

Restaurant pairs bold Zinfandels with grilled courses

The Wine Guerilla meets La Casa Sena's Chef Gharrity

BY JIM HAMMOND

Wine dinners are a good way to judge the quality of a restaurant. How well its menu pairs with the wines and how well the event is organized say much about the place.

On that basis, La Casa Sena wins five stars for a delightful and imaginative journey anchored by Wine Guerilla and the pairing expertise of Chef Patrick Gharrity.

La Casa Sena is one of Santa Fe's most popular restaurants, and for good reason. The courtyard that encompasses two sides of the interior dining rooms provided a relaxed and festive locale for the wine dinner.

The chef provided a grilled element for each course, which matched Zinfandel wines from various regions within Sonoma. I suspect the challenge of pairing these big wines might have been one of Chef Patrick's reasons for doing so, and it worked.

The five course dinner began with a smoked honeydew gazpacho topped with a pineapple salsa and paired with the Wine Guerilla 2009 Sonoma County Zinfandel, a refined wine that did not overpower the soup.

The second course, grilled butter lettuce and Treviso salad, was spiked by Tellicherry peppercorns from India, an almost fruit-like pepper that added another accent to pair with the Rebel Cru blend of Zinfandel, Cabernet Sauvignon and lesser amounts of Syrah and Petite Sirah. It is a fruit-forward and robust wine with a long finish.

Achiote grilled prawn as a third course was paired with the 2009



CHOPPETTE GRILLING BY CHEF PATRICK GHARRITY. Photo by Jim Hammond.

Clopton Vineyard "Old Vine" Zinfandel from the Russian River area. This is mostly Zinfandel with a bit of Alicante Bouschet for added depth and color. The nose is redolent of old-vine earthiness with forest floor, mushroom and spice with an undercurrent of red and black fruit which predominate on the palate. Again the grilling and smokiness of the dish allowed it to pair with this well-balanced bold wine.

As the name suggests, these are brawny Zins with alcohol that can climb above 15%. However, giving them plenty of time to breath and keeping the temperature on the low side of the Zinfandel range assures they will stay in balance and pair better.

A Sika venison chopette with purple potato-Humbolt fog gratin was paired with the 2009 Harris-Kratka vineyard Zinfandel from Alexander Valley, which is well-

known for its Cabs and Zins. This wine wove a purple haze of dark fruit, Damson plum, spice and earthy smoke, pairing

brilliantly with a chopette that was bigger than most chops.

The blueberry semi freddo swam in a red chile chocolate sauce and danced with the 2009 David Coffaro Vineyard Old Vine Zinfandel from the Dry Creek area, one of the premier regions for this grape. Chocolate and Zin always work, but adding the red chile and blueberry reflected some of the spicy notes of the wine and improved the pairing. The scoop of semi freddo looks like ice cream but has a clotted cream texture that made this dessert special.

The applause for Chef Gharrity and Wine Guerilla owner Bruce Patch was heartfelt and well-deserved.



Jim Hammond is the Southwestern Wine Guy and a contributing editor to *abqARTS*.

> Enjoy making Chef Gharrity's Trout in Adobe Clay recipe, available online at abqarts.com.

ARTFUL PAIRINGS



BRUCE PATCH OF WINE GUERRILLA (SECOND FROM L.), WITH GUESTS. Photo by Jim Hammond.

photo by Richard Malcolm
PROGRAM OF NATIVE AMERICAN THEATER
Asdzani Shash:
 The Woman Who Turned Into a Bear

by Rhiana Yazzie
 directed by Kim Gleason
AUGUST 5-21, 2011
 Fridays & Saturdays, 7 pm
 Sundays, 2 pm

\$12/ \$8
 Tickets: www.vsartsnm.org
 Reservations: 505-344-4542

Need a Fast Frame up?
BOGO at 1/2 price
2 Weeks Only
Offer Ends Aug 14

El Mirasol
Picture Frames
 Corner Eubank & Menaul
 9649 Menaul Blvd NE
 505-237-2911
ElMirasolPictureFrames.com