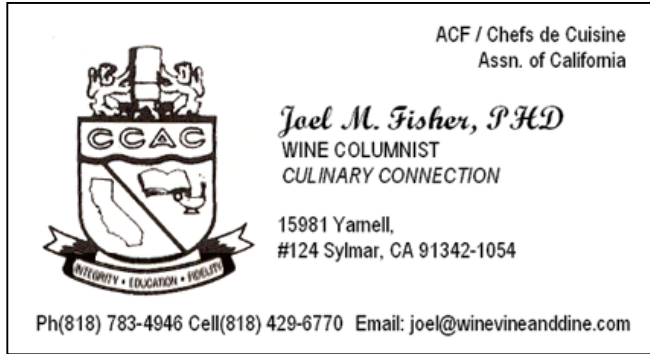


FROM THE GRAPEVINE



By [Joel M. Fisher](#)
with Sara Fisher Chapin



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Deep in the Glendale foothills lies [Rosso Wine Shop](#), a new store designed with the ‘disenchanted Trader Joe’s wine-buyer’ in mind. With a credo like that, how could I resist checking the place out?

Through the Montrose store’s inviting red door lay about 200 interesting bottles from Italy, Spain, France and California – all at truly reasonable prices. Rosso has two small tasting areas, which are being put to good use with events every Friday and Saturday from 5pm to 8pm (\$10 for three wines). The focus is on everyday wines, defined as affordable and food-friendly. I noticed that the bulk of bottles fell in the \$10 to \$30 range.

The man behind Rosso is Jeff Zimmitti. This 38-year-old former professional drummer decided to leave the music industry to pursue his second passion of food and wine. Intent on starting his own wine store, Zimmitti took some courses at the [San Antonio Winery](#) but is otherwise largely self-taught. He bid his time, looking for the right spot to hang his shingle.

Amusingly, the spot found him. While apprenticing at popular neighborhood restaurant [Bistro Verdu](#), the space next door became available. He now partners with Verdu’s Chef Michael Ruiz to host regular wine-pairing dinners and ‘Tasting Tables’ at the bistro. The partnership seems to be a successful one. I can vouch for one tasting table dinner at the Bistro. A first course of piquillo peppers stuffed with shrimp accompanied a 2005 Ernita Veracruz (Rueda) Verdejo. Paella Valencia, with braised salmon, chicken, mussels and chorizo matched nicely with a 2002 Bodegas Surco Valdrinal Roble (Ribera del Duero) Tempranillo. Smoked paprika roasted pork loin was perfect with a 2003 Saenz-Olazabel Bolanda (Navarra) Cabernet Sauvignon/Tempranillo blend. And a dish of poached pear was delightful with Dios Baco Pedro Ximenez

Owner/Chef Ruiz is an interesting young entrepreneur in his own right. His bistro has been embraced as a neighborhood gem that serves good Cal-French bistro fare. Ruiz actually lives in the neighborhood himself, which means his commute must be every Angeleno’s dream. The former executive chef at **Nic’s Martini Lounge** in Beverly Hills,

Ruiz has had an interesting career that has taken him from notable spots in Seattle to the Bay Area to San Diego. Bistro Verdu is earning some very positive reviews and rabid local followers. I hope business continues to flourish for this wine and food duo.

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File this one under the ‘where are they now’ category. Many of you remember Richard Battista – CEC, CEPC and CCE – the former dean of the School of Culinary Arts, Art Institute of California, and former president of the Los Angeles Chapter of the ACF. Battista has settled in Northern California and has started the [Professional Culinary Institute](#). Having partnered with some prominent chefs from around the country, the San Jose-area school is billed as the nation's only chef-owned culinary school. Although young, the institution is turning heads: their first ever student hot-food team won the American Culinary Federation’s National Championship last year.

I visited the facility recently, and was impressed. The classroom and kitchen spaces are great. I’m particularly interested (of course) in the school’s wine program. Master Sommelier David Glancy, MS and CWE (certified wine expert), and Battista established the first Certified Sommelier Program approved by the Court of Master Sommeliers. Every single one of the school’s first graduating wine students passed their tough certification test. Talk about speaking well of the program!

Richard’s ambitions continue. The school has just launched a hospitality management degree program. The new wine facility strives to exceed the notable Rudd Wine Building at Napa’s famed **Culinary Institute of America**. Last but not least, Richard looks forward to rolling out additional school locations outside of Northern California.

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One of my favorite ways to take the chill of our winter nights is with big reds and raisiny ports. If you haven’t tried this remedy yourself, I strongly recommend it. As always, happy drinking!

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Joel M. Fisher Ph.D writes a monthly column for the [Chefs de Cuisine Association of California](#) and has been the 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. He was the co-organizer of the successful LA WINE FEST 2006 and is currently working on the expanded 2007 version of this popular wine event. His email address is info@lawinefest.com. Sara Fisher Chapin enjoys helping demystify the world of wine for the under-35 set.