

WINE, SPIRITS & FINER FOODS SPEC'S Update!



Mon-Sat January 18
to January 23, 2010

DEFINING VALUE

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The Australian Specialty Menu
Wednesday, January 20, 2010 @ 7 p.m.
see page 3 for more details

Come check out our full service deli at our newest Houston store,
WESLAYAN & BISSONNET

COMING SOON
CORPUS CHRISTI
5625 South Padre Island Drive
TEMPLE
3550 S. General Bruce Dr.

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WINE OF THE MONTH!

Pigmentum Blanc 2008 \$10.41 cash
60% Ugni Blanc, 40% Colombard. Its brilliant color with light green tints confirms its freshness and youth. You will be attracted at once by explosive aromas of citrus fruits, exotic fruits and white flowers. The intensity persists on the palate thanks to a beautiful balance between the freshness of aromas and the fat issued from the well-crafted maturing while on lees. Pairs with seafood, white meats and blue cheese.

If you enjoyed this selection, try others from the same makers:

Pigmentum Malbec 2006 - \$10.67 cash
Pigmentum Rose of Malbec 2008 - \$10.67 cash

Tasting in the New Year

by Charles M. Bear Dalton



Spec's fine wine buyer Bear Dalton "clicking in" a tasting note at Restaurant Tres Girard in Morey St. Denis (Burgundy).

For many people, the end of the year brings a break in their routine. Ten or eleven months a year, their routine is set and the extended holiday season from Thanksgiving through New Year's breaks it. That's how it is for me also ... but maybe in a different way. For me and everyone else who works at Spec's, that holiday break in routine is the busy time. Those of us who work directly with customers are busier than ever and those who don't regularly work with customers often do during this time period. Even CPA Charlie Turner takes on a section in the Smith Street store; for just over a month, he becomes our eggnog specialist.

Thinking about it, I appreciate the break in my routine. It is fun to deal more with customers, even though I don't always know exactly where to go to find the case they are asking for. I used to know where everything was but as Spec's has grown and some of our jobs have become more specialized, I find myself asking the sales staff almost as many questions as they ask me.

The one thing that is truly tricky for me about the break in the routine is tasting. While most months I taste and take notes on over 400 wines just in the office, in December that drops down to virtually none. So January rolls around and the appointments start up and I begin to dig into the samples (mostly unsolicited) that accumulated in December and I find that I have forgotten how. Well, not really forgotten how to taste ... but I find that tasting wine and taking notes – which is second nature to me most of the year – is initially a chore as I have to regain my focus and “hone my chops” as a horn playing friend used to say. I feel about tasting right now the same way I felt when I first got back on a horse seven months after I broke my shoulder getting bucked off. I was excited to get back on, a bit nervous after all that time, and felt like I was relearning some things I was a bit rusty on.

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Inside This Issue: *Deli Specials, Collin's Column, Delicious Mischief, Beer Buzz, Wine and Cheese of the Week & more!*

Tasting in the New Year *from page 1*

In October of 2008 - after years of filling up spiral bound notebooks with tasting notes - I switched over to taking my tasting notes directly into a computer database built on the Filemaker Pro program. I now have several thousand distinct and unique tasting notes in my database and can easily search them by name and vintage and any of several other factors. The database has made my tasting notes that much more accessible and useable. It has also had an unintended but beneficial side effect: It has made me a more disciplined taster and has encouraged me to take more complete notes. If you read the tasting notes I regularly publish in Spec's Update, you know what I mean. Each note has a technical section and a sensory section. The technical section focuses on the wine's alcohol and blend as well as its winemaking and élevage techniques - which is the "why" of how it tastes. The sensory section focuses on the normal stuff of tasting notes with a bit more detail that comes from the process of clicking the note into the database. That process is a bit less natural than jotting shorthand into a notebook but the benefit is more access to better information. Here are my notes on two white wines I tasted this week.

PACO & LOLA Albarino, Rias Baixas, 2008

Tech: 13% Alcohol. 100% Albarino from the rocky granite and alluvial soils of the Salnes Valley made with no oak and no malo-lactic fermentation. Pale yellow gold in color with subtle green highlights, bright and clear with well formed legs; dry, medium-bodied with refreshing acidity and a really long, clean finish. Offers ripe citrus with mineral earth; deceptive as it is more than it initially appears. Well-focused and quite satisfying with a surprising richness (for Albarino). *Yum. Really Fine. BS: 90VHR. (WP).*

BYRON Chardonnay, Santa Maria Valley, 2007

Tech: 14.2% Alcohol. 100% Chardonnay barrel fermented with 100% malolactic fermentation given sur-lie aging and weekly lees-stirring. Some of the lots utilized native yeast fermentations. Yellow straw in color with just a hint of green; bright and clear with well formed legs. Dry, medium-bodied with fresh acidity. Elegant, juicy, lively, citrus and stone fruit with a hint of tropical fruit including banana. Lovely in the mouth. Offers plenty of mineral with integrated oak accented with very subtle creamy-buttery notes and a hint of floral. Rich and delicious but in fine balance; Lovely in the mouth. *Excellent. BS: 91+VHR. (WP).*



My challenge for the coming year is to make all the notes on all the better wines available to you the ultimate buyer. As I do so, there will be a note and a score and the score will be followed, as above, by some initials. In descending order, "VHR" will stand for "very highly recommended", "HR" will stand for "highly recommended", "R" will stand for "recommended", and "E" will stand for "endorsed". "NE" will indicate a wine that I don't think is endorsable. You, the ultimate wine buyer, are unlikely to see NE in a review as I try not to buy those sorts of wines. I say "try" because sometimes a successful ad campaign (among other possible scenarios) forces us to carry a wine we aren't altogether happy with.

In addition to those recommendations, I have begun affixing the designations CW and WP to my notes. "CW" will indicate a commercial wine. "WP" will indicate a wine-of-place. At its simplest, a commercial wine (CW) is one where there isn't an actual winemaker and an actual grape grower. Wines of place (WP) is a wine where a name can be put to the actual winemaker and the actual grape grower. While there is nothing wrong with the vast majority of commercial wines (which also make up the vast majority of all wines), I think it is good to know which they are. As to wines of place, there is no guarantee that all the places - the somewheres - a wine can be from will yield the grapes from which it is possible to make great or even just good wine every time. Nevertheless, I think it is good to know if a wine is "of a place" and I find that most of the very best wines are. ■



2521 Bagby @ McGowen

The Australian Specialty Menu

Wednesday, January 20, 2010 @ 7pm

Cost \$70 Plus tax & gratuity

Please call for Reservations

Tel. 713 521 ~7231

MENU

Hibiscus -Warm Brie and
Macademia Nut Canapés

Wild Hibiscus Flower- Cocktail Royal

Lemon Myrtle - Chili Prawns
D' Arenberg The Noble

Chardonnay Semillon 06

Australian Native Mint - Wrapped
Barramundi Sea Bass,
Jasmine Rice-Lemongrass- Riesling Reduction

D' Arenberg The Noble Riesling 06

Raspberry & Wild Rosella Sorbet

Dialog of Grilled Australian Lamb Chop & Kangaroo
Filet with Wild Pepper Berries - Red Currant Verjus
Reduction,
Salsify -Polenta -Quenelles

D' Arenberg Laughing Magpie Shiraz Maclaren Vale 06

Australian Cheese Soufflé with Native Leatherwood
Honey and Toasted Almonds