

The "Seder" in Oxnard

The Kosher wines of Herzog, for all the right reasons

By Joel M. Fisher with Kay Tornborg Photos: Avi Roth/Vineyard Report

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Oxnard, CA, 03/03/06 --- Fast forward from last summer, when I reported the grand opening of Herzog Wine Cellars in Oxnard even as the winery's restaurant, TIERRA SUR, was awaiting its new chef, Todd Aarons. He has arrived! And I, along with media from throughout California, attended a mock Passover Seder, pairing Chef Aarons reinvention of traditional Sephardic Jewish cooking with the wines of Herzog and with commentary by wine maker Joe Hurliman.



Attendees at Herzog's mock Passover Seder pairing kosher wine with kosher food.

Lisa McKinnon (Ventura County Star), the LA Times Patrick Comiskey (also Wine & Spirits), Avi Roth of the Vineyard Report, J.P. Webb, Herzog's PR representative, Sara Schneider of Sunset Magazine and this celebrant were all enthralled by the program devised by Jay Buchsbaum, VP Marketing for Royal Wine Group, which manages the six divisions constituting Royal Wine, including Herzog. Moreover, the restaurant is comfortable and attractive, with an open kitchen, slate accents and a wood grill and fireplace. The main room seats 40, their private room another 50-70, and the outside terrace has an additional 9 tables.



Chef Todd Aarons

Chef Aarons is a 1993 graduate of the California Culinary Academy in San Francisco. We chatted about his two-year tenure at Zuni Cafe there, before heading to Savoy in New York. During a yearlong break from Savoy he lived and worked at four restaurants in Tuscany but he particularly enjoyed Restaurante Da Delfina in Artimino, Italy. His Italian sojourn, joined with the Spanish/Moroccan cuisine of his Sephardic in-laws, has resulted in his Tuscan-influenced menus that put his own spin on this culinary coupling.

The meal began with Herzog's 2004 SAUVIGNON BLANC, from Los Alamos and Edna Valley. The wine had waited for us long enough to be a bit warm. But I found it spicy, with a long finish and hinting at some of the new French Oak in which it had been aged. It was paired with a delicious Hreimeh, or Moroccan spicy sea bass with red peppers and harisa. Even those who can't take too much spice will love this dish.



Winemaker Joe Hurliman

Next up was the 2004 CHARDONNAY, mostly from the Russian River, and barrel fermented. Ten percent of the blend was from Gainey Winery in Santa Ynez, and the wine drinks cleanly, slightly sweet but with crisp acidity. Sniff out the good fruit, with vanilla on the finish, with spices and licorice or maybe smoky oak. This was served with a Persian chicken soup having dried limes, chickpeas and a chicken dumpling.

Yet another specialty: the Pomegranate-braised lamb shoulder with fava beans, Syrah-macerated black figs and walnut Haroset with roasted asparagus, preserved lemons and dill. With this we enjoyed the 2003 ZINFANDEL from Lodi, which was certainly friendly, possessing a big chocolate nose and a fruity, long finish. Our trio of red wines included the 2003 SYRAH-EDNA VALLEY SPECIAL RESERVE, which was smooth, with rich tannins, showing berry fruits on the nose and palate with a strong trace of chocolate/mocha...they said caramel...and a finish of spices and vanilla. Last of the red

was the 2003 GENERATION 8 CABERNET SAUVIGNON. With only 90 cases made, and not to be released until the end of this year, this one may be difficult to find! Aged in the bottle for six months, this had chocolate, cedar and fruit with a very nice finish.



Tierra Sur Restaurant at Herzog Winery, Oxnard, CA

Dinner concluded with the most extraordinary dessert: Halvah Pot de creme, with date honey. Talk about something being sinfully good, this was absolutely fantastic! The wine was the 2003 LATE HARVEST WHITE RIESLING... sweet on the nose, floral, and peach with good acidity, helped by the Monterey grapes from which it's made. A little dividend: it's only \$18.

Less than an hour's ride from Hollywood you can imagine yourself in Tuscany with scents of the Middle East at your table. Tour the winery, watch the bottling process, taste wine, and enjoy lunch or dinner at Tierra Sur!

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