

August 2015

# The Bluffs Food & Wine gazette

J. COCO

## Event Report:

What's The Point at J. Coco Restaurant

## Inside

Riesling, the oft Forgotten Wine

Tom & Mary Murnan  
Portuguese Wine Vacation  
Vol. 17, June 8, 2012.  
The Madeira Wine Company



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



## President's Comments

Dear Members,

The children may be heading back to school but there is still plenty of summer to go. Having a barbeque on the back patio is one of the summer's highlights. If you haven't found the perfect wine to pair with your summer menu, I suggest you give this red Zinfandel a try.

The wine is a 2013 Sonoma Zinfandel from the Seghesio Family winery, a winery which has consistently produced 90 point + wines for the last 15 years. Established in 1895, it is now produced under the careful eye of 4th generation family member and winemaker Ted Seghesio.

Each vintage, is harvested in multiple lots of Zinfandel from the entire Sonoma County landscape. The best of these lots are selected to make Sonoma Zinfandel. A small amount of Petite Sirah is added to provide color and structure. The wine is then aged 10 months in American, French and Hungarian oak barrels.

The history of Zinfandel wine in California goes back to the mid 1800's and by the early 1900's it was the most widespread variety in the state. It wasn't until the 1990's that a dry red style of Zinfandel started to become popular. Originally thought to be made of native California grapes, research has shown that it originated in Croatia, and then made famous as primitivo in Italy.

The wine is available at the Madison Hy-Vee for under \$25 a bottle.

Enjoy!

*Bob Kossow*



**Wine Spectator 92pts**

**“A lively, zesty red that offers bright cherry and tarragon aromas and sleekly layered flavors of briary raspberry, nutmeg and fresh-cracked black pepper.”**

**Drink now through 2021**









## Editor's Corner



If you couldn't attend the J. Coco event, "What's the Point," you missed a good one. There was some controversy on this event because some of the wines were advertised as being below 90 points. Just to reassure everyone, our standard in the Council Bluffs Branch is to serve wines only 90 points or above as rated by professional wine writers. But, in a very narrow and highly structured situation, an exception can be made when approved by the Board. In this case, we had a highly qualified sommelier choosing the wines, and the Point was to learn something about ratings. One can get into a deep discussion of which professional wine writers are stingy with scores and which publications are too generous. As the discussion progresses, we can delve into those sommeliers and wine makers who detest the 100 point scale and are loathed to use it at all. But, have you ever read some wine reviews which have seemingly glowing adjectives, only to get a surprisingly mediocre score. Seemingly, you can't always trust the written review by itself.

I think the 100 point scale has merit because it forces the wine writer to pin down exactly how good he or she thinks the wine is. They have to give it a quality number. On the other hand, it is also my opinion that we should not be slaves to the 100 point scale. A case in point is our last pairing. The "answer sheet" that was passed around at the event had one rating from the Wine Spectator for the 2013 Jim Barry Lodge Hill Shiraz, at 84 and a NR (not rated) from Parker. Yet when I did some research, this wine was given 90 by Lisa Perrotti Brown of the Wine Advocate. So, even professional wine writers can disagree about the merits and score of a wine.

The whole point of the What's The Point? exercise is to better learn your palate and the factors that may change how your palate perceives a wine. On the first flight of Chardonnays, I liked the second, or lower rated wine (89) best at first, but with much more breathing, and with the food, I changed my mind and saw more merit in the first wine which received 91 points. Frankly, it can be quite difficult sometimes to decide if a wine is 88 or 89 points versus a 90 point wine. You should always choose what you and your palate like above what some wine writer tells you you should like. They may be tasting straight from the cave, while your bottle was tortured in some semi truck, cooking as it travels around the country. Or, your bottle may have improved with age over when it was given its rating, or maybe the wine writer had a bad bottle. And don't forget the food. The food may change everything, making the sub 90 pointer taste better than by itself, or vice versa, making that 90 pointer taste worse. The wine writers themselves don't always agree.

So the main point, brought out by Matthew Brown, is to learn something about wine and to educate and trust your palate. It is not a black and white tasting world out there. There is bottle variation and you may wonder why something got a 93 when you think it should have received 86. Those borderline wines may be great for everyday drinking when you don't have guests, and don't want to break the bank if it is just yourself drinking. You may prefer to save the exalted rated wines for company.

Personally, you may not want to be straight jacketed, imprisoned by the hundred point scale. As you can see, there is a lot of debate on the subject even by highly trained professionals. But as a Branch, to keep quality up, we have decided to utilize the hundred point scale, as used by professional wine writers, as the surest and simplest way to maintain our high level of quality. Our members have come to expect the finest, and we aim to oblige. It's just one of the reasons why our Branch is so successful.

Salut!

*Tom Murnan*

---

**Insanity is hereditary. You can get it from your children.**  
—Sam Levenson

---









## Event Report: What's The Point

by Tom Murnan

Our two event producers, **Jill Panzer** and **Diane Hayes** managed to convince chef owner Jennifer Coco to open her eponymous restaurant on a Sunday, a restaurant new to the Branch. I had tried three years earlier to book J. Coco, but through an unfortunate event, our planned dinner never took place. This time, the event was held, and we had a wonderful meal, served by an attentive staff. 49 signed up, of which 17 were guests. The venue itself was the historic Wohlner's Quality Foods building, 52nd and Leavenworth Streets, later to become Lee Drugs before renewing itself as J. Coco's. A large photo of the circa 1925 Wohlner's grocery store crew took pride of place on the south wall of the restaurant.

Diane and Jill had selected an intriguing theme for us: **What's The Point?** Enrolling the assistance of V. Mertz sommelier **Matt Brown**, this was one of those events I relish: the educational. I think our members have a hunger to learn about wine and food, so this was their day. How do professional wine writers rate wines? What are they looking for? What do they know that I don't know? There's no better way to learn than to have two or more wines side by side and discover for yourself what makes a quality wine and what detracts from that self same quality. With Matt choosing the wines, I knew we would not be straying too far from the 90 point reservation (our usual quality standard). As things turned out, we only had one wine that was getting a bit low at 84. All the rest skirted just below the 90 threshold at 88 and 89 points, making quality determinations more challenging.

We started our event with a nice spread of wines, some of which came from Jon Panzer's cellar. For a sweltering July day, with the heat index at 109 degrees, I was headed for the white wines, especially when I saw they included a **Condrieu** (read the Viognier grape) from **Guigal**, the famous French producer, **Esprit de Beaucastel Blanc** from **Tablas Creek**, and **Zind Humbrecht's** Alsatian dry **Reisling**, all top drawer whites. There was a nice assortment of red quaffers as well.

Our **Intro**, or appetizers, included **Bacon Wrapped Dates stuffed with Parmigianino & Boursin** cheese, **Grilled Flatbreads with Grilled Wild Mushroom**, **Fresh Ricotta with Radish & Arugula** **Stracciatella**, **White Balsamic & Shaved Fennel**. We also had a selection of artisanal cheeses with local wild flower honey and a fruit compote.

Once at table, **Jennifer Coco** introduced herself and told us it was her aim to capture and delight our palates. **Matt Brown**, our guest educator on loan from V. Mertz, introduced himself with the delivery of **Point 1**, our first course. **Scallop Crudo with Lime, Pomegranate Seeds, Chili and Blood Orange Gastrique** was paired with two California Chardonnays.

Matt informed us to taste with an open mind, and that one wine was over 90 points and one under. Both were from the Russian River, and both were from family producers. Similar classic California Chardonnays. To score high in the Russian River, the wine needed to be oaky and buttery. The **2013 Lewis Cellars** was raised in French oak and underwent malolactic fermentation, which reduces the acidity. It received a 91 from three publications. The **2010 Failla Hudson Vineyard** was more restrained, raised in different soil, and more minerally. It received an 89 from WS & RP. It was more friendly to food. There was not a lot



of points difference between these two. If you like a wine, the points don't matter that much. We can disagree with the experts when you have the wine open before you and you prefer one over another. The chili in the raw scallops was a bit of a curve ball for these Chardonnays. Matt thought the Failla was more subtle and let the food take the starring role.

**Point 2** saw **Savory Donuts filled with Foie Gras, dusted with Parmesan Truffle Black Garlic Dust, a Crispy Chicken Skin, and Smoked Cipollini Onion Maple Marmalade.** Wow, what a cornucopia of ingredients and flavors. Jennifer again introduced the dish. The chicken skin was meant as a compliment to the donut holes and foie gras. Mache leaf and orange Marigold petals were used as a garnishment. The chicken skin was rich, deeply browned and earthy, with all the fat rendered out. It was so crisp it just broke apart when eaten. I thought the donut holes a bit dry. They needed the marmalade to moisten them. The truffles were muted to the point that I could barely taste them. Very unique dish.

We had a pair of Cabernet Franc wines from the Loire for this course. Both from **Chinon**, which is a cooler region of France, earthy with a lot of acidity. Plum, cherry and raspberry flavors predominate with some smoky flavors as well. With the cooler climate, the Chinons are laid back and subdued, partly because the grapes don't get very ripe. Matt selected the Cab Franc because it rarely gets drunk on its own, but more and more producers in California are

bottling Cab Franc. It was hard to find a 90+ Chinon. I thought it was hard to decide which wine was 90. The group was about evenly split as to who preferred the **2012 Domaine de Pallus Chinon** (88 from 2 writers) and the **2011 Bernard Baudry Chinon** (90 WS, RP).

**Point 3** was a Lobster Brûlée and Wagyu Teres Major, Soba Crêpes with Yukon Gold Potatoes, Roasted Wild Mushrooms and Truffles Hollandaise Sauce. The truffles were definitely noticeable in the **Hollandaise...** wonderful. The truffle elevated the dish to ethereal. The Lobster Brûlée was just a touch sweet, the better to match the rich, sweet seafood flesh. It had thin sheets of caramelized sugar on top (the brûlée).

Three Australian Shiraz was our wine focus, however, if you had any Chardonnay left, it was certainly the way to go with the lobster. The reds were mostly for the Wagyu, which enhanced the wines. Matt spoke of how the wines changed in the glass, and how wine writers tend not to consider the window of approachability. They usually give a wine one rating forever. Yet the wine is continually evolving and changing as it ages.

Our three Shirazes were the **2013 Jim Berry Lodge Hill** (84), **2013 Two Hands Angel's Share** (90) and **2013 Mollydooker Enchanted Path** (93). All were reviewed by the WS (Wine Spectator). I was surprised to discover that the Jim Barry, at 84 points, did not seem like a looser wine. It turned out to be pretty good (or perhaps masked) with food. Later, after the event, I discovered that the Wine Advocate had given this wine

a 90, showing that even the experts cannot always agree. Another one of our Points is that wines do change and evolve...a lot. You hear a lot about 1982 Bordeaux and how good they were, but 1983, while not as age worthy, were still awesome. Each wine writer is different, and you have to learn their quirks, likes and dislikes. Wines are best judged on their own, by themselves without the influence of food or cheese. The most important thing is to trust your own palate. Personally, I was wondering if the Wine Spectator wine writer got a hold of a bad bottle of the Jim Berry and now the low score is etched in stone, so to speak.

We finished with **Wild Strawberry Soup, Buttermilk Panna Cotta, Angel Food "CROUTONS" & Drunken Berries.** There was almost too much strawberry sauce, but otherwise this was a great, light dessert. We enjoyed a **2009 Castelnau de Suduiraut Sauternes**, which added a sweet touch to our sweet tooth. Castelnau is the second label of the famous French Sauterne, Chateau Suduiraut, a Premier Cru Classé.

Many thanks to our event producers, **Jill Panzer** and **Dianne Hayes**. Dianne brought **Matt Brown** from V. Mertz, who selected the wines and lead our discussion. Thanks as well to **Jennifer Coco** and her crew, who gave up their day off to cook for our event. **Antonio Soto**, an ex-chef and planner of our whole menu, and line cook **Sarah Farmer** were also presented to our group.























# Riesling, the oft Forgotten Wine

by John Fischer







The next time you go to a restaurant peruse the wine list and look for Rieslings; you will be lucky to find one. For one reason or another, Riesling is simply not an “in-style wine.” This is even true for restaurants where the wine is ideal for wine/food pairings (Chinese, Thai, Indian). German Rieslings can be of very high quality and are generally available at bargain prices. For the sake of simplicity, we will limit our discussion to German Rieslings. Alsatian Rieslings are quite different than those from Germany and are not congruent for this discussion.

Let’s review the qualities of this wine. The great majority are sweet, tart, crisp, clean, light-bodied, and well-balanced—there is just the right amount of sweet to ease the aggressive tartness of the beverage— which makes them an ideal to match with a wide variety of foods. Keep in mind that full-bodied wines can be matched only to full-bodied foods, whereas light-bodied wines can be matched to foods of any weight. What’s more, tart wines are by and large much better candidates to match to foods than low acid wines.

Now let’s look where Rieslings really stand out. It is wonderful all by itself. There is nothing better than a cold, fresh, tart, crisp German Riesling with its hedonistic dab of sweetness to quench your thirst on a hot summer afternoon; moreover, you won’t get “hammered” because its alcohol content is low (usually below 10%).

You might be surprised to know that Rieslings are great matches with many styles of food. Sweet dishes like to find sweetness in the accompanying wine, as it ties the wine with the food. Consider the typical Thanksgiving dinner, which is so frequently served with such sweet items as cranberry sauce, and candied sweet potatoes. Riesling makes a wonderful complement to this style of food. Even

such naturally sweet vegetables as peas and carrots blend in with this wine.

Foods that are tart and/or salty pair great with the tartness and sweetness found in Riesling. Recall that salty foods call for tart wines. German chefs use liberal amounts of vinegar and keep the salt shaker handy in their cooking. Dishes like sauerbraten (pickled pot roast served with a slightly sweet ginger snap gravy) and sauerkraut are typical examples.

Riesling is ideal for spicy hot foods (Thai, Chinese, Mexican, and Indian). The spicy heat in the food is assuaged by the sweetness in the wine. The combination of sweet and spicy hot ties the wine to the food. What’s more, many of the dishes have a sweet component.

Sweet and sour foods (like the Chinese dish sweet and sour pork) make a fantastic union with Riesling as both wine and food have a sweet and tart component. You could not find a better pairing of wine to food than Riesling.

There is one important caveat: always keep the sweetness and tartness in the wine greater than that in the dish. Failure to do this will throw the wine out of balance. If the dish is sweeter than the wine, the wine will appear less sweet and too tart. If the dish is tarter than the wine, the wine will appear flat and too sweet. Of all the German Rieslings styles, the best for wine/food pairings are Mosel wines (green bottle).

Keep Rieslings in your wine repertoire; as you can see, they can make smashing accompaniments to many challenging wine/food pairings.





## Tom & Mary Murnan Portuguese Wine Vacation Vol. 17, June 7, 2012: The Madeira Wine Company

by Tom Murnan

Friday June 8th, 2012 found us going to one of the largest Madeira producers on the island, one with a distinct English slant: **The Madeira Wine Company (MWC)**. The MWC is actually a combination of many old lodges, but also with several traditional English wine companies. The company began in 1913 as the Madeira Wine Association (MWA), whose objective was to open international markets. The first two members were Welsh & Cunha and Henriques & Camara. They aimed to reduce costs by pooling resources in some pretty lean years after phylloxera and odium. In 1925, two traditional English Lodges merged into the association: Blandy's, established in 1811, and Leacock's, established in 1760. Twenty other companies joined the association over the years. In 1953, the Cossart Gordon Company, the oldest English Lodge dating from 1745, joined the MWA. In 1981, the MWA changed its name to the Madeira Wine Company.

In the 1980's, the Blandy family, recognizing the need for more working capital, approached the Symington family of Port renown and entered into a partnership with them in 1989. The Symingtons brought an extensive distribution network

and a investment in infrastructure and the production process, improving quality at every step. The major brands, then, of the MWC are Blandy's, Leacock's, Cossart Gordon and Miles.

Our guides were **Chris Blandy** and **Filipe Azevedo**, assistant wine maker. Before we toured the new plant, we first stopped to watch the coopers. The MWC has four coopers. There are only six on the island. Coopering is a dying trade here. In the USA, it is an art. Here, the Portuguese don't appreciate the old. They think they want new. The coopers repair the casks and lagars, and make new ones. Brazilian Satinwood is primarily used.

We toured the new facility, which has facilities for aging with the gentle canterio method for the finer wines and the quicker estufa method, which uses heat that caramelizes the flavors over a shorter length of time. The MWC ages 3,700,000 liters of wine here and another 600,000 at the Old Wine Lodge

One of the interesting stories we heard was that the Blandy's have named a wine after the **Duke of Clarence**. George Plantagenet, first Duke of Clarence, was the brother of two English kings: Edward IV and Richard III. He played an important role in the War

of the Roses. He was convicted of treason against brother Edward IV. Seems George wanted to seize the crown for himself. He asked to be drowned in a butt of Malmsey. A butt is 105 gallons. He was executed in 1478 at the age of 28. Historians are still trying to determine if he actually was drowned in a cask of Madeira or was executed in some other manner.

We toured the really fun facility next: the **Blandy's Old Wine Lodge**. This might be the most photographed place on the island.





The building, an old Franciscan monastery, was acquired in 1840 by Charles Ridpath Blandy. 200,000 tourists visit this showcase lodge annually. This is where the museum of historical artifacts, satinwood vats, tasting room and shopping areas are. A new guide, **Ana Soares** showed us around. First was the Lion's Room, so named because of some huge 9000 liter barrels belonging to a Swedish company were moved by sledge to this facility in the mid 20th century. A remark was made that this task would require men with the strength of lions to move them, which gave the room its name.



In the old days, the Blandy's would roll finished barrels of Madeira down the street to the harbor a few blocks away. Adjacent to the lodge is one of the oldest streets in Funchal where this was done. The museum held many interesting artifacts, such as **glass**

**demijohns**, where wine might be moved when it was no longer desirable to keep it in the wood, **old pressing equipment**, and a **borracho**, or goat skin which was one way men, called Borracherios, would carry loads of fermenting must from the country side to the lodge. Talk about a lot of work.

The canterio aging, known as the Sótão da Amêndoa, or Attic of almond, was our next stop. The room had been reinforced with steel I beams. Many casks of wine were aging in its moderate temperature. There was even a secret room used to hide wines in the old days.



We noticed casks with sealing wax seals on them. I asked Chris Blandy why. "All barrels that are sealed are part of an European funding ageing program known as **Poesi**, in order to incentive the houses to age wines. We are not allowed to tamper

with the seals/wine without the presence of an official from the Institute." In other words, no barrel samples. Sealing wax and ribbons placed around the bung prevents tasting, and as a side benefit, pilfering. If the wine is not meant for export, then barrel samples are permitted. So, in Madeira, you usually don't get barrel samples because the lodge wants the ability to export the wine.

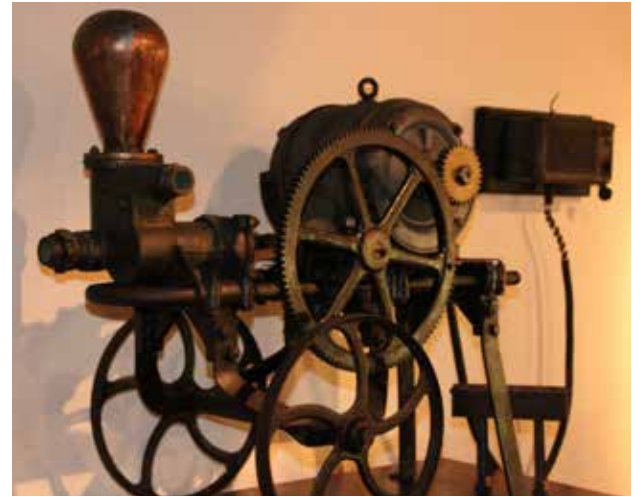
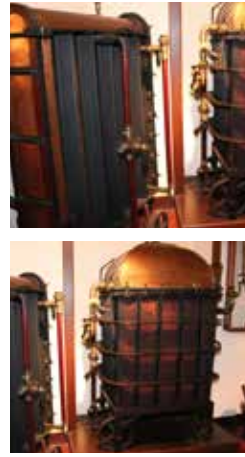
Our group went down to the Frisqueira, or vintage cellar for a tasting of 15 wines. We started with the Alvada, a 50% Bual 50% Malvasia blend that was excellent and a low price alternative to older Madeiras. We proceeded to a 10 Year Old Sercial, 1995 Sercial, 10 Year Old Verdelho, 1995 Verdelho, 10 Year Old Bual, 1996 Bual, 10 Year Old Malvasia, 1996 Malvasia, 1984 Verdelho, 1976 Terrantez, 1969 Boal, 1968 Verdelho, 1966 Sercial and 1920 Bual bottled in 2006.

Upstairs is a nice shop for buying souvenirs, and a Taste & Buy Bar with murals from **Max Romer** showing how Madeira wine was made. Very classy and nice indeed. The MWC is a very modern company. You can follow Chris Blandy on Facebook by asking to be his friend.

Next time: It was lunch time, so Chris Blandy and Ana took us to lunch.









# Upcoming Council Bluffs Branch Events

Mark Your Calendars!



## **September 13, 2015**

Little España in Rockbrook.  
11036 Elm St, Omaha (in the old Taste Restaurant).  
5 Course Spanish dinner with 11 Spanish wines.  
Producers: Patti & Steve Hipple



## **October 11, 2015**

A Halloween themed Walk-around at the homes of  
the Hipple, Panzers and Farmers.  
Producers: Patti Hipple, Jill Panzer and Liz Farmer



## **November 8, 2015**

\*Note Change of Venue  
Oregon Wine Country Dinner at Spezia.  
3125 S. 72nd St, Omaha  
Producers: Tom & Mary Murnan



## **December 5, 2015**

President's Holiday Event at Le Bouillon in the Old Market.  
Producer: President Bob Kossow

### 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](mailto:iwfs.councilbluffs@yahoo.com)



When you hire **Omaha Door & Window** for your home remodeling needs you can expect exceptional service and quality products.

With having served more than 130,000 customers for over 50 years we are a company that you can trust to be there after the sale.

Our products include **Garage Doors, Windows, Siding, Entry Doors, Attic Insulation, Sunrooms and much more.**

[www.omahadoor.com](http://www.omahadoor.com)

**402-733-6440**

## *The International Wine & Food Society of London, England Council Bluffs, Iowa Branch - Executive Committee*

President: Bob Kossow

Vice President & Gazette: Tom Murnan

Treasurer/Membership: Diane Forristall

Secretary: Sandy & Todd Lemke

Cellar Master: John Fischer & Patti Hipple

[bob.kossow@cox.net](mailto:bob.kossow@cox.net)

[murnantom@gmail.com](mailto:murnantom@gmail.com)

[Diane@Forristall.us](mailto:Diane@Forristall.us)

[ssahls@mac.com](mailto:ssahls@mac.com)

[jrudyf@cox.net](mailto:jrudyf@cox.net) | [stephenhipple@hotmail.com](mailto:stephenhipple@hotmail.com)



## *The Bluffs Food & Wine August 2015 gazette*

**PUBLISHER:** Todd Lemke

**EDITOR:** Tom Murnan

**GRAPHIC DESIGNER:** Matt Wiczorek

### **Keep In Touch!**

Please notify Club Membership Chairman Diane Forristall at [Diane@Forristall.us](mailto: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.*

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

All versions of Wine & Food Gazette are published monthly by Omaha Magazine, LTD, P.O. Box 461208, Omaha, NE 68046-1208. Telephone: (402) 884-2000. No whole or part of the contents herein may be reproduced without prior written permission of Omaha Magazine, excepting individually copyrighted articles and photographs. Unsolicited manuscripts are accepted however no responsibility will be assumed for such solicitations. The opinions expressed in this publication, except as specifically stated to the contrary, are solely the opinion of the author and do not necessarily represent the views of the Board of Governors of the Americas. The International Wine & Food Society, LTD., the publisher and any officer, director, member or agent thereof. The international Wine & Food Society does not endorse advertisers' products and is not responsible for damages incurred from the use of such products nor does it guarantee such products.