

FROM THE GRAPEVINE

BY JOEL M. FISHER



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If you read this month's column while hungry, prepare to drool. I'm going to focus on some decadent food-and-wine pairings that I have had the privilege of sampling recently.

I recently attended a wonderful wine dinner hosted by Jay and Linda Handel of Brentwood's **San Gennaro Café** Linda and Tony Charmello of [Young's Market](#) selected wines from [Ironhorse Vineyards](#) to pair with Chef George Galindo's Italian feast. Although Ironhorse is best known for its sparkling wines, Linda and Tony decided to showcase lesser-known treasures.

For the first antipasto we had *prosciutto di Parma* with cantaloupe, which was paired with the *2003 Cuve*. This Sauvignon Blanc-Viognier blend hit the right balance of fruits and sugars. The salty prosciutto made the wine taste drier than normal and delightfully crisp. Nice apple notes emerged on the nose and palate after the Cuve sat in the glass for a while. The second antipasto was a Maryland crab stuffed mushroom in a lemon wine sauce, which the *2002 Ironhorse Chardonnay* complemented by virtue of not being buttery. Instead the wine had a toasted flavor derived from the oak barrels in which it aged and nice hints of green, spice and pear flavors

We moved onto the *primi piatto*, a risotto with lemon and scampi served with a *2001 Pinot Noir*. The wine possessed a light floral nose and considerable fruit forward. The predominant note was that of cherry, supported by a gentle undertone of warm spices. The wine paired quite well with the risotto, as would have a Sauvignon Blanc, which would play up the risotto's lemon flavors.

Next was the *secondo* of veal medallions with eggplant parmesan. Here we enjoyed the *2000 Cabernet Blend* (50% Cabernet Sauvignon, 25% Cabernet Franc, and 25% Merlot). The wine's strong black pepper, green peppers and vanilla flavors went terrifically with the veal. The wine also possessed a beautiful dark-red color.

Linda and Jay have been hosting wine dinner for years. Upcoming events will feature the wines of [J. Lohr](#), [Beringer](#), and [R.H. Phillips](#), and I am slated to do the pairings for a dinner around June. For more information, call San Gennaro Café at 310-476-9696.

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I visited the **Hollywood-Vine Restaurant** to chat with Chef Mark Nosedo. I met Mark last year after his arrival from Napa, where he had spent several years as Executive Chef in Charge of Special Events for the Culinary Institute of America's Greystone facility. Mark learned the business side first, beginning in the Midwest. He rose from sous chef to executive chef to corporate executive chef at a seven-restaurant chain owned by Kruse and Muer before moving west. He came to the Culinary Institute of America in Los Angeles last year.

Mark and I spent some time discussing the restaurant's extensive wine list and batting around pairing ideas. He suggested pairing his signature duck-and-gouda quesadillas with a rich [Rancho Zabaco Zinfandel](#) (\$7 a glass) or the [Stags Leap Syrah](#) (\$42 a bottle). With the Ahi tuna poke tower – with wontons, papaya, cilantro and ginger slaw – a crisp [Casa Postelle Sauvignon Blanc](#) from Chile (\$6.50 a glass) or [Hoenig's Sauvignon Blanc](#) (\$48 a bottle) would be excellent compliments. For the blue-cheese encrusted filet mignon with grilled asparagus and bacon-and-chive mashed potatoes, Mark liked the [Clois de Bois Alexander Valley Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon](#) (\$12 a glass), the lush [Jordan Cabernet](#) (\$82 a bottle), or – for those on expense accounts – the amazing *1999 Insignia Meritage* (\$170 a bottle)!

The restaurant is opening their long-awaited lounge in March, which will feature even a bigger wine list. Mark wants to continue to build the restaurant into a destination venue with great food, service, atmosphere – and, of course, great drinks! (Reservations and information: 323-464-2345.)

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Another gastronomic experience for me this month was a luncheon at [Spago Beverly Hills](#). While the food was unsurprisingly tremendous – starting with a roasted Chino Farms beef “layer cake” with goat cheese, hazelnuts and shallot *au poivre* – the real treasure was the South Australian 2002 [Paringa Merlot](#) (\$12.50 a glass) that accompanied it. The wine was a beautiful dark-ruby color with spices, cherry and berries on the palate. All around, this bottle was mellow and lovely. I highly recommend finding this winner somewhere in town. You won't be sorry!

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I'll wrap up this column with a quick look at how the wine industry is faring. Are the days of Two-Buck Chuck coming to an end? They very well may be: the light harvest of 2003 helped reduce the grape glut that was largely responsible for pushing prices down. Also, as the dollar sinks on the world market, California exporters are enjoying a boost while many foreign importers shy away. This holds especially true for wines coming

from the European Union – although according to Peter Byck, co-chair of the [Winery Exchange](#) and presenter of the 2003 Wine Market Report at this year's Unified Wine Grape Symposium, Italy is still the #1 wine exporter to the States.

With good European wine bargains harder to come by, keep an eye out for the wonderful Australian and Latin American wines entering the country. If you haven't already sampled wines from those parts of the world, I strongly urge you to do so. Byck reported that Australian imports – with such notable brands as [Jacobs Creek](#) and [Wyndham Estates](#) – increased by 36% in 2003 and should overtake Italy for the #1 spot in the near future.

Byck's bottom line is that Americans appear to be buying more wine, period. Foreign and Californian wineries sold about 240 million cases in the U.S. last year, which is an increase of nearly 12 million cases from 2002.

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Last but not least, I wanted to give a big kudos to Lance for creating such a great new design for the newsletter. Bravo!

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