


FROM THE GRAPEVINE



By JOEL M. FISHER
With Sara Fisher Chapin

ACF/Chefs de Cuisine Association of California
11664 National Blvd. # 410
Los Angeles, CA 90064
ACFLA: 818-559-5218



Joel M. Fisher, PHD
WINE COLUMNIST
CULINARY CONNECTION

Email: joel@winevineanddine.com Cell: 818-429-6770

July 2007



After much anticipation, LAWINEFEST 2007 has come and passed. Roughly 1500 people came to the [Queen Mary](#) in Long Beach to sample wares from over 100 purveyors. Some other fun statistics: more than 500 wines were poured from 20 different wine regions around the world.

In addition to the general tasting area, our educational program featured some particularly popular sessions. Peter Birmingham, sommelier for **Il Grano**, moderated Saturday's program, and was joined in moderation duties on Sunday by George Skorka, former restaurateur, sommelier and director of restaurants for the [Jonathan Club](#). In the sessions, Amy Butler, winemaker for [Edward Sellers](#), talked about the fascinating reality of working at a small, specialized winery. Wes Hagen, [Clos Pepe](#), got a full house as he discussed Clos Pepe Pinot Noirs and the new Santa Rita AVA. Paul Sherman drew on his experiences as Sommelier for **Valentino's**. One of the most crowded sessions was hosted by cheese impresario Barrie Lynn, who guided the group through a cheese and wine pairing. My profound thanks to all the speakers.



A new element to this year's event was a special reserve tasting and paired dinner, held at the Queen Mary's fine dining room, [Sir Winston's](#). Executive Chef Thierry Ruax created a special menu for which I greatly enjoyed creating the wine pairings. The repast began with Oysters Oscar, paired with champagne from [Chateau Billecart-Salmon](#). We moved onto a refreshing romaine and sesame seaweed salad with bay shrimp, which paired with a [2005 Carica Sauvignon Blanc](#) that winery co-owner Dick Keenan

was nice enough to donate. With its clean, tropical tastes and delightful acidity, the wine opened with vibrant floral, grapefruit and guava notes. Next came an exceptional Boursin cheese-crust sea bass, served with a tomato and onion confit and paired with a rich 2004 *Talley Chardonnay*. Our main entree was Sir Winston's signature beef tenderloin with foie gras wrapped in phyllo dough. This paired perfectly with a smooth, balanced 2005 *Santo Stefano Cabernet Sauvignon* – which had hints of chocolate laced amidst dark fruits – and a 2004 *Riboli Family Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon*, which showed good tannins, good spiced berries and a long finish. The feast concluded with *Le Duet*, a fruit flan and chocolate decadence cake dessert sampler. Accompanying this was a wonderful selection of a *Yarden Gewürztraminer Ice Wine*, an elegant [Graham's Six Grapes Port](#), and the Italian lemon liquor, limoncello.

In addition to Chef Ruaux, I warmly thank restaurant manager John Bowshevicz, captain Jesus R Gonzales and our server, Benjamin Murillo. We honored them by leaving empty plates, and by a return visit. Thanks to all for a job extremely well done!

...

As part of my preparations for the [LA Wine Fest](#), I've spent a lot of time criss-crossing all of California's wine regions. I've visited old friends, and have discovered new gems. I want to tell you more about one of the latter.

Up in Napa, I discovered [Constant Winery](#), a stunningly beautiful operation high up in the picturesque Diamond Mountain area, near Mount St. Helena. Owner Fred Constant and his wife Mary have a lovely house on the property, and 40 acres of vines planted 15 years ago. (Historical side note: this area was originally planted in the 1890s.) Constant is growing Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Syrah, Cabernet Franc and Petit Verdot grapes. Constant comes from a career in broadcasting, having owned and sold radio stations, and has found a kindred spirit in winemaker Paul Coluntourni. Both men have degrees from Princeton University, and clearly have a wonderful thing going.

Constant graciously hosted me on his home's porch, where we sampled some of his bottles. Their classic Rhone-style 2004 *Syrah* is a big wine, and will be released this summer for approximately \$50. I was impressed by the 2004 *Cabernet Franc*, which initially showed an earthy nose and mint flavors that smoothed out nicely in the glass. Next we tasted Constant's 2004 *Cabernet Sauvignon*, a blend of 90% Cabernet with dollops of Merlot, Cabernet Franc and Petit Verdot. This wine was velvety from first sip, with strong, firm fruits and a long smooth finish. This wine will sell for \$85.

Constant and Coluntourni are producing a variety of wines, including a Claret. They will produce more as time goes on. I intend to keep my eye on this up-and-coming winery, and recommend that you keep an eye out for their bottles.

...

And now for a guest review. I met freelance wine writer Ben Nasarin a couple of years ago in Paso Robles, where we hit it off. He passed along his notes on a wonderful summer wine, which I wanted to share with you here.

Ben Narasin's Sweet Tooth Satisfied

[Chateau Julien's Sangiovese Rosato](#) (\$16, Monterey County). This wine screams refreshment on a summer day. Like pink lemonade for grown ups. Faded pink color with fresh strawberries on the nose. The wine has a wonderful hit of sweetness with red berries and a clean refreshing lucidity in the mouth. Thoroughly refreshing and just right for a hot summer day and on through a lingering evening. I kept putting it down but found myself coming back again and again and it just got better along the way. If I used points I'd call this 96 points

As always, happy drinking!



Joel M. Fisher Ph.D writes a monthly column for the [Chefs de Cuisine Association of California](#). He is the co-founder and organizer of the annual LAWineFest. He is Director of Public Affairs for Avalon Hollywood, and as a partner in [WineVineandDine](#) conducts tastings, wine dinners, and wine-and-food pairings throughout Southern California. His email address is joel@winevineanddine.com Sara Fisher Chapin is a freelance writer with more than a decade of experience writing for various publications and media.