



The International Wine & Food Society

Miami Branch

2005 Holiday Party

Palme d'Or



Christopher Zoller
Reporter

Becoming somewhat of a tradition, the perfect Holiday venue of The Palme d'Or at The Biltmore Hotel in Coral Gables was again our setting for this wonderful dinner. A record 86 members and guests filled the main and two private dining rooms to experience Executive Chef Philippe Ruiz' amazing talents.



was melt-in-your-mouth richness; a lovely bamboo spear held a coconut-rolled, lightly fried piece of Florida lobster; and small bites of "Goat Cheese with Chives" rounded out the snacks. Lots of new and fun stuff.

As we settled into our seats we were welcomed by President (and co-host) John Kuczanski, who also introduced our guests. The first course featured in-season big bay scallops in "Seared Coquille St. Jacques wrapped in Apple Smoked Bacon, Chestnut Puree and Light Pumpkin Cream". This gorgeous dish hit the mark on several levels, with the perfectly cooked scallop and the tasty bacon sitting atop the



Co-host and Branch President John Kuczanski challenged me, and Chef Ruiz, to come up with some "traditional" holiday treats for this black-tie event. Looking for winter and holiday ingredients was easier than expected and the Chef created special "non-menu" dishes just for us.

Our usual gathering in the Courtyard loggia was highlighted by Nicolas Feuillate Brut Rose Champagne, a festive bubbly to accompany several new hors d'oeuvres. "Stone Crab Crisp" was a simple but lovely presentation of our seasonal delicacy; "Smoked Fish Rilette" was dry and fresh shredded fish on a light cracker; "Foie Gras Mousse"



nutty, slightly sweet puree and all floating in the delicious autumnal soup. The flavors married quite well, especially with the 2003 Fisher Sonoma County Chardonnay. From the Mountain Estate Vineyard, which has cooler conditions than the valley floor, this chardonnay ripens slowly to feature rich aromas of orange blossom and lemon zest, with flavors of toasty oak, caramel apple, and fresh mango and had a crisp clean acidity and slight minerality to finish each bite of the dish.



One of the many holiday treats John remembered was Roast Goose, which can be a very tricky bird to serve. Rarely seen on South Florida menus, Chef Ruiz sourced some beautiful goose breasts for “Goose Aiguillette with Orange Sauce, Turnip Flan, and Baby Vegetables”.

Sliced thinly, the goose was perfectly cooked and, although farm-raised, provided the hint of game we were looking for. It was cooked on the rare side and had a slight resemblance to duck. A huge hit was the turnip flan, a great way to take this winter root vegetable to gourmet heights, with the strong flavors in a light, airy form. The orange sauce was quite mild, not the usual sweetly overpowering style, and the vegetables were “al dente”, not easy for 86 guests.



Board member and Wine Commentator Joe Cerniglia did a great job describing the lovely 1998 Allegrini La Grola IGT. This large Italian producer, dating back to the 16th century, makes this single-vineyard designate from their most prized location with mixed terroir and volcanic soils. A blend of Corvina and Rondinella grapes aged in French oak barrels, it had great intensity of color, rich dark spice and chocolate-tinged summer fruits on the nose and followed through on the palate with a medium body, dry, jammy fruit, fresh acidity and light but drying

tannins on the finish. It worked well with the goose and its sauce.

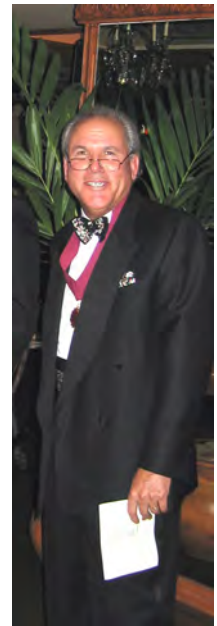
Continuing with a winter theme, our meat course was “Roasted Venison Tenderloin, Crispy Porcini Risotto with Grand Veneur Sauce”. The farm-raised venison was tender and only slightly more earthy than beef or lamb. It lent a nice rich flavor to the dish. Chef Ruiz took a large spoonful of Porcini mushroom risotto and seared it in the pan for a crispy delicious cake. The accompanying classic sauce, from age-old French recipes, added elegance, depth and richness to the dish.

So as not to overpower the marriage of delicate flavors, we chose a Cote Rotie for the wine pairing. The 1999 Domaine Andre Francois is a blend of 97% Syrah and 3% Viognier (yes, a white wine). It was so elegant it could have been made in Burgundy. Commentator Jim Cosmides, a huge fan of Rhone wines, pinpointed the region and described the subtleties and flavors to a “T”. With aromas of exotic spices and notes of tobacco and berries, it was well integrated and balanced.



At our behest, and to showcase a fabulous wine,

the chef prepared a wonderful plate of three “Artisan Cheeses with Condiments”. Staying away from blue or goat cheese, we had a Tome de Savoie, a Comte, and an Epoisses beautifully arranged on a rectangular plate with tiny accompaniments of fig marmalade, dried apricots and nuts. These allowed us to enjoy the 1990 Vieux Chateau Certan. Our commentator on this wine was Bob Hudson,





who thoroughly researched his subject, but easily spoke from his heart (and palate) as he told us a little of the history and a lot about the wine's flavors.

This highly rated wine from a famous vintage was one of the treasures in our cellar. It had a deep ruby color, a sweet, minty black currant fragrance with hints of tobacco and truffle or forest. It was full bodied, very ripe, almost youthful with sweet tannins, low acid, and a strong finish. What a treat!

Staying with a classic theme and the wishes of the hosts, the Chef reached



deep into his repertoire for “Chocolate Trilogy”. The three expressions in chocolate were an Apricot Chocolate Tart, a Palme d’Or classic know as the Crisp Mikado, and a Baby Chocolate Fondant. Each one alone can be heart-stoppingly decadent, and together, in small doses, they were sublime. Chocolate’s natural wine pairing was right up our alley, a 1980 Gould Campbell Port. While perhaps not being in the top tier of ports, this drink is still world class, with rich fruit flavors to match the apricot and chocolate while time has modified the alcohol to give it a mellow smooth finish.

The huge popularity of this event and venue was evident in the conviviality of the group and the popularity of Chef Ruiz and his staff. Restaurant Manager Sebastien Verrier and the wait staff were in perfect form, especially given the large amounts of “Wine, Food & Friends”. It was a great way to celebrate the Holidays.





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DECEMBER 14, 2005

RECEPTION

*STONE CRAB CRISP
SMOKED FISH RILLETTE
FOIE GRAS MOUSSE
COCO LOBSTER STICK
GOAT CHEESE & CHIVES
NICOLAS FEUILLATE BRUT ROSE NV*

MENU

*SEARED "COQUILLE ST. JACQUES"
WRAPPED IN APPLE SMOKED BACON, CHESTNUT PUREE & LIGHT PUMPKIN CREAM
2003 FISHER SONOMA MOUNTAIN CHARDONNAY*



*GOOSE AIGUILLETTE
ORANGE SAUCE, TURNIP FLAN & BABY VEGETABLES
1998 ALLEGRINI LA GROLA*



*ROASTED VENISON TENDERLOIN
CRISPY PORCINI RISOTTO WITH GRAND VENEUR SAUCE
1999 ANDRE FRANCOIS COTE ROTIE*



*ARTISAN CHEESE PLATE
WITH CONDIMENTS
1990 VIEUX CHATEAU CERTAN*



*"CHOCOLATE TRILOGY"
1980 GOULD CAMPBELL PORT*



COFFEE & MIGNARDISE

HOSTS: CHRISTOPHER ZOLLER & JOHN KUCZWANSKI

CHEF DE CUISINE: PHILIPPE RUIZ

259th Branch Event