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The Bluffs
Food & Wine
gazette

BRUSHI

EVENT REPORT:

Napa vs. Sonoma at
Brushi European and
American Cuisine



ALSO INSIDE

Pinot Noir from the Russian River Valley
AVA in Sonoma County, California

BRUSHI



EDITOR'S

CORNER

Since I have been a member, I do not recall ever having an event at **Brushi**. Having gone there myself, I always found the food presentation was fantastic, and the taste was great as well. So I was excited to have an event at Brushi. **David Hayes** is a friend of Owner / Chef **Paul Braunschweiler**. He helped out other two event producers, **Mike Wilke** and **Joe Goldstein** coordinate all the details. We had the restaurant to ourselves on a Monday night, when the restaurant is usually closed. Everything was nicely cooked, plated and delicious. Check out the story.



On November 13 we will compare **Russian River Valley Pinot Noirs** with **Sonoma Coast Pinot Noirs**. I thought it would be a good idea to get us up to speed on these two areas. Both AVAs (American Viticulture Area) make stellar Pinot Noirs due to the unique cool temperatures and foggy mornings. But can you tell the difference when you have a glass of each served blind in front of you? You will find out when you attend the **November 13th** event at **Champions Run**. We are starting with the Russian River Valley AVA in this Gazette, and will conclude with the Sonoma Coast in the October Gazette.

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Cheers! 🍷

Tom Murnan

Cover Photo: Brushi façade. Photo by Tom Murnan



"I ENJOY A GLASS OF WINE EACH NIGHT FOR ITS HEALTH BENEFITS. THE OTHER GLASSES ARE FOR MY WITTY COMEBACKS AND FLAWLESS DANCE MOVES."

— IT'S TIME FOR SOME LEXOPHILES



Event Report

Napa vs. Sonoma at Brushi European and American Cuisine

Story and Photos by Tom Murnan

To my knowledge, the CB Branch has never been to Brushi. I seem to recall they were off Center Street and about 142nd Street until they left Omaha for a while, and returned to their present location at 721 N 132 St. Chef/owner Paul Braunschweiler is a friend of David Hayes, who helped Mike Wilke and Joe Goldstein organize this event. I had been to the Dodge Street location, but a while back. It is a nice cozy corner of the building, which makes it larger than it first appears upon arrival. I was excited to try it again. We had 32 people attend, 8 of which were guests, two of whom were restaurateurs. These included Leo Fascianella, formerly of Pasta Amore, and his wife Pat; Mo Tavjar of Omaha Prime and wife Donna; Steve Hinchcliff of H&H Chevrolet and wife Michelle; Traci Saitta; and Jim Connor, Jane Hagebush's brother from San Francisco. It also happened to be Leo Fascianella's birthday, a young 65 I believe. It was a very hot summer day.

The theme was intriguing. We would compare the wines from Napa Valley and Sonoma. All the courses except for dessert had two wines to examine. Each California wine pair was from the same vintage.

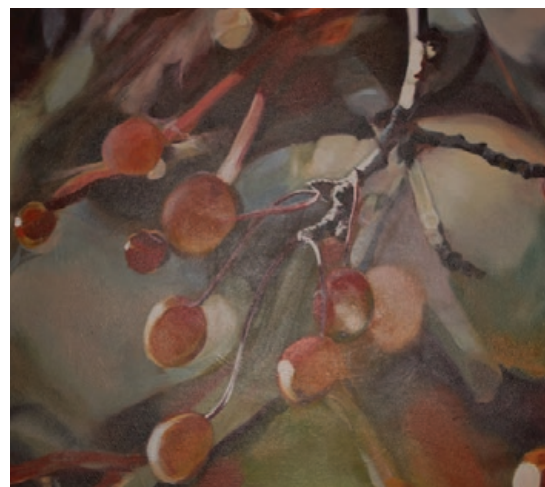
Quaffing, as is our wont, was an assemblage of wines as diverse as Napa, Bordeaux and Australia. A **Smoked Scottish Pizzette with Goat Cheese and Frizee** was brought straight from the oven. It was scrumptious warm, and I could have eaten at least a whole pizzette myself. A pizzette is defined as a pizza as small as three inches (finger food) or as large as a personal pizza. These were personal size. The cheese was more than just goat cheese and included mozzarella as well. The lightly smoked salmon was perfectly cooked. An auspicious start.

We were called to table for our first course, **Potato Gnocchi with Apple Wood Smoked Bacon, Napoli Sauce, Peas and Parmesan**. Gnocchi are Italian dumplings, while Napoli Sauce is a super quick sauce made with just tomatoes, garlic, crushed red pepper, and basil. It's also what Americans would call marinara. It was a deep red, and more delicious than the definition suggests, mostly because of the addition of the apple wood smoked bacon. This bacon didn't have the usual texture of regular bacon, and was thicker yet softer. I noticed the warm plate. A nice touch by the restaurant. Plating on warm dishes keeps your course warm longer, so it isn't tepid by the time it makes it out to you.

The **Grgich Hills Chardonnay 2018** hails from Napa and had sharp acidity attack but rounded, apple-y, and generous, albeit a bit unusual, flavors. Legendary winemaker Mike Grgich's career got a tremendous boost when the Chardonnay he crafted for the famous **Judgment of Paris** event in 1976 beat out a lineup of French Chardonnays. That wine? The 1973 Chateau Montelena Chardonnay. Not bad for an immigrant from Yugoslavia (now Croatia). The next year, on July 4, 1977, he began a partnership with the Hill family (Hills Brothers Coffee brand) to form Grgich Hills. Our comparison wine was the **Joseph Phelps Freestone Chardonnay 2018**, the Sonoma counterpart. Joe Phelps was a construction company owner who did work in the San Francisco area. A wine lover, he ended up building his own winery. Best known for their extraordinary Cabernet Sauvignon red wine, Insignia, they also make Chardonnay. I found the Phelps a tad bit softer than the Grgich, acid forward but also a bit disjointed. It was also a bit lighter in color. Both wines were good matches for the Gnocchi. You needed a bit of acid to cut through the Napoli sauce. ▶















◀ **Arugula Salad with Pear, Cucumber, Crispy Coconut Shrimp and Mango Vinaigrette** was next. Arugula was shredded into smaller strips, and pieces of mango were scattered in. The mango vinaigrette was wine friendly. Atop of the salad heap was a large shrimp covered with ground coconut. A nice, refreshing, summery salad. Our white wine pair turned to Sauvignon Blanc. We sampled **Cliff Lede Sauvignon Blanc 2019** to a **Quivera Fig Tree Sauvignon Blanc 2019**. Cliff Lede, a Canadian who loved Bordeaux wines, started his eponymous winery in 2002, in the Stags Leap district of Napa Valley. He hired David Abreu to replant the vineyards. They only produced Cabernet Sauvignon and Sauvignon Blanc. **Quivera** is located in the Dry Creek AVA of Sonoma, not far from Healdsburg. They offer a diverse portfolio of wines, besides Sauvignon Blanc, including Zinfandel, Cabernet Sauvignon, Petite Sirah and Viognier, among other varieties. I found the Cliff Lede was not grassy, my preferred preference, and nicely balanced with good acidity. The Quivera had a slight grassiness to it and seemed a touch unbalanced, with a little more acidity noticeable.

Hawaiian Fish Filet with Lemongrass Roasted Guajillo Sauce, Rose Rice, and Vegetable Julienne followed the salad. Kampachi was the unnamed fish in the menu, which is from the Amberjack family. This is a high-end fish farmed around Hawaii. It was meaty and dense (not light and flaky) expertly cooked, flavorful, full, sitting atop a disc of rose rice held together by Parmesan Cheese. Guajillo peppers are sweet, tangy and fruity with a bit of earthy flavor. This flavored the white sauce above which went the rest of the ingredients. Interesting, lively flavors.

We switched to red wines in this course, pairing the fish with **Pinot Noirs from 2017**. The **Belle Glos Eulench** (Napa) competed with the **Joseph Phelps Freestone** (Sonoma). Belle Glos hails from the Wagner family. Joe Wagner (Caymus, founded by father Charlie Wagner) named the winery after his grandmother, Lorna Belle Glos Wagner, who loved Pinot Noir. Vineyards are scattered throughout the California coast. The Eulench vineyard offering is rather rare, a smaller vineyard which benefits from cooling influences from the Pacific Ocean via San Pablo Bay, helping the grapes to maintain acidity and structure. Dissatisfied with the results of his Carneros and Napa Pinot Noirs, **Joseph Phelps** found pasture land on the Sonoma Coast in 1999, near the town of Freestone. There he planted his vineyard just 8 miles from the Pacific Ocean. The weather was cool, and so foggy it took until afternoon for the fog to burn off in the summer. There was a huge learning curve to adapt to Pinot Noir in this climate. Phelps was one of the first vineyards in the area. His choice has proven him correct, and many other wineries have planted vineyards in the area. My findings? The Belle Glos had a great nose, readily apparent upon your first sniff. It was rich, well balanced and hedonistic. Very smooth and all together. The Phelps was a bit sharp, but working towards integration and better balance.

Our entree was **Broiled New Zealand Lamb Chop, Provençale Bean Ragout, Creamy Polenta with Burgundy Sauce**. The chop was rack of lamb without the bone, cut into a nice disc shape. The ragout was white beans in a vegetable based sauce with tomatoes. Ragout is a slow cooked French styled stew, not to be confused with an Italian Ragu, which is a pasta sauce made with or without meat and occasionally tomatoes. The polenta provided a contrasting white color to the reddish ragout sauce. Off to the side was a streak of brown Burgundy sauce to enliven the lamb. A nice combination. I enjoyed the white beans as a less usual combination with the lamb.

We moved to Cabernet Sauvignon with our wine comparison. We enjoyed the **Faust Cabernet Sauvignon 2016** (Napa) with the **Stone Street Cabernet Sauvignon 2016** (Sonoma). **Faust** was founded by Chilean born **Agustin Huneeus** (Concha y Toro, who he build up as Chile's largest winery), who also founded the premium Napa Valley winery Quintessa. For many years, Faust was made at Quintessa, but is now made in Sonoma. Huneeus Vintners also owns or partners with Flowers Vineyards on the Sonoma Coast, Leviathan in Napa, and Benton-Lane in Oregon. The label is based on the German legend of Dr Faustus who sold his soul to the devil for youth, energy and passion. **Stone Street** was founded in 1989 by **Jess Stonestreet Jackson Jr.** (Kendall-Jackson) and is part of the Jackson Family Wines conglomerate. Stonestreet is located in the Alexander Valley AVA and is situated on a mountain, showing the power of high elevation wine growing. I thought the Faust was rounded with ripe tannins, balanced, still a bit young but wonderful now. The Stonestreet was intense but slightly acidic and slightly unripe, probably a result of its high altitude microclimate. Perhaps it could have benefitted from more hot days that Cabernet Sauvignon loves.


Dessert got switched from the Citrus Panna Cotta with Berry Compote on the invite and our menu sheets to a **Tiramisu with Vanilla Whipped Cream and Raspberry Sauce**. Moist with coffee flavors, and anchored on the plate with the vanilla flavored cream, this was a very nice Tiramisu that went well with our sticky: Château Suduiraut Sauternes. Located next door to Chateau d'Yquem, it is a Premier Cru in the Sauternes AOC. Another good match.

Many thanks to our producers. The service was good, but we probably could have used one more waitress than the two we had because David Hayes helped out on several occasions to serve and remove dishes, as did Julie Joebun. I thought they deserved a tip, so I passed a few bucks their way to show our appreciation! LOL. Many thanks to Mike, Joe and David for arranging the event, and to Paul Braunschweiler for providing a fantastic meal, not to mention working on the restaurant's day off. 🍷



Pinot Noir from the Russian River Valley AVA in Sonoma County, California

Story by Tom Murnan



Our November 13th event will feature the wine theme of comparing Pinot Noirs from the Russian River Valley AVA (American Viticultural Area) to the Sonoma Coast AVA. These two AVAs offer perhaps the best Pinot Noirs and Chardonnays made in California. This article will concentrate on the Russian River Valley (RRV), while the October Gazette will feature the Sonoma Coast.

Let's start with the geographical definition of what we are talking about. It is best to look at a map. The Russian River's source is in the hills of Mendocino County north of Sonoma County. It flows 110 miles south until it takes a sudden turn westward at Healdsburg, and then proceeds 25 miles to flow into the Pacific Ocean. Geologists are not sure why the river suddenly turned west because in ancient times it continued straight south to the San Francisco Bay area. The river was named by the **Russian-American Company**. Chartered in 1799 by Tsar Paul I to expand Russia's interests in North America, it began with merchant entrepreneurs (later replaced by aristocrats) who were to colonize the western edge of Alaska all the way down to California. Besides trading with the native people, they were fur hunters seeking otter, beaver, fox and the like. By 1812 they founded Fort Ross 10 miles north of the Russian River mouth. It was similar to the rival British sponsored Hudson Bay Company. The Russian ambitions failed to materialize over time, and they were eventually eliminated from North America by the British and United States.

The first thing you notice is that the Russian River is just at the top of the AVA. This is where the RRV began in the 1970's. Most of the wineries are located on the plains between Sebastopol and Santa Rosa. The western most boundary

is only 8 miles from the ocean. The RRV is known for its cool temperatures and fog, promoted by cool air from the Pacific, is perfect for Pinot Noir and Chardonnay, varieties that do not like constant heat. Temperatures fall between 35° and 40° at night. This gives a long growing season and prevents baked, over-ripe grape flavors. The central and western regions are the coolest, while the eastern part (near Highway 101) are the warmest. 42% of the grapes harvested are Chardonnay, while 29% are devoted to Pinot Noir. Zinfandel, Syrah, Sauvignon Blanc, Gewurztraminer, Cabernet Franc, Petite Sirah, Merlot and even Cabernet Sauvignon are also grown, with the latter two in the warmer areas of the RRV.

Recall that Pinot Noir is picky, like Goldilocks and the three bears: it doesn't want to be too hot nor too cold, Sonoma is famous for its fog, much of which is promoted by a gap in the in the coastal ranges of mountains. Named after the town of Petaluma, the Petaluma Gap provides cooling breezes from the Pacific for the southern portion of the RRV. The **Green Valley of RRV**, is a sub-AVA with the coolest temperatures and the most fog of any RRV winery. The fog is the last to leave in the morning and the first to reappear in the afternoon, making for a long, slow growing season. This means better complexity, retention of acidity, aromatic complexity, smooth tannins and a good sugar / acid balance.

Two kinds of soil predominate in the best properties. The **Goldridge Series** is composed of crumbling sandstone and sand left over from millions of years ago when the land was under the ocean. It is not especially fertile, which makes the vines struggle and gives better grapes. The other kind of soil is called **Franciscan Assemblage** which is composed of shale, greywacke sandstone, volcanic rock, and alluvial soil from around the river. ▶



Williams Seylem winery

◀ The warmer areas of the RRV, in the northeast corner, concentrates on growing Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon, and Sauvignon Blanc. Chardonnay grown here is more tropical in flavors. The **Chalk Hills** is a sub appellation to the RRV that acknowledges its warmer conditions. Rather than actual chalk, it has a powdery white volcanic ash in the soil that limits its vigor and hence over-production, making the vine struggle. Semillon, Sangiovese and Pinot Grigio is also grown there.

The RRV was made an AVA in 1983. The area was enlarged in 2006. It accounts for about one sixth of the total wine production for Sonoma County. In 2008, E&J Gallo tried to increase the area again to include its Two Rock winery, but so far this has been blocked by the Russian River Winegrowers Association. The area took off in the 19th Century when Italians planted vineyards on their farms. Prohibition was hard on the area. It wasn't until the 1970s that quality was emphasized over quantity. In 1973, Foppiano was the first to put the words Russian River Valley on their label. In the 21st Century, the area devoted to Pinot Noir has increased to 12,000 acres in 2003. By 2008, the RRV accounted for 19% of the Pinot Noir in California. Today there are about 70 wineries comprising of 15,000 acres.

The "classic" style of Russian River Pinots are characterized by vibrant (but pale) color, lively acidity, cherry and berry fruit flavors and delicate aroma that would often include earthy mushroom notes. Some well known wineries that produce RRV labels are Kosta Browne, Martinelli, Williams Seylem, Hartford Court, Ramey, and Paul Hobbs. 🍷

Sources: [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russian_River_\(California\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russian_River_(California)); www.sonomacounty.com/articles/russian-river-valley-wine-region-and-appellation; en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russian_River_Valley_AVA; www.wine-searcher.com/regions-russian+river+valley



Chalk Hill RRV sub-AVA



Hop Kiln Winery in the RRV



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BRANCH EVENTS

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SEP
19

HAPPY HOLLOW CLUB

White vs. Red - Who Wins?

Producers: Patti & Steve Hipple

Guest Speaker: Rick Plambeck, Owner of
Old Vine Wines & Spirits

OCT
17

402 EAT + DRINK

A Night of American Indulgence
American Comfort Food Paired with
Classic California Wines

Producers: Tabitha & Dave Thrasher

NOV
13

CHAMPIONS RUN

Russian River Valley vs. Sonoma
Coast Pinot Noirs

Producers: Murnan & Klemkes

DEC
5

PRESIDENT'S HOLIDAY CELEBRATION

Au Courant Regional Kitchen

Producers: Martins

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