

# The Bluffs Food & Wine gazette

Little  
España



tapas  
bar  
paella  
&  
sangria

## Event Report:

Five Course Spanish Dinner with 11 Spanish Wines

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Oregon Wine Country

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## President's Comments

Dear Members,

Champagne is the name of the world's most famous sparkling wine, the appellation under which it is sold, and the French wine region it comes from. While it has been used to refer to sparkling wines from all over the world—Champagne is a legally controlled and restricted name.

The US imported over 18 million bottles of Champagne last year, up over 12%. Even with those numbers we are behind France and the UK in champagne consumption. The French region of Champagne (comprised of the towns of Rheims, Epernay, and Ay) was the first region in the world to make sparkling wine in any quantity.

Champagne can offer variety to the wines that accompany your meal. It can be a brut (dry) to sweeter styles such as Sec, Demi-Sec and Doux, with brut the more popular style. In searching for wines for our December event I came across Gosset "Excellence" Brut Champagne. Like most bruts it is a non-vintage champagne.

This champagne comes from Gosset, the oldest wine house in Champagne dating to 1584. The French word brut translates roughly as 'raw', it indicates a wine bottled in its natural, raw state – i.e. without a significant addition of sweetness. It is made from the classic Champagne Blend (Chardonnay 36%, Pinot Noir 45% and Pinot Meunier 19%). Pinot Noir contributes good palate weight and darker, meaty aromas. Pinot Meunier gives good acidity and fruitiness. Chardonnay is said to bring elegance and finesse to Champagnes, along with a certain creamy roundness and lifted stone-fruit aromas. Champagne's can also include the four lesser-known Champagne varieties: Pinot Blanc, Pinot Gris, Petit Meslier and Arbane.

The winemaker suggested the following food matches:

“Perfect as a refreshing accompaniment to simple grilled meat dishes in the summer heat. The light salty tang on the champagne's finish reflects wonderfully with crisp, pan-fried garden vegetables.”

(I found this match for brut champagne if you want to get creative-- try pairing this wine with Fish Tacos.)

This wine is available online from a number of sources for about \$35 a bottle.

Enjoy!

*Bob Kossow*

### Stephen Tanzer 93pts

**“Vivid yellow. Powerful, mineral-accented orchard fruits and Meyer lemon the nose, with a sexy floral nuance adding complexity. Stains the palate with concentrated pear, melon and lemon curd flavors, with a smoky, leesy quality building with aeration. Surprisingly lively for its depth of flavor thanks to bright, nervy acidity and a chalky quality. Closes long and toasty, with excellent clarity and lift.”**

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## Editor's Corner

I always enjoy going Spanish in our restaurant hopping, and one of the best representations of the genre is Carlos Mendez establishments. Yes, there are two of them now, the new one being Little España in Rockbrook Village. Everything is done so simply but with oh so much flavor and taste. The simplicity of preparation allows the natural quality of the ingredients to step forward. Personally, I enjoy numerous smaller sized courses. It gives the palate a wider range of flavors to enjoy. Another nice thing is that the prices of Spanish wines are one of the best bargains in today's wine market. We had strong food matches with the wines. Patti Hipple spends hours researching the market and finding the best wine for the price, and I for one would like to thank her for her efforts. They paid off at this event.

Mary and I went to Oregon for the first time this July. Our destination was the International Pinot Wine Celebration (IPNC) in McMinnville. This was, very simply, a great trip that focused on all things Pinot. Wine makers came from as far away as Champagne, France, Italy, New Zealand and South Africa. The highlight of the event was a traditional Native American salmon bake where whole sides of salmon were filleted and slipped onto an Alder branch and roasted off to the side of an open fire. That gave me an inspiration for our November event. The theme will be an Oregon Wine Country Dinner and feature recipes we tried at the IPNC, such as wood roasted salmon and peach upside-down cake. All the wines come from Oregon, with an emphasis on Pinot Noir.

The dessert wine had no rating, and is the only wine from outside the Willamette Valley. It hails from the Columbia Valley on the Washington side. I brought it to a Board Meeting to see if it would measure up. It proved to be a fabulous Gewurztraminer made by cyroextraction (an ice wine not frozen by nature). So this may be the first wine that the Board has given a rating for an event, a lofty 95/100. Plan on attending this Sunday 11-8-2015 event at Spezia and see if you agree on the rating!

John Fischer speaks to us today about the color of white wines. Just like last month's article on the color of red wine, there are clues to be gleaned from the color and limpidity of white wine as well. Is it young? Is it old? Is it a bad bet? Read John's article to find out.

Salut!

*Tom Murnan*

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**"It took me fifteen years to discover that I had no talent for writing, but I couldn't give it up because by that time I was too famous."**

—Robert Benchley, *Pluck and Luck*

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# Event Report: Five Course Spanish Dinner with 11 Spanish Wines

by Tom Murnan



When I heard that our September 13th event was going to be held at the Little España, I knew we were in for a Spanish treat. The Branch had already been to "big" España, the original location in Benson, in January 2014. But this was chef owner Carlos Mendez's new expansion into the old Taste restaurant in Rockbrook. His philosophy is that he, his employees and customers are a big family, just like the culture of Spain, which is very friendly and family oriented. It did not disappoint. 28 signed up and 26 attended of which 21 were members.

Appetizers for the quaffing phase consisted of three items. **Dates Stuffed** with Cabrales blue cheese and a whole Marcona almond, all wrapped in a thin slice of Serrano ham. This was sweet, salty and delicious. Other delicacies included a skewer of house **Marinated Olives**, raw **garlic cloves** tempered by the marinade, and a strip of red pepper. The marinade consisted of olive oil, sherry vinegar, lemon and lime, which added a zestiness to the vegetables. Since these were all put on a skewer, they were easy to handle and made for a nice presentation. Finally there were three kinds of cheese, all on a toothpick: **Cabrales, Manchego and Drunken Goat Cheese**.

All the rest of the courses served Tapas food, which are small portions of very tasty stuff. More than just hors d'oeuvres, the name tapas comes from the old days when little covers were placed over wine glasses to keep the flies out of the vino in bars before the advent of air conditioning. The food was brought to table in a tiered rack that could handle three plates. Very Español. The food was all prepared very simply, which translates into deliciousness.

Our **First Course** consisted of two tapas. **Orange Salad** or "**Ensalada de Naranjas**" featured Valencia oranges, topped with ground Marcona almonds. Deep fried Goat cheese surrounded the greens. An in-house dressing of fresh orange juice, reduced by cooking, and added spices, was our dressing. The restaurant's number one tapas was also on the tiered platform: "**Gambas al Ajillo**" (**Sautéed Garlic Shrimp**). Shrimp was sautéed in chopped garlic and Chardonnay, which was reduced to make a light sauce. Very simple but delicious.

Two white wines paired up here. The **2013 Palcio Canedo** used the Godello grape, while the **2013 Pazo de Senorans** used Albarino. The Palcio was structured and minerally and dry. The Pazo was softer, less acidic, silky, with pleasing pear notes. **Steve Hipple** asked the group which wine they preferred. Most liked the Albarino.

The **Second Course** brought **Stuffed Piquillo Peppers, Goat Cheese, Marcona Almonds** drizzled with a **Balsamic Reduction**. The second tapas on the rack was "**Empanadas de Pollo**" or Seasoned Chicken Empanadas. The stuffed red peppers were grilled, peeled and marinated in olive oil and stuffed with goat cheese, chives and the balsamic drizzle. The empanadas were chicken grilled in olive oil and garlic, pepper and other spices, then put in a pastry shell and deep fried. There was also a **spicy aioli sauce** whose main flavor components consisted of lemon and garlic.

Steve asked us to taste the wines before the food, then try it later with the food. Again we had two wines dueling it out. This time we were tasting two reds. The **2012 Bodegas Volver Tarima Hill** consists of the Monastrell grape.

This was contrasted with the **2012 Tres Picos Garnacha (Grenache)**. The Picos was tannic, intense and tasted of dark fruits. The Volver was less tannic, with dark fruits again, but a touch acidic. A vote of the diners found that most gave the nod to the Garnacha.

Our **Third Course** again featured two tapas: **Slow Cooked Braised Lamb** and **Marinated Beef Skewers**. The lamb was braised / slow cooked for 10 hours in red wine, rosemary and garlic, while the beef was marinated before grilling. It was accompanied by a simple but flavorful **Chimichurri Sauce** based on basil, parsley, garlic and a lot of Sherry vinegar. The beef seemed a bit neutral on its own, but was enlivened by arugula leaves and peppers, which added some excitement. The lamb was accompanied by deep fried potatoes. I noticed the taste of oil in the potatoes.

Our red wine pairs consisted of **2009 Finca Sobreno Seleccion Especial** which used the Tempranillo grape, contrasted to the **2010 Mas d'en Gil Bellmunt Priorat**, a blend of Garnacha, Cariena and Cabernet Sauvignon. The Mas was very tannic, inky dark and acidic, almost Bordeaux like. It was huge, muscular and raw, needing time. The Finca was very earthy, with

rounded tannins, and similar acidity as the Mas. 100% Tempranillo, it spent 14 months in American oak. It was spicy with sandalwood notes, muscular, loganberry and chocolate truffle flavors. Voting for a favorite was about equal.

The **Fourth Course** was the restaurant's signature **Paella Sacramento**. Generous amounts of chicken, pork, shrimp, calamari, mussels, escargot and chorizo were cooked in a huge shallow pan that took two people to move. Chicken stock cooked the Bomba rice which was flavored with saffron, the most expensive spice. It takes 6000 flower stamens to make one ounce of saffron, a very labor expensive spice. A tapas side of **Sautéed Mushrooms in Red Wine** accompanied the paella. Only one wine for this course: the **2004 Viña Ardanza Reserva** which consisted of Tempranillo and Garnacha. It was a very nice match.

Our final course was **Dessert: Ponche Crema Ice Cream with Cinnamon Crisp**. The Ponche cream consisted of cinnamon, Sherry and vanilla ice cream in the cream. The ice cream consisted of Hazelnut ice cream, vanilla and Venezuela rum. The Cinnamon crisp was a deep fried flour dough sprinkled with sugar and cinnamon.

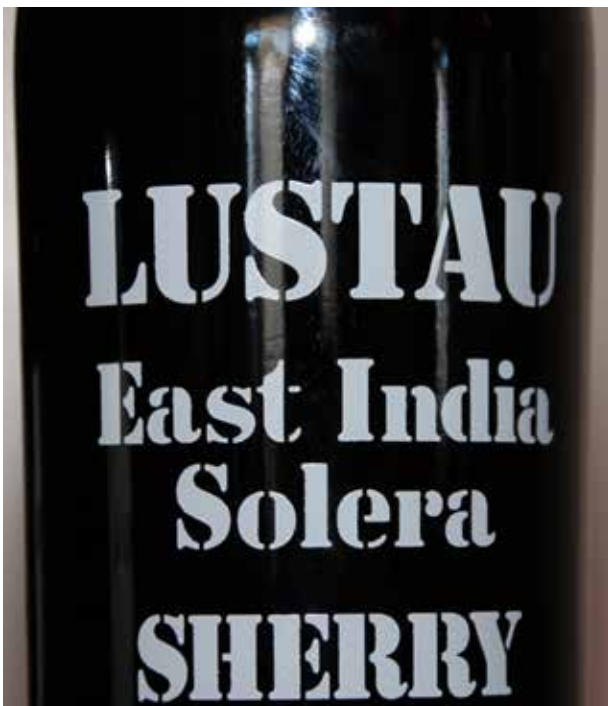
One of the world's great Sherry's was served. **Emilio Lustau East India Solera Sherry** is made from the Pedro Ximenez grape and sported a dark brown in color, provided flavors of maple sugar, brown sugar and raisins, and was very sweet. A wonderful finish.

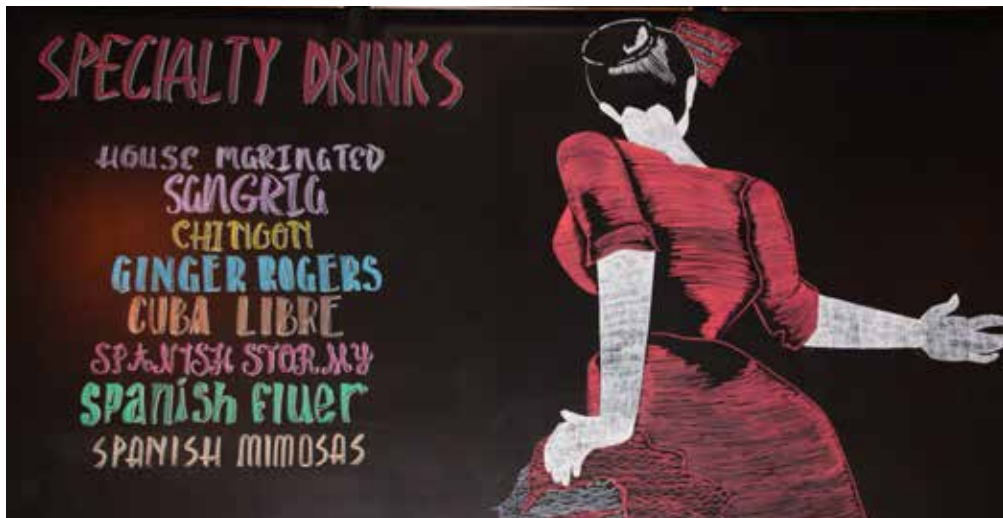
Many thanks to **Chef Carlos Mendez** and his staff who worked on their day off. I found out that it was also Carlos' wife and daughter's birthday, so double thanks are in order. Hosts **Steve and Patti Hipple** did a great job of selecting the wines. It all amounted to a very enjoyable evening.















# Evaluating the Appearance of White Wines

by John Fischer





As white wine grapes ripen they lose their green tones and pick up various shades of straw-like or golden hues. This is reflected in the color of the wine. In cooler climates where the grape is less likely to fully ripen, you can discern a slight green cast to the wine— often seen in Chablis.

A healthy wine will be brilliant giving the appearance that light is emanating from within the wine itself in the same fashion that a diamond captures light. As a wine starts to deteriorate, the wine will gradually lose its brilliance, and although clear will slowly begin to take on a dreary dull appearance.

What causes this loss of brilliance is the formation of particulate structures within the wine as it ages. Just like the carbon particles in a flawed diamond will rob the diamond of its radiance, the particles in wine absorb light causing the wine to gradually lose its glow. These particles in wine progressively increase in size as the wine ages. Initially, the particles are too small to be seen with the naked eye and the wine, although not brilliant, is perfectly clear. As the particles grow larger, the wine begins to appear cloudy.

Attendant to the loss of brilliance is the appearance of brown tones. Brown tones are always a bad sign. They are the result of an oxidative process – the same process that causes the cut surface of an apple (or any fruit) to turn brown when exposed to

air. Like the fruit, the wine picks up brown tones and the flavors in the wine are slowly burned away. The wine is in its decline.

The color scenario is a little different for sweet wines. As they age, the better wines will gradually darken and become golden in color. Some wines will turn to the shade of honey. Do not mistake this color with the appearance of brown tones. These wines will be brilliant and like gold will have a sense of opulence. Nevertheless, with time, brown tones will interject themselves into sweet wines as well. They will lose their limpidity and decline.

A few years ago, I was perusing through the bins of a wine shop and found a dozen or so splits of late harvest Rieslings on sale. They had been reduced from \$35.00 to \$8.00 per bottle. Apparently the dark color of the wine had fooled the shopkeeper into thinking that the wine was in decline. However, this wine was brilliant and old gold in color. I bought them all. I couldn't wait to get home to taste them. The wine was spectacular! Instead of lowering the price, he should have increased it.

In summary, keep in mind that brilliance and lack of brown tones are signs that the wine is healthy. Evaluating these appearance changes are subtle and sometimes somewhat difficult to discern, but with practice, patience, and a little experience these changes in appearance are easy to master.



# Oregon Wine Country

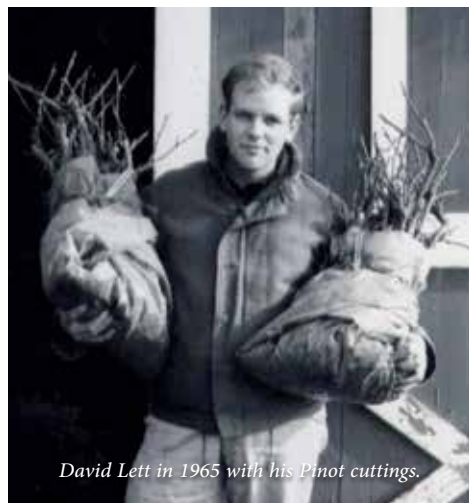
by Tom Murnan



If you are enamored of all things Pinot Noir, as I am, you will be surprised to learn that it was only about 50 years ago that the grape variety was planted in Oregon. In 1965, David Lett of Eyrie Vineyards planted the first Pinot Noir and other cool variety grapes in the Willamette Valley. But Oregon was long known as a great place to establish a vineyard. As far back as 1847, Henderson Leulling, a horticulturist who traveled to the territory on the Oregon Trail, planted the first grapes. The first recorded winery was Valley View, established in the late 1850s. But throughout the 19th Century, immigrant pioneers would experiment with many different grape varieties, including Riesling, Zinfandel and an unknown variety of sauvignon. An Oregon wine won a silver medal at the 1904 Louisiana Purchase Exposition, otherwise known as the St. Louis World's Fair. Like most of the wine industry, Prohibition (1920 to 1933) dealt the nascent industry a severe blow. For approximately 30 years after Prohibition's repeal, the industry was mostly dormant. The wines then were based on fruit wines, not *vitis vinifera*. In fact, only two wineries were growing *vitis*

*vinifera*. Then in the 1960's, California wineries opened vineyards in the state. By 1970 there were five wineries with a combined total of 35 acres under vines.

The first Pinot Noir in Oregon was grown by Richard Sommer in the Umpqua Valley, with the first bottling available in 1967. David Lett also was convinced that Oregon was not too cold for Pinot Noir, a notoriously fickle and temperamental grape to grow. In 1965, David had earned a degree in viticulture and enology at



*David Lett in 1965 with his Pinot cuttings.*

University of California, Davis. He came to Oregon armed with 3000 cuttings of Pinot Noir, Chardonnay and the first cuttings of Pinot Gris in the United States. His theory was that these varieties would thrive in the red soil and climate of the Dundee Hills just outside McMinnville. History has proven him correct.

In 1976, the Spurrier tasting in Paris, dubbed the Judgment of Paris, proved that a Cabernet Sauvignon and a Chardonnay from California could beat out French Bordeaux and Chardonnay based wines. In 1979, Lett entered his 1975 Pinot Noir in the Gault-Millau Wine Olympics. 330 wines were entered by 33 countries. The 1975 Eyrie Vineyards Reserve placed in the top ten, bringing much needed recognition to Oregon pinots.

The Oregon wine industry continued from one strength to another, improving every year. Besides Eyrie, the rest of the five founding vineyards who introduced Pinot Noir to the Willamette Valley are Ponzi, Erath, Sokol Blosser and Adelsheim. One important factor that has helped vineyards in Oregon was the passage of the 1973 land-use law, which kept urban land use out of agricultural areas. The most important result was that



it kept the hillsides from being converted to housing. The best vineyards are on hillsides, not so much on flat ground, so this was an important law for the wine industry.

By 1980, there were 34 bonded wineries, and Oregon Pinot Noirs were winning awards. There were 1,100 acres of vines. In 1984, Robert Parker Jr. wrote favorably of them. By 1990, there were 70 bonded wineries and 5,682 acres growing numerous varieties, not just Pinot Noir. The Phylloxera root louse was discovered in the 1990s, causing vintners to replace their rootstock to resistant rootstock.

Oregon's AVAs (American Viticultural Areas) are The Willamette Valley, Southern Oregon, Umpqua Valley, Rogue Valley, Columbia Gorge, Walla Walla Valley and the Snake River Valley. The most well known is the Willamette, which contains these six sub districts: Chehalem Mountains, Dundee Hills, Eola-Amity Hills, McMinnville, Ribbon Ridge, and Yamhill-Carlton District.

Sources: Wikipedia; eyrievineyards.com;



# Upcoming Council Bluffs Branch Events

Mark Your Calendars!



## **November 8, 2015**

Oregon Wine Country Dinner at Spezia's 3125 S. 72nd St, Omaha  
All wines come from Oregon except one from Washington State.  
Producers: Tom & Mary Murnan



## **December 5, 2015**

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



## **January 16, 2016**

Spencer's at Hilton Garden Inn with cuisine by Chef Glenn Wheeler  
Producer: David Tritsch



## **February 5, 2015**

Field Club. To be announced.  
Producers: Tom & Mary Murnan, Jill Panzer

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about what's going on!

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