



The International Wine & Food Society

Miami Branch

Boys Night at Riviera Country Club

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Report by Christopher Zoller

With nary a mention of good old St. Patrick, about 26 members and guests gathered in the living room of The Riviera Country Club for a lovely reception. We had a new drink to try, Cremant d'Alsace, Cuvee Julien, Brut by Dopff. This is a delightful crisp sparkler from the Alsace region of France using local grapes and produced in the methode champenois. We learned that it needs to be served very cold and makes a light and pleasant aperitif, and it was wonderful with the selection of passed hors d'oeuvres. We enjoyed chilled oysters on small porcelain spoons with a dollop of Crème Fraiche and Caviar as well as a Carpaccio of Beef on Crostini with Sauce Vert. The green sauce had me thinking of St. Patty and the cured beef could have been corned. Also served was Chicken Wellington, a classic wrapped pastry filled with moist chicken as a change of pace from beef. Along with the Wellingtons were grilled portobello, crimini, and oyster mushrooms. All the hors d'oeuvres were excellent.

We were seated at five tables in the Candlelight Terrace Room overlooking the golf course with the beautiful Biltmore Hotel in the distance. The first wine poured was an old favorite, Ferrari-Carano Reserve Chardonnay 2000 from the Carneros region of California. This is a classic, very rich with oak and butter, but a nice touch of chalky minerals. It was smart to let this wine warm and air in the glass during the next two courses. The first course was a surprise from the chef: Duck Consommé with Shiitake Mushroom and Pastry Hats. The soup was clear and lean,

probably triple filtered to eliminate all fat, but very rich with good duck flavor. The mushrooms were perfectly diced and crunchy, accompanied by finely chopped chives. The mushrooms must have been roasted or fried to achieve their nice texture. The pastry hats actually looked like large white button mushrooms and were as visually appealing as they were tasty.

The fish course was Pan Roasted black Cod with Vermouth and Chevre Sauce. A small filet with skin on was perfectly cooked and dressed with a nice salad of frizzed lettuce, diced tomatoes, roasted shallots and long thin chives. This all sat atop a rich and thick sauce of a pale salmon color and a unique combination of the flavors of sweet vermouth and goat cheese. Here the Ferrari-Carano really started to shine with a nose of toasty oak and a lush, caramelized mouthfeel. It was an excellent pairing with the dish, and a favorite of one of our hosts, Austin Stubblefield.

The Entrée was a true delight and a great combination. It was Vegetable Stuffed Veal Loin with Sweetbreads and Truffle-Scented Gold Potato Puree. Executive Chef Mark Daley took tender veal loin, pounded it flat and rolled it around a rich, thick vegetable and tomato puree. The stuffing had wonderfully intense flavors complemented by a Madeira Demi Glace. The accompanying sweetbreads were very good sized, with a crisp crust and a tender center, having been quick cooked at a high heat. The whole dish was spectacular. Co-host Carl Melzer found a great Burgundy producer in our cellar: Domaine Faiveley. Their 1995 Charmes-Chambertin, a Grand Cru, was rich with great black cherry and blackberry fruit flavors and showing young crisp tannins. It had the large barnyard, leather and tobacco elements found in good Burgundy. This wine was a perfect match, as one of our tablemates said: "This (dish) is what Burgundies are made for".

We had an elegant cheese course featuring Aged Cheddar, Pierre Robert, and Mont Briac served at the perfect room temperature. Alongside came superb light skinned seedless grapes: they were Muscat Special. Our hosts found another wonderful wine match: Chateau Pape Clement, 1988 from Pessac Leognan, a Grand Cru Classe de Graves. With a hefty percentage of Merlot this wine was exceptionally smooth and fruity, super rich with sweet but high tannins. It was very complex, aromatic and full flavored, with hints of smoke, earth and black currants. It is drinking very well, and seems to be fully mature at this time, with some good years left.

Dessert was a gorgeous Poached Pear stuffed with White Chocolate Passion Fruit Mousse. The lovely tart flavor of the pear was nicely contrasted with the chocolate and fruit mousse stuffing. The accompanying wine was a Coteaux du Layon, 1996 by Saint Aubin. This unusual dessert wine is from chenin blanc grapes in the Loire Valley and it was nothing short of perfect with the dessert, being sweeter than the course and therefore enjoyable on its own. Chenin Blanc juice is lighter and a little crisper than sauvignon blanc, and this wine was sweet but not cloying, with a light finish.

Overall the service was exceptional and the staff of Riviera was very attentive. Chef Mark Daley and his Sous Chef, Mario Leiva joined us for some quick cuisine questions and our compliments. Co-hosts Austin Stubblefield and Carl Melzer were assisted by President Suhel Skaf and we all toasted another great experience of Wine Food and Friends.