

ARIZONA VINES & WINES



TOUR WINE COUNTRY

Wine Tour Maps inside with a complete listing of all Arizona Wineries & Tasting Rooms

FEATURED WINERY - *Freitas Vineyard*

Display until March 2012

\$3.95

14>



0 74470 25510 9

WINTER 2011

VAGABONDING LULU

AN EXCELLENT PAIRING: WINE AND CRUISING

BY STACEY WITTIG, TRAVEL WRITER

It was an awkward moment. From the stage, Celebrity Chef Hervé Laurent looked straight into my eyes, his face twisting around his penetrating stare. His eyes bulged as he searched for the right word, and he looked at me as if I were hiding it. If he didn't find the word soon, I was sure that his face, now becoming the color of a fine red Côtes de Bordeaux, was going to explode all over the wine flight lined in front of me.

You see, Chef Hervé is a very accomplished, meticulous, and intense French chef. So to lose a word is as intolerable as lifting your eyes while making a white wine cream sauce. The connoisseur served as Master Chef and instructor at Le Cordon Bleu in London and Sydney; Paul Bocuse Institute in Lyon, France; and HOSTA in Switzerland.

In 2004, the Frenchman opened The School of Culinary Arts in Central America and has since taught in the Spanish language.

"I am thinking in French, translating to Spanish and then trying to speak in English," apologized the genius, sweeping a glass of white wine under his nose. Chef was invited by the International Food Wine and Travel Writers Association to speak on food and wine pairings. He found his word and gallantly dashed along.

Chef Hervé shared the stage with Don Reha, our guest winemaker, who led us in wine tastings. Reha directed us to taste our first glass of wine, a 2009 Sauvignon Blanc from Niner Wine Estates in Paso Robles, California. "The winemaker is a woman," explained Don Reha of Reha Wines, Inc. "The crisp acidity would pair well with coconut curry, cashews, or white chocolate." As a vintner, Don began at Fetzer Vineyards in Redwood Valley, spent almost a decade at Thorton Winery in Temecula, and studied at UC Davis. The pairing of the California beach boy with the acclaimed French chef was making for quite a show.

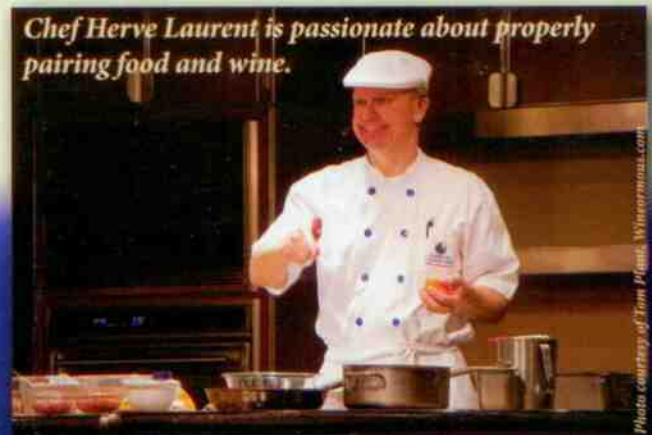
"Before you taste, swirl the wine for 15-20 seconds," interrupted Chef Hervé. "Do not be afraid, you will not break the wine." Our group of writers laughed, picked up glasses and swirled away.

Since we are on Holland America's *ms Westerdam* whilst cruising Alaska, the food of choice is salmon and Chef Hervé is showing us how to prepare distinctly different sauces to accompany the Alaskan delicacy.

"I love sauces. You get many tastes depending on the reduction," announced Chef Hervé. He was preparing three: a red wine sauce with maple syrup that "gives a little sweetness to the sauce," a creamy white wine sauce with zest of orange added in the final minutes, and a sweet-and-spicy papaya and ginger sauce.

Fortunately, we were in Holland America's state-of-the-art Culinary Arts Center where overhead mirrors and huge TV monitors set among stainless kitchen appliances made it easy for us to see the preparations and interact with Chef Hervé and Don. Although we have brought along our own experts for the writers group, Holland America's chefs and wine experts have also presented gourmet cooking demonstrations and classes in this setting throughout the cruise. Holland America's cooking theatre on the Lower Promenade Deck is sponsored by *Food & Wine* magazine.

Wine and cruising go together on Holland America's Westerdam



Chef Herve Laurent is passionate about properly pairing food and wine.



California winemaker Don Reha leads the group in tastings.



Photo courtesy of Tom Plant, Winecountry.com

As a vintner, Don began at Fetzer Vineyards in Redwood Valley, spent almost a decade at Thornton Winery in Temecula and studied at UC Davis.

Chef Hervé sliced the thick, cooked salmon fillets into two-inch bites and placed four on every plate. "I need one volunteer for each of the sauces. You will spoon your sauce over one of the pieces on each plate," commanded the chef. I jumped up and grabbed the heavy white wine sauce pan and started dabbing the pink morsels. On the fourth piece of salmon, Chef Hervé crumbled bacon. Then he invited the audience to come up and taste.

Cruising is a great way to experience wines and learn more about food. On this cruise we've tasted rhubarb in a Roche 2008 Cabernet Sauvignon from Sonoma, velvety licorice in a Scheid 2007 Syrah from Monterey and dark Swiss chocolate and Dutch cream in Chocolais, a new specialty wine. We've paired Edam cheese with an off-dry Riesling from Loredona Vineyard another Monterey vineyard, soft cheeses with an acclaimed J. Lohr Vineyard Pinot Noir from Paso Robles and Amsterdam cheese with a splendid Merlot from Chateau Julien, Carmel, California.

Reha offered a theory about why Merlot is the best selling red in the U.S. "Merlot is still one of the easiest varietals to pronounce," jested Reha. "You can order a Merlot and not risk looking like a fool on a first date." Later Reha predicted that the next red wine will be Syrah. If the complex tastes of Zaca Mesa 2008 Syrah from Santa Barbara are any indicator, then I could agree.

One of my favorite events shipboard was our welcoming champagne reception. Sponsored by Thornton Winery, we enjoyed a sparkling wine flight of their 2004 Brut Reserve, Non-Vintage Brut, Non-Vintage Blanc de Nois and Non-Vintage Cuvée Rouge. Faithful to the Méthode Champenoise, Thornton produces award-winning sparkling wines. I just didn't know they produced so many finely-bubbled delights.

You can make your cruise more wine-friendly by engaging the knowledgeable wine stewards – we had fourteen on our cruise. They introduced me to enjoyable wines that I would not have tried on my own. Or ask your cruise line ahead of time if they offer special wine experiences. For instance, Holland American offers a Sommelier Dinner once per sailing. The cellar master, or "sommelier," introduces combinations at course intervals, revealing the background and basis for each blend while a culinary team of six – including the executive chef – collaborates to produce the Sommelier Dinner.

Another option is to book your cruise to your favorite wine country. Years ago I enjoyed a Cruise West small ship cruise to Napa and Sonoma in the fall. But why wait that long? It's summertime in South America and Buenos Aires is calling. This vagabond would opt for Holland America's shore excursion where, under the tutelage of a Buenos Aires wine expert, you'd taste Argentine wines in private two-hour tasting sessions. In the next port, tour vineyards and wineries of Uruguay and at the end of the voyage experience culinary and wine tasting near Valparaiso, Chile. Book now, the *ms Veendam* sails from Buenos Aires on January 23.



Photo by Stacey Wittig

Chateau Julien Wine Estate - Carmel, CA
www.chateaujulien.com

Holland America Line
www.hollandamerica.com

J. Lohr Paso Robles Wine Center
www.jlohr.com

Roche Winery - Sonoma, CA
www.rochewinery.com

Scheid Vineyards - Salinas, CA
www.scheidvineyards.com

School of Culinary Arts Central America
Master French Chef Hervé Laurent
San Salvador, El Salvador, Central America
www.scarts.com.sv

Thornton Winery - Temecula, CA
www.thorntonwine.com

Zaca Mesa Winery & Vineyards - Los Olivos, CA
www.zacamesa.com

Stacey "Vagabonding Lulu" Wittig is a freelance travel writer based in Flagstaff, Arizona who enjoys food and wine. Enjoy this article? Follow her escapades at www.vagabondinglulu.com.

