

The Bluffs Food & Wine gazette



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I love the Council Bluffs Branch! We have so much fun and so many unusual events. I believe we broke new ground with the murder mystery dinner theater event at the Cornerstone Mansion, the former Offutt House. And that mansion has had some brushes with murder, suicide and paranormal activity. I don't ever recall a murder mystery being done in the branch before, nor can I think of anyone talking about such a past event. This was a perfect segway into the Halloween season. Just about everyone had a costume. We were all assigned a character part to play, and we would drop clues about our opinions about various characters throughout the evening. Once the murder was committed, we had to try and figure out who might have done it. The food was quite good as well and a caterer had to be hired. The wines were all carefully chosen. It was just plain fun. Read all about it.

In our Note From The Board series, Joe Goldstein tackles taking his wife Jill out for a special anniversary dinner. Having been in the IWFS for awhile, he was not a complete neophyte when it comes to navigating a wine list, but Joe writes of using a (not so) secret weapon that helped him calm his wine ordering jitters. Did he have his nose buried in his smart phone looking up wine reviews? I guess you will have to read his article to find out. My only comment is that his suggestion only works at higher end restaurants!

The Executive Board is appealing to all members to increase their participation, whether it be to write an article for this Gazette or putting on an event next year. It really is true that the more you invest in something, the more you get out of it. Do not be afraid if you've never hosted an event. We have help to assuage all your fears and objections. You mostly need imagination, organization and enthusiasm! Read on for more details.

In vino veritas!

Tom Murnan



"Next to excellence is the appreciation of it."

**-William Makepeace Thackeray,
British author (1811-1863)**







Event Report: Cornerstone Mansion Murder Mystery

by Tom Murnan

The Council Bluffs Branch of the IWFS moved into murky, uncharted waters with a murder mystery play using audience participation. This kind of event had never been done before in our Branch that I know of. Murky, you say? Well, we didn't know who dun it! This was a very much hands-on, everyone participate kind of function that was a tremendous amount of fun. Many thanks to Patti Hipple who conceived the idea and picked the venue. It was so appropriate for the Halloween season with most people coming in costume, and the fact that it was held in a bona fide historic mansion, rife with history for the Omaha area. Thirty people attended including four guests.

Some paranormal activity is attributed to the former Offutt mansion. Reports of sightings of an old man and a boy in the parlor have been made. Disembodied footsteps have been heard between dusk and dawn. It is said that a poltergeist has been known to wreak havoc during household celebrations. And a woman named Emily was beaten to death by her chauffeur husband in the carriage house. Charles Offutt, a morose attorney, committed suicide upstairs on the second floor.

The house was built in 1894 by Anna and Casper Yost as a wedding gift for their only daughter Bertha, who married Charles Offutt. Casper Yost was an assistant to Alexander Graham Bell, and learned the telephone business. He was the president of three telephone companies that eventually merged into Northwestern Bell in Omaha. Offutt was a lawyer in Omaha, but was Speaker of the House in Kentucky before coming west. The couple had three children. Our Offutt Air Force Base was named after Jarvis Offutt, who was one of the first US Air Force personnel killed in World War I.

Victoria Deuel was our guide to help us navigate the many characters and complexities of the game. Before the guests arrived, they got to select from a number of characters that had conflicting interests and could possibly be a murder suspect. We were given nametags with our assigned character.

Quaffing took place in the sunroom off to the south side of the mansion, where Victoria informed us about how the game was played. Each person was handed an envelope with information about their character. There would be a pre-murder period, then a post-murder phase, and finally, all would be revealed. This was a different kind of event than we are used to in that everyone was concentrating on solving the mystery rather than focusing on the wine and food. Nonetheless, we had stellar wines and great food catered by John Benker and his crew. We started with **Pepper Bacon Wrapped Dates with Orange Fig Glaze and Fresh Peach Salsa with Mascarpone on Corn Tortilla Rounds & Crispy Prosciutto**. The latter was light, tasty and refreshing, while the bacon was delicious as only bacon can be. Sweet and sticky with the dates and glaze, it was substantial and satisfying finger food. We paired the hors d'oeuvres with a bubbly, the non vintage **Roederer Estate Brut**, which was a fine starter. This phase took longer than usual, with everyone studying about who to talk to and what clues to drop, which I suspect threw off the chef's timing for upcoming courses.



Once at table, the game continued. Seating was carefully composed, grouping characters with whom they needed to converse. Our **First Course** was a tasty **Shrimp Pumpkin Bisque with Fresh Chives** was served and fell right into the autumn theme. Three large shrimp were in each bowl. The bisque was creamy and rich and tasted fully of pumpkin. Toasted pumpkin seeds were tossed in as well, making for some crunch. A **2012 Greywacke Chardonnay**, which hails from New Zealand, was the chosen wine. I found it to be a touch woody and full bodied with noticeable acidity. The bisque, however, smoothed out the acid notes. A good match, better with food.

The **Second Course** was **Veal Scaloppini Forestier with Wild Mushrooms, Marsala Demi Glaze Reduction and Pureed Parsnips**. Whenever you see Forestier in a menu title, you know there is going to be mushrooms. In this case, Shiitake and Brown mushrooms were used. Cuts of lean veal were sautéed and sauced with a Marsala and red wine reduction. The glaze was wonderful and deeply flavored.

The mushrooms added an earthy note, and the parsnip puree a bit of sweetness. It was a nice change from potatoes. My only quibble was that the veal seemed a bit overdone, probably a casualty of our lingering at quaffing.

We had two wines with this course. **The 2012 Swanson Napa Valley Merlot** was structured and a bit tannic, while the **2013 Escarpment Pinot Noir** was softer. Steve Hipple asked the group which wine they preferred, and the majority selected the Merlot.

It was right about now that we all discovered the tragic death of **London Wilton** (Patti Hipple), the woman everyone loved to loathe. I must say, no one was crying. Although her body was dumped in the Ballroom, that is not where she was murdered, nor was she murdered in the adjacent rooms. We had now moved into the Post Murder phase of the game.

Our **Third Course** was **Lamb Osso Bucco with Butternut Squash Ravioli, Bordelaise Sauce & Shaved Parmigiano-Reggiano**. A nice sized piece of bone-on lamb was flanked by the ravioli, sprinkled

with pomegranate seeds and topped with a red flower blossom. Nice long thin shavings of Parmesan cheese finished the dish. Rich and earthy, the lamb was quite toothsome, and the squash filling in the ravioli supported the hearty, earthy, autumn theme.

Again, we had two wines with this course. **The 2012 Bodega Teso La Monja "Almirez"** Toro hails from north west Spain. Toro is the Denominación de Origen for wines coming from Zamora. In this case it is 100% Tempranillo. Quite tannic and full bodied, I thought of pepper and black fruits. It reminded me of a Northern Rhône. It was ripe but not lush and cut through the richness of the lamb and red wine sauce. The **Orin Swift 2013 Machete** sported 15.7% alcohol, which is your first clue that it was going to be rich and lush. It was a blend of Petite Sirah, Syrah and Grenache. Instead of balancing the food out, it contributed to the richness.

Game participants were busy talking to each other, and going from table to table, trying to determine the murder weapon and gathering clues as to who the killer might be.



Dessert was a **Pear Frangipane Tart with Candied Pecans, Caramel Sauce & Chantilly Cream**. Pears were baked on the shell, topped with candied pecans, drizzled with caramel sauce with a dollop of whipped Chantilly Cream to the side. The tart had a butter crust that proved to be quite hard, too hard to break with your fork. Aside from this quirk, it was a nice way to finish, and not too sweet for the **2007 Château de Myrat Sauternes**. Our sticky matched nicely with the pear tart, as it tasted itself of pear, apple and honey from the botrytis.

We ended with all the characters coming forward and speaking (reading) their peace. Personally, I had thought the killer might be London Wilton's librarian sister, **Miss Rita Bookaday** (Liz Farmer). I thought I might not reveal the killer here in the Gazette, but thought, what the heck, she's in jail anyway! So in the end it proved to be **Ms. Sugga Ann Flower** (Jill Panzer).

Great fun was had by all for our first murder mystery. Many thanks to **Patti and Steve Hipple**, who went through much more work than usual by arranging a caterer, and carting everything for the dinner to the mansion: tables, chairs, table cloths, wine glasses, table decorations, and wine. Thanks as well to **Mona Jones**, proprietor of the Mansion, **Victoria Deuel** who ran the game, and **John Benker** and his dedicated and hard working crew who crafted a wonderful meal for us.

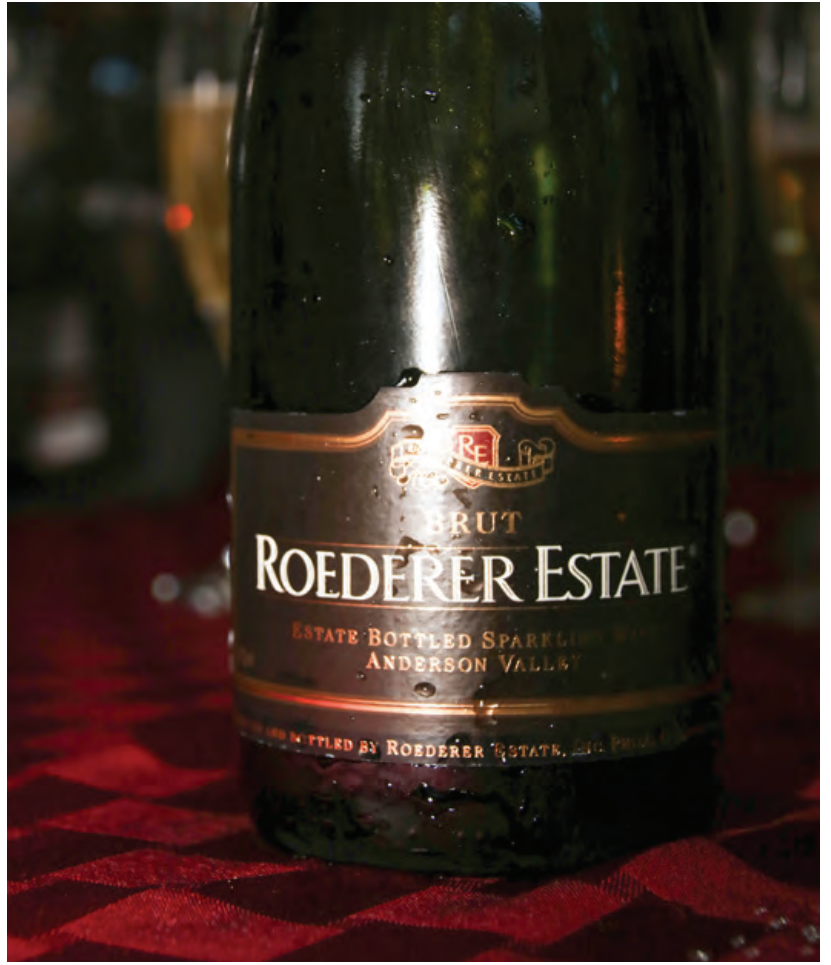












A Note from the Board: Making a good meal a Memorable experience

by Joe Goldstein

So a few weeks ago, Jill and I decided to celebrate our anniversary by going out for a nice evening without the kids. I know this begs a few questions.

1. What was she thinking?
2. How in the world did she put up with that for 20 plus years?
3. What nice restaurant would let him in wearing sweatpants, and a t-shirt ?

That being said we chose **V. Mertz** to celebrate our special occasion. Armed with my new found knowledge of wine, and wine pairing, learned from IWFS CB, and carefully listening to **Dr. John Fisher**, off we went. Keep in mind my usual hang outs include Big Fred's, DJ's Dugout, and Jimi D's.

Dining at an upscale restaurant can be intimidating enough, especially if your entertaining clients, business partners, or a significant other. When the waiter hands you an extensive wine list many thoughts go through your head. You should know that help is always closer than you think: the sommelier.

Sommeliers are trained in everything related to wines. They are required to have a great knowledge of vines, vineyards, wine-making regions, methods, and must have tasting experience. All of this would be a waste if they didn't possess a sincere desire to share all of this knowledge with us, and to help us in picking out just the right bottle. A sommelier should not only be well trained in wine and food, but should also be very skilled in customer service.

Above all, a sommelier is there to help you. Chances are the sommelier has had a lot to do with the wine list you are looking at, and he or she would be more than happy to you make sense of it, no matter what your price range is.

Many thanks to **Mathew Brown** the sommelier at V. Mertz. He was able to make a good meal into a memorable experience by recommending the perfect wine.

Remember this. The sommelier is your secret weapon. Get past your fears and call on the expertise of your sommelier. Not only will you improve your dining experience, you might just learn something that you can take with you to future meals. Think of the sommelier as the librarian of the wine cellar. They are always waiting to be called upon for reference.

When you use a sommelier to pick out wine, you're not being a demanding customer, you're taking advantage of a great opportunity.

Cheers!







CALLING ALL MEMBERS!

Calling all members! We are looking for ways to increase membership participation. One way is to contribute an article to the Gazette. If you had a particularly good meal, have a favorite recipe or wine / food story, experienced a kitchen disaster, or went to a cool wine district while on vacation, throw a few words together and share your story with the rest of the Branch. You could be a published wine and food writer!

We are also looking for members to volunteer to be event producers and plan/host an event of their choice. As we approach 2017, there are a number of event dates open.

It may seem daunting if you have never done an event before, but what you mostly need is a touch of creativity, organizational skills, and a good helping of enthusiasm. One of the best ways to get more out of your membership is to actively participate beyond just going to events.

In 2016, Connie & Gary Martin, along with Don & Kathy Wittler put on their first Branch event at the Railcar Modern American Kitchen. It turned out to be a wonderfully imaginative meal with many excellent culinary touches. Likewise, new Board Members Jill & Joe Goldstein put on their first event by themselves at the Corkscrew in the Blackstone district.

The results were delicious.

If fear of matching wines to a menu deter you, know that you will always have help. A Board Member's participation is required for every event. The Member will either help you with the wine selection or find someone who can. The Branch has made a detailed brochure on how to do an event and is an invaluable guide to let you know, step by step, what you have to do next. The Branch has a wine cellar you can draw on as well, or you can bring online wines in if something is unavailable locally.

What makes the Council Bluffs Branch fun and unique is the unusual events that we do. It is further enlivened by the participation of its members, especially new members. There is a great feeling of satisfaction and accomplishment after a successful event. It is like anything. The more you put yourself into something, the more you get out of it.

So, if you know a favorite chef, have an idea in mind, or love a particular style or district of wine and want to learn more about it, the best way is to take the plunge and make a commitment. Open event dates span from May through December of 2017. If you are interested, email me at murnantom@gmail.com or approach a Board Member. The Board looks forward to working with you!

Tom Murnan

Upcoming Council Bluffs Branch Events

Mark Your Calendars!



December 10, 2016

NOTE CHANGE OF DATE!

President's Holiday Dîner at Le Bouillon

Theme: French Comfort Food

Producers: Tom & Mary Murnan

January 22, 2017



V. Mertz

Theme: The Art of the Cellar with guest

host Mike Glasby of Courtier Wines

Producers: Jill Panzer and Mike Glasby



February 12, 2017

Omaha Field Club

Theme: Amador County wines featuring great

Zins and Rhone Varietals

Dance to the music of the 60's-80's with DA

the DJ, Dennis Aliano

Producers: Mary & Tom Murnan

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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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.

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

President: Tom Murnan

Vice President: Stacie Matz

Treasurer/Membership: Diane Forristall

Secretary: Jill Goldstein

Cellar Master: John Fischer & Patti Hipple

Gazette & Photos: Tom Murnan

Webmaster: Bob Kossow

murnantom@gmail.com

smatz1@cox.net

Diane@Forristall.us

Jill.Goldstein@KutakRock.com

jrudyf@cox.net | stephenhipple@hotmail.com

murnantom@gmail.com

bob.kossow@cox.net



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EDITOR: Tom Murnan

GRAPHIC DESIGNER: Matt Wieczorek

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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