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The Bluffs *Food & Wine* *gazette*

Event Report: **White vs. Red—Who Wins?**



ALSO INSIDE:

RECIPE: ROASTED EGGPLANT & ELEPHANT GARLIC BISQUE,
HEIRLOOM TOMATO JAM, BASIL OIL & ROASTED RED BELL
PEPPER BY CHEF BRENDEN BROWN

TIN CITY, PASO ROBLES, CALIFORNIA: DESPARADA WINES



EDITOR'S

CORNER

We had a fascinating time with our **White vs. Red—Who Wins?** event at Happy Hollow Club. Hosts **David & Diane Hays** and **Patti & Steve Hipple** had us rethink many people's default wine position: that red wine is always the better choice. But not so fast. Let's test that assumption. Guest speaker **Rick Plambeck** of Old Vine Wine & Spirits was our guide from the first course to dessert, we had five examples to savor and decide which color wine worked better. You will just have to read the event report, but let me say that the white wines did quite well, thank you.

The second course we had **Chef Brenden Brown's** Roasted Eggplant & Elephant Garlic Bisque, Heirloom Tomato Jam, Basil Oil & Roasted Red Bell Pepper. That was so delicious, irrespective of the wine, that I asked for the recipe. This one will be added to our recipe index the next time we update it. Plus, it is friendly enough to execute for the home chef. It would help if you grow basil, like I do, when you go to make the Basil Oil, since it asks for a pound of basil leaves.

The larger Paso Robles area is one of California's fastest growing wine destinations. They now have over 200 wineries, a good number of them you would classify as boutique wineries (2,000 cases or less). Since about 2013, an area just south west of Paso Robles about 3 miles, is **Tin City**, a name given to the area in the 1920s because of the corrugated tin buildings found there. It is a little industrial park, really, about 2 square blocks. The area has 22 wineries, a cider house, a distillery and a brewery, besides other businesses and food outlets. It would be a pleasant way to while away the day while easily going to the different wineries. Everything is within walking distance. The first winery I went to was **Despada**, who is owned by a woman who is also the winemaker. Read about her unusual wines.

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**THEY SAY
EVERY PIECE OF
CHOCOLATE YOU
EAT SHORTENS
YOUR LIFE BY
TWO MINUTES.
I'VE DONE THE
MATH. SEEMS I
DIED IN 1537."**

— IT'S TIME FOR SOME
LEXOPHILES

Cover Photo:

Rising Moon over Happy Hollow Club.

Photo by Tom Murnan

Event Report:

WHITE VS. RED— WHO WINS?

Story & Photos by Tom Murnan

I have to admit, I was intrigued by the wine theme of this event. We are so conditioned into thinking that the red wine has to be the better match with food that it just becomes our default thinking position. But that 'taint necessarily so. I had the perfect example the other day when Mary made thick cut pork chops on bone with fresh peaches. Fresh Colorado peaches that were at their seasonal peak. So good. So I immediately thought that Pinot Noir would be the best match. But I had some Alsatian Pinot Gris with appetizers, so I had a glass of that as well. I was astounded that the Pinot Gris was the superior wine with that dish. The peach flavors of the Pinot Gris married seamlessly with the Colorado peaches for a wine match of the month for me. It was incredible, and left the Pinot Noir in the dust, a far back second place.

There was a lot of thought that went into this event. And practice as well. Our hosts, the Hipple, the Hayes, and Rick Plambeck had a practice meal with Chef Brenden Brown, who crafted our event dinner and worked out all the early culinary kinks. Plus, they had the wine guidance of Rick Plambeck, owner of Old Vine Wine & Spirit, who was our vinous and culinary guide and speaker for the evening. I, for one, was excited to attend this event which gave us unique wining and dining experience, as well as education to boot...one of the reasons we all joined. We all need more educated in these subjects. We had 32 sign up, which included 2 guests.

Not on the menu was a pleasant surprise

when we got our nametags: a **White Port Spritzer**. Those who attended the IWFS Douro Festival were treated to this delightful and thirst quenching combination of White Port, tonic water a mint leaf and orange zest. In this case, the White Port was **Sandeman Apitiv Reserve** non-vintage. A nice little extra. Thanks Patti. We didn't have quaffing and appetizers, so we proceeded to our assigned table.

Rick was our culinary and vinous guide for each course. His overarching advice, should you try this kind of red v. white event at home, was to **pair the acidity of the wine with the food, not the flavors**. The acidity will cut the richness of a dish.

He started with the **Domaine Carneros Brut 2017** by giving a dissertation on making Champagne. The AOC of Champagne has international legal rights to its name and label designated words. Only wine from Champagne, France, can call itself Champagne. All other bubbly is sparkling wine, (or vin mousseux in French) not Champagne. Then the designation on the label must say **Méthod Champenoise** if the wine comes from France, but **Méthode Traditionnelle** if your bubbly came outside France. Méthod Champenoise (MC) means the secondary fermentation occurred in the same bottle as the first fermentation. The secondary fermentation is what carbonates the wine and gives it bubbles. Méthode Traditionnelle means the same thing, but also that the wine was made outside France. There are other production methods as well. **Charmat** (think Prosecco)

is the way they put in bubbles the cheap way, in bulk, in a tank. **The Transfer Method**, and the **Continuous Method** (Germany), the **Ancestral Method**, and **Carbonation Methods** are all different ways to put bubbles in the bottle, all inferior to MC, but beyond the scope of this article. The MC method gives a bready, yeasty flavor to the wine. Then the lees (dead yeast cells in the form of sediment) in the bottom break apart and yield toasty, buttery flavors. The lees are removed by riddling, which moves the sediment to the neck by twisting the bottle and bringing it more vertical into the bottle's neck. When it is time to put a cork in the wine, the lees are frozen then expelled.

Our red wine comparison is **Château d'Esclans Rosé Rock Angel 2018**. From Sasha Lichine, it is the same winery that does Whispering Angel, but this is their high end rosé. It gets a bit of oak to give it palate weight, so it is not just a high acid rosé. It is a rosé from Provence, which are usually a light salmon color. The two grapes used in this are Grenache and Rollo, or its other spelling, Rolle. Rollo/rolle is better known in this country as Vermentino, which contributes bright acidity. But it is not an acid bomb. The sur lie aging (keeping the lees in the bottle for a time) helps reduce the sharpness of the acidity. The winemaker then does **bâttonage**, or stirring the lees to increase flavor. Again, the lees are dead yeast that falls to the bottom. The Grenache gives it color.▶















◀Whew. That was a long 16 minute tutorial I videoed, so I was starving and thirsty! Our **First Course** was **Truffle Fries in Cones, Baby Swiss & Strawberries, and Fried Chicken Lolli Pop**. During the practice dinner, it was decided to increase the truffle flavoring on the fries. I was all in on that decision. Filling but delicious, I ate every fry. The Chicken Lolli Pop was a drumstick of a smaller chicken, fried and served room temperature. A square of baby Swiss cheese was topped by a single strawberry. The better wine? In my estimation it was the sparkling wine. Champagne, or vin mousseux, works very well with fried foods, the chicken drumstick in this case. The rosé had a bit of sweetness to it that seemed to distract rather than enhance, in my estimation, although the acid was high.

Onward to our **Second Course**. We were served **Roasted Eggplant & Elephant Garlic Bisque, Heirloom Tomato Jam, Basil Oil & Roasted Red Bell Pepper**. This turned out to be a rich bisque with a nice swirl of basil oil, which added quite a bit of basil flavor. Bits of red floating atop were the roasted red bell pepper. I asked Chef Brenden for the recipe and he agreed to give it to us for our recipe index. Our wines were as follows. **Cliff Lede Sauvignon Blanc 2019** and **Seghesio Cortina Zinfandel 2015**.

Rick told us that the **Sauvignon Blanc** was the main pairing wine. Besides the Sauvignon Blanc grape there were also Semillon 13% and Sauvignon Vert* 7%. It is 68% French oak, then finished in stainless steel, and harvested at night to preserve freshness. Semillon lends complexity to the herbal, vegetal, and citrusy Sauvignon Blanc. The Semillon gives the wine a mouth-feel, a creaminess. It's not just all acidity. There is a **distinction between high alcohol and a high acidity on the palate**. Acidity is detected on the edges of the tongue, while alcohol is felt at the back of the throat. You feel that malic acid, which is like a green apple taste, on the edges of the tongue. The acid cuts the creaminess of the bisque and makes it go great with the dish. Light and refreshing, the wine goes with a creamy dish. There is some vegetable notes. Used French oak was utilized, which is more moderate than American oak, and allows the wine to soften. [*Sauvignon Vert is not related to Sauvignon Blanc. It is an Italian grape called Friulano. Ed]

The **Seghesio Zinfandel** is 100% Zinfandel from Dry Creek Valley. It was selected because it has bright acidity. It mirrors the Sauvignon Blanc in that respect. It is not a jammy, baked-fruit zin because Dry Creek has

higher acidity. It is cherry and tart berry. Red fruit. Your pairing wine should be lighter, more red fruits, less oak and less tannin, because the bigger you go, the harder it is to pair. Cabernets, with its heavy oak, needs ribeyes, porterhouse, tomahawk steak and the like, but their pairing options are smaller. That's why the French wines, with their higher acid, are easier to pair to food. When the room was asked for a favorite, it was split, but more voted for the Sauvignon Blanc. Personally, I felt the only thing that worked with this zin was the high acidity.

The **Third Course** was **Ginger & Lavender Muscovy Duck Breast, Vanilla, Soaked Cherries, Wild Rice, Honey, Scallions**. Our wines? The **Pride Mountain Viognier 2019** and **Domaine Drouhin Rose Rock Zepherine Pinot Noir 2015**. Rick asked what wine would you think would be the default wine to select? One would think the Pinot Noir, but it is actually the Viognier was the recommended wine. Pride Mountain is 2000 feet above the valley floor, which puts the vineyard above the fog line. It gets a long, even hang time because it doesn't get the heat spikes the valley floor has. The mornings are warmer and the afternoons cooler at 2000 feet. They also gets 65 inches of winter rain. They have to worry about canopy containment as in the spring the vines show great vigor, too much vigor really, because they are always cutting fruit back. Not a lot of oak enhancement in this Viognier. Who would have thought a white would be so good with the duck? The rice has a savory component, as does the fat of the duck. The acid helps cut through all that. The soaked cherries were a nice touch both for the duck, which always appreciates a fruit, and the Viognier.

The **Domaine Drouhin Rose Rock Zepherine Pinot Noir** is 100% Pinot Noir, so no blending. Oregon has the strictest criteria for labeling in the USA. If the label says Oregon, it has to have 100% Oregon fruit. To have a varietal on the label, the percentage of the grape has to be 90%. If an AVA is on an Oregon label, like the Willamette Valley, or Ribbon Ridge, it has to have 95% that varietal of fruit in the bottle. In the USA, it only has to be 75%. Mary Murnan won the prize on guessing the correct percentage of Pinot Noir on this one: a nice waiters corkscrew from Silver Oak / Twomey. Zepherine is the name of a rose variety. The baked fruits and candied components went quite well. The room was split about 50/50 on their favorite for this pairing.

Our **Fourth** and final meat **Course** was a hefty **Braised Osso Bucco, Foraged Mushrooms, Wilted Spinach, Fine Herbs, Cele-**



riac "Risotto", Toasted Pecans. There was a lot of meat on that bone. The veal sat on a bed of celeriac and wilted spinach. A sauce covered the meat, which was crowned with pecans covered by celery leaves. A great presentation.

Paul Hobbs Russian River Chardonnay 2018 was the chosen white. Hobbs was chosen because they make a great chardonnay, and this bottling is one step above the usual bottling. It has a little more complexity and body to it to help it stand up to the veal. 43% new French oak was used. They do native malolactic fermentation with bâtonnage to increase lees contact with the wine which increases the wines richness and creaminess. The malolactic is where the buttery component comes in. Native malolactic fermentation means it happens naturally, and is not inoculated, but there is no control since it happens naturally, and you have to watch it daily to see that nothing crazy is going on. The wine is not overly oaked.

The **Hour Glass Blueline Merlot 2018** is a Bordeaux blend, but it has 86% Merlot, and was the recommended pairing. Blueline means there were two streams named Blueline running through the vineyard, and it deposited shale, which makes the wine a little more acidic. It is more of a red than blue fruit, and it is not a jammy Merlot either. It has red fruit notes to it. When you see tints of blue, the acid is lower. When you see tints of orange when swirling, the acid is higher and the age of the wine is older. A fun tasting trick. You can distinguish age and acid. 2018 was a bumper crop in Napa, moderately warm, so they could harvest when they wanted to, not when they had to. Merlot was overwhelmingly the favorite pairing of the two, but the chardonnay did surprisingly well.

Dessert found us with **Pistachio & Orange Infused Chocolate Dipped Crème Brûlée, Raspberry Coulis, Toasted Pistachios**. Surrounded by a collar of chocolate, the

orange flavored crème Brûlée with pistachio bits within had a smear of raspberry coulis under one end of the circle, and an edible tube sitting on whipped cream.

It was a good thing they did a practice dinner because the original dessert, a rhubarb tarte, was not a good match for the sauternes. It made the sauternes taste bitter and austere. So Rick had to change the dessert by adding a fat component, the crème brûlée. It goes to show how complex this event was.

Our duo of wines were **Château Coutet Sauternes Barsac 2009** and **Quinta da Romaneira Late Bottled Port 2012**. The recommended wine was the Sauternes. There are 5 villages in Sauternes: Sauternes, Barsac, Fargues, Bommes, and Preignac. Sauternes is affected botrytis, a noble rot, which gives it a honeyed flavor. The fruit is handpicked because the noble rot progresses slowly.

Quinta da Romaneira is made of 50% Touriga Nacional, 30% Touriga Francesa, 10% Tinta Roriz and 10% Tinto Cão. The Late Bottle Vintage procedure speeds up a ruby port to mimic vintage port by oxidizing it in a barrel for a 5

year period. Vintage port is only aged in barrel 2 years, limiting the oxidization process. It is finished with a brandy called Aguardente. The raspberry coulis would match the LBV. The group overwhelmingly voted for Sauternes as the better pair.

Many thanks to **Rick Plambeck** for being our guide tonight. Thanks as well to **Patti & Steve Hipple**, and **David & Diane Hays** for going the extra mile to actually have a practice meal to determine how everything would pair. Of course all this would not have happened on such a high level of achievement without the capable guidance and cooking skills of **Chef Brenden Brown**. The service staff did an outstanding job of keeping us on track, preparing the wines, pouring the wine, clearing the glasses, and delivering the food. Thanks again, all. 🍷



Recipe:

BY CHEF BRENDEN BROWN



YIELD: 6 TO 8 SERVINGS



ROASTED EGGPLANT & GARLIC BISQUE

*1 large eggplant (about 1 pound)
Kosher salt
Fresh Cracked Black Pepper
1 each whole head of garlic
Olive Oil
1 ¾ cup chopped Red Onions
½ cup Chopped Fresh Basil
1 T Chopped Fresh Thyme
1/2 tsp Red Pepper flakes
3 cups of Seeded Chopped tomatoes
4 ½ cups chicken Stock*

Preheat oven to 370° F. Trim ends of eggplant, and leave skin on. Cut in to ¼ inch rounds, sprinkle with salt and pepper. Place on Paper towels for about 30 minutes to remove extra water.

Cut top of garlic Head, drizzle with olive oil, salt, and pepper. Wrap in foil, leaving a small vent on top. Place Eggplant, and garlic on greased baking tray and roast for 15 minutes. Remove eggplant and continue roasting garlic for another 35 minutes, or until soft. Chop eggplant into 1 inch pieces.

In a large soup pot, heat 1 T olive oil over medium heat, add onions, basil, thyme and pepper flakes. Sauté for about 5 minutes, or until onion is translucent. Squeeze out garlic head, making sure the peel does not go into the pot. Add eggplant, tomatoes, and stock. Bring to boil. Reduce Heat, cover, and simmer to 10 to 12 minutes.

Remove from pot and transfer to a blender or food processor. Do in small batches and use the broth to adjust consistency.

Season to taste.

BASIL OIL

*1 pound of basil, stems removed
2 cups Olive oil*

In medium pot, heat oil to 325F. Fill blender canister with basil leaves. Once oil is to temp, pour over basil. It will splatter so work fast. Place blender canister on blender, put lid on. Cover lid with towel and hold tight. Turn blender on low speed, then gradually turn to high. Run blender for 2-3 minutes or until oil is bright green. Pour oil through fine mesh strainer and/ or cheesecloth. Allow to cool. Good under refrigeration for one week.

HEIRLOOM TOMATO JAM

*2 pounds of heirloom tomatoes, or ripe red tomatoes
1 cup red wine vinegar
1 cup sugar
3 sprigs of thyme
1 T garlic, minced
2 each shallot minced
Pinch of salt*

Core and seed tomato. Add vinegar, sugar, shallot, thyme and garlic in small sauce pot. Bring to simmer. Chop tomato, and add to pot. Cook mixture uncovered on medium heat until all of the liquid is evaporated. Stir regularly for it not to burn. It should look like loose jam, it will thicken once cold. Remove thyme stems. Good for two weeks in the refrigerator.



TIN CITY, PASO ROBLES, CALIFORNIA: DESPARADA WINES

DESPARADA

Vailia From

I was not aware of Tin City when I went to Paso Robles, CA, in 2019, so I missed it. I didn't make that mistake this October. In my mind's eye, I conceived it as in a walled automobile junk yard. But that was not the case. Located 3 miles south of Paso off the intersection of Hwy 46 and Hwy 101, it is in an industrial park with nice looking steel corrugated buildings. Or corrugated tin, if you will. You can easily walk to any of the 22 boutique wineries, BarrelHouse Brewery, Tin City Cider, and Wine Shine Distillery. And yes, there are opportunities to eat as well. McPhee's Canteen, Six Test Kitchen, Tin Canteen, Etto Pastificio (a pasta specialist) and Negranti Creamery with its exotic and rich sheep's milk ice cream. This is a one stop destination that you could spend some serious time exploring garagista, maverick winemakers. Reservations are required for these tiny wineries. Music is also played at BarrelHouse.

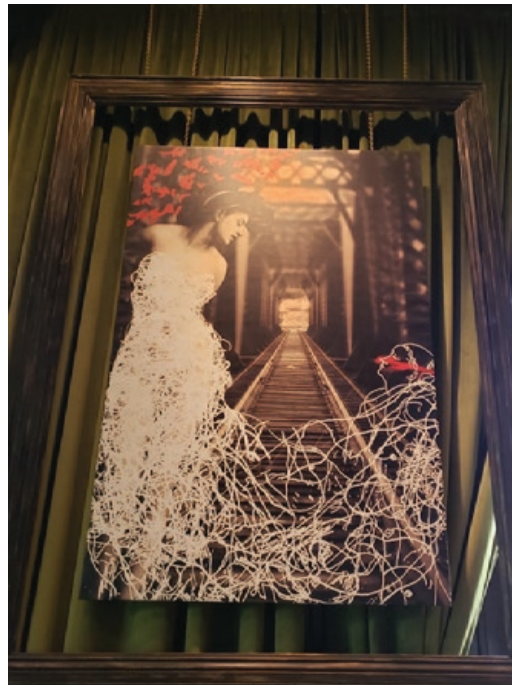


Desparada Wines was the first stop. It started out as an all woman winery (although our tasting guide was a man) owned by Vailia From, who is also the wine-maker. Her husband is Russell From, who owns Herman Story Wines. Vailia specializes in Bordeaux and Italian varietals. She sources her wines from over 20 wineries and growers from iconic vineyards. The first wine was made in 2009. All the yields are small. She uses unusual aging containers in her

quest for quality, such as amphora and acacia wood barrels. Acacia wood can be preferred instead of oak when you do not want to add tannin and seek to enhance the body and texture of lighter grapes, like Chenin Blanc, but you still want to add some oxidation to the wine that wood affords.

She offers several series of wine. The **Terroir Series** are all made in amphora, the clay vessels from ancient times that is seeing a resurgence today. The **Explorer Series** has experimental labels and funky names, like Sackcloth & Ashes. One of the fun things we learned was that the staff takes a stock label template, drinks the wine that will go into that bottling, and doodles on the template to come up with a unique label for that particular year. All the ideas are submitted and the best label chosen for the coming year. Late 19th and early 20th Century Viennese artist Gustav Klimt's sketches are also used to inspire labels. What seems like doodles contain some of his sketches. ▶

Note how the Gustav Klimt sketches enter into the white, lacy doodles, especially on the right side where you can see a bit of red by a head.



Vailia From, owner and winemaker of Desparada

◀ The most imaginative offering was the **Dress Maker** line of Cabernet Sauvignon. Begun in 2012, Dress Maker is a solera style wine. I have heard of a solera-system in fortified wines like Sherry, Port or Madeira, but never as a regular still wine. A solera is a system where you progressively mix the next vintage into the barrel so that the method matures the younger wines, freshens the older wines, and helps maintain the consistency, or historical continuity of the wine. As time goes on, there may be only a tiny amount of the starter wine. In this case, however, the solera will stop in 2026 and will include 7 vintages. I was so intrigued I bought a bottle. Mine is Version 3, the waning crescent. They go by versions, not a vintage date, and the phase of the waxing or waning moon on the label. According to the highlighted phases of the moon on the label, there are 4 more versions of this solera to still be released. From the winemaker, Vailia From, here is her description of Version 3 of Dress Maker:

This is Dress Maker. A Solera-style Cabernet Sauvignon beget from seven vintages, seven years of experimentation and bold ventures. A thread of poetry here, a thread of nature there, all brought forth by this – my labor and my spirit, bottled. It’s the lynchpin around which my creations spin, a culmination of my trials and triumphs. Conceived in 2012, Dress Maker integrates Cabernet Sauvignon vintages from each harvest since, evoking the best of their characters. A perfect balance of old vintage depth and new vintage vibrance.



The staff takes the template, in this case, of the woman walking, and adds creative touches, or the painted swooshes. Every vintage has a slightly different label.

So, the current version has 7 vintages in the solera, Version 2 had 6, and version one had 5 vintages in the solera. Vailia seems like a free spirited artist and creative individual. All her wines were interesting. Desparada is the feminine for Desperado, or outlaw. The name seems a good summary of Vailia’s wine making philosophy. 🍷



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NOV
13

CHAMPIONS RUN

Russian River vs. Sonoma Coast
Pinot Noir
Producers: Murnans & Klemkes

DEC
5

AU COURANT
REGIONAL KITCHEN

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Producers: Martins

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