

A Review

An Interactive Wine Dinner (Tuesday)

On Tuesday evening, March 6th, I was privileged to attend the dinner at Charlie's L'etoile Verte Restaurant. This event was part of the series of dinners put on by the "Great Chefs of the South" for the Hilton Head Food and Wine Festival. I am delighted to report that the event was a complete success. To a sold-out room of guests, Chef Palmer Golson served an appetizer called an Exotic Mushroom Tarte with Split Creek Farm Chevre Roquette Salad. This was followed by Local Black Grouper seared with crème de Petits Pois, Scalloped Potatoes and Fresh Vegetables. Desert was an Almond Shortcake with Lemon Marscarpone and Raspberries. To accompany the food, Sommeliers Margaret Golson and Jennifer Teed decided to have some interactive play with the wines to be served with the dinner, and the dinner guests. (This is called a "Sommelier Smackdown") Each Sommelier chose a wine that she thought would go best with the course. The wines were then concealed in a brown paper bag and served BLIND to each guest. The result here is that each guest has two glasses of wine to try with each course, and a packet of voting slips. For the first course Margaret chose a Bargemone Provence Rose 2010. Her defense of the wine was textbook. Mushrooms and Rose from Provence is a classic match. Jennifer, on the other hand, chose a Zepaltas Sonoma Pinot Noir 2009. She defended it by stating that she thought a "bold" red would carry well with the mushroom preparation. The guests agreed and Jennifer won the first round.

The second course was accompanied with two white wines from Italy. Jennifer chose a Vietti Roero Arneis 2010 from Piedmont. Margaret chose a Nanfro Frappato from Sicily. The winner was again Jennifer. Desert was served and out came selections of sweet desert wines. Margaret's choice was a limoncello from Italy. Jennifer chose a Moscatel Dorado NV from Italy. Evidently the guests preferred their Almond Shortcake with Jennifer's Moscatel as she won again and swept the "Sommelier Smackdown."

The Dinner guests enjoyed the Interaction very much. Their enjoyment was certainly enhanced by the way that the staff at Charlie's, in a very precision and seamless manner, served each course and exchanged the wine glasses. Terrific food, wine, and happy guests. Who could ask for more? I can only hope for a repeat next year.

The Grand Tasting (Friday)

The Grand Tasting took place on Friday of the Festival week. If a more spectacular wine tasting has taken place somewhere else on planet earth, please advise. The setting was The Harbour Town Golf Clubhouse and Conference Center at Sea Pines Resort. The wines available for tasting were displayed on 23 tables in the perimeter of the room, and in the center of the room was the table that displayed the wines for the silent auction. (The receipts from the Silent Auction went to the John T and Valerie Curry Educational Scholarship Fund.) The hard work and attention to detail that went into the preparation for this event was abundantly clear. Executive Chef Michael Ramey prepared exquisite food that was passed continuously throughout the evening. And the wine... Oh! The wine! I was like a kid in a candy store. It was one of those moments when I wished that I had several thousand dollars in my pocket and the ability to spend the whole bundle on the silent auction wines. I was looking at the table filled with wines being presented for the auction. They were all premium wines that had been assembled from those submitted for the International Judging and Wine Competition. Short of presenting a list of the wines at the event, allow me to just summarize by stating the varietals that were present – i.e. Chardonnay, Cabernet, Pinot Noir, Merlot, Sparkling, Cabernet Franc, and Pinot Gris. My own personal favorite of the evening was the Rex Hill Reserve Pinot Noir, Table #16. I was thinking on my way home that evening that I had attended an event “not to be missed.”

The Wine and Food Festival (Saturday)

How am I able to put into the limited space that I have left a fitting summary for The Wine and Food Festival? It is easy! Just say “Smashing Success” loud and clear. Or I could say 5000 attendees sampling 740 wines. However it was more; much more. The 5000 attendees had only three hours to move from the various stations that featured wine vendors, food vendors, activity

tents (Celebrity Cookbook Authors), retail tents (Olive oil, The Chocolate Canopy, Roller's Wine and Spirits, Cork It by Herm, Lisa Unlimited, The Island Fudge Shop), and The Sponsor Tents (The Westin Hilton, Heavenly Spa by Westin, Adams Outdoor, Classic Party Rentals, and Dude Magazine). Clearly this was enough to keep one busy for three hours. What impressed me more than anything else was the courteous staff. Well done, folks. Hope to see you next year.

Next stop is the wines of Maryland.

Cheers

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