 10-ounce Filet Mignon or a 14-ounce Dry-Aged Sirloin Steak. Cooked to order, these were served with Roasted Wild Mushrooms and Fresh Creamed Spinach. What could be better to pair with these than great Bordeaux?

Fortunately, we had some! The 1990 Gruaud Larose and the 1982 Langoa Barton, both from St. Julien. These wines inspired even more animated discussion and comparisons. To quote from a few: "wonderful subtleties", "tannins rounding out", "violets", and "fluidity". The Gruaud was excellent, with all components in balance. The fruit had indeed rounded out the tannins and the vanillin and tobacco from the oak had softened to the right complement. The wine caressed the tongue. The Langoa was dryer with a slightly tighter finish, but still well coordinated at the young age of 21. Clearly a group of guys can get carried away when describing sensuous wines. Supple yet firm, long lush legs, smooth mouthfeel all worked well. It became apparent to all that it is hard to compare one great wine to another. (I will let you imagine the analogies.) Each was so wonderful on its own comparison was not fair. We were all quite pleased to experience both.

The Capital Grill offered an excellent selection of several domestic and imported cheeses, again giving us choice instead of a fixed course. These were served with breads and crackers and grapes. The wine for this course was Muga Grand Reserva, from Rioja, the 1985 vintage in magnum. Muga's Prado Enea Reserva is arguably one of the top two or three wines in Rioja, a region famous for aging their wines for very long periods in a fair amount of American oak. The wines are more advanced in color and are smooth and supple, with aromas of tobacco, cedar and smoky oak. The '85 vintage was one of the best, both in quality and quantity. This wine had all of the typical Rioja characteristics plus smooth subtle fruit with very light tannins only because of the large format. It seemed to work well with all the different choices of cheese.

Dessert proved the old adage that everyone loves chocolate, and, like red wine, recent studies indicate it could actually be good for you. This was an exceptionally light Flourless Chocolate Espresso Cake. Delicate and very moist with rich chocolate flavors and only a hint of espresso, it was superb with the 1970 Warre Vintage Port. The wine stood up well to the deep flavors of the cake, clearly an excellent choice for chocolate over sauterne or other "stickies". It was even better with the few cigars that appeared around the table afterwards.

This dinner proved that simple meals can showcase wine and camaraderie. Everyone had his preferences, everyone had a choice or two to make, and everyone had a great time. It is especially fun when we can all learn something about either wine or food or service. In this case, bottle variation happens, glasses must be cleaned and thoroughly rinsed, and decanting and airing are very important. Special thanks to Suhel Skaf, our host and President, and to Bob Dickinson for both his input and (out) pouring of the wine.

