

## FROM THE GRAPEVINE

BY [JOEL M. FISHER](#)



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Every year wine aficionados wait with baited breath for the third Thursday of November. That's the day the latest crop of *Beaujolais Nouveau* hit the stores. Made from gamay noir grapes so fresh they've barely had time to miss the vine, this extremely quaffable wine has its own groupies.

To celebrate this year's release, [WINEVINEANDDINE](#) and [Victor's Restaurant](#) hosted a *Nouveau* wine dinner. Bill Gotti and I picked five bottles to test and paired them with an expansive dinner that ranged from salmon ravioli and onion soup to *boeuf bourguignon* and *crepe belle Helene* (a sinful concoction of pear, almonds, chocolate and vanilla ice cream).

The first *Beaujolais Nouveau* we opened was the [Louis Tete](#) (\$10-\$11). This wine, with 12.2% alcohol, showed good color in the glass and cherry on the nose, as well as a whiff of peppermint. Next was the *Nouveau* from [Pierre Dupond](#) (\$10-11). Darker than any others we sampled, this wine (12% alcohol) was rich with berry fruit on the nose and palate. [Henri Fessy](#) (\$10-11) came next. With 12.5% alcohol, this had nice colors and a pleasant flavor. Despite being tart on the finish, this bottle was the second-most popular that night.

Where would a *Nouveau* tasting be without [George Duboeuf](#) (\$9-10)? Sadly, this bottle – with 12% alcohol – was not his best. This wine was earthy to the point of being herbaceous. That said, it still managed to be very fruity and showed a good finish.

Last came the [Joseph Drouhin](#) (\$12), which was voted best of the night. I mentioned last month that the Drouhin Beaujolais winemaking team said they were very happy, as well they should. At 12.8% alcohol, this was the biggest wine of the flight and loaded with lush fruit.

We are grateful to our friends at **Maddelena** for their assistance in obtaining the wines. Also, a word to the wise: if you bought any *Beaujolais Nouveau* this year, please be sure to drink it within the next few months.

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Another recent event was the [Escoffier Society of Southern California's](#) annual formal banquet. Kudos to Executive Chef Jean-Marc Weber of the **California Club**! The dinner was superb in every way. I hope we return to the same venue next winter so can enjoy another outstanding production from Chef Jean-Marc and his crew.

The evening kicked off with varied hors d'oeuvres and a [Nicolas Feuillatte](#) *Brut Reserve Particular NV*. This well-balanced, full-bodied champagne had a lovely nose of green apple and hazelnuts. At \$35, it's a bargain. Next came a duck terrine accompanied by [Champagne Duval-Leroy](#) *NV Rose*. A traditional champagne, this well structured wine burst with all the freshness and expressiveness one would expect from a *Cotes des Blancs* chardonnay.

We moved onto a decadent *Mousseline de Saint Jacques au Moules et Safran* (mussels in a cream sauce). This was served with [Domaine Billaud-Simon's](#) *Chablis Tete d'Or 2000*. Rated highly by Robert Parker, this wine showed typical oak overtones but was balanced by an acidic backbone.

The next dish served was *Pigeon Roti au Vin de Banyuls Galette de Celeri* (squab), along with the wonderful [Domaine Bertagna Vougeot](#) *1er Cru Clos de la Perriere*. This was Pinot Noir at its best: cherry red, deep black fruit, strong tannins and nearly perfect acidity. This wine, already very approachable, will be even better in five to seven years.

*Filet Mignon de Veau* (veal) was our main course, which paired well with the [Chateau La Lagune](#) *1986 3eme Cru Haut-Medoc*. I absolutely loved this wine. It showed a dark, mature hue and ripe mulberry fruit. It also possessed spicy tannins that, hopefully, will be outlasted by its substance.

The feast came to a close over a cheese plate and *La Palette de Chocolat avec Son Nougat aux Amandes* (chocolate with almond nougat). With this we enjoyed [Blandy's](#) 5-year-old *Malmsey Madeira*, a splendid full-bodied dessert wine.

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As another year comes to a close, let me wish you all a very happy holiday and a wonderful New Year's!

Joel M. Fisher, Ph.D. is Wine Instructor for the Culinary Arts Department, [Art Institute of California Los Angeles](#). He is Director of Public Affairs for Avalon Hollywood, and as a partner in [WineVineandDine](#) conducts wine tastings, wine dinners, and wine-and-food pairings throughout Southern California.