



Holiday Party

Palme d'Or



DECEMBER 12, 2007

REPORTED BY CHRISTOPHER ZOLLER

Once again we returned to our favorite South Florida venue for the Annual Holiday Party, The Palme d'Or Restaurant at The Biltmore Hotel. Chef Philippe Ruiz is at the top of his game, having learned so much working closely with scores of Michelin-starred chefs from France during his many years at the Palme d'Or. It is truly a pleasure for us to work with him. He creates menus using



so many seasonal ingredients and he has come to understand our request for a Holiday/Winter theme. The excitement of working with his dishes is in finding the appropriate wines to enhance the experience of each.

This event is always a sell-out, and the main dining room only holds 70. We decided to limit attendance to members and one guest only, and we received 85 reservations! Thankfully, restaurant manager Sebastien Verrier was able to accommodate us using the side rooms. We gathered under the veranda of the Courtyard for some exceptional hors d'oeuvres and a wonderful Champagne. The Heidsieck & Co. Monopole "Blue Top" nonvintage has been a classic for many years. Since the earliest incarnation of Cunard Cruise Lines it has been their "house" Champagne and is still served on Seabourne. Later in the evening Past President Mitch Lundeen gave us a great bit of history and some excellent tasting notes. This blend of 70% Pinot Noir and 30% Chardonnay has fresh citrus-laced minerals and yeast on the nose and is a light to medium bodied wine with flavors of toasted, buttered nuts, crisp lemon drops and ripe apples. It was rich yet dry, with a refreshing acidity to wash down the large array of passed goodies.



The amazingly rich *Foie Gras Mousse* was served on a simple toast and was a huge mouthful (I actually needed two)! Like a thick but room temperature ice cream, it was all essence of goose liver in an incredibly decadent format. It even had a nice sweetness, as if being served with a chutney or a Sauternes. Philippe has often made his famous *Coco Lobster Stick*, a wonderful "lollypop" of coconut-coated lobster meat lightly fried and easy to take. Superb tropical flavors from a local shellfish. The light little *Crab Cake and Avocado Mousse* was a new flavor combination, with a delicate all-meat crab ball topped with the light, distinct avocado flavor. For low carb





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lovers, endive makes a great platform, and the *Smoked Fish Rillette in Endive* was as good as it gets. I think Philippe used smoked monkfish to make this wonderfully restrained stuffing for the endive leaf. Finally the *Goat Cheese Mousse & Tapenade* was also served on a light cracker and was a new flavor combination mixing the earthy, salty olives with the creamy but acidic chevre. All this great food and lots of champagne made for a



long and lovely cocktail hour. It could have been sufficient alone, but a wonderful meal awaited us inside.



At the tables we were treated to a surprise amuse bouche: *Seared Scallop Provencal*. This perfectly cooked scallop was crispy on the outside and meltingly tender on the inside and had just a hint of fresh tomato



and lightly herbed sauce. A great treat. To stretch both our cellar and our member's knowledge, we decided to serve an Old World and a New World Chardonnay with our first course. During our menu consultation Philippe had suggested a dish marrying stone crab and smoked salmon. We are

always interested in his creations and the resulting *Floridian Stone Crab with Balik Smoked Salmon. Lemon Cream & Osetra Caviar* was a beautiful marriage. Formed in a low, wide ring mold, the shredded stone crab meat was blended with the smoked salmon. Balik is a reference to the belly of the salmon, supposedly its purest and rarest form. The flavors were



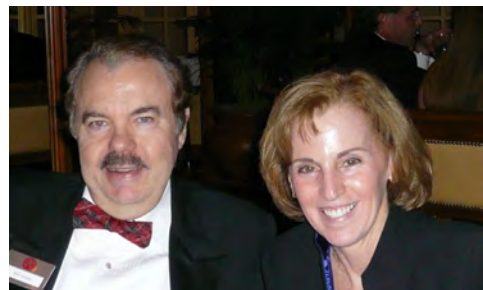
terrific, rich with seafood, each fish was detectable and the blend was unique. It had a wonderful creamy texture and the light touch of caviar was all the salt needed. Chardonnay is a natural with shellfish like crab or lobster and also with salmon, rich in natural Omega 3 oil. Choosing two wines from



the same vintage, both being in our cellar, gave us a chance to compare these very different terroirs. The 2002 Forman was not your typical Napa Valley heavily oaked, buttery, malolactic fermented chardonnay, and that's why it was chosen. It was steely, mineral laden, full-bodied and quite dry. This is due to using only one third new oak barrels during fermentation, which was non-malolactic.



With marvelously crisp flavors of pear and lemon butter and the dryness of a grand cru Chablis, it was perfect for this course. Branch Secretary Steve Blythe was able to tell us quite a bit about this lesser-known producer and the 93 Parker points earned by this fine wine. We prevailed on Vice President Bob





Hudson to tell us all about the 2002 Domaine & Maison Remi Jobard Meursault Les Genevrieres. This gorgeous white Burgundy had a nose of white peaches, creamy spices, even lilies. It was medium-bodied with a big, tongue-coating mouthfeel and distinct flavors of minerals, flowers and apples. It had a very long finish. These two wines were surprisingly similar, even though they are a world apart. Jobard did not harvest until quite late, preferring to let the grapes ripen fully, typically a California technique. Both exhibited Burgundian minerality. They were each delicious with the wonderful dish.



For true winter comfort food, the French turn to confit, but we wanted a few more ingredients and a new twist, so Philippe came up with a unique variation of "pot pie": *Duck Confit, Sweet Bread & Wild Mushroom Croustillant with Coco Bean Puree & Truffle Sauce*. It was amazing to see so many of my favorite flavors in one dish, and working so well together. Inside a very lightly fried crust (was it a wonton wrapper?) was the shredded duck meat along with chopped sweetbreads and an assortment of wild mushrooms. Moist and tender, the earthiness of all three was warm and enticing. On the plate were the white bean puree and a smooth, tasty truffle sauce.

The winter theme came through with each bite. Looking for an elegant Pinot Noir to match these ingredients proved to be a little challenging, but the depth of the Branch cellar finally turned up the 2002



Michel Colin-Deleger & Fils Maranges 1er Cru La Fussiere. Michel Colin is primarily known for his white wines, but this excellent red suited our needs beautifully. With aromas of fresh blackberry, blueberries, and minerals it had nicely restrained flavors of black cherry, earth, and tobacco. Its soft, ripe tannins and good acid were refreshing with each swallow, and the match worked well as the food and wine were very complementary.



As an excellent, low fat alternative to beef, Philippe suggested *Seared Buffalo Tenderloin with Rustic Polenta, Brussels Sprouts & Foie Gras Sauce*. He sourced the American Bison from a company in New York State. It was fork tender, perfectly undercooked and melted in the mouth. Clearly more farm-raised than wild, it was tastier than beef but not at all "gamey".



The rough corn-meal and roasted brussels sprouts clearly maintained the theme, and the smooth silky foie gras sauce was a nod to strong, distinct flavoring. Looking for two Bordeaux wines for this and the next course, we came across a few candidates, but the clear winner



with the buffalo was the 1990 Chateau Figeac. (94 Parker points!) Not your typical St. Emilion, this is usually a blend of 35% Cabernet Franc, 35% Cabernet Sauvignon & 30% Merlot. Wine Chair Bob Dickinson gave us a



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little history of the Chateau and some excellent tasting notes. Showing a saturated dark purple color and a powerful bouquet of jammy black fruits, olives, minerals and licorice, it had a powerful entry in the mouth with the big sweet fruit balanced by the moderate tannin and good acidity. It was a strong rich wine, elegant, complex and aged beautifully. We enjoyed it at its peak and it is a tribute to our past buying acumen and our excellent storage.

Moving to the left bank for a wine to go with our cheese course gave us an opportunity to have another well-aged wine that was still a youngster due to a vintage of bigger tannins. So we gave a little more air to the 1989 Chateau Gruaud Larose. Drew Bailey gave us a thorough and knowledgeable outline of the fascinating history of this property and great insight to the flavor profile. The 150 or so hectares are planted to 57% Cabernet Sauvignon, 30% Merlot, 8% Cabernet Franc, 3% Petit Verdot and 2% Malbec. Of course, each vintage is a different blend, and the '89 shows the herbal side of Gruaud - Larose. It had a deep ruby/purple color and seemed a little more closed on the nose, but worked up some nice black fruit aromas. It was a big, tannic, spicy wine with good balance. Even with the decanting and late in the evening, it continued to evolve in the glass and went beautifully with the

Selection of Ripened Fine Cheese consisting of *Aged Gruyere, Tomme de Savoie, Morbier, & Aged Goat Cheese*. This wonderful selection offered something for everyone along with a petit Mesclun salad, toasted nuts, and a few chutneys. The world of cheese is so huge and fun that I think it would be interesting and educational to offer a cheese course paired with a dry white wine as a future learning experiment.



From the start of the course selection months ago, Philippe suggested a dish from his pastry chef that I could only describe as "pina colada" as soon as I tasted it. The *Pineapple Napoleon with Coconut Ice Cream, Orange & Tapioca Sauce* was tropical and holiday all at once.

The light cake with delicate pineapple glaze was delightful with the house-made ice cream full of coconut flavor and the fruity, rich sauce. The dessert-to-wine rule is: try for a sweeter wine than dish, but here we went for a great complementary spice and fruit combo, and they seemed equal on the sweetness scale. The 2000 Paul Blanc Gewurztraminer Furstentum Vendage Tardive had holiday spice all over it. With aromas of flowers, pineapple, lychee nuts and cinnamon, the sweet but light wine was refreshing and distinctive on its own, not thick and cloying on the palate. It was a lovely match for the dessert.



To serve 83 people seven wines, five hors d'oeuvres, five courses, and numerous refills takes a remarkable staff, both on the floor and in the kitchen. Philippe and Sebastien are masters of their crafts and make a wonderful team. The waiters and cooks did another remarkable job helping us celebrate the 2007 Holiday Season with Wine, Food, & Friends.



The International Wine & Food Society
Miami Branch

IW&FS 2007 Holiday Dinner

December 12, 2007

Palme d'Or

Biltmore Hotel

Dear IW&FS Member:

You are invited to our 281st event.

WHERE:

La Palme d'Or at The Biltmore Hotel
1200 Anastasia Avenue
Coral Gables, FL 33134
(305) 445-8066

WHEN:

Wednesday, December 12, 2007
Reception at 7:00 PM
Dinner at 7:30 PM

EVENT DESCRIPTION:

Christopher Zoller did such a good job hosting last year's Holiday Party, we asked him to do it again. Actually, he volunteered! Palme d'Or will again host our member's favorite event. We will optimize your pleasure this year by making this a "Members Only" Event. Of course, our cherished "First Guests" will accompany our members.

Chef Ruiz and Christopher are working on another grand menu of delights of the season. As always we will have a fine Champagne for our reception. At table, we'll start with a Napolean of Stone Crabs and Smoked Salmon. To feature some fine Burgundy we'll enjoy a Duck Confit with Sweetbreads and mushrooms. In lieu of wild game you will delight in the tender tastiness of a Seared Buffalo Tenderloin with Foie Gras Sauce. After delectable cheeses, you will be amazed by the tropical fruit dessert surprise.

Join your fellow gentlemen and ladies for this Holiday event. Seats are limited, so reserve early. We will do everything in our power to accommodate all.

We look forward to enjoying your company at our annual Holiday celebration of Wine, Food and Friends.



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DECEMBER 12, 2007

RECEPTION

*FOIE GRAS MOUSSE
COCO LOBSTER STICK
CRAB CAKE AND AVOCADO MOUSSE
SMOKED FISH RILLETTE & ENDIVE
GOAT CHEESE MOUSSE & TAPENADE
HEIDSIECK & CO. MONOPOLE "BLUE TOP" NV CHAMPAGNE*

MENU

*FLORIDIAN STONE CRAB WITH BALIK SMOKED SALMON
LEMON CREAM & OSTERA CAVIAR
2002 FORMAN CHARDONNAY & 2002 RÉMI JOBARD MEURSAULT-GENEVRIERES*



*DUCK CONFIT, SWEET BREAD & WILD MUSHROOM CROUSTILLANT
COCO BEANS PUREE & TRUFFLE SAUCE
2002 MICHEL COLIN-DELEGER & FILS MARANGES 1ER CRU LA FUSSIÈRE*



*SEARED BUFFALO TENDERLOIN
RUSTIC POLENTA, BRUSSELS SPROUTS & FOIE GRAS SAUCE
1990 CHÂTEAU FIGEAC*



*SELECTION OF RIPENED FINE CHEESE
AGED GRUYERE, TOMME DE SAVOIE, MORBIER & AGED GOAT CHEESE
PETIT MESCLUN & TOASTED NUTS
1989 CHÂTEAU GRUAUD LAROSE*



*PINEAPPLE NAPOLEON
COCONUT ICE CREAM, ORANGE & TAPIOCA SAUCE
2000 PAUL BLANCK GEWÜRZTRAMINER FURSTENTUM VT*

*HOST: CHRISTOPHER ZOLLER
CHEF DE CUISINE: PHILIPPE RUIZ*

281st Branch Event