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The Bluffs Food & Wine gazette

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

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HAPPY SPRING EVERYONE! IT'S so nice to have warmer weather now.

We had an unusual event on March 11th. Two of our members, **Todd Lemke and Joe Goldstein**, were celebrating birthdays. Joe's B day just happened to be on the day we all gathered at the Omaha Press Club. The birthday theme was everywhere, with candy party favors, black confetti, balloons and even a clown. Most everyone got their picture taken with **Professor Jerkelle**, who added to the lighthearted party atmosphere. The food was pretty good as well. Read about it in the Event Report section. I might add that many of the wines came from our ever growing, ever improving cellar.

Patti and Steve Hipple heard about **an all Champagne dinner** on one of their international festival trips. Even though Champagne is quite capable of being served successfully throughout one meal, it is seldom done. I can only think of one time before that I was so entertained. Champagne is one of those wines that is able to be paired with a vast array of different foods. To prepare us for the all Champagne event at V. Mertz, I thought you would enjoy reading about the early history of the appellation, and review how the first true sparkling wine was made.

To get us up to speed on Champagne and sparkling wines, **John Fischer** writes about bubbly this month. Since most Champagne is sold around the December and New Year's holidays, John asks if it is a holiday wine, or a wine that can be served throughout the year. I know that for myself, it should not be confined to a one month period at the beginning of winter. But make up your own mind after reading what John has to say.

Skol!

Tom Murnan

**"My only regret is that I have not drunk more
Champagne in my life."**

-John Maynard Keynes

Cover: The Muse of Champagne. Detail from an early 20th Century poster.





EVENT REPORT:

BIRTHDAY EXTRAVAGANZA AT OMAHA PRESS CLUB

by Tom Murnan

ALWAYS ENJOY DINING in the clouds at the Omaha Press Club. Up on the 22nd floor, the views are stunning. Plus you get to see who is the latest face on the bar room floor. One of our Birthday Boys, **Todd Lemke** (whose b day is March 13th) was so honored in 2013. Our other Birthday Boy, **Joe Goldstein**, actually had his B day on the day of our event: March 11th. The Birthday theme was evident everywhere, what with candy party favors and black birthday confetti strewn around, and balloon figures as well, there was no missing this bash theme. Plus, we had **Professor Jerkelle** the clown. He was fond of saying he had a PhD in P.I.E. Herr Professore was responsible for tying the balloon shapes. Almost everyone got their picture taken with the Professor during quaffing. Thirty five people attended, including six guests. Most of the wine came from the Branch cellar.

Quaffing composed of a great **Smoked Salmon Chaud Froid**, with melt in your mouth tender salmon covered with cream cheese and sides of chopped shallots and capers. I liked the fact that the bread was toasted. It made it easier to eat our portion of fish. The other appetizer was **Murray's French Double Crème Brie**. Almost too pretty to break, it was none-the-less breached anyway, allowing its gooey goodness to spread out. With these two hors d'oeuvres, we had two wines. We tried a **2013 Foster e Rocco Rosé** from the Australian Heathcote

region in central Victoria. Made from the Sangiovese grape, and fermented in old French oak, the wine sported flavors of strawberry, red apples and cherry. To contrast that, a fuller red was also offered. Hailing from the French Beaujolais region, we had a **2013 Maison L'Envoye Côte de Py, Vieille Vigne Morgon**. Morgon is one of the cru Beaujolais, among the region's best. From an excellent vintage, this Gamay grape based wine had berry flavors and light tannins.

Grilled Corn Crab Bisque was our first sit down course. Rich and cream based, but salty, the bisque had intense crab flavor. It was garnished with a teaspoon of chopped crab meat, a dollop of sour cream, a chive spear and corn kernels. A baton of puff pastry bread stick helped neutralize the saltiness and richness. We had two wines to compare. Would the **2014 Fess Parker Ashley's Chardonnay** pair better or the non vintage **Graham Beck Brut Methode Cap Classique**? The Beck comes from South Africa and some of the grapes comes from Stellenbosch. A sparkling wine that is a great alternative to Champagne at half the price, it was lively with great acidity. The Fess Parker comes from the Santa Rita Hills near Santa Barbara in California's Central Coast. It is barrel aged with 30% being new French oak, which is immediately detected on the palate. It was oaky, balanced and forceful with notes of pear, citrus, and minerality. Which went better with the soup? I gave the

nod to the sparkling wine because, with its bubbles and high acidity, seemed to reduce the saltiness of the soup. Both were very good, however.

Villamonte's Thunderbird Salad in Parmesan Crust © was next. Our Chef de Cuisine, Steve Villamonte's father Luis developed this recipe while working as Chef at the Happy Hollow Club in the 1960's. Steve had it patented. Along with its unique dressing, the salad includes iceberg and romaine lettuce, tomato, chives, bacon, mozzarella and bleu cheese, all in a bowl made from heated/melted Parmesan cheese. Delicious. You can buy Thunderbird salad dressing at HyVee. Many times we do not have a wine for the salad course, but tonight we did. We tried the **2014 Craggy Range Te Muna Road Sauvignon Blanc** from the Martinborough district in New Zealand. Grass Attack! Wow, this is one of the grassiest Sauvignon Blancs I have had in a long while. A flavor very much associated with SB that does not appeal to me, even after a half hour, the grassiness did not dissipate much, and it was overpowering the salad. I guess if you like that component the wine was OK.

Our **Strawberry Purple Carrot Sorbet** was next. No wine with this course, but it was a dark purple color, with a small stick of lemon peel and mint leaf to garnish and add color. Sweet and deeply berry like. I liked it.

Our Entrée was **Broiled Lamb Filet with Roasted Garlic Cloves, Kalamata Olive, and Charred Sunchoke**. It sported two kinds of sauce, a **Natural Jus** and a **Tart Cherry Glaze**. Two tender racks of two bones each sat opposite of each other on a rectangular plate in an attractive presentation. The lamb was wonderful, and just the thing to compare to our two wine choices. We had a **2013 DeLille Cellars D2 Proprietary Red** from the Columbian Valley in Washington State, and a **2013 Hamilton Russell Hemelen-Aard Valley Pinot Noir**. The DeLille is the second wine of the estate which is a Bordeaux blend of grape varieties raised in French oak. Bordeaux and lamb are a classic combination. To contrast this, a Pinot Noir from South Africa was presented. Well balanced with silky tannins, wine writer Robert Parker thought the wine was like a Vosne-Romanée Beaux Monts. When asked by Todd which wine everyone preferred, the votes were about evenly split.

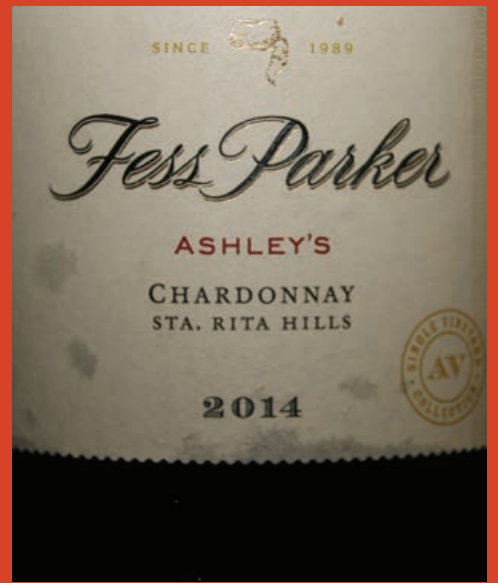
Dessert found us with a **Tempered Chocolate Torte with Raspberry Coulis**. A beautiful dark chocolate covered the torte and a decorative triangle of dark decorated dark chocolate added to the decadence. No problem with the wine being sweeter than the dessert here. We tried a **1927 Alvear Pedro Ximinez Solera**. A solera is a method whereby an older vintage is used to enrich younger vintages. We probably have about a thimble full of wine from 1927 still left in the barrel, but the method is a way of spreading the richness of great vintages with younger vintages. Every year, the younger wines are mixed with older wines until the winemaker feels it is time to sell the wine. At my table the discussion was how it was too bad that we did not often drink Sherry anymore. Intensely sweet, and tasting of prunes and raisins, this Sherry is an indication of why Sherry in general is beginning to become fashionable again.

I would like to thank Joe and Todd for a very enjoyable birthday celebration. Thanks as well to **Chef Steve Villamonte** and his staff for good service and great cooking. Thanks to **Patti Hipple** helped select the wines, both for our Branch Cellar and tonight's dinner.















An Early History of Champagne & How It's Made

By Tom Murnan

On April 23rd, our event at V. Mertz will feature the wine theme of an All Champagne Dinner. Champagne is incredibly versatile and can easily be used throughout a meal. But how is it made? First a bit of background.

To start, Champagne is a trademarked name zealously guarded by the French. Real Champagne must come from the French Champagne region around the city of Reims. In the really old days, Champagne made only still wines, and those were dilute and uninspired. Think about it: the region is 45.83 degrees latitude, about the same as Quebec. So it is pretty far north. Wine made in a cold climate many times doesn't have time to fully ferment. Instead, it begins fermentation, stops when the cellar gets too cold, and starts up again when it gets warmer in the Spring. Now, to have bubbles invading your still wine was considered a flaw, a failure of the wine maker.

There is a myth that the famous monk Dom Pérignon (1638-1715), of the abbey at Hautvilliers, invented sparkling Champagne. This myth was heavily promoted by Moët and Chandon when they launched their prestige cuvée Dom Pérignon in 1936. The name Moët is Dutch not French, so the final "t" is pronounced not silent. The reality is that it took about 150 years to deliberately, and successfully, capture carbon dioxide in the wine. And Dom Pérignon had competition as well: a Dom Oudard from his abbey in Pierry. But rightfully, Dom Pérignon discovered many things about making sparkling wine.

- He discovered the advantage of low yields.
- He harvested in cooler weather so the wine was more elegant and fresher.
- He invented the traditional horizontal wine press.

- He pressed the grapes as close to the fields as possible for freshness.
- He was the first to get white wine from red grapes (Pinot Noir).
- He was the first to keep white grapes (Chardonnay) from turning brown.
- He was the first to separate the juice into three different pressings, with the first pressing known as yielding the best juice.
- He developed the idea of a cuvée, or blended batches of red and white grapes before bottling. It is only recently that grapes from a single cru has become popular.
- He began using stronger bottles that would not explode when under pressure. He used stronger English glass which had a large punt in the bottom to increase strength.
- He was the first to use corks in Champagne.



(Left) Dom Pérignon
By Victor Grigas - Own work, CC BY-SA 4.0,
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=36666400>
(Right) Remuer riddling Champagne

So, as you can see, Dom Pérignon was quite an innovative force in developing sparkling wine. The oft repeated quote, supposedly uttered by the Dom on his first taste of sparkling Champagne "Come quickly, I am tasting the stars" seems to be an advertisement first printed in the late 19th century. The Veuve (widow) Clicquot Ponsardin was the first to come up with a method to remove all the sediment in the bottle before final bottling and marketing by using a process called riddling.

Historically, the **Méthode Champenoise** fermented the cuvées in the barrel, bottled them in late fall or early winter, whereby a secondary fermentation would take place inside the bottle when it warmed up in the Spring. To encourage more carbon dioxide, a "tirage" of yeast, yeast nutrients and sugar were added to the bottle. The bottles are placed upside down in a riddling rack. When sediment forms as the yeast acts on the nutrients and sugar, it is guided into the

neck by the process of remuage. Riddlers would deftly twist thousands of bottles a day and very slightly shake the sediment into the neck of the bottle. When the bottles are ready, a process of disgorgement is used. The necks of the bottle are frozen so that the sediment is encapsulated into a small block of frozen wine. The temporary crown cap (like the old pop bottle caps) are quickly opened, the pressure of the carbon dioxide expels the plug, and the wine is topped off with reserve wine. It is at this point that the dosage, or amount of sugar, is determined. From sweet to dry, the wines will be labeled differently depending on the sugar added in the dosage: **Doux** 50+ grams; **Demi-Sec** 32-50 grams; **Sec** 17-32 grams; **Extra Dry** 12-17 grams; **Brut** 0-12 grams; **Extra Brut** 0-6 grams; and **Brut Nature** 0-3 grams per liter. Then a high quality cork is inserted and a **muselet** or wire basket is secured around the top to prevent accidental opening.

There is a lot of pressure behind that cork, up to 6 atmospheres! This is a very brief description of how Champagne is made in the traditional method. There are several other methods, such as the bulk **Charmat** method, where sugar and yeast are added in large stainless steel tanks instead of the individual bottle.

Champagne is a fascinating product with much history, lore, and marketing behind it. There are Non-Vintage, Vintage, Blanc de Blancs (all white grapes), Blanc de Noirs (Pinot Noir or Pinot Meunier only) and Prestige Cuvées. Blended wines from Grand Marques like Veuve Clicquot Ponsardin, Moët and Chandon, Bollinger, Krug, Laurent-Perrier and Taittinger used to be the way Champagne was made and marketed, but now there is a push for the small growers to make their own Champagne.

Sources: *2000 Champagnes* by Richard Juhlin, Scala Books 1999; Wikipedia

A dynamic photograph of champagne being poured. A green glass bottle is tilted on the left, with a large splash of golden liquid erupting from its neck. Two champagne flutes are positioned in the foreground, one on the left and one on the right, both containing bubbly champagne. The background is a solid black, which makes the golden liquid and the numerous bubbles stand out sharply. The overall composition is energetic and celebratory.

*Champagne—Holiday Wine
or a Wine for All Seasons?*



BY JOHN FISCHER

THERE IS LITTLE DOUBT that Champagne is a festive drink that is consumed in great quantities over the holiday seasons. The shelves of retail stores are packed with a wide variety of Champagnes, and retailers are set about touting their merits. This is all perfectly understandable, but don't sell this wine short. Make no mistake; Champagne is not only a wine for special occasions, it is a wine for all seasons. This is a refreshing beverage for a hot summer day, but is equally good when sipped in winter around a blazing fireplace. It makes a wonderful aperitif for an up-scaled dinner party, and is one of the most food-friendly wines.

It is peculiar that you hardly ever see Champagne served in restaurants. It isn't the price. You can purchase good Champagne at a fairly reasonable price. What's more, there are many red and white wines that are far more expensive; nevertheless, you will find them served at a scattering of tables in many restaurants. This is unfortunate, because Champagne is a marvelous wine to serve with a wide variety of dishes. It is purely a matter of perception that you only drink Champagne on festive occasions.

What is it that makes Champagne such a stunning beverage to serve with food? It is the dichotomy of its character: it is both tart and creamy. The finely beaded pinpoint carbonation of its mousse gives a round, smooth, creamy sensation, yet the high level of acidity provides tartness. Only high quality sparkling wines possess this creamy characteristic. **If a still wine (a nonsparkling wine) is tart, it is not creamy, and if it is creamy, it is not tart; Champagne is both tart and creamy.**

These characteristics are very beneficial to food pairings. The great majority of dishes are enhanced by tart wines. Tartness in wine supports and embellishes the flavors in foods.

However, the real magic of Champagne occurs when you have a creamy dish that is looking for tartness. For example, consider poached Dover sole topped with a rich Mornay sauce (creamy white cheese flavored sauce). **Tartness in the wine enhances flavors in the dish,** (that's why fish is often served with a wedge of lemon), **and the creaminess of the Champagne reflects back to the creaminess of the dish. This match is pure hedonism!**

In addition to creamy foods, other foods that are enhanced by Champagne are **crispy foods, fried foods, and puffed-up foods.** Some examples to illustrate these include such items as eggs Benedict, lobster Newburg in puffed pastry shells, breaded fried oysters, pike quenelles with Béchamel sauce, and crab salad on toast points. Although Champagne is a very food friendly wine, it is not a panacea to all food matches. It would certainly not be the ideal wine to serve at a chop house.

The term Champagne belongs to wines made in a specifically limited area some ninety miles northeast of Paris. Most of the other countries respect the designation "Champagne" and call their sparkling wine by another name. In Italy it is called Spumante and Prosecco; in Germany, Sekt; and in Spain, Cava. In the United States, sparkling wines can be labeled Champagne as long as the label specifies the place of origin, such as "New York State Champagne." Champagne labeled **Brut** contains no sugar, then in increasing order of sweetness the wines are labeled **Extra Dry, Sec, Demi-Sec, and Doux.** The term extra dry is somewhat of a misnomer, as it is actually a wine with a bit of sweetness.



Upcoming Council Bluffs Branch Events

Mark Your Calendars!



April 23, 2017

V. Mertz
Theme: All Champagne Dinner
Producers: Patti & Steve Hipple



May 21, 2017

Happy Hollow Club, Chef Jason Hughes
Theme: Todd and Joe's Birthday Extravaganza
Theme: A Day at the Races
Producers: Jill Goldstein & Jenny Ayoub



June 3, 2017

Residence of Nate and Liz Farmer
Theme: Barbeque
A State Champion BBQ chef will
cook us dinner
Producers: Farmers, Hipple
and Lowell Wilhite



July 15, 2017

Council Bluffs Country Club
Wines and cuisine of Argentina
Producers: Kossows and Tritschs

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:

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The mission of the Council Bluffs Branch of the International Wine and Food Society is to develop a profound understanding and appreciation of both wine and the culinary arts and to enjoy this experience in the camaraderie of friends. Our task is to educate our membership about wine and to develop the skill of matching wine with food. We strive to drink high quality wines and to experience an eclectic array of foods prepared by the area's top chefs.

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in hosting an IWFS event.**

To access past Gazettes and other features about our Branch, go to the international website following this link: www.iwfs.org/americas/council-bluffs

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