



The International Wine & Food Society

Miami Branch

Bob Hudson and Mike Bittel were able to get us booked on the very busy schedule of Bernard de Laage de Meux, Director of Marketing for Chateau Palmer in Margaux. Once the date was set our hosts started a whirlwind of activity. Securing the Four Seasons Hotel was just the beginning. Next was to obtain some of the highest rated Palmers of the last 23 years. As their task consumed them for a few months, the new Chef at the Four Seasons, recently arrived from duty in Bangkok, created a specifically Palmer-oriented menu, with fresh ingredients and minimal processing. We were in for a great treat.



MAY 16, 2006

**HOSTS: MIKE BITTEL
& BOB HUDSON**



Christopher Zoller
Reporter



We took over the entire Miami Ballroom and the small reception area outside. For our cocktail we had the crisp and delicious Deutz Brut Champagne non-vintage. This sparkler had full body, with notes of apples, raspberries and pears, a tart edge and a nice crisp finish. The passed hors d'oeuvres were superb! First was "Pepper Seared Beef with Horseradish Cream on Stilton/Walnut Shortbread", as big a mouthful as it sounds. The custom made shortbread had a sharp blue-cheese tang with the walnut flavor enhancement, topped with two nice slices of beef and a dollop of the horseradish cream. It was delicious. The chef used a cross cut technique, obviously with a mandolin, to create hash-marked slices of purple Peruvian potatoes that were lightly fried and topped with rare seared yellow fin tuna.

With the addition of a touch of Wasabi Cream, these were a tasty take on the classic combo of tuna with wasabi, made fun with the creative potato disc. As a hint of things to come we had Tartufello Risotto Croquettes, which were bite-sized balls of truffled risotto, lightly fried and easy to pop in your mouth. Earthy flavors and al dente rice made for a nice chew.



The spacious ballroom was set beautifully with eight tables of ten, and we finally settled down to the main event. After an appropriate welcome and guest introductions by President John Kuczanski, Bob Hudson introduced us to our theme and our guest commentator from Chateau Palmer, Mr. de Meux. He gave us a fascinating history of the Chateau and some great insight into the winemaking style, types of grapes used in varying blends each year, and the philosophy of the proprietors. The assemblage at Palmer uses a very high percentage of Merlot, giving the wine a distinctive richness and generous character. They also allow the grapes to macerate longer than most, permitting the grape skins to stay in contact with the juice for more than 3 weeks. This accounts for the richness of color, high extract and the bold tannins. These wines are never filtered, and are known for their sensational fragrance and bouquet, rich texture, deep fruitiness and concentration.



Our first course was "Portobello and Wild Mushroom Carpaccio, Caramelized Shallot & Manni Oil, Micro Greens and Grano Padano Shavings". This raw dish consisted of large thin slices of the delicious Portobellos lightly drizzled with the unique olive oil and surrounding a pile of quartered baby bellos tossed with



the sweet caramelized shallots and graced with the shavings of the unique cheese. The earthy flavors were fresh clean and smooth, the greens giving the dish both color and a little crunch. The huge paper-thin

slices must have taken lots of giant Portobellos and the consistency was nicely contrasted with the bite-sized quarters. This dish was fantastic with red wine, and what a great wine we had: 1996 Chateau Palmer. It had a deep saturated purple color and showed a nose of leather,

spiciness, vanilla and floral accents, along with black plums and currants. With big deep fruit flavors at the onset, it had wonderful structure and firm tannins with plenty of sweet fruit. It was in balance now and looks like it will continue to age beautifully for another 20 years. Bernard indicated that it had more Merlot than most, 45 to 47% and that the grapes achieved excellent ripeness in that vintage, accounting for the big fruitiness.



Next up was “Seared Foie Gras on Cabernet Risotto with Aged Balsamic Reduction”. In a bold (someone at our table said “inspired”) move, Bob and his tasting team decided to serve a red wine with this course. It proved to be one of the high points of the night. Perfectly seared foie is hard to do when you are serving 84 all at once. Somehow the kitchen team made it happen; no easy feat. This dish was made unique by the accompanying risotto, made with a reduction of Caymus Special Select, a rich Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon. The savory flavors of the tender rice were why this course was red-wine friendly and the Balsamic reduction was just a hint of rich ripe sweetness. We were served the 2000 Alter Ego of Chateau Palmer. Bernard stressed that this was not

considered a “second wine” as many of the chateaux do, but a wine meant to stand on its own merits with its own style. All indications were that that it is a very “international” style, as this wine could hold its own on the world stage. Coming from a huge, ripe and highly regarded vintage, it had great ripeness, acidity and fruit. My notes say “huge everything!” A very dense inky color, big fruit extract, big volume, very “California-like” and brawny round mouthfeel, sort of velvety. The tannins were soft, making it very approachable, but still showing plenty of muscle. Another candidate for longevity, it was delicious.



Two wonderful preparations of Veal gave us great delight and a chance to try two great vintages of Chateau Palmer. This large course was a meat-eaters dream. Described as “Pan Fried Milk Fed Veal Medallion & Slow Braised Veal Shank Croquette with Truffled Yukon Gold Potato, Wilted Greens, Tawny Port Demi-Glace”, this dish consisted of a filet, not just a medallion, of tender, melt-in-your-mouth veal that you could cut with your fork. It also featured an unusual, twice-cooked preparation of Veal Shank. Tender, slow cooked veal leg meat was shredded off the bone, rolled in a breadcrumb and herb dip and then lightly deep-fried to create a crispy crust bursting with juicy meat. The thick rich sauce had just the slight touch of sweetness and grape flavors to tie in with the wonderful pair of wines. We had the 1983 and the 1989 Chateau Palmer, two highly rated and rare vintages. The '89 was considered one of the best wines of that year, which Bernard described as “sunny”. With the characteristic dark purple color and a big nose of plums, black currants, some



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licorice and floral notes it was elegant and medium bodied. It seemed to be ready to drink, beautifully balanced between the tannin and fruit, and one could sense the “heat in the glass” description. The highest rated wine at Palmer (at least by Robert Parker) in the past 25 years, the 1989 was even more brilliant, more vibrant. The color was a little more opaque, showing its age but still the classic purple/plum. The nose was complex with Asian spice, coffee, cacao, warm licorice and some cedar. It was very powerful on the palate, with super-concentrated fruit flavors now showing through the softening tannin. It did not have any rough edges, being extremely smooth with a silky long finish. What a great treat!



The cheese course was quite simply “A Study of Cheese” with truffled brie, herbed goat, a Comte, and a Parmigiano-Reggiano, with all the appropriate accoutrements. Skipping more than a decade, we came back to the 1999 vintage of Chateau Palmer. This was another superstar of its vintage, slightly more approachable now than the famous 2000 but every bit as gorgeous. Again showing the deep purple color that is a trademark of this Chateau, it had a phenomenal nose of spring flowers (violets?), black currants, leather and licorice. Bernard

indicted it is very slow to evolve and it showed many dimensions, all in balance but continuing to resolve as it ages into a very profound wine. It was big, generous and open with huge rich flavors of the grapes with sweet tannins giving a rich mouthfeel and an incredibly long finish. Another rare treat, I hope I get the chance to have this wine again one day.



For one of the most, if not the most, decadent divine desserts we have ever had, the pastry team created “Valhrona Chocolate Fantasy”. Every form of chocolate you could wish for was on this plate: fondant, ice cream, dark chunks and light shavings, even a mousse. It was a chocoholic’s dream and a dieter’s nightmare. Making this dish even more decadent was the choice of the 1971 Bodegas Toro Albala Pedro

Ximenez Gran Reserva. This fortified Spanish wine was a deep dark brown and almost seeped out of the bottle like molasses. As it diluted and warmed on the tongue it smothered the palate with dried figs, dried prunes roasted nuts and a hint of orange zest. It was a dessert unto itself and also has great use as a topping for ice cream or strawberries. The excess was memorable.



The opportunity to taste such rare and wonderful wines with a man who knows them better than any of us, made for one of our most educational as well as enjoyable evenings. Bernard described the Chateau and vineyard beautifully and appreciated the irony that is Palmer (“growing Merlot in Cabernet Sauvignon soils”) making this Chateau so distinctive. Our hats are off to Bob Hudson and Mike Bittel for all the time and effort they put in to the planning, preparation, and most of all the huge success of this wonderful night. This was truly an incredible event for Wine, Food & Friends.



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FOUR SEASONS HOTEL

Miami



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RECEPTION

PEPPER SEARED BEEF WITH HORSERADISH CREAM ON STILTON/WALNUT SHORTBREAD
RARE SEARED TUNA ON PERUVIAN PURPLE POTATO WITH WASABI CAVIAR
TARTUFELLO RISOTTO CROQUETTES
DEUTZ BRUT CHAMPAGNE NV

MENU

PORTOBELLO AND WILD MUSHROOM CARPACCIO
CARAMELIZED SHALLOT & MANNI OLIVE OIL, MICRO GREENS, GRANO PADANO SHAVINGS
1996 CHATEAU PALMER



SEARED FOIE GRAS
CABERNET RISOTTO, AGED BALSAMIC REDUCTION
2000 ALTER EGO



PAN FRIED MILK FED VEAL MEDALLION & SLOW BRAISED VEAL SHANK CROQUETTE
TRUFFLED YUKON POTATO, WILTED GREENS, TAWNY PORT DEMI GLACE
1983 CHATEAU PALMER AND 1989 CHATEAU PALMER



A STUDY OF CHEESE
1999 CHATEAU PALMER



VALHRONA CHOCOLATE FANTASY
1971 BODEGAS TORO ALBALA PEDRO XIMENEZ GRAN RESERVA



COFFEE & TEA SELECTIONS

HOSTS: BOB HUDSON & MIKE BITTEL

WINE COMMENTATOR: BERNARD DE LAAGE DE MEUX

264th Branch Event