



The International Wine & Food Society
Miami Branch

POR FIN

RESTAURANT & LOUNGE



A GRANDE FINALE
June 10, 2008
Reported by Christopher Zoller



John Kuczanski has served our Branch exceedingly well for the past four years as President. He has taught us a lot (and I'm sure learned a thing or two), created new and wonderful systems, and he has quietly (sometimes) hosted and assisted over 40 events during his tenure. To memorialize the end of his term as our President, he chose to go out with a bang by co-hosting our season finale co-ed event at a restaurant he has been cultivating since its inception: Por Fin in Coral Gables.



Our 287th Branch event was remarkable in many ways. Rarely does a new restaurant take so quickly to our demanding standards of food and service. The location of Por Fin in the heart of the Coral Gables business district makes it very accessible.



Proprietor Carlos Centurion and Chef Marc Vidal were very eager to please and their commitment showed. Co-hosting this event with John was Branch Secretary Steve Blythe. Together they were able to craft an evening of great food, excellent wine pairings and total delight.



The expansive restaurant covers two floors, and the entire ground floor became our venue. We were greeted at the door by an eager and attentive staff pouring Heidsieck & Co. Monopole Blue Top Champagne. This crisp crowd pleaser has been served for generations in multiple venues,



reportedly (by Ariel Solarzano and Donna Blythe) on the Titanic, and more recently on Seabourne and Seadream Yacht Club cruise lines. It is flavorful, with 70% Pinot Noir juice and flavors of toasty apples with a medium mousse and lovely clean acidity. It beautifully complemented the savory hors d'oeuvres. We had a classic presentation of Ahi Tuna Tartare served on a porcelain spoon with just the right touch of oil and herbs; rich yet refreshing. Also served on a spoon was Foie Gras, uniquely wrapped in a sweet caramelized slice of apple with a touch of vanilla oil, the combination mimicked a serving on a plate with a sip of sauternes.



It was luscious. The most unique hors d'oeuvre was Goat Cheese Escalibada. This preparation came in a small timbale, much like a Crème Brulee. It had a similarly charred top to toast the cheese and





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the delicate goods inside were eagerly scooped out with a spoon. All three were very rich without being overpowering. Thankfully, the champagne was up to the task of rinsing our taste buds.



Although it has become a mainstay of many a menu, our first course of Pan Seared Sea Bass was, in a word, spectacular. The large filet was beautifully seared on the outside and the flesh was creamy, smooth, soft and still a little flaky for a perfect texture and



flavor combination, served with the restaurants signature Potato Crisps, a tomato confit, leek chips and the piece de resistance: Kalamata Oil Drizzle. This extra kicker put the dish over the top with the lush Mediterranean flavor of the olive oil adding depth to the otherwise light elements. Most of us found the 2002 Vincent Girardin Puligny Montrachet 1er Cru Les Pucelles to have lovely aromatics of fresh flowers and a light body with pure yet tangy flavors of spice, flowers and mineral and enough acidity to complement the dish. Unfortunately, sometimes bottle



variation can occur, and commentator Mitch Lundeen, who has an excellent palate, discerned that the pours at his table were less than expected. He was kind and considerate, but firm in his knowledge that this wine was better from a different bottle. He did agree that the sea bass was a wonderful dish and the choice of wine was appropriate.



Our second course was a delight. I am always impressed how simple treatments in the kitchen can send ingredients from everyday to heavenly. In this case, the slow but careful roasting of seasonal mushrooms stuffed in ravioli was a special treat. Chef Marc took delicate care in preparing these mushrooms and bought out the fantastic roasted,



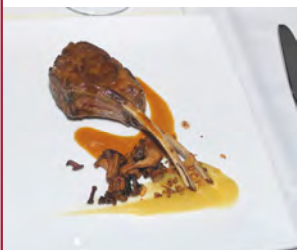
forest flavors by adding a sauce of foie gras and truffles (the epitome of the mushroom kingdom) and some shaved parmesan cheese to create an outstanding mouthful. Almost all of the five taste sensations were titillated by the



sweet, savory, tart and earthy flavors combined in this one gorgeous dish. I'm convinced it was the slow, meticulous roasting that did the trick. John and Steve instinctively knew that this dish screamed for pinot noir grapes, and since they were going for the real thing they chose an outstanding red Burgundy, the 2002 Chambolle



Musigny Les Charmes, a premier cru from Domaine Ponsot. Bob Hudson, freshly returned from an intensive visit to Burgundy, spoke eloquently about this wonderful wine. At the approach, the wine had intense minerality, with a hint of flint and an earthiness to match the mushrooms. As it opened up in the glass the great fruit flavors of blueberry and blackberry came up out of the strong structure and in the glass we began to smell the aromas of candied red fruits and some violets. This was a perfect example of classic food and wine pairing.



Our first meat course was a set of double lamb chops, crisply seared on the outside and perfectly pink on the inside. Accompanied by an apple compote, sautéed Chanterelle Mushrooms and Caramelized Pistachios, this was a classic dish just begging for Bordeaux. John dragged out a 1985 Vieux Château Certan. Thank goodness that for most of these





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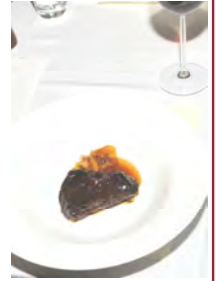


past 20 years since its release it has had a pretty good home. I was tasked with describing this wine, and I still maintain that it got short shrift from the critic(s). However, with not much time in carafe, it drank beautifully as soon as it was poured, and it was very ready to drink. Possibly past its prime, it was never going to be a blockbuster, but its fragile soft and seductive notes of roasted herb, olives and a slight hint of berry fruit was clearly evident in the first few sips. I'm glad we got to try it, even in its fleeting moments of glory. The lamb chops and their accoutrements were well served. The sweetness of the apple, the savory mushrooms and the crunchy yet sweet pistachios added

a lot of complexity to the delicious young lamb.



An unbelievable presentation followed with our second meat course: Braised Beef Cheeks. Again becoming a popular menu item, this presentation was a blockbuster. Silky smooth, tongue-tender, melt in your mouth essence of beef, this must have been another marvel of hours of slow careful roasting to bring out all the intense beef flavor and break down those cheek muscles until they literally melted on our mouths. Chef Marc knowingly only added only apricots and thyme-scented croutons to the plate, and we had all we



would ever need. Screaming for another Bordeaux, this time Steve and John found a real gem, 1986 Château Ducru Beaucaillou. Just the opposite of the preceding '85 VCC, this wine is in its youth, and John advisedly gave it lots of air. The dark ruby/purple wine gave up scents of cranberry and black currant with mineral hints of pencil lead and earth. On the palate, it was very concentrated and rich with all the foregoing flavors and a strong structure and thick tannins.



It was another great match as it stood up to the amazingly rich dish.



Dessert must be John's favorite dish, if only so he can get to his favorite wine.

For four years or more he has been drooling over the prospect of opening the 1986 Château d'Yquem he found on our cellar list. Well, tonight was his opportunity and he took it. Once again sensing the perfect pairing, Chef Marc came up with an apple tart with almonds, vanilla ice cream and toffee syrup. Not quite deconstructed, but with all the elements in proper and distinct perspective, this delicious dessert proved the axiom about apples and this elixir of a wine. Rich and thick with an unctuous mouthfeel, the wine showed great acid after its cloying sweetness. It's hard to understand this wine, even after you've tried it several times, but to taste its beautiful combinations of flavors with a sweet/tart dessert is to find a little gourmet paradise.



This was a fabulous finale to John's exceptional term as our president. He has innovated our cellar list, upgraded our dining standards, expanded our ranks, and entertained us for all this time. As he has often said, he's an excellent cat-herder. He deserves

his well earned respite, but we won't let him slip quietly into that good night. He's a "keeper". This was another example of fine Wine Food and Friends.





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June 10, 2008

RECEPTION

FOIE GRAS

AHI TUNA TARTARE

GOAT CHEESE ESCALIBADA

HEIDSIECK & Co. MONOPOLE BLUE TOP BRUT NV



MENU

PAN SEARED SEABASS

POTATO CRISPS, TOMATO CONFIT, LEEK CHIPS & KALAMATA OIL DRIZZLE

2002 PULIGNY MONTRACHET 1ER CRU LES PUELLES, GIRARDIN



RAVIOLI

SEASONAL MUSHROOMS, PARMESAN CHEESE, FOIE GRAS & TRUFFLES

2002 CHAMBOLLE MUSIGNY LES CHARMES 1ER CRU, PONSOT



SEARED LAMB CHOPS

APPLE COMPOTE, CHANTERELLE MUSHROOMS & CAMELIZED PISTACHIOS

1985 VIEUX CHÂTEAU CERTAN



BRAISED BEEF CHEEK

APRICOTS & THYME SCENTED CROUTONS

1986 CHÂTEAU DUCRU BEAUCAILLOU 2ÈME GRAND CRU CLASSÉ



APPLE TART

ALMONDS, VANILLA ICE CREAM & TOFFEE SYRUP

1986 CHÂTEAU D'YQUEM PREMIER CRU SUPÉRIEUR SAUTERNES



HOSTS: STEVE BLYTHE & JOHN KUCZWANSKI

PROPRIETOR: CARLOS CENTURION

CHEF: MARC VIDAL

287th Branch Event