


FROM THE GRAPEVINE
BY [JOEL M. FISHER](#)
with Matthew Fisher



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BULLETIN: The year moves on. My long-time colleague, Sara Chapin, delivered a beautiful (and big!) baby boy, the day after Valentines Day. We all welcome Carter Alexander Chapin to the world, and as his grandfather, I look forward to introducing him to wine when the time comes.

HEADS UP! LA WINEFEST 2008. Let me remind you that [LA WINEFEST 2008](#) is rapidly approaching. Now in its third year, LA WINEFEST 2008 will be held July 12-13, 2008 at the historic [Raleigh Studios in Hollywood](#). We're particularly excited to welcome Georg Riedel, who will be coming from Austria to present a comparative tasting of three wines in his famous [Riedel](#) glasses. Also on July 12, we will present a Reserve Dinner, prepared by Chef Eddy Rocq, a young and dynamic talent. Eddy trained in France, and began his career in Paris at the Hotel Crillon and Le Méridien Etoile. He then worked at Le Relais Saint-Michel (once my favorite restaurant in Mont Saint Michel), and most recently at hotels in Beverly Hills and Orange County. You will be hearing more about this exceptional young chef very soon. For further details, visit www.lawinefest.com

HAIL! THE "STARS" OF SANTA BARBARA! Not long ago, I attended a program featuring wines hailed as the "Stars of Santa Barbara." With wines coming from many new wineries in that lovely and beloved area, the tasting was a pleasure. I was so impressed with one of the first releases from the new Coquelicot Winery, the 2006 Riesling from the Santa Ynez Valley (\$18) that I asked owner Bernard Rosenson to let us serve it at the WINEFEST's Reserve Dinner, a request to which, happily, he agreed.

Among the other "Stars" on display were wines from [Alma Rosa](#), a new project from veteran winemaker Richard Sanford. The Alma Rosa Pinot Gris (\$16) and Chardonnay (\$16) were both delightful, as was the 2006 Pinot Noir (\$49). [Dragonette Cellars](#), from the Santa Ynez Valley, have produced a true star in their 2006 Pinot Noir (\$30), from the Santa Rita Hills. Made from grapes acquired from [Fiddlestix Vineyards](#), this Pinot has great fruit, and shows delightful promise for the future. I also enjoyed Dragonette's inaugural release, the 2005 Syrah (\$30) from the Santa Ynez Valley. [Beckmen Vineyards](#), an old favorite of mine, was also there, pouring their 2006 Purisima Mountain Vineyard Marsanne (\$30), the 2006 Estate Syrah (\$28), and the 2006 Estate Grenache

(\$22) I found the soft and aromatic Grenache to be particularly drinkable, with a long, complex finish.

Other wineries, new and old, were also at the event showing off the fruit of their labor. [Casa Barranca](#), the first certified organic winery in the region, poured their 2006 Grenache (\$25), a ripe and fruit-forward bottle. The 2005 Cabernet Sauvignon (\$20) was powerful, but quite well balanced. Newcomers [Demetria Estate](#) can be found in Foxen Canyon, on the old Andrew Murray site. Their 2005 Pinot Noir (\$35) from Santa Rita Hills is lovely! It won me over with its earthy flavors and lush finish. Demetria's 2005 Cuvee Constantine (\$35) blends classic Rhone varietals Mouvedre, Grenache and Syrah, producing an intriguing and exceptionally fruity wine that was a pleasure to taste.

Another old friend, [Buttonwood Farm Winery](#), poured a half-dozen of their favorites. Their signature 2006 Sauvignon Blanc (\$14) was crisp and complex. The 2003 Cabernet Franc (\$18), with its fine nose and spicy flavors, very much shows Buttonwood focusing on evoking the region's *terroir*. The 2002 Trevin (\$30), blended from 50% Merlot, 25% Cabernet Sauvignon, and 25% Cabernet Franc, is an ambitious wine, big but delicate. We also tasted the 2007 Cabernet Franc, which, although young, teases with good fruits and a nice balance – keep your eyes open for its release. Winemaker Karen Steinwachs is doing wonderful work each year in improving Buttonwood's wines. I'm happy to see them succeed, and look forward to more of their quality wines in the future.

Itself an up-and-coming region (though not for growing grapes!), the Culver City renaissance offers Angelenos a wonderful variety of wine bars and restaurants. I finally made it to Bottleneck, a year-old wine bar sitting happily in the neighborhood's commercial center. My son Matthew and I chose a quiet Sunday evening to explore the restaurant, which was nonetheless doing brisk business. I thought their wine list was, well, sort of awesome, both in terms of its breadth, and also their "hook": every wine on their list is available by the glass if you order 2 or more glasses. This opens up a range (and a price point) of wines typically only sold by the bottle. Mike Olsen, the night bar manager, was extremely friendly and happily helped us explore the menu and the wine list. We started with a Tagent Albarino (\$12 per glass), an Edna Valley variation on the theme that was pleasant, though lacking some of the vigor of Spanish and Portuguese interpretations of the grape. We went on to try the Flowers Pinot Noir from Sonoma (\$22 per glass), an **Assentato** Nero D'Avila (\$11 per glass) from Italy, and finished with a nice (but unidentified) Sauterne that Mike very generously insisted we taste.

We picked eclectically through the menu, beginning with a selection of cheeses, featuring a notable aged cheddar, a perfectly creamy triple cream brie, and a subtle Etorki. After the cheese, we continued to sample our way through a charcuterie plate, featuring a particularly good sopressata that played nicely against our red wine choices. The petite lamb chops, prepared by Chef Sherie Farah, were perhaps the best I've enjoyed in the past few years, cooked in a Pinot Noir and sweet cherry reduction, and served with pearl onions. The only downside was having to leave – I will definitely return to try some of Chef Sherie's other creations.

Joel M. Fisher Ph.D writes a monthly column for the [Chefs de Cuisine Association of California](#) and was for 7 years the wine instructor for the Culinary Arts Department, [Art Institute of California-Los Angeles](#). Now Adjunct Instructor of Wine for the Cordon Bleu program, 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. His email address is joel@winevineanddine.com. Matthew Fisher accompanied the senior Dr. Fisher on six European trips, where they were invited by wineries in France, Germany, and Spain. Kay Tornborg, of Hollywood, will assist in editing.

Matthew Fisher (left), with wine writer W.R. Tish at a Mario Batali restaurant in NYC.



As always, happy drinking!