

*Society of Medical Friends of Wine Newsletter*  
**December 2017**

**Anatomy of a Trial Dinner**

To help plan for the Society's Annual Dinner on Saturday, January 20, 2018, a dinner committee convened on December 1<sup>st</sup> in the Golden Gate Room on the 25<sup>th</sup> floor of the Hotel Nikko in San Francisco. Attendees included co-presidents Brenda Shank and Mark Rosenberg, wine chair Fiona Donald, and Society members and guests Daniel and Betsy Bikle, Gina Lopez Rosenberg, Judy and Roger Ecker, Barry Liu, Tom Green, Joan Boothe, Almon Larsh, and Marion and Bob Blumberg, along with our Executive Secretary Susan Guerguy.



Trial dinners can be a lot of work, but also a lot of fun, and allow for an informal venue to discuss food choices and wine pairings. If you like discussing the nuances of different spices and arguing over the qualities of wines, trial dinners could be just your cup of tea. And a successful trial dinner is paramount for a quarterly dinner being well received and educational for the entire membership.

This one was a grand success, inspired by Fiona's decision to offer wine selections from wineries greatly impacted by the recent North Bay fires.

We started the evening with a glass of lovely sparkling wine from Domaine Carneros, which we also carried forward to accompany the first course options of Sesame Crushed Ahi Tuna and Scottish

Salmon Tartare. At this point the sparkler was joined by a Gewurztraminer from Gundlach-Bundschu, a Sauvignon Blanc from Stag's Leap, and a Chardonnay from White Rock. In addition to the main ingredients in these two offerings, we learned about micro licorice, Yuzu Gelee, and Furikaki crackers.

The still white wines were carried forward to see how they accompanied a choice of two salads--beet trio with preserved lemon vinaigrette or asparagus salad with grapefruit segments and citrus vinaigrette, all the while discussing dressing choices to avoid wine clashes and whether or not January is optimal timing for asparagus.

The main courses were a wintry delight, with options of espresso rubbed filet mignon of beef or a plate filling 16-ounce grilled bone-in rib eye steak. Red wine options were very interesting, with a Chateau St. Jean 2013 Cabernet Sauvignon and a Stag's Leap Artemis Cabernet Sauvignon 2014 compared to a lighter and fruitier 2015 Paradise Ridge Pinot Noir.



To conclude the evening, we were presented with dessert options of Pistachio Raspberry Tranche--beautiful to the eye and more benign to the palate, or an absolutely fabulous Molten Chocolate Fog Cake accompanied by its own fog. Fiona asked our thoughts on a very rare 13-year old dessert wine of botrytized Semillon and Sauvignon Blanc.



If you love talking about food and wine, trial dinners are just plain fun. No need to hide your opinions, be shy or conciliatory. Let it all out, lobby for your favorites, and leave it to the chairs and Susan to diplomatically convey your thoughts to the kitchen.

This dinner, like all memorable trial dinners, evoked lots of discussion and not always similar opinions. Should we go with the butteriness of the tuna or the texture and spice of the salmon tartare. I love beets--I don't like beets. Pairing asparagus with wine is challenging. No, it's not--the grassiness of the Sauvignon Blanc goes perfectly. The filet is so tender it melts in your mouth. It's so tender it's bland--I want a steak I can sink my teeth into. And these were mild, compared to the discussions on the wines.

One can always try to compromise among strong opinions, but the result can be an okay but not very exciting event. I have always counseled dinner and wine chairs to embrace the controversy, encourage the discussion, and educate the members. As long as you are prepared to defend your choices, go for it! That's part of the prerogative of volunteering to chair an event and makes for an exciting final event.



So what were the decisions? I'm afraid you will have to wait for the formal invitation to the event to learn, but I can tell you that Fiona left with fire in her eye and a spring to her step, so I know she will meet the challenge. And I for one am very much looking forward to the dinner, and I do hope you can join us at the Hotel Nikko, 222 Mason Street, San Francisco on January 20<sup>th</sup>. Our annual dinner is always a special event, and this year will be made the more so by our being able to support some of the wineries impacted by the recent tragedy.

The holiday season is usually a busy, perhaps even frenetic, time of year, and this year it may be even more so, given recent natural disasters, political challenges in our capitol, and scary turmoil internationally. It is also time to reflect on and celebrate the love of family and friends, and with that in mind I would like to join with Susan, your officers and Board of Governors in wishing all of you a peaceful and happy holiday season and New Year.

Bob Blumberg  
Editor and Cellar Master  
Society of Medical Friends of Wine