

OCTOBER 2021

The Bluffs Food & Wine gazette

EVENT REPORT:

Oak Hills Country Club—
Can you find the Less Expensive Wine?

A large, light-colored stone sign for the Oak Hills Country Club. The sign features a stylized oak leaf logo on the left. The text "Oak Hills" is written in a large, green, serif font, and "COUNTRY CLUB" is written in a smaller, green, sans-serif font below it.

Oak Hills
COUNTRY CLUB



ALSO INSIDE: The Sonoma Coast AVA
Upcoming Council Bluffs Branch Events



EDITOR'S

CORNER

It's been ages since I've been in the Oak Hills CC club house, and that was for lunch. Boy was I surprised to see the interior upgraded, stylish, and modern looking. We had the whole restaurant to ourselves on a Sunday evening. Very spacious. We spread out to the bar area for quaffing, and then moved over to our own little corner for dinner. First time event producers, **Susan Rauth** and **Brent Rasmussen** did a fine job on what can be an intimidating enterprise of putting on an event. Once you have to do one yourself, you notice a lot more details you might take for granted if just casually attending. We even had a wine theme, which adds interest to the event. Club Executive Chef, **Zach Chingren** had an interesting menu for us as well. Read about it within.



**LAUGHTER
IS THE BEST
MEDICINE. OR
WINE. IT MIGHT
BE WINE."**

— IT'S TIME FOR SOME
LEXOPHILES

In November, your humble scribe's event will contrast the Russian River Valley (RRV) to the Sonoma Coast for exceptional Pinot Noirs. Compared to the Sonoma Coast, the RRV is much more rugged. In days of yore, they did not consider it grape growing country. Sheep and orchards maybe, but not grapes. But it turns out that the Finicky Grape, aka The Heartbreak Grape, is thriving there. More and more wineries are popping up in this mostly forested area. Take a read about the difference, especially if you plan to attend the November 13th Pinot Noir event at Champions Run.

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You can also access the Branch Recipe file by clicking: https://issuu.com/omaha-publications/docs/iwfs_cb_council_bluffs_recipes.

Cheers! 🍷

Tom Murnan

Cover Photo:

Oak Hills Country Club.

Photo by Tom Murnan

Event Report:

OAK HILLS COUNTRY CLUB— CAN YOU FIND THE LESS EXPENSIVE WINE?

Story by Tom Murnan

Photos by Tom Murnan and Wayne Markus

It has been years since I've been in the clubhouse of the Oak Hills Country Club. Was I surprised. They seem to have made a complete makeover of the dining room and bar area. Everything looks modern, clean, and very spacious. There is a lower tier that looks outside, and an upper tier, where we were. There was room to spread out around the bar for quaffing, then move to a nice area already set up for dinner. First time event producers were **Susan Rauth** and **Brent Rasmussen**. They did a really nice job at their golf club. Brent remarked later he had a new appreciation for all the event producers who bring you month after month a quality wine dinner. There is more to planning a smooth running event than the casual member may realize. We had 31 attend, 6 of which were guests. Our centerpieces were made by member **Denise Meyers** from her shop Arrange This N That flower and gift shop. Executive **Chf Zach Chingren** was in charge of the culinary end of the meal.

There were some changes from the invitation. Instead of a charcuterie board with flatbread crackers and lavosh, we had three different kinds of appetizers. A **Shrimp Bruschetta** was passed around first. That hit the spot. Shrimp were cut lengthwise

and laid flat on the bread slice. Tasty. Then **skewers of grape tomatoes** were alternated with mozzarella, drizzled with balsamic, with thin slices of lettuce to add color. These were OK, but I am not a big mozzarella fan as the cheese is so neutral. [One suggestion to enliven the ensemble: use fresh Basil slices instead of lettuce. Fresh Basil always wows the taster.] About this time I realized the server was taking the whole tray of shrimp bruschetta back to the kitchen. I suggested he bring it back out of its sanctuary and lay it on a table so we could have at it. He quickly complied. Finally, we had a tray of small but delicious **meatballs**, each with its own skewer. But it had its own bowl of thickened beef gravy which supercharged the flavors. I could have eaten half the platter. but wisely resisted that urge. We had 3 red quaffers and one sparkling to sample. **D66** was a Grenache wine, **Croudoulet de Beaucastel 2015** was the second wine of Château Beaucastel, the famous Châteauneuf-du-Pape. Finally we had a **Hess Collection Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon 2012**. Our bubbly was a **Roederer Estate Brut NV** from the Anderson Valley. Roederer always makes superior sparklers.

It was time to head to our assigned table. After admitting it was a challenge to host an event, Brent proposed this challenge: Can you detect which wine is the more expensive, and which the less? Everything was pre-poured and breathing when I arrived much earlier than most. Every course had a two bottles to compare. We knew the name, but not the order of pour.

The **First Course** was **Mixed Green Salad, Pickled Grape Tomatoes, Goat Cheese, Honeycomb, and Toasted Sunflower Seeds with Champagne Vinaigrette**. The salad was nicely plated, but seemed a bit on the ordinary side. The cherry tomatoes didn't taste pickled to me, but I would rather they not be pickled anyway. But I did appreciate the wine friendly Champagne vinaigrette dressing. One thing that did raise the level of the salad was the fresh honeycomb. That was really good, and the comb was light enough that it didn't seem like you just bit into a beeswax candle. It dissolved nicely. The honey and comb, however, dominated everything, making the other ingredients move into the background and disappear. ▶





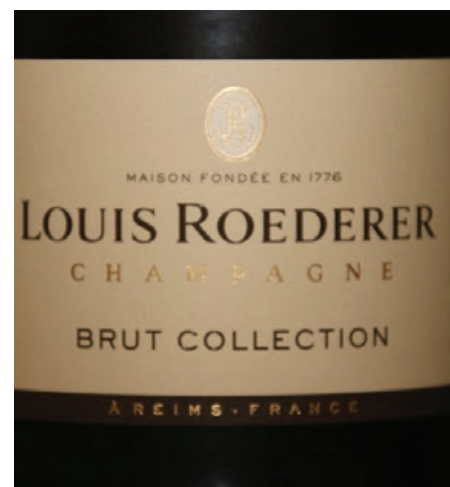






Zach Chingren
Executive Chef





◀ Our two wines were both Rieslings. Their identity was revealed later, but I correctly spotted the **Jean Biecher et Fils Sommerberg Grand Cru Riesling 2019**. Dry, elegant, long farewell, and less sharp and edgy than its competitor, it had the breeding of an Alsatian Grand Cru. This was compared to the **Smith Madrone Riesling 2016** from Napa Valley (in the mountain above Beringer). It was bold, fairly well balanced but had a bit of an acid bite. It was on the dry side as well. I got the price wrong because any Alsatian Grand Cru seems to command a price of \$60 to \$70 minimum. I don't know. Maybe Brent got a steal-of-a-deal price. But at \$15.00 to \$20, it was the deal of the evening. I better find out where he got it at that price. The Smith Madrone was the most expensive of the pair at \$30 to \$35. Sometimes having the identity of the wines doesn't help you when you have a curve ball like this pair.

Moving on to the Second Course, we had sea food. **Prosciutto Wrapped Seared Scallops, Fig Jam, Arugula, Caramelized Onion, Feta, and Balsamic Reduction** adorned the plate. A nice, wide slice of the Italian ham wrapped the scallops. Prosciutto and scallops have a nice affinity / contrast in flavor that just works very nicely. Surf and Turf. The plates came out a bit tepid, but not objectionably so. Warm plates would have helped. The caramelized onions, fig jam, arugula and feta all added complexity and palate interest. This was a nice course.

Sticking with the white wine trend established in the previous course, and appropriate on a hot summer day, our two wines were Chardonnay this time. We knew we were having the **Ram's Gate Chardonnay El Diablo 2016** and **O'Shaughnessy Chardonnay 2018**. The first was from the Russian River Valley in Sonoma, and the second was from Napa. The O'Shaughnessy was the essence of Chardonnay, well balanced not oaky, and penetrating. Brent said it was a favorite of his. The Ram's Gate was more Burgundian, but buttery and a bit oaky. The Russian River Valley produces a bevy of great Pinot Noirs and Chardonnay. Brent told us one wine was half as expensive as the other. And that would be the Ram's Gate at \$25 to \$30. The O'Shaughnessy costs about \$55.

The **Third Course** found us with **Smoked Beef Tenderloin, Potato Pave, Oyster Mushrooms, Demi-Glace, and Beet Puree**. You could taste the smokiness of the beef, which was a nice touch. It was tender and delicious. The Demi-glace made for a nice sauce. There wasn't an oyster mushroom in sight on any plate, as far as I could see, but the mushroom variety they used, perfectly formed but very

small, substituted nicely. The beet puree added color and an earthy component to the dish. **K Vintners Jack Syrah / Cabernet Sauvignon Washington 2015** was our first red. Coming from the Rocks District of Walla Walla Washington, it was a blend of 70% Cabernet Sauvignon and 30% Syrah. It was startlingly forceful and powerful, but still well balanced. Attention getting. Its contender was a **Mount Eden Vineyards Estate Cabernet Sauvignon 2016** from the Santa Cruz area of California. It was a Bordeaux blend of 79% Cabernet Sauvignon, 12% Merlot, 7% Cabernet Franc, and 2% Petit Verdot and aged in 50% new American oak. This was easy drinking and well balanced compared to the K Vintners, smooth and elegant. The bargain wine was the K Vintners at \$40, while the Mt. Eden was \$95, its price propelled by high ratings from Vinous and the Wine Advocate no doubt.

We finished with a **Chocolate Sabayon Fresh Berries, Chambord Whipped Cream, Cigar Wafers, Mint and Edible Orchid**. A sabayon is a cross between a pudding and a mousse. The fresh raspberries and blackberries added color and interest to the pudding, and the cigar wafer was an artistic, interesting touch as was the orchid, which was a pretty spectacular crown for a dessert. Only one wine for this course, the **Louis Roederer Brut Premier** non-vintage Champagne from Reims, France. While we enjoyed a Roederer Estate Brut sparkler from the Anderson Valley for quaffing, we had the real article for dessert. Both wineries are owned by Champagne Roederer. Champagne style wines go with almost anything, and it was unfazed by the chocolate, berries and whipped cream. It might have been a bit dry a style, being a Brut, for a sweet dessert. Perhaps an Extra Dry would have made it match even more seamlessly. But I enjoyed the genuine Champagne brut for the dessert anyway.

Many thanks to Chef Chingren and his helpful staff for a great meal. Service was attentive, and requests were handled quickly. Thanks to first timers **Susan Rauth** and **Brent Rasmussen** who did a fine job, as well as Board members **Amanda Harrington** and **John Matthews** who served as a resource for Brent and Susan. Let any Board member know if you, a member, wants to do their own event. You will be assigned a Board member to help you navigate the finer details of putting on an event. It is really rewarding to enjoy the fruits of your first event, and of course the resulting party. As Brent said, it really gives you a better appreciation of our events, and makes the fun even more intense. 🍷



The Sonoma Coast AVA

Story by Tom Murnan

On November 13th, my event is featuring Pinot Noirs from the **Russian River Valley** and the **Sonoma Coast**. We discussed the Russian River Valley in the September Gazette. Today we are focusing on the Sonoma Coast. Both these areas are marvelous areas for growing the Fickle Grape.

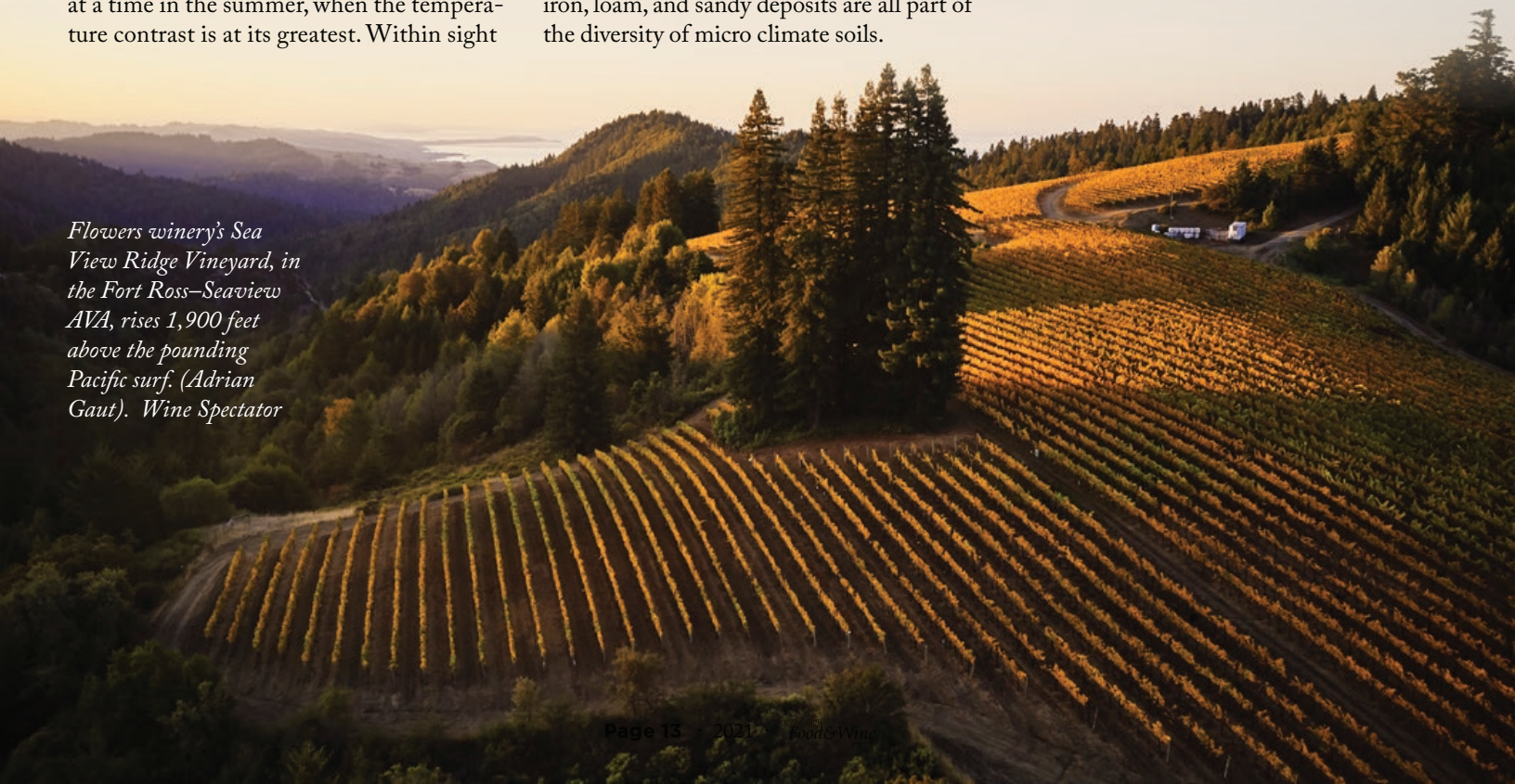
Until recently, the Sonoma coast was not considered suitable to grow grapes. Too cold, too damp and rainy, too foggy they said. It was the province for old redwood forests, sheep ranches, and apple & pear orchards, not vineyards. It is a wild, forest covered area, riddled with low mountain ridges, with extreme heat, cold, wind and at times, torrential rain. Even today, wineries in the area are remote and hard to get to, and have poor cell phone reception and no tasting rooms. The **Fort Ross** area of the coast can have between 60 to 80 inches of rain a year. Geographically, the westernmost coast of California was formed partially by the San Andreas fault. The clash of the cold Pacific water and the warmer California air generates fog that can blanket the coast for weeks at a time in the summer, when the temperature contrast is at its greatest. Within sight

of the Pacific Ocean, with its unusually cold water, massive tectonic activity thrust up ridges during the prehistoric era, at times over 1500 feet above sea level. But an interesting thing happens in this maritime climate. You get an unexpected temperature inversion. The usual mountain gets colder as you climb upward. Near the Pacific, in Sonoma County, the San Andreas mountains reverse that, and it gets warmer the higher you get. The mountain ridges allow you to get above the fog line (920 feet above the sea), allowing the sun light to blanket the vineyards, warming the growing fruit while still coddling the Pinot Noir and Chardonnay grapes in the cool (but not downright cold) atmosphere they crave, in which they thrive.

But it is more than just mountain ridges which block the winds from the Pacific inland. There are unique soil combinations as well. The **Boomer Formation** is marine volcanic soil thrust up by the San Andreas fault. The **Franciscan Melange** soil, originating from ancient sea beds, is also scattered around the area. Black clay, red-fractured rock rich with iron, loam, and sandy deposits are all part of the diversity of micro climate soils.

The **Sonoma Coast AVA** was created in 1987. Unlike the French AOC (Appellation d'Origine Contrôlée) system, with all its incredibly detailed regulations and restrictions, the **AVA (American Viticulture Area)** boundaries are more driven by those who lobby the government for a particular area, along with some historical concerns. Sonoma-Cutrer was instrumental in defining the Sonoma Coast area. It contains 500,000 acres, most of it not planted to vines. It contains a wide range of microclimates, so much so that **sub AVAs** have been petitioned. The most recent sub AVA is the **Fort Ross-Seaview AVA**, approved in December of 2011. It contains 27,500 acres, but only 550 acres are yet planted to vines. Properties that have invested in Fort-Ross Seaview include Flowers, Peter Michael, Fort Ross Vineyard, Red Car and Wayfarer. The Flowers winemaker, Chantal Forthun says her wine shows the wildness of the area, the primal forest, a feeling of mountain grown fruit, but it is also very near the coast, receiving the benefits of the sea. But the Sonoma Coast is making world class Pinot Noirs, and to a lesser degree,

Flowers winery's Sea View Ridge Vineyard, in the Fort Ross-Seaview AVA, rises 1,900 feet above the pounding Pacific surf. (Adrian Gaut). Wine Spectator





Chardonnay. Another sub AVA is the **West Sonoma Coast**. After 10 years of petitioning the government, final approval seems near. Proponents of the West Sonoma Coast say they are trying to define the true Sonoma Coast.

For our November 13th event, we are having a tasting before dinner. **The Flowers Seaview Ridge** will be tasted. Joan and Walt Flowers founded their winery in 1990. While the vineyards are near the Pacific, the winery itself moved inland near Healdsburg recently since the access to supplies are easier than in the wilds. They use biodynamic and sustainable methods in the vineyards. Besides the 43 acre **Seaview Ridge Vineyard**, which sits at 1900 feet above sea level, they also have the 29 acre **Camp Meeting Ridge Vineyard**, which sits about 1300 feet above the Pacific. They are focusing on studying and understanding the soil strata with an effort towards improving quality. ▶



Flowers winery's Sea View Ridge Vineyard, in the Fort Ross–Seaview AVA, rises 1,900 feet above the pounding Pacific surf. (Adrian Gaut). Wine Spectator



*Martinelli Fort Ross Seaview.
Note the fog covering the area.*

◀ This helps guide the selection of rootstock, soil enrichment, trellising, pest control and harvest strategies, all with the aim of pushing Flowers to a new level of excellence. The famous husband and wife team of John Wetlaufer and Helen Turley, who has consulted for the likes of Colgin, Peter Michael and Bryant, has their own winery, **Marcassin Wine Company**. Neither are consulting any more, just focusing on their own winery. Marcassin means wild boar in French, which is apropos for this wild and forested area of California. Wetlaufer concentrates on the unusual soil in the vineyard, the spacing of the vines, and the like, while Turley concerns herself with the winemaking. She aims for a Burgundian style of Pinot Noir. **Martinelli Vineyards and Winery**, located in the Russian River Valley, also has vineyards in the Sonoma Coast. They acquired these parcels in the 1860s. The Blue Slide Ridge is 52 acres, mostly planted to Pinot Noir. They also have Wild Thyme Ranch, Charles Ranch and Three Sisters. All are limited production vineyards. The Blue Slide vineyard is the steepest, surrounded by forest. The original pioneers had to clear the forest for agriculture, but now the State of California forbids tree removal to develop vineyards. This limits future growth of the wine industry in this AVA. All these wineries make big and bold Pinot Noirs with smooth tannin, harmonious acidity, and ripe, rich fruit. But other wineries, like **Hirsch Vineyards**, focus on a lighter style. This is partially done by earlier harvesting, making them less alcoholic, less dense, crisp, and more minerally than fruity, while still well balanced. Hirsch mostly sells to other

wineries, like **Littorai**, **Failla**, and **Williams Seylem**, but has begun bottling under their own label 9 different vineyard locations. But Hirsch has identified 60 different blocs within their vineyards to better pair the Pinot Noir clones to the different soil types. Their highest elevation vineyard is at 1600 feet. They have one vineyard, the East Ridge, which is on its own rootstock. This is risky because of phylloxera, the root louse that attacked California in the 1870s.

The Sonoma Coast has supplanted the Russian River Valley (RRV) as the premium AVA since collectors see it as something different, something more unique than the more inland RRV. They like the elegance, slightly higher acidity, and more pronounced aromatics than the RRV. Let's see if we can detect anything different between the two AVAs in our tasting, and throughout the meal, where we will contrast the two districts throughout the meal.

For more on the Sonoma Coast, I highly recommend the Wine Spectator's Kim Marcus' story in the September 30, 2021 issue: ***Pinot's Magical Kingdom*** and ***Reclaiming the True Sonoma Coast***. 🍷

Sources: <https://www.winespectator.com/articles/pinot-s-magical-kingdom-093021>; <https://www.winespectator.com/articles/reclaiming-the-true-sonoma-coast-093021>



UPCOMING COUNCIL BLUFFS BRANCH EVENTS

Mark Your Calendars!

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 vs. Sonoma Coast
Pinot Noir
Producers: Murnan & Klemkes

DEC
5

PRESIDENT'S HOLIDAY CELEBRATION

Au Courant Regional Kitchen
Producers: Martins

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**



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Gazette & Photos: Tom Murnan

happygardener1988@yahoo.com

dave@supportworks.com

diane@forristall.us

tabithathrasher@hotmail.com

jrudyf@cox.net | stephenhipple@hotmail.com

murnantom@gmail.com

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Editor: **Tom Murnan**
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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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