

NOVEMBER 2020

DOLCE

The Bluffs *Food & Wine* *gazette*

EVENT REPORT:
DOLCE DINNER WITH
"WHO IS RIGHT?" TASTING



ALSO INSIDE • Winery Profile: Clarendon Hills Winery Profile: Leonetti Cellars
Jordan Vineyard's Yellow Wax Bean Salad with Grilled Fennel & Onions



PRESIDENT'S COMMENTS

Greetings to all;

Our October event was hosted by Bob and Suzanne Kossow and Gary and Jane Hagebush at Spencer's Chef Glenn Wheeler delighted attendees with a variety of fall inspired courses with paired wines. Such a fun evening! Thank you to Bob, Suzanne, Gary and Jane.

With cooler evenings, I find that my tastes turn to more Cabernet wines and since I love salads, I wondered if one could find a salad which would pair with a rich Cabernet. Consider trying the Jordan Vineyard "Yellow Wax Bean Salad" with your favorite rich, bold Cabernet. Although the yellow wax beans are the star of this salad, the grilled fennel and onions with the olives and hazelnuts bring a cohesiveness this salad so it pairs well the a full bodied cabernet. The vinaigrette is less acidic allowing even a softer aged cabernet to shine when paired with this salad. Recipe to follow. Enjoy!

Be safe and be well. 🍷

Connie Martin



Cover Photo: Cover photo: Dolce front façade. Photo by Tom Murnan

“This ‘killing them with kindness’ thing is taking way longer than I expected.”

EDITOR'S

CORNER

A big thanks to the **Dave and Tabitha Thrasher**, who organized back-to-back events in August and September. August was Stokin' Goat, and September, Dolce. The **Hipples** also co-produced the Dolce event. But for two events in a row, Dave came up with unusual themes to keep our wine minds active. This time it was to see if you agreed with the Wine Spectator's and Wine Advocate's opinions on their estimated "drink-by" dates. And, of course, the food was excellent at Dolce.



I selected two Winery Profiles this issue to coincide with our tasting wines. One was **Clarendon Hills**. Founded by **Roman Bratasiuk**, an Australian government scientist who had no formal wine training, he started his winemaking on a shoestring while still working his government job. He made deals with vineyard owners until he had enough money to buy his own vineyards. Eventually, he quit his biochemist job and started his own winery. It was the first Australian wine to charge \$100 per bottle, and it became one of the first Australian cult wines.

The other selected wine, **Leonetti Cellars**, didn't arrive because Dave had checked an online box on a previous order to send that wine in a temperature controlled container, but forgot to uncheck it for the present order. So our wine arrived well cooled but a week late. Scrambling, Dave dug up enough **Pahlmeyer Merlot** from his dad, brother and himself to use in the tasting. But the Wine Profile had already been written in anticipation of the tasting. Not one to waste an interesting story, read about Washington State's early cult wine. It is still an interesting story, even if Dave did forget to un-check that box!

Our President has been interested in a pairing of a Cabernet Sauvignon with a fall inspired salad. She found an excellent **salad** which would pair with a Cabernet and has tried it. Pairing a Cab to salad would not be my first thought, but Connie says it works.

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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.



I HATE IT WHEN PEOPLE ACT ALL INTELLECTUAL & TALK ABOUT MOZART WHILE THEY'VE NEVER EVEN SEEN ONE OF HIS PAINTINGS."

Tom Murnan

Event Report:

Dolce Dinner with “Who Is Right?” Tasting

STORY & PHOTOS BY TOM MURNAN

Another unusual theme from the wine mind of Dave Thrasher, who seems to have a knack for creating an interesting twist in his events. But more on that a bit later. Dolce is always one of my favorite event hosts. Chef Anthony Kueper bought the restaurant 3½ years ago, and quality meals just kept coming, getting better every year. We maxed out on reservations with 36 signing up, two being guests. When I arrived early for photos, our hosts, Patti & Steve Hipple and Tabitha & Dave Thrasher were busy preparing for the sit down tasting, pouring out exactly 2 ounces of our four wines which would be served blind.

Appetizers and quaffing wines came first, however. There were three large mounds of delectable charcuterie: **Mortadella, Tuscan style Coppa, and House Made 2 year old Prosciutto.** What is the difference between Coppa and Prosciutto you might ask? Indeed, they looked very similar on the appetizer table. The two are very similar, but coppa is not brined as ham (prosciutto) is. Green olives completed the aperitivo course. We had our choice between two quaffers: Costal EQ, a grassy Sauvignon Blanc from Chile, and Ringbolt Cabernet Sauvignon 2013 from the Margaret River area of Australia.

Once seated Patti and Dave explained the theme. Basically, we were to write down the drink-by date of each wine. When did we expect the wine to be over the hill? After a half hour of tasting and discussion with tablemates, Dave would reveal what the experts from the Wine Spectator (WS) and the Wine Advocate (WA) thought. I have to disclose that my personal bias is that we drink most wines way too early, and find fault with them if they are not as bright and perky as when newly

bottled. To me, just because they lose their first blush of youth is no reason to condemn them to be drunk early. There was one change from the advertised lineup, however. We were supposed to have a Leonetti Merlot 2005, but because of a few technical glitches, the wine had not shipped as anticipated. And wouldn't you know it, I wrote a Winery Profile on Leonetti, perhaps the first cult winery in Washington state. The substituted Pahlmeyer Merlot 2007, after some last minute scrambling, was a great pick, and no one complained about that choice!

Dave revealed the wines. **1. Pahlmeyer Merlot 2007: WS 2011-2015; WA 2018-2030.** My opinion was another 10 years, so I agreed with the WA. A show of hands indicated that the majority agreed with WA.

2. Château De Fieuzal Pessac Leognan [the better areas in Graves] **2009: WS 2013-2021; WA 2013-2037.** I thought that the fruit was likely to dry out before the tannins and so drink-up within 3 years. I was on the side of the WA but did not think the wine would last until 2037 and still be enjoyable. The show of hands was a 50-50 split.

3. Ferrer Bobet Vinyes Villes Priorat 2007: WS 2013-2017; WA 2014-2025. I opined that it would be pleasurable for 8-10 more years, going 5 years beyond the WA. A resounding majority favored the WA.

4. Clarendon Hills Moritz Syrah 2002: WS 2014-2015; WA 2004-2021. My opinion was another 8 years, with which neither the WA or WS agreed. The majority agreed with the WS. ▶



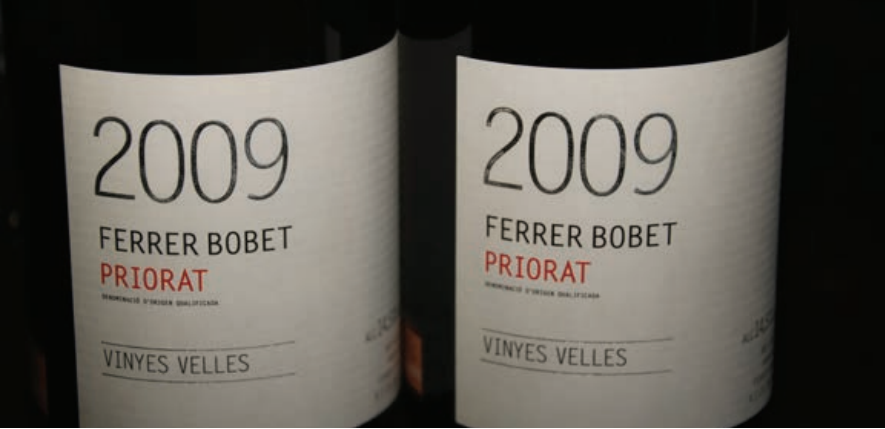












◀ This was a good example of my opinion that this branch's tasters prefer young wines and are confounded by old ones. I just had a 1989 Hermitage La Chapelle, a Syrah based wine like the Clarendon Hills, and it was magnificent. I'm not saying the Moritz was magnificent, but I thought it could last longer than one more year. You get more complexity and nuances with an old wine, with resolved tannins and better balance, even though the fruit has faded from its perky stage. It takes some getting used to if you only consume younger wines. But don't be too quick to discount them because they are turning more mellow. So, I loved the exercise. There are no right or wrong answers, and the experts are not always right. If one trend was brought forth it is the WS tends to like their wines young, while the WA gives a longer window of opportunity.

On with dinner! Our First Course was **Scallops with Vanilla Butter Sauce and Beet, Orange & Sprouts**. The scallops were nicely seared on top but not the bottom. The Vanilla Butter was eye opening, attention getting and unusual. I must say I have never had anything like it before, with its ethereal vanilla scent. On the palate, it jumped out at you with its power and essence of vanilla bean flavor. It also made the scallops seem quite rich. However, we were brought back to earth by the al dente beet slices topped by two orange sections and sprouts, all of which cut the richness noted above with its earthiness and citrus flavor. Nicely done, Chef Anthony. **The Hartford Court "Four Hearts" Chardonnay 2017** was a spot on match. Its acid also helped to cut the butter's richness. Noticeably oaky and forceful, it was a well balanced Chardonnay.

The Second Course found us with **Duck Confit with Sweet Truffle Carrot Risotto, Herb Emulsion and Egg Yolk**. Shredded duck which was cooked in its own fat (confit) sat atop a bed of truffled carrot risotto. The "sauce" was an egg yolk, which provided an umami note, topped with a herb emulsion. The light bodied duck needed a lighter wine, so the **Brick House "Les Dijonnais" Pinot Noir 2015** was just the ticket. The earthiness in the duck paired beautifully with the earthiness of the Pinot, a classic companion. Dijonnais means it was made in a French style of Burgundy, the home of Pinot Noir.

Our Third Course was **Imperial Wagyu Strip with Potato Pave, Brussel Sprouts, Oyster Mushroom and Demi-Glace**. The pave was amazing: moist, rich colorful with its orange colored sweet potatoes alternating with layers of regular potatoes. The steak was thick, on the large side, and had intense beefy, salt-of-the-earth flavor, with its center still having some pinkness. I rarely have oyster mushrooms as they seem pretty hard to find in Omaha. These seemed to be deep fat fried and complimented the steak with its earthy flavors. Continuing the earthy theme was the Brussels sprouts, which were roasted perfectly. Our Round Pond Estate Rutherford Cabernet Sauvignon 2012 was up to the job of integrating all these assertive flavors with aplomb.

Dessert Course was an **Apple Pear Tart with House Made Almond Ice Cream, Smoked Almond and Foie Gras Caramel**. The tart had the apples in the starring role with the pears as a chorus in the background. Cinnamon was the prominent flavor while the caramel sauce added complexity. I have to say I did not detect any foie gras flavors. The pastry was a touch drying but very light. The Domaine Huet Vouvray Le Mont Molleux 2016 was moderately sweet and low acid. Molleux is the indication that it is a quite sweet wine, although this was more like a Champagne extra dry, more off-dry than very sweet. It had flavors of pears and honey that went nicely with the dessert. Neither the dessert nor the wine was intensely sweet, so this combination worked.

Thanks to **Dave Thrasher** who ferreted out our tasting wines. It is no easy feat to find older vintages. If the wines were not on the older side, this effort to identify drink-by date would be academic, a mere unfounded opinion. But with some actual age under their belts, one could opine on their length of life. **Patti Hipple** sourced the dinner wines with her usual thoroughness. I very much enjoyed the Vouvray at the end, a wine that is a bit out of fashion now but delicious none-the-less. And don't forget **Tabitha T** and **Steve H**, who helped assemble everything just before show time. Thanks as well to **Chef Anthony Kueper** and his crew who gave up their Sunday off to produce a memorable meal and great service. 🍷

WINERY PROFILE: *Clarendon Hills*

BY TOM MURNAN



Clarendon Hills was founded in 1990 by **Roman Bratasiuk**, who had no previous wine experience. Situated in the McLaren Vale wine region of southern Australia, not so far from Adelaide, Clarendon Hills has an interesting founding story. Roman was a biochemist working for the Australian Government who loved great wine. With his scientific background, he felt that he could make his own great wine. He knew what he liked, and that was French wines from the Rhône valley and Bordeaux. He began searching out old vine vineyards. The Clarendon township area was

selected because many immigrants in the 1880s brought with them French pre-clonal cuttings. These are cuttings where the vines' own rootstock is used. They did not need to graft American rootstock due to the root louse, phylloxera. The vines flourished and wine was made there ever since. One day in 1989, Roman knocked on the door of a grower whose fruit he liked, and they made a handshake agreement that he would buy the fruit from the upcoming harvest next year.

On February 24th, 1990, part time winemaker Roman Bratasiuk showed up unannounced at the door of this farmer at 6:00 am and informed him he was going to harvest the grapes. All he had with him was a bucket and pruning shears. he began harvesting the field himself, working until 9:00 that night. He returned the next day to finish the job. Those grapes were Syrah, but he repeated the process for two other vineyards which had Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot. He would repeat the practice of using single vineyards in the future, and was the first winery in Australia to offer single vineyard bottlings.

THE VINES FLOURISHED AND WINE WAS MADE THERE EVER SINCE. ONE DAY IN 1989, ROMAN KNOCKED ON THE DOOR OF A GROWER WHOSE FRUIT HE LIKED, AND THEY MADE A HANDSHAKE AGREEMENT THAT HE WOULD BUY THE FRUIT FROM THE UPCOMING HARVEST NEXT YEAR.

The wine making that first vintage was quite primitive as well. Empty bottles were used to crush the fruit, which was transferred by bucket to three old dairy tanks he bought for \$100.00. There was no temperature controlled tanks, and just the wild yeast on the grapes themselves fermented these first batches of Clarendon wine. The wines were pressed in a borrowed basket press. Three third-hand used barrels were used to age the wine. The wine turned out to be delicious, and sold out. ▶



Roman Bratasiuk

CLARENDON HILLS



ASTRALIS

Astralis features the Southern Cross constellation



Adam and Alex Bratasiuk

◀ He used the profits to buy more equipment as well as a tin shed to store them in. A local newspaper ran a story with the headline “Tin Shed Wine Takes on the World” giving him some free advertisement. Aiming for purity and perfection, every year he would tweak his skills in the vineyard as well as the winery. All the vineyards are on dry ground, surviving by what watering Nature gives them.

ROMAN BRATASIUK FELT HE MADE HIS BEST WINE WHICH WAS OUT OF THIS WORLD, SO HE REBRANDED HIS \$30.00 1994 SYRAH TO HIS MOST FAMOUS LABEL, ASTRALIS, (LATIN FOR PERTAINING TO THE STARS) AND RAISED THE PRICE TO \$100.00 A BOTTLE. THE WINE SOLD OUT.

The wines continued to sell, and in 1994 Bratasiuk gave up his government laboratory job to work full time at Clarendon Hills and hired his first worker. He felt he made his best wine which was out of this world, so he rebranded his \$30.00 1994 Shiraz to his most famous label, **Astralis**, (Latin for pertaining to the stars) and raised the price to \$100.00 a bottle. The wine sold out. It was the first bottle of Australian wine to be priced at \$100.00. The wine continued to be made by hand.

In 1996, Robert Parker Jr. named him the wine producer of the year. This turned Astralis into a cult wine. A few issues later, The Wine Advocate commented about the 1994 Astralis and said “This is the hottest wine in Australian wine circles, as it came out ahead of two great vintages of Henschke and Penfolds’ Grange in a recent tasting. If readers can believe it, it is a bigger denser, more concentrated wine than the Grange.” Parker awarded the 2010 and 2015 Astralis 100 points, and the 2008, 2006, 2005, 2003, 2002, 2001 all received 99 points.

The Scandinavian publisher of FINE had a group of 15 international Masters of Wine select the greatest thousand bottles of wine from 1727 to 2006. The Astralis 1994 and 1996 were included in the list. The Wine Enthusiast selected Clarendon Hills as the New World Winery of 2006.

Roman continues to be an ambassador for Clarendon Hills, presenting his wines to various countries. His sons Alex and Adam now work with him. He prefers to use the French word for Syrah rather than the Australian Shiraz, and he uses a French like classification system to categorize his own wines. This is somewhat recent because somewhere around 2014 the Astralis changed from Shiraz to Syrah.

Premier Grand Cru is the Astralis label.

Grand Cru are Domaine Clarendon BDX {Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot}; Piggott Range Syrah; Onkaparinga Syrah; Onkaparinga Grenache; Romas Grenache; Hickinbotham Syrah; Hickinbotham Cabernet Sauvignon; Brookman Syrah.



Premier Cru are Domaine Clarendon Grenache; Liandra Syrah; Moritz Syrah; Kangrarilla Grenache; Blewitt Springs Grenache; Sandown Cabernet Sauvignon; Brookman Cabernet Sauvignon and Brookman Merlot.

Cru level includes Bakers Gully Syrah; Hickinbotham Grenache; Clarendon Grenache; and Liandra Mouvedre. 🍷

Sources: Robert Parker Wine Advocate; <https://clarendonhills.com.au/>; [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Clarendon_Hills_\(wine\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Clarendon_Hills_(wine))



WINERY PROFILE: *Leonetti Cellar* BY TOM MURNAN

*Chris Figgins at
Leonetti Vineyards*

Leonetti Cellar is a subscription based winery founded in 1977 by Gary and Nancy Figgins. It was the first commercial winery in the Walla Walla area. Most of its wines are sold directly to their mailing list of customers. But the family has deep roots in the Washington AVA. Francesco and Rosa Leonetti emigrated from Calabria, Italy and established a farm near Walla Walla in 1906. Gary planted Riesling and Cabernet Sauvignon cuttings in 1974 on his grandparent's farm, and fermented the grapes on their dirt floored farmhouse,



Stone house built by the Figgins



Chris Figgins

where he would experiment in fermentation and winemaking. The name Leonetti Cellars comes from this relationship, then, of grandparents and grandson. It was the beginnings of wine making in an area that rotated crops between wheat and peas, not grape growing.

Gary had an uncompromising pursuit of excellence and guided the winery to great success, even though he had a full time job as a machinist at Continental Can. He would work on building machinery needed for the winery after hours. Twice a year, wine was taken to Seattle to sell to wine shops and restaurants. The Walla Walla winemakers are a tight community and they would share information with the likes of L'Ecole 41 and

Woodward Canyon. Gary worked with various vineyards to buy fruit. His style was early drinking with 100% new toasty American oak barrels, vanilla and caramel flavors.

Chris Figgins, son of Gary and Nancy, took over the estate in 2001. At the time Leonetti was producing about 4000 cases of cult status wine a year, mostly sold on the mailing list. He graduated from Washington State university in 1996, studying architecture, horticulture and engineering. He loved vineyard management and location and planted a Cabernet Franc vineyard by himself. One day he was out fishing and saw a sign for a 16 acre lot. He pulled the sign and convinced his dad to buy the parcel. ➤



Gary & Nancy Figgins, founders



◀ It was the first vineyard on Mill Creek Road, now filled with other vineyards from various wineries. Chris expanded the number of vineyards. Chris changed the wine style from his father's use of 100% new American oak to 60-70% new French oak and some clay amphorae.

Less approachable young, the wines end up being earthy, juicy and terroir oriented.

Current wines include their flagship Reserve line, a Bordeaux blend coming from three or four estate owned vineyards and made to cellar 20 to 30 years (the Wine Advocate awarded the 2010 Reserve a perfect 100 points); Cabernet Sauvignon, another Bordeaux blend; Merlot that aims for Pomerol type finesse; Sangiovese; Aglianico, a new line of noble red wine hailing from the southern Italy area; and Single Vineyard reds. These include the estate owned vineyards of Loess, Molly Roller, Serra Pedace (the village the Leonettis came from), and Mill Creek. 🍷

Sources: <http://leonetticellar.com/family.html>; <https://www.winespectator.com/articles/the-prince-of-walla-walla-49235>; <https://www.winespectator.com/articles/where-s-the-beef-42617>

Recipe

JORDAN VINEYARD'S YELLOW WAX BEAN SALAD WITH GRILLED FENNEL & ONIONS

INGREDIENTS

1½ cups beans
1 fennel bulb, thinly sliced
6 grilled cippolini onions
⅓ cup hazelnuts, cracked
½ cup Niçoise olives, pitted and halved
½ nasturtium petals
½ nasturtium leaves, torn
¼ basil leaves and blossoms
2 ounces hazelnut vinaigrette
Kosher salt to taste
Fleur de sel to taste

For the hazelnut vinaigrette

2 ounces sherry vinegar
1 Meyer lemon, zested and juiced
1 shallot, minced
1 tsp Dijon mustard
1 tsp raw honey
2 tsp apple juice
6 ounces hazelnut oil
6 ounces Jordan Extra Virgin Olive Oil

For the beans

¾ cup yellow wax beans
¾ haricots verts or romano beans
2½ quarts water
Salt for seasoning

For the grilled cippolini onions

6 cippolini onions
1 ounce Jordan Extra Virgin Olive Oil

For the grilled fennel

1 fennel bulb
1 lemon, juiced
2 Tbsp Jordan Extra Virgin Olive Oil
Kosher salt to taste
Freshly ground black pepper to taste

Continued on the Next page ▶

INSTRUCTIONS

Serves 6

◀ In a non-reactive bowl, whisk together all of the ingredients for the hazelnut vinaigrette but the oils. Slowly drizzle the oils while whisking to emulsify. Reserve.

Prepare an ice bath. Remove the stems and strings from the yellow wax beans and haricots verts, leaving a 1-inch tail for aesthetic reasons. Bring 2½ quarts water and salt to a rapid boil. Blanch the beans. Immediately shock beans in the ice bath, retaining bright color, texture and flavor. When cooled through, remove beans from ice and keep chilled until service. Beans may be blanched in the morning and refrigerated, but they should be cooked as close to service as possible.

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Roast the hazelnuts for 10 minutes or until they are fragrant and take on color. Remove from the oven and dump hazelnuts onto a cooled sheet pan. Rub off approximately half of the skins with a clean dish towel and reserve.

Meanwhile, heat a cast iron pan over medium-high heat. Add the onions and sear. Transfer the onions to a sheet pan and finish baking in the oven at 350 degrees until soft (about 8-10 min). Remove from the oven, allow to cool, then skin and store in olive oil or a portion of the vinaigrette for up to 1 week.

Heat grill to medium-high. Peel the thick outer layer from the fennel bulb and carefully slice on a mandoline, approximately 2mm thick. Reserve the slices in acidulated ice water (ice water with 1 Tbsp of lemon juice). When ready to grill, remove the fennel from the water and pat dry. Reserve the water. Lightly toss in a bowl with 2 tsp of the olive oil and black pepper. Place the fennel on the hottest part of the grill and allow the fennel to smoke for approximately 1 minute. Turn and cook for an additional 30 seconds. Remove the fennel and quickly plunge into the existing ice water to arrest cooking and refresh. Remove from the water, pat dry and toss in a bowl with the remaining lemon juice and olive oil. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Reserve.

To serve, toss all of the ingredients together in a non-reactive bowl and season this yellow wax beans salad with salt and pepper. Garnish with additional nasturtium petals, basil and fleur de sel.

Wine Pairing

The tannins on the hazelnut skins, charred fennel and roasted cippolini onions all complement the natural grape tannins and the oak barrel's tannins in Jordan Cabernet Sauvignon. The less acidic vinaigrette rounds out this already stellar Cabernet Sauvignon food pairing. If you are enjoying this yellow wax beans salad recipe with an older vintage of Cabernet Sauvignon, reduce the acid in the vinaigrette to allow this softer aged wine to shine. 🍷



Source: <https://www.jordanwinery.com/culinary/recipes/yellow-wax-bean-salad-grilled-fennel-onions>



**UPCOMING
COUNCIL BLUFFS
BRANCH EVENTS**

Mark Your Calendars!

**NOV.
14**

SPEZIA

California vs. Oregon Pinot Noir
Producers: Tom & Mary Murnan

**DEC.
6**

**J. GILBERT'S
RESTAURANT**

Producers: Connie and Gary Martin

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