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Chasing Grapes : For the Love of Champagne

Simone FM Spinner, CWS

August 15, 2012

I find myself engaging in conversation about wine with people every day. In these conversations, I am often asked, “What is your favorite wine?” My answer is always the same... Champagne. Not just any sparkling wine: Champagne. I have many other loves, but none thrill me like Champagne. Yes, Barolo and Châteauneuf-du-Pape have tried to tempt me, Rioja and Burgundy seduce me, Priorat, Bordeaux and Brunello di Montalcino have all tried to steal my heart, but I am forever loyal to the one I love the most. J’adore... je t’aime Champagne....

Since the first creation of Blanquette de Limoux in 1531AD by Benedictine Monks in the Abbey of Saint Hilaire, near Carcassonne, sparkling wine is produced in many places and in many styles. Italy brings us the traditional Franciacorta, tangy, off-dry Prosecco and peaches & cream, fizzy, Moscato d’Asti. Prosecco is excellent for peach bellinis and Moscato is just excellent. Spain delivers often bone dry, delicious Cava produced using indigenous Spanish grapes macabeu, parellada, xarel·lo, and more recently, pinot noir and chardonnay. Germany has Sekt, Portugal makes Espumante, sparkling wines are made in Hungary, Britain, Australia, and in the United States. I am happy to sip on any of these sparklers. They are refreshing, light, fun, and they each have a unique style and personality. But, when it comes to pure, unadulterated BLISS, only one wine delivers. Champagne.

Champagne is a complex wine from a tiny, equally complex region in northern France. The area, known as Champagne, has a sordid, brutal, aristocratic, and serious legacy. Champagne has been a coveted wine region since 52 BC when Roman legions first cultivated grapes there and quarried the abundant limestone bedrock carving out the miles of crayères (caves) to build temples, buildings and roads. These caves, discovered many centuries later, became the perfect storage facilities for caring for and aging the delicate wines of Champagne. During World War I & II, the men and women even lived in these caves for protection from the ravages of war. It is said, that there have been more battles on the lands of Champagne than on any other lands in the world. Some of the grandest scale, deadliest battles have been waged in the vineyards from Attila the Hun, to the Hundred Years’ War, Prussian Wars, and World Wars. Out of this lengthy history of devastation, comes a lovely, elegant, expression of the vines long devoted to the happiest celebrations of life. The most important rites of passage like marriage, the births of babies, the coronations of kings and queens, holidays, the maiden voyage of a new yacht, and so

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many other joyous celebrations. But, no other celebration calls for Champagne quite like the celebration of love.



Recently, mon petit ami Jerome and I celebrated such effervescent bliss with a bottle of my favorite of all Champagnes. Perrier Jouët. This special wine is all about love. The Perrier Jouët Champagne House was founded in 1811 by young newlywed lovers, Nicolas Perrier, the son of winegrower, Adèle Jouët, the daughter of a family of wine merchants. The couple invested in 65 hectares in Epernay and 40 additional hectares in Avize and Cramant, some of the most prestigious, Grand Cru vineyards in the region. *(Pictured here)* The House of Perrier Jouët still resides on these lands. The legendary love story of Nicolas and Adèle flourished until his death in 1854, at which time their son, Charles, took the helm of the business. Perrier Jouët, like most Champagnes of the time, was a relatively sweet wine. Charles created the very first, modern style, dry Champagne, revolutionizing the wine, the region and the industry. Long associated with royalty and prestige, in 1888, Perrier-Jouët became the most expensive champagne in the world; with Perrier-Jouët 1874 breaking all price records at Christie's, the world's leading art auctioneer. The iconic, gorgeous, hand painted Perrier-Jouët bottle was first created by famed Art Deco painter Emile Gallé in 1902. The work of art was one of five prototype bottles misplaced in a crayère until it was mistakenly uncovered in 1964. The white and green bouquet of anemones has become the symbol of the house, the symbol of excellence and a symbol of effervescent love.

Many a romantic and a poet agree with me and extoll the virtues of Champagne. Legend has it that Dom Pérignon, a blind monk, upon tasting Champagne for the first time, exclaimed, "Come quickly, I am drinking the stars!" Coco Chanel said, "I only drink Champagne on two occasions, when I am in love, and when I am not." Casanova felt Champagne was essential for seduction. Marilyn Monroe was famous for bathing in Champagne. And, my favorite, Oscar Wilde, infamous for his provocation, "I can resist anything except temptation," added "Only the truly unimaginative can fail to find a reason for drinking champagne."

I can always find a reason to drink Perrier Jouët. The Perrier Jouët Grand Brut, with its ultra-fine mousse, smoky, mineral notes with hints of lemon zest and peaches is thoroughly delightful, but

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the Cuveé Belle Époque Grand Fleur, the Cuveé Grand Fleur Blason Rosé, and the Cuveé Grand Fleur Blanc de Blanc are absolutely unbelievable. If I could only drink one wine for the rest of my life, it would be Belle Époque. Belle Époque has a wonderful, feminine, delicate bouquet of ginger, freesia, gardenia, toasted almonds, and creaminess with a luminous mousse that plays on the tongue. The chiffon pale pink Rosé adds faint strawberries, cinnamon and pink rose petals, while the Blanc de Blancs delivers a slight lime blossom, honeysuckle and lemon curd note to the beautiful, elegant, exquisite blend that is Perrier Jouët.



There is nothing more titillating than spending an afternoon with a perfectly chilled bottle of Belle Époque, a platter of freshly shucked, briny, succulent, oysters and mon petit ami Jerome....Effervescent Bliss!

*Perrier Jouët Grand Brut is affordable and can be found at most regional wine specialty stores. Perrier Jouët Belle Époque Grand Fleur can be found at Applejack Wine & Spirits, Argonaut Wine & Spirits, Divino, City Wine, and Incredible Wine & Spirits and may be special ordered. Belle Époque Blason Rosé and Blanc de Blancs are trickier to find, but, on occasion, they may be special ordered.

Photos/info: Flickr by Gaetan Lee, <http://www.perrier-jouet.com>

Chasing Grapes: Sultry Reds to Warm Up Your Cool Nights

Simone FM Spinner, CWS

September 27, 2012



Piedmonte

Falling in love and indulging in truly sensual experiences are the last bastions of an innocent, childlike wonderment that an adult can experience. The world may lose its luster but it doesn't have to lose its joy. Sensuality brings us pleasure by engaging our tactile, visual, audio, gustatory, and olfactory perceptions of the world around us. There is nothing in the world better than being in the embrace of the one you love, feeling the warmth of their skin and their breath as their lips brush against yours. Some people are thrilled by the sensation of silk against their skin or the feeling of fresh, cool soil in the garden in the spring. Others are turned on by the sounds of a heartfelt, raging guitar solo or the coo of a sleeping infant. Rich golden, orange and red leaves hanging on autumn trees against amber and pink skies at twilight bring happiness to the people who happen to notice. But for some, the truest expression of sensuality is found in the aromas and tastes of an amazing bottle of wine paired with a fantastic meal.



The Rhône Valley in autumn

Something about autumn stirs my own cravings for more sensual wines with layers of complexity only found in the sultry red wines from the northern shores of the Mediterranean and Ligurian Seas. These wines awaken my appetite for more luxurious cuisine and a more serious dining experience. Gone are the casual, steamy, dog days of summer with its crunchy salads, cool soups and icy cold white or rosé wines. In Denver, days may still be warm but evenings are a bit chilly. It's the perfect time for cuddling in front of a roaring fire with mon petit ami Jerome, and indulging our senses. Wonderful, rustic pasta dishes and smoky grilled fare complemented with the wines of Piedmont or the Rhone Valley bring a sensuality that has been missing all summer back into my kitchen and into my life.

The following wines illustrate my quest for this sensuality to warm these shorter days, cooler evenings, and fulfill my desire for a sultry, aromatic, and flavorful wine to pair with a more substantial meal at the end of my day. These are wines I have selected to honor the passions of mon petit ami Jerome; his favorite regions and wines that I know he will fall in love with.

I was recently introduced to Proprietà Seprino Uvaggio 2006 by my friend Ashley, at Little's Wine & Spirits. This gem of a wine is full of surprises. Hailing from the foothills of the Alps in northern Piedmonte, Italy, the wine was created by father and son team, Paolo and Luca de Marchi. The word uvaggio indicates that it is a field blend of Nebbiolo, Vespolina and Croatina, fermented together and aged in wood for a medium bodied and firm structured wine. (As opposed to the vinaggio which is a blend of finished wines). The wine shows an inky, purplish tone with classic Nebbiolo notes of rose petals, cocoa, and tar rounded out with a lovely spicy scent, jasmine blossoms, ripe pomegranate, and a hint of juicy Morello cherry. Even though it has a rigid tannin structure, there is just enough acidity to keep this well-balanced wine for years to come.

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Ready for harvest in the south of France

We love France, French wines, and the Rhône Valley produces many of our favorite wines. In recent weeks, mon petit ami Jerome acquired two contrasting styles of Châteauneuf-du-Pape, the staunchly traditional Bosquet des Papes Chante le Merle, 2009, Vieilles Vignes, and the more modern Le Vieux Donjon, 2008. Châteauneuf-du-Pape is a fascinating commune of the southern Rhône with a history of unique culture and unique wines to reflect the dramatic history of the area. In 1308 Pope Clement V relocated the papacy to the city of Avignon. For seventy years, the Avignon Popes did much to advance the wine making of the area. They encouraged viticultural regions to expand and brought more modern technology to the area. The wines of the region became known as Vins du Papes. Wine of the Popes. Always rustic and earthy in style, Châteauneuf-du-Pape allows up to 13 different red and white grapes into their blends but relies on four main varietals to signify the unique style. Grenache, Mourvèdre, Syrah, Cinsault, are the main varietals utilized but Counoise, Muscardin, Terret Noir, and Vaccarèse are allowed along with white grapes including Grenache Blanc, Bourboulenc, Clairette, Picardan, Roussanne, and Picpoul. Bosquet des Papes Chante le Merle, 2009, Vieilles Vignes, has been a family owned labor of love since 1860. Chante le Merle is their baby. The bracing and balanced wine is mostly Grenache with a splash of Syrah and Mourvèdre, showing notes of lavender, raspberries, mocha and a spicy, rich finish. Family owned and very small production, Le Vieux Donjon, 2008 is a bit more solid and rustic with assertive perfume and more juicy fruit. It is broad, plush and solid, with notes of kirsch, juniper, baked spicy apples, and hints of anise seed and cypress.



Ripe syrah grapes bursting with flavor

Côte-Rôtie is the roasted slope of the Rhône Valley known for Syrah often blended with a bit of Viognier. This is one of the first and only regions of France to allow, and even encourage the blending of a small amount of white grapes into the red wine to encourage a silky smooth and more floral aroma and mouth feel. The most distinctive characteristic of Côte-Rôtie wine is the beautiful and aromatic aroma. The fragrant notes often include green olives, raspberry, violets, meaty bacon, black pepper, white pepper, blueberry, blackberry, plum, and leather. Most of the vines are very old, with 40 years being an average and some vines being over 100. This produces low wine yields of very flavor-concentrated fruit, leading to lush and flavorful wines. Domaine Partick Jasmine Côte-Rôtie, 2007 is an elegant and classic representation of Côte-Rôtie. This particular wine boasts juicy cherries, ripe raspberries, tobacco, crushed minerals, violets, and a sprinkling of white pepper. Jasmine has a lively acidity along with a firm tannin structure and a glorious, smoky finish.

As lovers of most things Nebbiolo, it is only natural to find ourselves drawn to the king of Piedmonte: Barolo. Piedmonte is one of the oldest wine regions in the world and yet, it seems always under wraps save for the most adventurous wine lovers. The unique mesoclimate and tortonian soil riddled with limestone marl give way to wines that are heady, aromatic, elegant, and well-balanced with the ability to age for many years. Nebbiolo is a late ripener and was once reserved for sweet wines, but in the mid-19th century an inventive Italian invited a French winemaker into his fold and the pair created the first modern Barolo. Oddero Barolo is a modern representation of this black-skinned grape known for its tar, rose petals, truffles, licorice and dusty cocoa notes. Friends and I recently shared a bottle of Oddero Barolo 1994 which was just ready to drink. The most difficult thing about loving Barolo is leaving it alone for years while it matures and becomes the absolute beauty it is destined become.

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All of these delectable wines should spend more time in the cellar, but look for them now while



they are available.

They are small production, coveted, rare and beautiful gems. Find them, buy them, lay them down and leave them alone. In a few years, when they are more accessible, the bliss you experience, much like love, will be well worth the wait.

photos by wikiposts and author

Chasing Grapes: Denver Food & Wine Festival, Sip, Savor, Sample

Simone FM Spinner, CWS

August 30, 2012



A great way to explore wine on a grand scale is to attend one of the many food & wine festivals that are held annually, all over the world. You can connect with other wine lovers and foodies, neophytes to connoisseurs, and share your experiences, impressions, all while learning about new things, new people, new cultures, and of course new wines. Twenty years ago, Colorado was host to a few events, such as Aspen Food & Wine, Colorado Mountain Wine Fest, Taste of Vail, and Telluride Wine Festival. These days, the festival scene is abundant and you can find a festival nearly every weekend. Most are small-scale and may have morphed from the county or town fair into a more modern version of communal gathering. Even some Farmer's Markets



display wines for tasting.

For the passionate wine lover, few things are more exciting than walking into the Grand Tasting tent at a serious wine & food festival. Once your eyes adjust to the shadowy lighting, you will be overcome by the rows and rows of long banquet tables lined with hundreds of bottles of wine

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opened for tasting with eager wine company representatives vying for your time and taste buds. The lure is only compounded when the area's best restaurants participate and offer tantalizing morsels for your added pleasure. I have had the luxury of attending several such festivals, including Aspen Food & Wine and the Denver Food & Wine Classic. My petit ami Jerome has never been to a food & wine festival and next week he has his first tickets. I am looking forward to witnessing his excitement at the first glimpse of the Grand Tasting: 600 wines just waiting to touch his lips. It will be a pleasure to experience the wonders of perfectly paired wines, in perfectly selected glasses with him. His growing love for wine, and thirst for wine knowledge is exciting for both of us.

September 5th, one of the largest food & wine events in the state opens for 4 event packed days of tasting, talking, seminars, parties, and fundraisers. Denver Food & Wine Classic is in its eighth year. Held annually on Auraria Campus nestled in the heart of downtown Denver, this food & wine event is one of the great events of the season.

This year, in welcoming the new Springhill Suites Marriot and Metropolitan State University Hospitality Training Center, most seminars, parties, and fundraisers will be held in the brand spanking new facilities. The Grand Tasting will remain on the central lawns of the Auraria Campus. Wednesday at 6 pm, the Marriot and MSU will host legendary winemaker, Joseph Phelps, of Insignia fame and Frank Bonanno for a fundraiser dinner. The 2009 Insignia, released the day before, will be the featured wine of the evening. Quite a treat for those of you who have never had the pleasure of sipping on this powerhouse red from California. Friday brings a lineup of seminars, including celebrity chefs, rock -n-roll, beer & wine, and mixologist specialties. Starting off the day with a culinary presentation hosted by Bravo TV, featuring Colorado's own, "Top Chef" Kelly Liken and "Around the World in 80 Plates" star, Jenna Johansen sharing their personal tricks of the trade and tales of the industry. You have the opportunity to learn about the heightened sensory experience provided by using the best of the best glassware at the Spiegelau Beer Glass Seminar and the Riedel Wine Glass Experience on Friday afternoon. For any of you that doubt a glass can make a difference, I recommend taking the challenge. You will be more than pleasantly surprised. Wrapping up the Friday festivities is the first annual, "Restaurant Rocks" party hosted by Kelly Liken, Jenna Johansen, Southern Wine & Spirits, and COBG Mixologists, featuring local rocker Opie Gone Bad and delectables from celebrated local restaurants.

After partying all night Friday, you will want to drag yourself out of bed for the culmination event. The Grand Tasting, featuring over 600 wines and delectables to match gears up at noon and wraps up at 4 pm. Plan on spending every minute sampling, sipping, and savoring the best Denver and the wine world has to offer. This is the 'not to be missed' event of the festival. Thousands of people, dipping into various tents to explore the wonderful world of food and wine. Jerome and I will be there, wandering from tent to tent, table to table, sipping and savoring wines, sampling cuisine and attending seminars. I am sure we will finish our culinary excursion in the Pernod Ricard tent with glasses of my beloved Perrier Jouët Champagne in hand! You can attend a Viking Culinary Chef Showcase, Beam Global Cocktail Party, Pernod Ricard's "Perfect Mix" lounge, and participate in a silent auction. Guest chefs include Dario Cecchini, Restaurateur and World Famous Butcher from Panzano, Italy, Elise Wiggins, Executive Chef at Panzano Denver, and Daniel Asher, the Organic Chef and Wizard of Linger

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and Root Down fame. The goal of this event is to raise funds for the Denver Post Community Foundation, Colorado Restaurant Association Education Fund, and Metropolitan State University Hospitality Department.

For more information and to purchase tickets visit the Denver Food & Wine webpage or Facebook page. Tickets range from \$60 to \$95 per event. The fundraiser dinner is a suggested donation of \$500 per plate.

<http://www.denverfoodandwine.com>

<https://www.facebook.com/#!/pages/Denver-Food-and-Wine>

photos courtesy of Southern Food & Wine

Chasing Grapes: The World's First Premier Cru: Aglianico

Simone FM Spinner, CWS

September 13, 2012



Vineyards in Campania

2,700 years ago, on the sun drenched slopes of Mount Falerna near Campania and Latium in Southern Italy, Aglianico grapes basked in the sun in three very special vineyards. The first vineyard was known as the Caucinian Falernian and was located on the highest slopes, the second vineyard was the Falernian found on the lowest slopes; and between the two vineyards rested the third the prized Faustian Falernian vineyard. These precious vineyards were owned by Roman aristocracy for millennia and are still under vine today. Originally, the Phoenicians cultivated the grape in Greece. During the 7th or 8th BCE the Greeks brought the Ellenico grapes to Italy where it gained its new name: Aglianico.

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The Falernian wine made from these ancient Aglianico grapes, from the Faustus vineyard were the world's first Premier Cru, and were reserved for the extremely wealthy and important members of Roman society. It was a wine of legend and heritage, written about by famous poets, philosophers, scholars, and historians. The grapes were harvested late in the season and had tremendous levels of sugar resulting in a sweet wine with very high alcohol content. The wine was left to oxidize for up to twenty years in clay amphorae vessels. The potent sugar and alcohol content of the wine made it age worthy and suitable for travel. The Roman legions carried Falernian throughout Europe and as far north as Britain. Pliny the Elder commented, "It is the only wine that takes light when a flame is applied to it." He also described a particular banquet honoring Julius Caesar in 60 BCE where the famed "Opimian vintage of 121 BCE" was served. That vintage was an exclusive Falerian and was one of the finest wines ever created.



Aglianico grapes

Aglianico grapes are deep purple, hearty, and full of potent flavors. In Basilicata, they thrive in the volcanic soils of the extinct volcano, Mount Vulture, and on the hills near Taurasi in Campania. The commoners of Rome drank a crude red wine pressed from these grapes. The rustic, inky black wine was superior in tannins and in acidity. It had notes of smoky ash from the volcanic soils and bright red fruit from the abundant sunshine. The best Aglianico was more elegant than rustic and reserved for Roman aristocracy alone. Legend claims this is the wine offered to Jesus before his crucifixion and the same wine that Mary Magdalene dabbed to his lips as he was dying. We will never know.

What we do know is that this lovely little grape is still growing in these same vineyards in the southern most regions of Italy. Eighty years ago two winemaking families began to produce modern wines from Aglianico grapes grown on Mount Vulture vineyards. The two most prominent regions for Aglianico in Italy are in Campania, where it is known as Taurasi DOCG, and Basilicata, where it is known as Aglianico del Vulture DOC. Until very recently, Donato D'Angelo and Paternoster were the only two producers of Aglianico del Vulture available in the

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U.S. Feudi is a new leader in the Aglianico game. Now, Aglianico is springing up on wine lists



and in wine boutiques across Denver.

Recently, I had the great pleasure of presenting three styles of the Aglianico grape to a budding group of wine aficionados. I happened across an expression of the grape I'd never had the chance to try: bubbly! De Conciliis Selim Spumante is the first sparkling Aglianico from the Campania region of Italy. Bruno De Conciliis harvests his grapes from vineyards in Paestum, near ancient Greek ruins. This beautiful, fresh, smoky wine blends Aglianico with Fiano grapes to produce a lush, lively wine with notes of orange blossom, tangy citrus and fleshy, succulent peaches. Named for a jazz great, Selim is an anagram for Miles, as in Miles Davis. Pair Selim with a fresh seafood salad or even with a late morning brunch. Next in the lineup was Apollo Aglianico from the hillsides of Ponte Sannio, Campania. This Aglianico has a more modern style made from hand harvested fruit that has been fermented in oak and stainless steel vats but it is finished for six months in oak barriques. It is unfiltered adding to its richness, blackberry juiciness and perfume of vanilla and blueberry jam. Finally, we tasted the more traditional Terra di Vulcano Aglianico del Vulture, a classic representation of this inky, rustic, sultry grape. Salvatore Pala first began making Aglianico in the 1950's in Basilicata and this is one of his darlings. The project is still family owned, the grapes are hand harvested and fermented in oak and stainless steel, and although the winery uses modern technology, the wine is still a classic. This sensual wine is full bodied, with a nice balance of tannins and acidity. It shows gorgeous smoky notes of black plums, black cherries, dried cocoa, violets, and rose petals. Aglianico loves food and is fantastic with rustic, wood fired pizza, smoked salmon, spicy cured meats or lean grilled meats. Share these wines with your friends and loved ones at your next late summer barbecue. I am looking forward to sharing all three of these sexy wines with mon petit ami, Jerome, the very next chance I get! I am sure he will love Aglianico as much as I do.



Mount Vulture

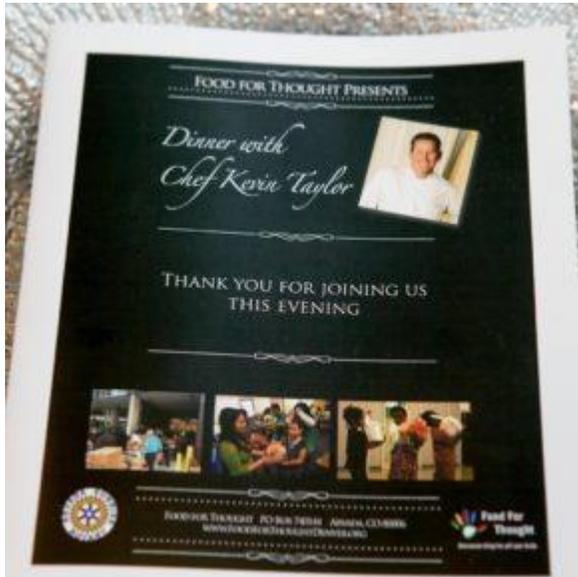
Look for this trio of wonderful wines at Little's Fine Wines, 2390 S. Downing St Denver, CO 80210; Mon-Thurs: 10am to 11pm Fri-Sat: 10am to 12am Sun: 12pm to 9ish pm; 303-744-3457. Ask for Ashley.

photos courtesy of flicker, salentosolemarevento, and lucania.se,

Chasing Grapes: Food For Thought, Chef Kevin Taylor and Metro Pair for a Charitable Evening

Simone FM Spinner

March 23, 2013



Once or twice a season an event comes along that really stands out from the rest.



Last Thursday, at the beautiful new *Metropolitan State University Hospitality Learning Center*, that event of this season took place. MSU hosted an intimate, invitation only, VIP dinner perfectly pairing the *Food For Thought* charity with legendary local chef, Kevin Taylor, to create a spectacular evening of delectable cuisine, libations and reverie. Chef Kevin Taylor constructed a truly inspired menu for the evening. As guests arrived for the cocktail hour in the edgy, modernly designed, glass encased MSU Alumni Student Lounge, they were offered a tasting of the ultra-exclusive Casa Dragones Sipping Tequila. Casa Dragones is 100% blue agave joven tequila hailing from Tequila, Mexico. At \$250 for a single bottle and worth every ducat, this one of a kind sipping tequila is handmade in

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small batches by the world's first female Maestro Tequilero. The gorgeous, hand-etched bottle can be custom inscribed for the most discriminating tequila connoisseur.



Guests enjoyed a glittering view of lower downtown as they were treated to mixed cocktails to accompany a quartet of passed hors d'oeuvres and canapés including Kumomoto oysters with Bloody Mary jelly; skewers of bocconcini, fresh basil and tiny heirloom tomatoes drizzled with a 20 year old balsamico; a lush black truffle custard resting in a crisp puffed pastry sprinkled with pecorino; and a creamy foie gras mousse with caramelized pineapple and a pineapple gastrique. MSU President Stephan Jordan introduced the star of the evening: *Food For Thought*, and its co-founders, Bob Bell, John Thielen, and volunteer coordinator Jeane Larkins, who unfolded the story of *Food For Thought*. *Food For Thought*, (<http://www.foodforthoughtdenver.org/contact/>), was formed in 2012 because of the desperate need to provide healthy and appetizing food for young, under nourished students and their families in the Denver Metropolitan Area. *Food For Thought* reached a hallmark of registering its 500th volunteer the very morning of this fundraiser event:

“Two members of the Arvada Sunrise Rotary Club, Bob Bell and John Thielen, founded Food For Thought after becoming aware of a tremendous need in the Denver Public Schools for such an effort. A partnership with Metro State University was formed when Metro donated on-campus space and provided access to their student body that make up the majority of volunteers. With support and initial funding from the Arvada Sunrise Rotary Club Foundation, the first Powersacks were delivered to two Denver Elementary schools in March 2012. Since that time, in less than a year, Food for Thought has delivered over 43 tons of food consisting of 23 deliveries to the two schools for a total of over 14,000 Powersacks! Each Powersacks bag contains enough food to feed a family of four for a weekend. Food For Thought is a 100% volunteer organization. 100% of all funds raised are used to buy food and supplies for the program. This is a local, grass roots effort directly impacting a huge childhood hunger problem in our community. The two elementary schools served by Food For Thought are Columbian Elementary and Fairview Elementary. Each school has approximately 300 students, ages 3-12. Over 90% of the students at each school qualify for Title 1 benefits allowing them to receive free or reduced breakfast and lunch at school. Powersacks are designed to provide weekend meals so the students don't come to school hungry on Monday morning and are ready to learn and grow. Hungry students are unfocused, disinterested, and unable to experience learning at an optimal capacity.” <http://www.foodforthoughtdenver.org/about-us-food-for-thought-denver/>

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After the presentation about *Food For Thought*, guests congregated in the elegant *MSU Hospitality Learning Center* restaurant to dine on the artistic endeavor of Denver's truly iconic restaurateur. Chef Kevin Taylor presented his first course of vanilla poached Maine lobster, jumbo lump blue crab, pistachio guacamole and lime crème fraiche paired with 2010 Landmark Overlook Chardonnay from Sonoma, California. The graceful and expressive chardonnay brought out the natural sweetness of the lobster while playing on the vanilla notes leaving the mouth to water, longing for a second taste. Known for out doing himself with each course, Chef Taylor delivered an outstanding entrée of tender roast bison and a root beer braised bison short rib that melted in the mouth. The bison was accompanied by succulent parsnips, Chioggia beats, toasted oats and a whiskey jus. The perfect wine pairing for this dish was a 2004 Baron de Ley Gran Reserva Rioja from Spain. Rioja is always a crowd pleaser and this 100% tempranillo was a smoky, lush, rustic but glorious wine that brought out the tremendous depth of the cuisine. For dessert, Chef Taylor thought of something playful. His special interpretation of a classic Snickers candy bar consisted of rich salted caramel, crunchy peanut brittle, and pillow-y nougat paired expertly with Chambers Rosewood NV Muscadelle dessert wine from Victoria, Australia. This little gem of a wine has notes of orange blossom, honey, candied rose petals, and ripe peaches which toned the sweet and salty "Snickers" creating an amazing and satisfying dessert. French press coffee and specialty teas were also served to culminate a luscious gastronomic experience.

MSU Department of Hospitality, Events, & Tourism, Director, Dr. Chad Gruhl, donated the beautiful space for the evening. Chef Kevin Taylor and his server captain Daniel McGaughey graciously volunteered their time and skill. Tracey Johnson of Southern Wine & Spirits kindly donated all of the wine, spirits, and beer for the dinner. Meredith Main Cheairs of Casa Dragones donated her wonderful sipping tequila for the cocktail hour. Laurence Rau, VP of Centerplate, and Judith Thomas, Creative Director of Square Two Financial contributed their time and resources to the organization and event. All servers, kitchen staff, and bar staff were

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student volunteers from the restaurant, culinary, and wine classes of Dr. Michael Wray; Professor & Chef, Travis Smith; and Professor & Sommelier, Simone FM Spinner, CWS, CWE, who were also on hand to lend their time and expertise. James Webb, Events Operation Manager for MSU was available to ensure a seamless evening. **The event and the *Food For Thought* organization owes its success to these volunteers and volunteers like this within the community who selflessly give of their time in service to others. MSU owes a special gratitude to the student volunteers: Sam Watson, Brian Tohill, Rachelle Bunker, Tahmina Hoshmand, Chris Squires, Maritza Cortez, Patrick Gruber, Brennan Sheets, Mike Baltus, Ralitsa Pavlova, Justin Ohlmacher, Ray Barrow, Heidi Torres, Donna Hayes, Tom Deutsh, Andrea Denault, Amir Harrison, and Rachel Smith.**



This article was written by Simone FM Spinner, CWS, CWE. Simone FM Spinner, CWS, CWE is a wine educator, sommelier, and passionate wine & food connoisseur. She is Professor of Wine Studies at Metropolitan State University. Ms. Spinner is also a graduate student at UC Denver studying the aesthetics of wine and pursuing her WSET Diploma in wine studies. She is

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always *Chasing Grapes* and enjoys sharing her experiences with you-Salut!



Chasing Grapes: The Wine Dinner, a Great Way to Learn About Wine

Simone FM Spinner, CWS

October 11, 2012



1515 Restaurant

Learning about wine is just as much fun as kicking back with your favorite glass at the end of your day. It's easy to grab the same bottles every time. It's much more fulfilling to take a few risks and foray into new and different wine regions to explore something you've never heard of. In previous articles I have discussed various ways to expand your wine knowledge, from developing a relationship with your local wine vendor, to taking a class or two, and even attending one of the amazing Wine & Food festivals in your region. This week, I am going to clue you in to one of the most pleasurable ways to learn about wine: the co-hosted restaurant and wine distributor Wine Dinner.

Wine dinners have come into the spotlight in the last decade or so as a great way to learn about food and wine focused on a specific cuisine, wine region, or even winery. In the Denver Metropolitan area, you can find a wine dinner scheduled just about every night of the week. Chic

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restaurants such as Frasca Food & Wine in Boulder, Bistro Vendome on Larimer and the Kitchen on Wazee in Denver, or Indulge Wine Bar in Highlands Ranch are legendary for their expertly executed wine dinners.



1515 Restaurant just before the feast

Every autumn, The Hospitality, Tourism and Events Department of Metropolitan State University hosts an affordable wine and food focused, learning opportunity, for its wine students, in the form of a classic wine dinner. This year, the event took place at 1515 Restaurant, an iconic gem specializing in modern American cuisine, located on Market Street in LoDo. This past Tuesday evening, more than 80 faculty, students, alumni, and friends turned out to feast on the specially crafted dishes of Chef Jon Brown and owner Gene Tang paired with strategically selected wines offered by wine distributor, RNDC. Chef Brown created a menu specifically for the event inspired by the wine regions of northern Italy.



Brasato al Barolo

The evening started with a crunchy soft shell crab tempura, tangy fennel slaw, compressed watermelon infused with peach schnapps drizzled with a delicate basil syrup paired with smoky and crisp 2010 Michele Chiarlo “Le Marne” Gavi. The second course was an Italian pork roulade with spinach, nutmeg, ricotta, crusted pecans and a tangy San Marzano tomato sauce which was paired with a very traditional, crisp and aromatic 2010 Borgo Conventi Pinot Grigio from Collio. The main course for the evening was a succulent Brasato al Barolo; a braised short rib dish with rosemary and truffle polenta, spinach with candied bacon demi which was offered with the juicy yet complex 2010 Pio Cesare Barbara d’Alba. And finally, the dessert course was a festive Carnival Tasting of Cracker Jack gelato, white chocolate funnel

cake, and cherry cotton candy served with a classic peaches and cream 2011
Ruffino Moscato d'Asti.



Carnival Tasting Dessert Tray with Moscato d'Asti

Instead of sitting with other faculty, I decided to sit with a few of my students. While the students were enjoying, what was for many of them, their first fine dining experience, the faculty and wine company representatives visited their tables to discuss and critique each dish, wine, and pairing. Although, slow to offer their opinions on the first course, wine as a natural social lubricant worked its magic and by the second course opinions, anecdotes, tasting notes, and evaluations were free flowing. The students and their friends and family were joyously discussing the finer points of wine and food pairing, teaching one another about the wines or the food preparations. Bantering about aromas and mouth feel, and how certain aspects of each dish affected the wine and vice versa. By the end of the evening, everyone was satisfied, both in their gastronomic and in philosophical senses. Of the courses, the first and main course were thought to have offered the best pairings, but everyone raved about the dessert tray.

The Metropolitan State University and 1515 Restaurant wine dinner was an amazing value at just \$48. Wine dinners are easy to find and can range in price from \$40 to \$300 depending on the restaurant and the wines to be presented. Grab your love and your friends and treat yourself to this fun and educational wine experience. You won't be sorry you did. And, who knows, you just might find a new wine to kick back with at the end of your day.

photos: the author and open table