



*The International Wine & Food Society*

**Miami Branch**

# **Babette's Feast**

**Two Chef's Restaurant**

**September 22, 2004**

**Report by Drew Bailey**

Celebration was the evening's theme as the Miami Branch of The International Wine & Food Society kicked-off its 2004-05 season with a stag event featuring an updated version of Babette's Feast at the Two Chef's Restaurant in Pinecrest. The feast was made famous by the movie of the same name, wherein the heroine created a meal from her memories of Mediterranean cuisine, after winning the lottery while working in cold Scandinavia.

The revelry began with seafood-inspired passed hors d'oeuvres featuring Crab Cakes with real Aioli, Tuna Tartare with Reggiano and Georges Blanc's Potato Fritters topped with a Beluga Caviar. Of course, no festivities are ever complete without the requisite champagne, and complementing this terrific trio of tapas was the impressive and imposing sight of a Methuselah of Alfred Gratien NV, which had graced the club's cellar for many years and was ready to make its debut. The attendees applauded the champagne, which had taken on many of the characteristics of "English Style" in terms of the size of the bubbles and the mouthfeel, while still demonstrating

enough fruit and acid to please all palates. Indeed it succeeded in doing this, as a few bottles of Louis Chauray NV champagne being held in reserve were required in order to satiate the diners' thirst.

Once all guests were seated, Chef Jan Jorgensen and Hosts Joe Garrigo and Bob Hudson described the legendary "Feast", its history and what had been modified. The first course was Real Turtle Soup, which is a true misnomer. The chef explained that he had begun with a veal head and a 50 gallon stockpot, and reduced this broth four separate times in order to derive 32 eight ounce ladles-full. The depth of preparation for this course was evident, as the soup was concentrated, full of earthy flavor and produced the always pleasing "sticky lips" effect. A Dry Amontillado Los Arcos Sherry Solera Reserve from Lustau accompanied this dish, and proved to be a worthy compliment, further highlighting the earthy tones present in it.

The celebration continued with a Spinach Ravioli with Lobster Fondue. The lobster meat was stacked atop the ravioli, with an ample portion of buttery broth. Chef Jan explained that his sauce base for seafood started with a lighter chicken stock that could compliment and take on the characteristics of the dish, rather than a fish stock that could result in an overpowering "death by seafood" effect. Domaine Cauhape 1997, a dry wine from AC Jurancon that delivered racy acids and an enjoyable mineral content, paired excellently with this course.

A Stuffed Quail with Truffles, Foie Gras & Baked in a Nest resumed the feast. The birds were New York Dressed, which meant that, among other things, the birds came complete with their heads still attached. The chef intimated that "macho men" could enjoy the brain, with some attendees indulging while others looked on. This course was another heady demonstration in earthy flavor provided by the foie gras and truffles, and was very reminiscent of another celebratory period, Christmastime in France. A red burgundy, 1996 Clos de la Marechale Première Cru from Faively, accompanied this dish. While still quite young, this effort from the Côte de Nuits provided the ample berry and cherry fruit and structure needed to make it a great partner in this course.

Chef Jan continued the festivities by demonstrating a presentation of venison that combined classic elements of both French cooking and that from his native Denmark. The revelers were treated to a Roasted Venison Loin with Galette of Potatoes & Haricot Verts, accompanied by a reduction sauce and Champagne grapes. The French elements were evidenced with the vegetables. The beans were tied in a tight stack and the galette was a luxurious experience in butter. The cuisine of Denmark was evident in the meat, as the venison was roasted rare and presented with the combination of a sturdy reduction sauce, as well as the fresh fruit. The pairing for this plate came from the watershed 1982 vintage from Bordeaux, as Chateau Larmande, St. Emilion Grand Cru was the offering. This wine displayed ample depth to be able to stand up to the meat, while still demonstrating the great red and black current fruit that makes this vintage so spectacular.

The celebration concluded with a Fallen-Out Gorgonzola Soufflé with Armagnac & Apple Compote. There was no mistaking the presence of the blue cheese in the soufflé as it made itself felt, however, not overwhelmingly so, and the fruit and brandy compote soften the edges, providing a balanced, ethereal experience. Accompanying the desert was a 1991 Late Bottled Vintage Port from Fonseca. This wine performed a gallant double duty as not only is it a classic desert wine given its high sugar content, but also a traditional pairing for blue cheeses such as Gorgonzola. This is so since it is a fortified wine and therefore has enough structure to not be overwhelmed by the cheese.

Preselected commentators helped to navigate the attendees through the ocean of wines poured, with their comments welcomed in order to provoke thoughtful discussions. While members had made comments throughout the various presentations, it was at the end where an involved, intellectual debate about the nature of the port poured began. Late Bottled Vintage ports are wines that do not come from a declared vintage year, but are not a blend of years either, like a ruby or tawny port would be. LBVs are aged longer in barrel than their vintage counterparts, are typically lighter in style and are made to be consumed upon their release. The crux of the discussion was whether the LBV took on more of the characteristics of a ruby or a tawny port.

In the end, though, everyone who participated in this updated version of Babette's Feast could agree that the season was off to a spectacular start.





