

The Bluffs Food & Wine

May 2013 *gazette*

Event Report:
Spring Gala
at V. Mertz

Also inside
Spain's
Mencia Varietal

Tom & Mary Murnan June 2012
Wine Vacation Vol 7



A publication of the Council Bluffs Branch of the International Wine and Food Society

President's Comments



Hi Everyone,

Here is a very big red from Paso Robles California, a 2010 Austin Hope Syrah by Hope Family Vineyard. This wine has intense fruit and rich berry flavors of blackberry, boysenberry, currant, black licorice, vanilla and oak. The wine drinks nice now although it will get better with age. Pair this wine with brisket, stew, beef steak, lamb, venison and maybe pork chops if the sauce isn't too acidic. The alcohol content is 15%, ranked 76 out of the top 100 by the Wine Spectator and rated 93 pts. Drink now through 2022. You can purchase this wine at Whole Foods for \$34.99. If you purchase at least 6 you can get 10% off.

Best Wine, Food and Friends,

Patti Hipple
President

Editor's Corner

What a way to inaugurate Spring but with a fabulous dinner at one of Omaha's finest restaurants, V. Mertz. The staff volunteered to work on their day off for our event, for which we give them our profound gratitude. There were so many gourmet touches about this dinner, such as the house making their own smoked bacon, that you simply must read about this event. You are always guaranteed something unusual when you go to V. Mertz.

John Fischer writes of an obscure Spanish grape variety in his article on the Mencia varietal. A new group of winemakers have begun to extract all this varietal can give. Read about the latest trend with this grape.

Ever wonder what they would serve you for dinner if you were a guest at a great Port Lodge? Mary and I found out when we stopped at our first vineyard during our June, 2012 wine vacation. The Quinta do Crasto's winemaker and owner's house sits high above the Douro River valley, yielding a spectacular view of this rugged viticulture area. We had wonderful weather and sat outside on the patio, eventually dining under the light of a full moon. Talk about romantic. Wonderful food, and all wines from the Lodge. This was what this trip was all about!

Enjoy!

Tom Murnan



Photo courtesy of hugel.com

Event Report

April 14, 2013

Spring Gala at V. Mertz

story by Tom Murnan

Twenty-three members and five guests gathered on Sunday to celebrate the arrival of Spring at one of Omaha's premier restaurants, V. Mertz. The staff gave up one of their day's off to provide us with a true gourmet dinner. All the wines were purchased or came from the Branch cellar. This report would be shorter if there wasn't so much to tell!



We started with a plank full of various **Charcuterie and Small Bites**. Fourteen different ingredients, from Salmon Gravlox, Beef Lardo to nuts and cheeses intrigued our palates. Quaffing wines included 2009 Avant, an unoaked Chardonnay, 2005 Novi Syrah, 2011 Tarima Monastrell from Spain, and the 2008 d'Arenberg The Stump Jump.



Once at table, President Patti Hipple presented three new couples and one individual with membership plaques. These included Stacie Matz (Duke was absent), Bill and Theresa Clark, Jill and Jon Panzer, and Shonna Schramm. General manager Matt Brown then spoke of the meal Chef



Jon Seymour had prepared. Jon's theme emphasized the flavors of Spring.

Textures of Squid was our first dish, which included grilled and sous vide squid. Sous Vide means ingredients are vacuumed sealed, then the pouch is boiled in water. The sealing prevents dilution of the flavors. The tentacles were grilled crispy which made for a nice contrast to the sous vide. Parsley purée enlivened the plate with its green color. A citrus sauce, hazelnuts and coconuts provided lively flavors. A smoky bread provided contrast. It was a lovely dish. The chosen wine was a 2011 La Cana Albariño, a white wine which was fresh and minerally, with peach stone and tropical notes and some salinity due to the vineyard's proximity to the sea. A very nice match.



Peas & Mint were next, both inspirations of Spring. The most interesting part to me was the pea tendrils. They had some of the characteristics of bean sprouts, but were long, leafy, and with a definite pea flavor. A mint purée provided color and a contrasting flavor. Sautéed Sugar Snap and regular peas were used. Other flavors came from Chamomile tea and rye. Pulled pork provided the meat flavors. A soft poached egg yolk was nested inside the tendrils. A 2008 Alsatian Reserve Riesling from Trimbach paired nicely with the dish, providing nice savory and chive flavors, as well as pears and quince.



The **Poached Bay Scallops** proved to be the most difficult to provide a matching wine. Because of the smoked bacon, potatoes and mushrooms in an otherwise sea inspired dish, both a red wine and a white were selected. The white was a 2010 Pouilly-Fuissé Marie Antoinette from Vincent, while the red was a 2006 Domaine Serene Evenstad Reserve Pinot Noir. To the question of which wine was the best match, in the end I thought it was a



split decision. The Pouilly-Fuissé, a French Chardonnay, went better with the delicate scallops, while the Evenstad went better with the bacon infused broth with its earthy, savory aspects. The Pinot Noir had tannin, albeit very mild ones, and tannin tends to mask delicate flavors like the scallop. So, if you concentrated on the scallops, the white went better, but if your thoughts concentrated on the broth and everything except the scallops, then the red went better.

I felt this was a confusing dish, with its pork and fish flavors, and it made the wine pairing problematic. The house made bacon came from pork belly cured for two weeks, then smoked with half cherry and half apple wood. Beech mushrooms were picked fresh and added a woody flavor that had an affinity for the Pinot Noir. Not many restaurants go to the trouble of smoking their own bacon. The bacon and mushrooms did, however, overwhelm the scallops. I was unsure if I was on land or sea since the course was entitled scallops.



A **Lamb Duet** was our main course, another imaginative dish. Leg of lamb was done two ways: braised and slow roasted (about 7 hours). Seven different kinds of grains were purchased from Squeaky Greens in Plattsmouth, NE. It took three and a half days to prepare.

The grains were earthy, yet sweet. They were selected because they were at their sprouting point and for their texture. A yogurt was placed underneath the grains to give moisture and flavor. Various kinds of onions (pearl and Texas Sweet) were poached and scattered on top. The **2007 Perrin & Fils Vinsobres Les Cornuds** and the **2006 Clarendon Sandown Cabernet Sauvignon** accompanied the lamb. The Perrins own the famous Château Beaucastel. The Vinsobres is a Côte du Rhône blend of 50% Syrah and 50% Grenache, and was rated number 89 of the top 100 by the Wine Spectator for 2009. It seemed to me a bit rustic for the lamb. The Clarendon came from 80 year old pre-phyloxera vines from a very sandy soiled vineyard from the McLaren Vale area of Australia. It was classically structured and featured fully resolved tannins. It was the better match for the lamb.



We closed with a **Death By Chocolate** dessert. House made toffee accompanied an assortment of chocolates and grains of Espresso artistically presented on the plate. Chocolate pastry cream was smeared on the plate. Two truffles filled with liquid ganache, a dark chocolate

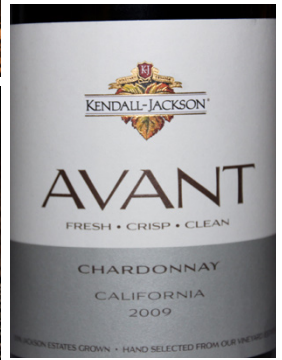
cake with a caramelized white chocolate crème at the center, and a dark chocolate glaze made Death ever so sweet and enticing. Toffee chips provided a different flavor and color. Finally, coffee/chocolate grounds added texture and piquant

flavor. The 1997 Fonseca Vintage Port went very well with the dessert and could stand up to the strong, sweet flavors.

Many thanks to Head Chef Jon Seymour, Chef de Cuisine Jacob Newton, our three Certified Sommeliers David Eckler, Matt Brown and Chris Walter, as well as the rest of the staff for all their efforts, and to Patti Hipple and proprietor and member David Hays for organizing this event and selecting the wines. It was truly an amazing experience.



More photos of this event on the following page »



*More photos of this event
on the following page »*



Mencia an up-and-coming varietal

by John Fischer



Photo courtesy of: SanchoPanzaXXI wikipedia.org

Over the past few years, several relatively obscure wines, such as Malbec from Argentina and Carmenere from Chile, have received well deserved attention from the wine drinking community. The next addition to this list may well be Spain's Mencia wines. Alvaro Palacios is the principal person responsible for bringing this distinctive grape from the hinterland of northern Spain to the attention of wine aficionados worldwide, and it was very well received.

Until recently, the vast majority of wines produced from Mencia have been light, simple, and straightforward wines meant for early consumption. This style of wine was the result of plantings designed to give high yields of undistinguished thin wines. However, recently, much more concentrated and sophisticated wines have been produced by a group of winemakers intent on extracting the full potential from this hitherto poor performing grape. Employing careful vineyard

management, they used older established vines grown in schist and granite soils on carefully selected hillside locations to create wines that have generated rousing attention from Spain's wine industry.

Mencia's origin is uncertain; however, many believe that it was brought to northern Spain from France. Nevertheless, DNA profiling carried out at the University of Politecnica in Madrid concluded that it is identical to the Jean du Dao grape found in Portugal. Where it actually came from is still a mystery. The great majority of present day plantings are found in the northwestern part of the Spain in the Bierzo, Ribeira Sacra, and Valdeorras regions.

Several of these wines have recently received high scores (over 90 points) from the Wine Advocate, Tanzer, and the Wine Spectator and have even made it to the Spectator's top

100 list. These wines have good fruit supporting acidity and well integrated tannins. The hallmark fruity flavors are black cherries and blackberries. Mencia wines are supported by a collection of savors including blueberries, flowers, camphor, smoke, plum, licorice, herbs, chocolate, cola, and coffee. Some of these flavors, such as, camphor, blueberries and cola, are not commonly found in red wines, and when present serve as good markers for the varietal.

Typically, quality Mencia wines are somewhat budlike in their youth, but with a little time in bottle they develop admirable complexity and finish with a surprisingly long and lingering farewell. As the tannins soften, the wines fruity profile gradually emerges. The average longevity is about 7-8 years; however, some last only a couple of years. Nevertheless, the more successful vintages can last and improve for well over a decade.

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John Fischer is a member and two-time president of the Omaha Branch of the IW&FS, past director of the Nebraska Chapter of LADV, and founding member of the Council Bluffs Branch of the IWFS. He teaches a course on wine and matching wine with food at the Institute for the Culinary Arts in Omaha, NE and is author of two books: *The Evaluation of Wine* and *Wine and Food - 101*.

Tom and Mary Murnan's Wine Vacation

Quinta do Crasto

June 2012: Vol 7

by Tom Murnan



We resume our visit to the Quinta do Crasto along Portugal's rugged Douro River. Situated high over the river valley, the view was spectacular. It was now time for a tutored tasting followed by dinner.

We sauntered into the home of our host, Miguel Roquette where the table was set with seven glasses of Port. The name Crasto derives from the Latin word castrum, or fort, and there have been references to the area



as far back as the late 17th century. We tasted three LBVs, or Late Bottled Vintage, and four Vintage Ports. LBV was specifically designed to drink younger than the slow maturing Vintage Ports. This is accomplished by aging it for an extra three or four years over Vintage Port's two years in the cask. We tasted the 2006, 2005 and 2004 LBVs, then Vintage

Ports from 2009, 2007, 2004, and 2003. Vintage Port only comes from very good growing years and must be declared. Typically, this happens only about three or four times a decade. I would rate all the Vintage Ports from 90

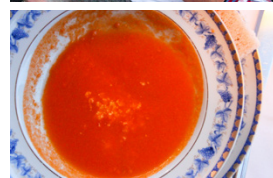


to 94 points, while the LBV's ranged from 86 points for the youngest to 92 for the more mature. All of the Crasto Ports



were very nice indeed, and less expensive than some of the better known British Houses.

The tasting over, we moved back outside to the patio for an evening dinner. A chef had been hired to prepare our feast. **Hor d'oeuvres** included **Blood Sausage, Alheira (smoked) Sausage, Salami, Tuna Cake, Local Goat Cheese with Cherry Tomatoes** toasted in an oven with oregano, **Toasted Almonds and Olives.**



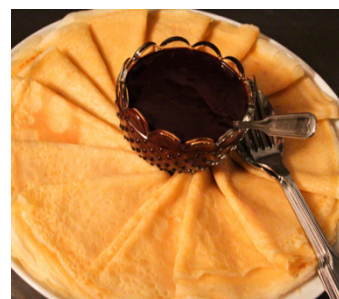
At table, we opened with **Tomato Soup** with two kinds of virgin olive oils. A red Crasto table wine was paired with the soup, the **2010 Crasto Douro**. It was a bit raw because of its youth.

Our main course was **Salad and Wild Duck with Sausage and Rice**. Two hot sauces were available, with one being described as “dangerous!” Wines included the **2000 Douro Superior** (soft and very approachable after 11 years), the **2009 Douro Reserva**, a **2004 Touriga Nacional** and the **2003 Maria Teresa** from their best vineyard. The latter was still tannic, oaky with very pure fruit, and impenetrable dark ruby color.

Cheeses followed the entrée, which included **Queen’s Marmello**, Azores (100% cow milk), and **Serra da Estrela**, made from sheep’s milk from the mountain area. We finished with **Crêpes with Chocolate Mousse** as well as **Strawberry Cheese Cake** and **Strawberry Ice Cream** topped with strawberries from the Quinta. Two Ports accompanied the desserts: a **1996 LBV** and a **1995 Tawny Colheita**. Unlike Vintage and LBV ports which spend relatively short times in cask, Tawny Ports spend years in the wood and are typically blended from numerous years. However, if they come from a specific year, they are called **Colheita**. Both Ports were extremely young. The 1995 was mahogany with red notes in the color indicating its youth. It had chocolaty flavors and was not all that tannic. The 1996 was dark red and not as complex. Both went admirably with the desserts. Although we did not try it, a bottle of Miguel’s great grandfather, Constantio Almado, from **1908** was brought out, evidence of the long provenance of this Port Lodge. It was simply known as **Constantino** then.

By this time, we were enjoying the wonderful full moon in a very dark corner of the world. We boarded our waiting bus for the long ride back to our hotel quite content with the world.

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Upcoming Council Bluffs Branch Events! Mark Your Calendars!

Wednesday, June 5 • The Tritschs & Hipple host winemaker Danny Gordon from Tamarack Cellars of Walla Walla, WA who will discuss and pour his wines.

Sunday, December 8 • President's Event at the Omaha Press Club



Hosting an event?

Let us know when, where and a little bit about what's going on!

We would love to include YOUR event on the calendar!
email details to: stephenhipple@hotmail.com

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KEEPING In Touch!

Please notify Club Membership Chairman Diane Forristall at Diane@Forristall.us to let her know if you are interested in hosting an IWFS event.

PURPOSE: To meet communication and service needs, to broaden participation and understand and to be an information exchange for the membership of The International Wine & Food Society in the Americas.

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