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The Bluffs Food & Wine *gazette*

Tin City Part 5:
ONX Estate Vineyard



Inside: Event Report: Monarch Restaurant in the Deco Hotel, A Tour Through the CB Branch Cellar
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EDITOR'S

CORNER

I think the last time we went to the Deco Hotel it was to the Zin Room. At the time, that was the main restaurant for the hotel, placed at the far end of the building. Now the old Zin Room is used for parties, and the regular hotel restaurant is closer to the front desk. It used to be named Monarch Prime, and featured Dry Aged Beef in a glass aging machine, but COVID closed the restaurant in 2020. It was resurrected as the Monarch Restaurant in more recent times. Our wine theme was a Tour of the Branch Cellar and featured a blind tasting of four different Branch Cellar wines. Check out the story.

My Tin City mini-series ends with ONX Estate Vineyard. One of the larger facilities in Tin City, they focus on Rhone varietals. They also own some of their own vineyard land, which is the exception rather than the rule in Tin City. I recall that all the wines I sampled were pretty good. If you ever make it out to Paso Robles, CA, stop at Tin City and go to some of the 22 wineries there, all within walking distance.

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You can also access the Branch Recipe file by clicking: https://issuu.com/omaha-publications/docs/iwfs_cb_council_bluffs_recipes. 

Tom Murnan

Cover Photo:

ONX tasting room in Tin City, on the outskirts of Paso Robles, CA. Photo by Tom Murnan.



**IF THE WORLD
WERE A LOGICAL
PLACE, MEN WOULD
BE THE ONES WHO
RIDE HORSES
SIDESADDLE."**

— IT'S TIME FOR SOME
LEXOPHILES

EVENT REPORT:

Monarch Restaurant in the Deco Hotel; A Tour Through the CB Branch Cellar

Story & Photos by Tom Murnan

It has been quite the while since we came to the Deco Hotel and dined at the then Zin Room. Our current event was held in the old Zin Room, which is the party and events room. Monarch Restaurant is now a wood-fired modern Italian restaurant, serving house made pasta, seafood and steaks. Not as colorful as the main restaurant, the walls are uniformly white, bereft of pictures and other wall adornments. But what did it matter? We were here to study food and the wines in the Council Bluffs Branch cellar. I had forgotten how noisy the room is with 44 people, which included 7 guests. Whatever happened to wall carpet, designed to deaden noise? I think it died in the early 1980's. **Tabitha and Dave Thrasher** were our event producers.

When I arrived, at about 4:20 p.m., the wines were just being poured for the tasting at 5:20. So they had about an hour to breathe. And, no, I didn't peek at what was being poured. There's no fun in doing that.

The invitation was quite brief on what we were having for appetizers. It just said Cheese and Charcuterie Board. In actuality there were numerous food items to choose from. They can be broken down as follows. 1. **Cheeses**- herbed boursin cheese, parmesan cheese, taleggio cheese, aged cheddar cheese, and pesto marinated mozzarella cheese. 2. **Sauces** – quince paste, local honey, whole grain mustard. 3. **Meats**- speck from northern Italy, spiced salami, and chorizo picante from Spain. 4. **Antipasti board**- marcona almonds, gherkin, pepperoncini, flame roasted red bell peppers and garlic confit. 5. **Fruits**- dates, mission figs, and strawberries. A nice spread offering numerous choices.



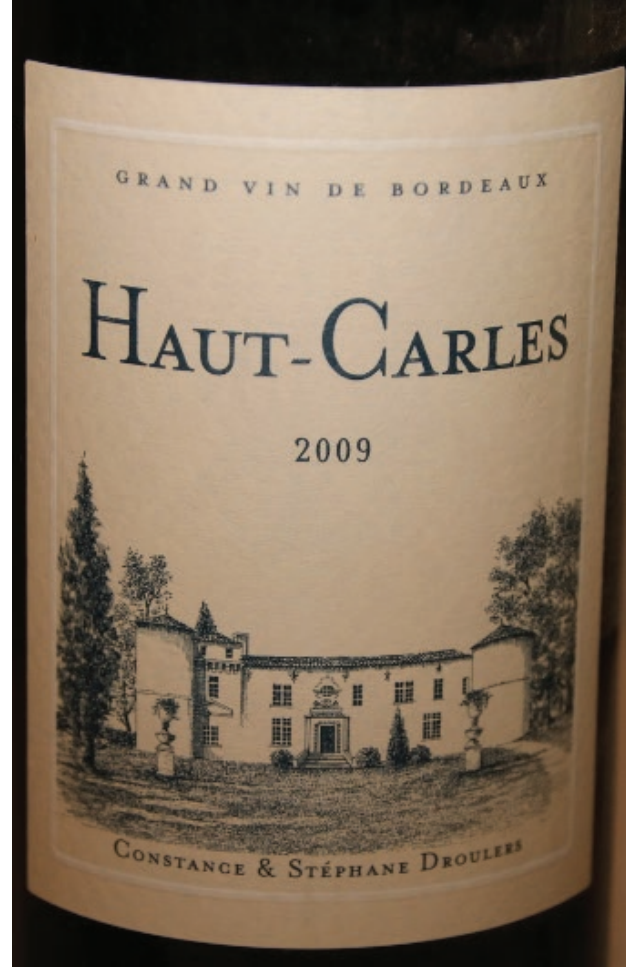
THE GLORIOUS WINNERS OF THE BLIND TASTING OF 4 VARIETALS

*L to R, Back Row: Dan Thrasher; Josh Johnson; Jenny Ayoub
Front Row: Chris Rix; Susan Koesters; Leah Johnson; Patti Hipple; Jill Goldstein*

These were paired with end-of-bin wines leftover in the cellar. Sometimes it happens that through natural attrition of using wines for events, there are one or two left over, not enough to use for a dinner course at an event, or even a tasting. Coudoulet de Beaucastel 2015 was a Rhône red available, the second wine of the famous Châteauneuf du Pape, Château Beaucastel; Bodega Norton Privada Family Blend 2014, a blend of Malbec, Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon from Argentina; D66 (Department 66) a Grenache from the Roussillon AOC of France; a Brut Rosé from

Domaine Carneros in Napa and a Roederer Estate, both bubbles. Plus a few more odds and ends.

We were called to table, and host Dave Thrasher laid out the rules of the blind tasting. We were to identify the grape varietal in our 4 glasses. We knew what the different wines were, just not what order they were poured in front of us. We had before us a Round Pond Estate Cabernet Sauvignon 2012; a Walter Hansel North Slope Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 2013; a K Vintners MCK Syrah 2014; and a Seghesio Cortina Zinfandel 2015. ▶







◀ What Dave didn't say before the tasting started was that as wines age, they lose their baby fat and some of their distinctive characteristics. In other words, they start tasting closer together. That tidbit came out after the tasting, but over time, I have found it to be true. It gets even harder to differentiate when the wines are 30 or 40 years old. Our oldest, a 2012, was only 9 years old. When the hour of reckoning arrived, you could stand up if you got a wine correct. You had to sit back down if you got one wrong. We had 8 glorious winners who correctly identified all 4 wines. I have to say the ladies did quite well on this. Out of the 8 winners, 6 were women. Congratulations! We just hope our winners don't become insufferable wine snobs! LOL.

Our **First Course** was **Scallops with Star Anise, Caramelized Leeks and Persimmons in a Brodo Pescado**. The Italian Brodo Pescado means Fish Broth in English, although my notes say Japanese fish broth relish (one of the staff told me). My guess is that the staff member got their wires crossed. This was a complex dish with a lot of flavors. The star anise got mingled into the mix and was not prominent. I liked the leeks, caramelized in a pan over the stove. They added a lot of flavor. The persimmon wedges were orange colored and looked like orange slices, but of course didn't taste like oranges. They added an exotic note. The scallops had a nice browning on top but were not overdone. My only quibble was that the dish came out tepid. My suggestion: heat the plates before adding the food and the dish will stay warm longer. It takes awhile to serve 44 people. Food cools down quickly. The Stag's Leap Wine Cellars Karia Chardonnay 2019 was a spot on wine pairing. Quite nice.

The **Second Course** was a **Beet Salad with Fennel, Pomegranate, and Honey Dressing**. This was served cold. I am one of those who like beets, and they were nicely cooked, then chilled, and were very full bodied and flavorful. They were not al dente, but they didn't melt in your mouth either. I thought them perfectly done. Something like this needed a red wine, and the Penner Ash Pinot Noir 2015 from Oregon worked well. Notes of strawberry and plums in the body. Rounded, perfectly balanced tannins. Smooth, suave, and elegant. Lynn Penner Ash was the first female wine maker in the Willamette Valley.



Penner Ash

She and her husband Ron started the winery in 1998, with the wine making facility added in 2003. It has a great view of Mount Hood. The first vintage was in 2005. The winery was added to the Jackson Family Wines conglomerate in 2016, so our wine was made by the Penner Ash family.

Quail and Fig comprised the **Third Course**. The bird was further accentuated by **Prosciutto, Roasted Fig and Blood Orange Gastrique**. A gastrique is a simple sweet/sour sauce, usually made from caramelized sugar and deglazed with vinegar or other sour liquid. The quail and the fig had a great affinity. The sweetness of the fig seemed to bring out the sweetness of the quail flesh. The Blood orange gastrique tightly adhered to the quail with some kind of seeds sprinkled in it for an interesting addition. The bread stuffing inside the quail was a tad bit sweet as well. Our wine, a Domaine de la Côte de L'Ange [angel] Châteauneuf-du-Pape 2012 was a seamless match, the figs and their acidity in the dish drawing out more complexity out of the wine. I have to say that the domaine is somewhat obscure, although it was listed under Other Châteauneuf-du-Pape Producers in Robert Parker's *Wines of the Rhône Valley Revised and Expanded Edition* (1997) with just some statistics mentioned. The Mestre family is one of the oldest in the CduP appellation and the domaine has remained in the family for several generations. Monique and Jean Claude Mestre took over in the 1960s, and their daughter and her husband began managing in 1988. I was very pleased with the selection, thought it was perfectly ready to drink, complex, and an excellent choice for the quail, fig and orange gastrique. ▶













L to R: Executive Chef Igor Kokozov; Sous Chef Shawn Lahood; Tabitha Thrasher; President Dave Thrasher; General Manager Benn Sieff; Executive Chef Tim Maides

◀ **Rack of Lamb** was our **Fourth Course. Herb Crusted**, it was accompanied by **Creamy Polenta and sauced with a Shallot Red Wine Demi Glace**. Nicely roasted, with a red center but a crisp, bread crumb and herb crust, which was delicious, this was a great entree. Each person had a double thick slice of lamb showing two frenched (cleaned bare of meat) bones sitting atop the polenta and partially covered with dark brown demi glace. Demi glace is a highly concentrated, reduced brown sauce. Part of the liquid has been evaporated to further concentrate it, and red wine is frequently added for even more flavor. It typically is more potent than a regular sauce, and can be used as a base for other sauces. The polenta was creamy salty and forceful. So tasty and savory.

We had a Bordeaux to accent the lamb: a Château Haut Carles Fronsac 2009. Bordeaux is the classic accompaniment to rack of lamb. The Haut Carles is a Right Bank Bordeaux in the AOC of Fronsac, which is known for its limestone terroir. The weather is also a bit cooler than the better known AOC of St-Emilion. Fronsac is known for its good value. The Chastenet de Casainge family arrived at the 14.5 hectare Château Carles in 1900. The best parcel, 5.5 hectares, is called Haut-Carles. The property boasts a stunning 15th Century château. The current owners are serious about improving their wine, with a very modern facility built in 2003. Our 2009 wine was tannic, forceful and cut right through all the forceful lamb, polenta and herb flavors.

We ended with a **Dessert of Poached Pear and Vanilla Crème**. The pear was poached in red wine, evident from the deep red stain which penetrated the pear. A dried oatmeal crumble was strewn on the plate under the pear, which added a tremendous amount of crunch for a texture contrast. The Château Raymond Lafon Sauternes with its sweet and honeyed flavors was an ideal match.

Great thanks for **Dave and Tabitha Thrasher** who came forward to take this January event when there were no other volunteers. It was a nice stroll through our growing cellar. We actually had two executive chefs tonight. This was the last dinner for **Tim Maides**, brother of Ben Maides of Au Courant fame. Taking his place was Executive **Chef Igor Kokozov**. Our Sous Chef was **Shawn Lahood**. Except for a few lulls, service was attentive. I think we had a great evening of food and wine. 🍷

Introducing New Members Ashley & John Harbison

Wine Bio by John Harbison

Ashley and I are both Midwest natives. Ashley was born and raised in Omaha, and I in Kansas City. We met in college while both attending Saint Louis University. We then moved to Columbia, MO where she studied pharmacy and I attended medical school. Post graduate training took us both to Kansas City and then Orange County, CA for some time. We then moved back to Omaha in 2015, and now have a 7-year-old daughter and 5-year-old son.

Our interest in wine is relatively new over the last 4 years or so. While we had both always enjoyed wine on occasion, settling down in Omaha and completing medical training gave us the time to pay more attention to our specific likes/dislikes. It has also been a great subject for to discuss outside of work. Serendipitously our first home was next door to IFWS members Brian and Paige Ritter, their passion was contagious. Over the last few years Ashley and I have been to Napa Valley a couple of times and are always looking forward to getting back soon! Like parenting, medicine, and golf, I appreciate both the short-term rewards and lifelong challenge that wine presents. 🍷



John and Ashley Harbison

“SERENDIPITOUSLY OUR FIRST HOME WAS NEXT DOOR TO IFWS MEMBERS BRIAN AND PAIGE RITTER, THEIR PASSION WAS CONTAGIOUS.”

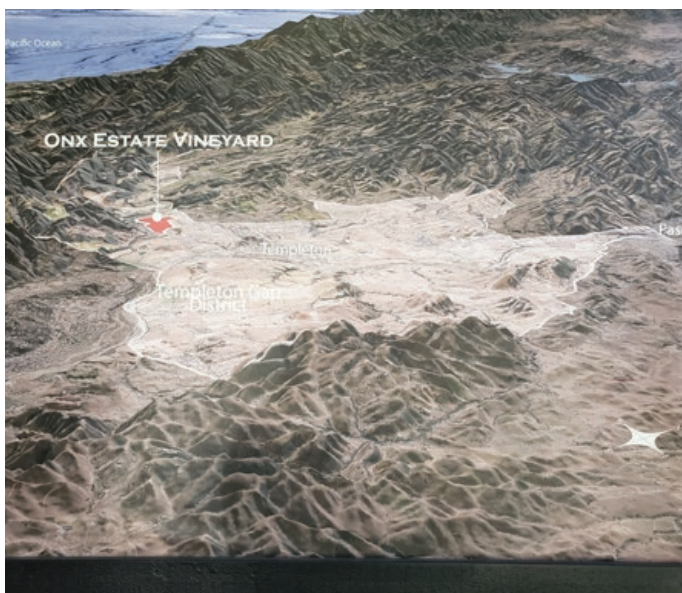


TIN CITY PART 5: ONX ESTATE VINEYARD

Story & Photos by Tom Murnan

The ONX Estate Vineyard (pronounced onyx) is one of the few wineries in Tin City, just outside Paso Robles, CA, which actually owns their own vineyard. Their website has an amusing page about their history. They start from a timeline of 11 million years ago, when their vineyard was covered by an ancient shallow bay that created limestone deposits from calcified sea creatures. They then skip to 1600 A.D. to say the Chumash Indians would meet the Salinan Indians on the vineyard site to hunt and trade goods. The City of Templeton was established in 1886, and the city of El Paso de Robles in 1889. In 2004, the Olson family bought their vineyard in the Templeton area. It was planted between 2005 and 2007. The vineyard is right in the Templeton Gap and has some of the most dramatic temperature swings in the wider Paso area. The

gap allows breezes from the south to come up through the ridges of the mountains into the Templeton and Paso Robles AVAs. It allows for lower temperature air from the ocean to cool the air, during both the days and the nights, which tempers the hot weather in the vineyard. Around 4:00 in the afternoon, the wind is at its strongest, and can knock loose things, like umbrella picnic tables, over. The gap helps the Temprenillo grape, which has pH/acidity issues, and Mourvèdre, which has ripening issues. The Indians used to use the **Templeton Gap** to reach Ute Pass to arrive at Colorado Springs in El Paso County. The soils at ONX Estate are a complex mix of rocky alluviums. Large rocks mostly of calcareous sedimentary origin are scattered throughout the site. Sandy, gravelly loams define most of the property and provide excellent drainage for vine roots. ▶







◀ Whilst planting the vineyard, they noticed that the soil contained Onyx Caliche, which gave them the inspiration for their name, ONX. Between 2009 and 2012, the Olson family bought contiguous land to their estate vineyard to expand it to 130 acres, and they planted additional varieties of grapes. In 2017, they acquired another vineyard, the 50-acre Kiler Canyon Vineyard in the Willow Creek AVA. They now had 18 different varieties of grapes, with numerous clones. Their first wines were made in 2012. In 2015, they opened their tasting room and production facility in Tin City, where I made my visit.

The afore mentioned Olson family has been farming in the Paso area for over 100 years. They are dedicated to making world renowned wines. It is a brother/sister and spouses relationship, with Steve Olson and sister Judy Laakso having the blood relation. They focus on the vineyard, using a minimalist approach. Primarily, they are a Rhône producer. They raise Syrah, Petite Sirah, Mouvedre, Grenache, Pinot Noir, and Zinfandel for the reds. As for the whites, Rousanne, Grenache Blanc, Viognier and Sauvignon Blanc are grown, with Tempranillo used for a rosé.

While in the tasting room, we tried the **2019 l'Autre Femme** [the other woman], a white built for some aging with 52% Rousanne, 32% Viognier and 10% Grenache Blanc. It got its name because they felt it was their second wine with feminine characteristics. **2017 Mad Crush** is a red that changes the grape varieties in the bottle annually, depending on the vintage. It had 35% Grenache, 24% Tempranillo, 26% Mouvedre, 5% Syrah, 5% Zinfandel, and 2% Petite Sirah. They purposefully want a delicate wine. Their **2017 Crux** was a GSM mix. One high end wine, **Noble Intrigue**, \$70.00, comes from the famous **Bien Nacido Vineyard** in the Santa Maria Valley. It is 100% Syrah. Only eight miles from the Pacific, but in a valley, the region is cooler than the Paso Robles area so it takes longer to mature and has a higher tannic structure. **Reckoning** is another high end red, a little cheaper at \$58.00, but made with 55% Syrah, 15% Petite, 10% Tempranillo, 10% Grenache and 10% Zin.

Besides their wines, you can rent a place to stay. The Cottage is an English style cottage, a Briarwood apartment, a three bedroom house in the Kiler Canyon, or a studio apartment in the same area. 🍷



Briarwood Cottage



Kiler House



UPCOMING COUNCIL BLUFFS BRANCH EVENTS

MAR
5

SPENCER'S FOR STEAKS AND CHOPS

102 S 10th, Omaha, NE 68102
Producer: Bob Kossow

APR
3

801 CHOPHOUSE

Producers: Hipple

MAY
TBD

VENUE TBD

Producers: Goldsteins & Wilke

JUNE
TBD

VENUE TBD

Producers: Harrington & Matthews

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