


FROM THE GRAPEVINE

BY [JOEL M. FISHER](#)





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with Sara Fisher-Chapin

It's very gratifying to have readers ask me about wines, restaurants and places to stay. It's an even happier event when readers share their discoveries with me. I decided to make an exception and share the following tale.

"The annual visit to my sister's country house north of New York City always evokes childhood memories. This year's trip included a drive to nearby Dutchess County to visit an old haunt of our parents', **Old Drovers Inn**, in Dover Plains. On a small country road, this 1750 structure, which offers guestrooms, cannot be surpassed for charm. Dinner was most memorable.

"We escaped the muggy weather by letting the darkness of the Tap Room, glowing from candles and tiny white lights, envelope us. The wine list was impressive, but since we had no designated driver I ordered wine by the glass, a **David Bruce Pinot Noir 1996**. I was thrilled with my choice. Rich, full-bodied, with significant fruit forward, cherry and berry aromas and flavor, as well as a clean finish, this wine from Santa Cruz went beautifully with all of dinner.

"I started from the 'traditional' menu, dating back from before my parents' time: a sublime cheddar cheese soup. My sister Pat opted for the more modern beef and goat cheese salad, which she intends to repeat on her next visit. We were surprised and delighted with the traditional popovers.

"My dinner was a hearty bouillabaisse in a Mediterranean tomato broth, full of delectable sea creatures. Pat chose the five-spice slices of duck breast with cherry compose, which she pronounced tender and delicious.

“The new executive chef, Scott Penny [who spent some time out in Santa Monica in the now-extinct Nelsons, and came to Old Drovers Inn intent on bringing innovative cuisine to the classic place. – ed.], responded to the complements we sent to the kitchen by visiting our table. Scott took us on a short tour with in-house historian and general manager Eileen Stanton. We got to view the authentically Early American first-floor rooms available for private parties. Before we’d reached upstairs, Pat was already planning **her** holiday party, and we found it impossible to pick between the Library (with working fireplace), the Federal Room (with working fireplace)...or just take everyone to the Tap Room (with working fireplace).

“We agreed that Old Drovers Inn is ‘one of the 10 most romantic inns in the Northeast’.”
- *from sisters Kay Tornborg of Hollywood and Pat Tornborg of New York City.*

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Now let’s hop back to the West Coast. Recently at **Campanile** on La Brea, **Maddelena Wines** and Alan Stark presented a tasting featuring Umbrian wines from the **Arnaldo Caprai Winery**. Joining us was Marco Caprai, the winery’s fearlessly innovative young owner. Marco is credited with bringing the Sagrantino grape to the world stage. He worked closely with researchers from the Milan University School of Agriculture to resuscitate this indigenous varietal.

We began with the *2004 Gregante Grechetto di Colli Martani* (\$19), which I thought a great white. Dry but balanced, it had lovely floral tones and good fruit. The ruby-red *2004 Poggo Belvedere* (\$15) was intriguing, having been finished in steel rather than oak. This spicy wine would be wonderful with cheeses and meats, and could age comfortably for up to another four years. We moved on to a *2001 Montefalco Rosso* (\$22). A remarkably fresh Sagrantino-Sangiovese blend, the wine has focused fruit, a firm structure and light tannins. Its aging potential is four to six years.

We next tasted a bottle that Marco thought resembled a classic Cabernet Franc. The *2001 Outsider Rosso* (\$60-70), is a Cabernet-Merlot blend that managed to serve up both lush black current on the nose and some bite. We followed this with a *2001 Callepiano, Sagrantino di Montefalco DOCG* (\$45). Dark red and intense, this wine showed some slightly bitter raspberry tones. I thought this wine could be put down comfortably for over a decade.

We wrapped up with the winery’s jubilee wine, the *25 Anni Sargrantino di Montefalco* (\$90). Jubilant it was! Terrific aromas transition from rich fruit to spice and vanilla. Velvety on the tongue and deep garnet on the eyes, this beautiful wine was a real treat. For those with self-restraint, the bottle could age another 20 years. But why wait?

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I circled up with Allan Stark again at the former Patina restaurant on Melrose, now reborn as the seafood-focused **Providence**. Stark and I were joined by Netta Habel-Williams, regional manager for importer **Dreyfus, Ashby & Co**; Pascal Schiele, export manager of the Alsatian winery **Dopff & Irion**; and Maddelena's Marco Campo. Given the seafood, we paired exclusively with whites from Dopff. We sampled a nicely crisp and floral *Cremant N/V* (non-vintage), an even blend of Pinot Blanc and Chardonnay; an easily drinkable *Riesling Traditional 2004*, a lively *Pinot Gris 2004* with clean white-peach flavors, and an elegantly mineral *Pinot Gris Maquisards 2004*. We concluded our meal with an enthusiastically spritzzy well-balanced *Gewürztraminer 2004*.

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Many of you know that Sara Fisher-Chapin has been editing this column for the past several years. We've reached the point where she is also doing a great deal of research and tasting for me. So, as a proud father and colleague, I have invited her to share the byline. Please welcome her!

And as always, happy drinking!

Joel M. Fisher, Ph.D. has been Wine Instructor these past five years 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. **Sara Fisher-Chapin** has been a professional journalist and writer for over a decade. One of her earliest – and favorite – assignments was to cover the Tuscan wine country for Fodors LLC.