

The Bluffs *Food & Wine* *gazette*

JUNE 2018

EVENT REPORT:

V. Mertz Annual Dinner

INSIDE

AUREOLE WINE ANGEL: The Most Heavenly
Job in Las Vegas



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



President's Comments

Hello Everyone,

Let me start about by saying Happy Mother's Day to all the mothers, and grandmothers. Thanks for all you do.

May got off to a great start thanks to the Hipple's and the Hayes. The blind tasting at V. Mertz provided an entertaining twist on the usual tastings, and as usual the food was outstanding. Special thanks to Matt Brown at V. Mertz who always provides amazing insights into the wines, making the event educational as well as fun.

Thanks to everyone for attending. I believe the event was sold out. Attendance has been outstanding this year. Let's keep it up in the coming months.

Please join me in welcoming our newest board members. Thanks to John Matthews and Amanda Harrington for agreeing to become part of the board. It is my hope that John will be instrumental in helping the Council Bluffs group update our technology and join the 2000's, and to have Amanda help Diane with Membership duties.

The events coming up include a disco theme in May, a family style Southern Comfort food in June, and an upscale Italian dinner in July. Should be fun.

Looking forward to seeing everyone soon.

Cheers,

Joe Goldstein

“The University of Nebraska says that elderly people that drink wine at least four times a week have the highest bone density. They need it - they're the ones falling down the most.

-George Carlin



Cover Photo: Wine angel at work in the Wine Tower, Aureole restaurant, Las Vegas.
Photo by Tom Murnan

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Editor's Corner

Another triumphal meal AT V Mertz in the Old Market. We had an all red wine dinner, including the dessert wine. Then, in a somewhat unusual move for this Branch, we had a sit down tasting. A blind sit down tasting. Guided by third degree Sommelier candidate Matt Brown, we were challenged to determine what grape variety we had in the glass. Afterwards, we had those wines paired with food. It was great fun, and educational as it always is when Matt Brown provides the tutorial. But what distinguishes V Mertz from most Omaha restaurants is its imaginative cuisine, deftly crafted to promote the wine.

This kind of thing separates them from other competitors and places them in the true gourmet category of dining experience...one of the reasons a V Mertz event usually sells out. There was a lot going on in this meal, a lot of food and wine interactions. Read all about it within.

I went to a garage door convention in Las Vegas this April, and one of the factory reps invited us out to dinner. He made the mistake of allowing me to choose the restaurant! I chose Aureole in the Mandalay Bay casino with its wine tower. I was reminded of what great dinner theater the Wine Angels are. They scale the 42 foot wine tower that dominates the restaurant, retrieving your order in dramatic fashion. Be sure not miss this story.

Tom Murnan

"Growing up, my mom would often say, "If you kids didn't cost so much, I could drink wine that comes out of a bottle."

-@thelordhasspoke





EVENT REPORT

V. MERTZ ANNUAL DINNER

Written By Tom Murnan | Photos by Tom Murnan

AN EVENT AT V. MERTZ, one of the best restaurants in the metropolitan area, always sells out quickly, and to capacity. It is tight, but 50 people fit into the snug environs of the Passageway venue. This included four guests. Our theme was an all red wine dinner. But to better hone our palates, a sit down blind tasting of five wines was presented. Advanced Sommelier Matt Brown had free range to select the wines. Not exactly Mission Impossible, since about 10 people identified all the wines correctly, our mission was to decide whether the reds were Pinot Noir, Grenache, Cabernet Sauvignon, Syrah or Zinfandel. All the wines were young, either 2014 or 2015.

Matt told us that we could, of course, have an all red wine dinner, but that you have to be creative with the food pairing. We were given a clue sheet that gave information on the flavor profiles, aromas, and structure of our 5 grapes. The sheets gave us an indication of how a Somm would approach tasting and thinking about wine. No parlor trick, a Somm assesses wine for its true qualities and its own essence in the glass. This is a fun way for us to assess each wine and understand each component of that wine: the tannins, the acid, the fruit.

All of that tells you a story about where that wine comes from and what grapes makes it up. We had twenty minutes.

Matt: "When you can figure out what chemical compounds are in which grapes, it will give you cues to figuring out what grape is in the glass. For example, you might find a chemical called Pyrazine, a chemical in bell peppers. Pyrazine is common in Bordeaux varietals. Cabernet Sauvignon almost always has some level of Pyrazine. You are going to smell green pepper, sweet pepper, jalapeno or bell pepper. The riper the grape gets, the less that Pyrazine is there. When the wine is really ripe and comes from a warm climate and has a lot of oak, it takes on this grilled asparagus or fennel kind of smell. It also gives you insights of where the wine might come from if you can pinpoint what kind of Pyrazine level is in that wine. Cabernet Franc has high levels of Pyrazine, while Cabernet Sauvignon is a little bit lower than that. Rotundone gives you a black pepper flavor, found naturally in Syrah in high quantities. It is also present in smaller quantities in Grenache, but you smell it as a white pepper rather than a black pepper. The thin skinned varietals tend to be a little more red fruit driven while the thicker skinned varietals tend to

have darker fruit flavors. When you get closer to Syrah, you see more blue and black fruits. When you taste Pinot Noir and Grenache, you taste more strawberry, raspberry, red fruit driven tones. Cabernet is definitely on the black fruit side, maybe a little bit of blue, cassis, that kind of thing coming into play. Zinfandel is a wild card. As a grape cluster, it ripens unevenly: you will see some fully ripe grapes and some under ripe grapes. So you can get some raisinated flavors, and at the same time, you taste fresh blueberry, all in the same wine. In Lodi, where it is really warm, you get raisinated fruit, baked fruit. But in parts of Sonoma, where it is cooler, you get that blue, that fresh side of it. Those are the kinds of aromatic compounds that can give you clues to what is in the glass.

"The final step in our Court of Sommelier process is to put all the clues together. If you put too much weight on one particular note, you can end up missing a wine pretty easily. It is all about practice and understanding. The first thing I tell people going through the Court of Master Sommeliers is that you have to be OK with being wrong. I have been wrong more than everyone in this room combined. It is about learning to appreciate wines for what they are. The more you practice and participate in this

teaching process, the more you can appreciate it." Through a process of elimination, accomplished by having voters raise their hands, about 10 people were left standing. The bad thing with such a small sample size, if you got one wrong, then by definition you got two wrong.

Dinner began with **Plum Creek Farm's Chicken Multiple Ways: Cured, Grilled, Roasted and Fried**. This was topped by several pieces of incredibly thinly slices of skin, so thin that you could see through it. Very crisp, this had some browned flavors to it. One cylinder shaped piece was salty, smoky and tasted like ham, probably the cured piece. The roasted had more traditional chicken like flavors. A pickled onion garnish provided a sharp contrast and a completely different flavor profile. With this dish, we had the **2015 Ridge Pagani Ranch Zinfandel**. All the vines are between 90 and 120 years old. Its soft, rounded fruit went well with the various styles of chicken.

Carrot Soup: Leek Custard, Grilled Shrimp & Chili Oil was next. Chopped shrimp accompanied by a slice of green leek was brought to the table in bowl. A server then poured the carrot soup around it, making it look like an island. Rich with cream and bright orange, the carrots were enlivened by the chili oil. The soup was rich and had a bit of piquancy due to the chili oil. The shrimp provided a bit of "meatiness" in contrast to the richness. Our wine was the **2015 Ken Wright Cellars "Tanager Vineyard" Pinot Noir**. Ken Wright was from Kentucky but came west to California and learned to make wine, then started Panzer Creek in the Willamette Valley, which he sold in the 1990s to start Ken Wright Cellars in 1994. His focus is single vineyard sites. This wine is a single vineyard site in the Willamette Valley of Oregon. It has a little bit of earth and spice and a savory tone to it, perhaps originating from the fossilized "Willakenzie" soil found in the vineyard. This makes it friendly to the soup. Soup is a difficult thing to tie into, many times having textural issues. Matt wanted a wine that would tie into the **finish** of the soup and not battle the carrots directly. An interesting pairing to see how the food affects the wine as compared to just drinking the wine on its own.

Ricotta Gnudi, Young Garlic and Onion, Arugula and Braised Pork Shoulder was our next course. Gnudi are gnocchi-like dumplings made with ricotta cheese instead of potato, with semolina. The result is often a lighter, "pillowy" dish, unlike the often denser, chewier gnocchi.

Slightly shredded pork shoulder was placed atop the gnudi, garlic and onion, topped by wide arugula leaves, all nicely presented. Grenache was the featured wine. **2012 Langmeil "Fifth Wave" Grenache** was our study vehicle. Matt again. "From the Barossa Valley, the wine comes from some of the oldest Grenache vines in the world with 70 year old vines. Hailing back to 1843, Langmeil is a 5th generation winery (hence the term 5th Wave). They own only old vine vineyards and know how to handle old vines better than anyone else in the world. When you put the wine with this food, you see how flexible Grenache is. Grenache is not traditionally high in acidity, but at the finish the bright red fruit really comes out. The arugula highlighted the pepper tone that is naturally found in Grenache. The arugula comes from Squeaky Green outside of Plattsmouth, NE. The dish also had a bit of beef ash, which highlighted the oak profile and toned the oakiness down a bit. The wine has never been in Nebraska before." The wine had opened up even more than during the tasting and provided sweet fruit, making a pleasing affinity with the pork.

Our main course featured beef with two wines to compare. **Beef Tenderloin, Roasted Beets, Asparagus and Shiitake Mushrooms** were paired with Syrah and Cabernet: **2014 Clos Solène "Hommage à Nos Pairs" Syrah** and **2014 Corison Cabernet Sauvignon**. Matt was our guide. "The Syrah is from Paso Robles while the Cab hails from Napa Valley, St. Helena. The Syrah has 97% of that varietal with a touch of Grenache and Viognier. The wine is really big, with pepper notes and a lot of new oak. The name of the wine translates to "a tribute to our peers" named for those friends who helped them to get to where they are now. A big powerful dish was needed, which is why beef tenderloin was selected. Moving to the Cab, Cathy Corison is the winemaker, one of the first women who graduated from UC Davis for wine making. She has been making wine for 40 years. She owns the oldest vines on the Napa Valley floor with the Kronos Vineyard, and there is a significant amount of Kronos in the wine. Cathy has always had restraint in her wines, she never made a wine with more than 13.5% alcohol, and the wines are always balanced. To get the full appreciation, the wine needs to be paired with food. 2014 was a big vintage, definitely ripe. The beef is from Morgan Ranch just outside Burwell, NE, who sells more beef to Michelin starred restaurants in the world, and one of the few that export back to Japan. Your need a powerful dish to go with these powerful wines."





We had green and white asparagus, roasted beet puree and mushrooms to accompany the beef. I found the shiitake's formed an earthy bridge for a savory experience with the wines, but the asparagus, a traditional enemy of oaky red wines, was a distraction. There was no sauce on the beef which was not one of those melt in your mouth kind of cuts you get with more marbled versions. Both wines were a triumph with the beef.

Our final course was dessert: **Gâteau Marjolaine, Hazelnut, Meringue and Crème Anglaise** sauce. We were supposed to have a French dessert wine from the Rivesaltes appellation, but it didn't arrive in time. That is why I featured Rivesaltes in the last Gazette. So Banyuls, another nearby appellation, was substituted instead. A famous Rhône producer, Chapoutier, made our **2015 M. Chapoutier Banyuls**. Twenty years ago, Chapoutier branched out from its Rhône home to expand to Australia and Roussillon in southern France. The area is very warm and the vineyards are terraced. Matt: "Banyuls is a fortified wine, but slightly different than Port. It has less alcohol (16%) than Port but still maintains a natural sweetness to it coming from the grapes. The fermentation is halted by adding grape spirits to it. So you get this red, fruity, Grenache driven style." Matt wanted to highlight both the hazelnut and strawberry on the plate. The dessert is V Mertz's twist on a classic flour free dessert, Gâteau Marjolaine, but totally reworked. The dish features many flavors: hazelnut meringue (the crispy portion of the dish), coffee flavors, whipped cream, a pastry cream, and a little bit of strawberry over the top and Crème Anglaise to finish.

Not really a cake, wafers of meringue cut in pieces which melted in your mouth, formed the body. Not overly sweet, and marshmallow-like, the dish was very light but did not overwhelm the Banyuls. The wine was an interesting change from our usual dessert tipples.

Many thanks to the V Mertz staff who gave up their day off to produce this wonderful meal. Thanks to Matt Brown, David Eckler, Dylan Thomas and Terrence Dougherty, our Somm candidates, for their wine service. Head Chef Jacob Newton and Sous Chef James Calkins created a most imaginative and creative menu. Thanks as well to members / proprietor David and Diane Hayes for their support, as well as to our producers, Patti and Steve Hipple.









AUREOLE WINE ANGEL:

THE MOST HEAVENLY JOB IN LAS VEGAS

Written By Tom Murnan | Photos by Tom Murnan

LAS VEGAS HAS BEEN A WINE AND FOOD Mecca for at least 20 years now. Such top chefs as Charlie Palmer, Gordon Ramsay, Joël Robuchon, Emeril Lagasse and the like all compete with a cadre of internationally known chefs. This is dining of the highest order, where a kind of **dining theater** is created, aiming for the ultimate dining experience. You start with anticipation and just the right ambience. Flawless service, creative cuisine, impeccable ingredients, a large selection of wine to make that perfect match: are all part of the magic. The aim is for a memorable, hedonistic experience that will bring you back for more. Certain themes may appear. For example, the **Picasso Bellagio** boasts of 25 original Picasso works of art worth over \$250 million dollars (and hidden security cameras everywhere). The Mandalay Bay houses **Aureole**, established in 1999. The center attraction there is a 42 foot tall temperature controlled wine tower that can hold 10,000 bottles of wine. With over 2,700 different labels in house, Aureole boasts the largest wine selection in Las Vegas. Aureole is a Wine Spectator Grand Award winner since the year 2000, as well as a James Beard Award recipient. It has received a Michelin Guide star every year since the Guide started in New York City, or 13 consecutive stars. The cuisine is progressive American.

Part of their success is due to their ever-evolving menu. Under the culinary care of Chef Charlie Palmer, Aureole changes out 50 to 60 percent of their menu at the first of every month. They are not repeated. Chefs conceptualize each dish, and then experiment with them to refine them and make them harmonious. Seasonal ingredients are used at their height of flavor profile. The staff finds the ever changing menu both a challenge and motivating. It is much more interesting for them than repeating the same old favorites.

At four stories tall, the tower is quite large. Omaha has a miniature tower at Crave in Mid Town Crossing, but nothing on this scale. The concept was inspired by Tom Cruise's *Mission Impossible* hacking a CIA computer, held up by two cables to keep him from touching the alarmed floor. The bottles are stored in backlit Lucite bins, which makes the tower glow. As part of the theater, and also as a practical matter, Wine Angels are used to retrieve the wine. In the canonical books of the Bible, only three names of Archangels have been revealed: Michael, Gabriel and Raphael. After my dining experience in April 2018, I may be able to add one more: Hannah.

Physically fit and nimble, Hanna McBride enjoys rock climbing and ceiling hanging where aerial fabric silks hang from above at a specialty gym. In the earlier days, Wine Angels wore a black cat burglar outfit. In 2013, a black two piece outfit studded with 100 LED lights was tried (so the customers could better see them). But the modern garb is a gold one piece jumpsuit that looks silver in certain light settings (like a camera flash). A modified fall harness belt is worn around the waist and has two rings on either end, attached to cables anchored in the ceiling. An electric winch pulls the angels up into wine heaven to return with your requested celestial nectar.

Hannah enjoys putting on a show, posing in ballet-like acrobatic postures for her audience. It is an eye grabber to the diners below, as well as the general public walking by in the casino two stories up. This may be the best job in Vegas. But it is not all poses. The angels, there are two of them, have to stock the tower and take inventory in addition to making an average of four trips per hour up the 55 to 60 degree tower. So it is a bit chilly in there. Humidity is kept at 70%. A hip holster is available to carry six bottles. No acrobatics when wearing a loaded holster. A wireless remote control with either up or down is used to ascend or descend. There is a pair of cables on each of the four sides of the tower. To get to the corner bins, you must push off and swing a bit. It is surprisingly easy, and no special training was necessary. The bins are all marked with a number system, and the wait staff enters the number of the bottle into the computer to let the angel know which one to select. When not in the air, Hanna walks around the restaurant, talking to diners and taking photos with tourists.

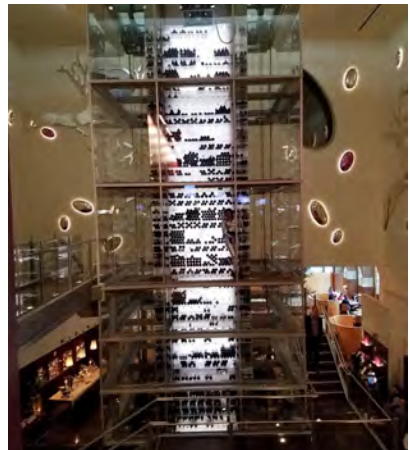
While the wine list is extensive, the food menu is more modest but selected with the greatest care. Divided into Surf, Root and Ranch, everything is à la carte. At our table of three, we had one salmon order and two steaks. What to order? Pinot Noir, of course. Navigating the extensive wine list, I spotted a highly unusual offering: the **1999 Williams Selyem Sonoma County Pinot Noir**. The winery sells only to a very limited number of restaurants and wine stores, and when they do, they charge the retail rate. I assumed Angel Hanna was going to retrieve it, but discovered from my server that old and rare wines are not in the tower. Instead they are in a temperature controlled secure vault. This was opened and poured around to encourage breathing and awakening.

While waiting for my starter of **Foie Gras Du Jour**, I enjoyed a glass of **2015 Domaine Schlumberger Pinot Gris** from Alsace. Soft, mineraly and flavorful and only slightly sweet, it went well, especially when the Foie Gras arrived. Incredibly tender, two lobes of thinly sliced goodness arrived sat in a bed of blackberry sauce. Grape slices and bean sprouts acted as garnishments. A brioche filled with nutella, grapes and bacon inserted in the center acted as a compliment as well as a counterweight to all the richness of the liver. Delicious and decadent and perfectly executed.

Our main courses arrived hot. I had the 8 oz Center Cut Filet Mignon and Scallops, which sat on a bed of mashed potatoes and was accompanied by turnip slices, baby cauliflower and broccolini. Ordered rare, the steak was nicely seared on the outside and red inside. Tasting from my fellow diners plates, the salmon was smoked, moist, intense and wonderful while the Bone in Ribeye was a little fattier than my filet, but quite flavorful.

In the meantime, the Pinot had opened and was exploding with flavor. Made in a Burgundian style, it had a pronounced earthy nose. The body was smooth with a intense flavors, again earthy, and a light red color, albeit a bit cloudy, just starting to darken with age. This proved once again that with Pinot Noir, the depth of color does not portend the intensity on the palate. The wine had an incredible affinity to the mushroom side I ordered, even better than the steak. It boasted a long farewell. It was the most memorable Pinot Noir I had in a decade. Heavenly!

I finished with a glass of Broadbent 5 year old Reserve Tinta Negra Mole Madeira. This was a delicious, memorable meal. I would heartily suggest you reserve your place at Aureole the next time you are on the Strip. Maybe you, too, will have a vision of angels during your experience.



UPCOMING COUNCIL BLUFFS BRANCH EVENTS

Mark Your Calendars!


MAY
19

 **VENUE: NEBRASKA WAREHOUSE**
A 1970's Dance Party
Producers: Denise & Jon Meyers,
Kathy Wittler


JUNE
6

 **DANTE WEST**
Dante Italian Dinner
Producers: Koesters and Hipple

JULY
14

 **COUNCIL BLUFFS COUNTRY CLUB**
The Country Club on the Lake
Producers: Schierbrocks and Tritsches


AUG.
—

 **TBA**
Producers: Lemkes and Thrashers

SEPT.
7

 **AYOUB HOME**
Summer white party (dress in all white)
Featuring all great summer wines
Chef Benjamin Maides
from Au Courant
Producers: Ayoub, Kossows & Hipple


OCT.
—

 **TBA**
Producers: Jill Goldstein
and Jill Panzer

NOV.
18

 **LE BOUILLON**
An 85th Birthday Party
Madeira Sit Down Wine Tasting
featuring a 1932 Verdelho
Producers: Tom & Mary Murnan

DEC.
—

 **V. MERTZ**
President's Holiday Dinner
Producer: Joe & Jill Goldstein

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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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President: Joe Goldstein
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Secretary: Connie & Gary Martin
Cellar Master: John Fischer & Patti Hipple
Gazette & Photos: Tom Murnan

goldie2@cox.net
Jill.Goldstein@KutakRock.com
Diane@Forristall.us
happygardener1988@yahoo.com
jrudyf@cox.net | stephenhipple@hotmail.com
murnantom@gmail.com



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PUBLISHER: **Todd Lemke**
EDITOR: **Tom Murnan**
GRAPHIC DESIGNER: **Katiuska Núñez**

KEEP 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.

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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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: iwfs.councilbluffs@yahoo.com