



wine
**Richard
Watson**

Best choice isn't always house wine

One of the minor dilemmas/challenges we all face occurs each time we dine out and elect to have a glass or two of wine with our meal. (Except for breakfast this can be most meals, for many of us.)

Assuming there are enough people present, the initial choice is between selecting a full bottle of our choice or choosing that which the restaurant has selected for us, the so-called "house wine." The illusion is that the choice is a matter of economics alone. In part, this is true, but if the dimension of quality is added to the picture, the simplicity of the issue quickly clouds.

Through but unsystematic research over the years suggests that the typical cost of a glass of "house wine" in a restaurant costs about \$2.50 for a six-ounce glass. Let's call that 40 cents an ounce.

Most restaurants buy that wine in economy jugs or boxes, usually containing at least three liters, or approximately 100 ounces (to be precise, 33.8 fluid ounces). For this the restaurant pays perhaps \$4, or four cents an ounce. The initial \$4 investment, and it can be even cheaper, and frequently is, yields \$40 in revenue. That 10 times is a most handsome profit even when the matter of overhead is allowed (glasses, service, equipment, washing and storage).

AND THE QUALITY of "house wines" thus priced is usually, at best, modest at well. Sometimes it is rather poor.

With better "house wines," say Fetzer Sundial Chardonnay or Lake County Cabernet Sauvignon, seen too infrequently, a restaurant will buy that for \$4 when done so in some volume. The bottle would produce four six-ounce servings at 16 cents an ounce to the house. When served at the more likely price of \$3.50 the glass, the margin diminishes but is still strong. You would be paying 60 cents an ounce for either of these examples.

This double-tiering of offerings is becoming more common as storage

devices become more available to restaurants and wine lists get more complex.

The alternative to drinking bulk "house wine" is to buy a full bottle. A \$15 bottle of Maron or Zinfandel probably cost the house about \$6.75 (assuming a two to two-and-a-half times markup over cost), less if bought carefully. You will pay about 80 cents an ounce for a wine that cost the owner 28 cents.

Thus, at about 70 cents your cost, you get what the marketplace deems is worth 28 cents by the bottle. Figure four six-ounce glasses from a bottle, or \$4.25 a glass.

IT TAKES LITTLE arithmetic (though I have now had enough) to see that wine quality can be quickly upgraded for a few cents.

So, consider this all a recommendation to think carefully about too readily settling for the "house wine" to save a few cents if quality-per-dollar is your meter.

Buried in all the figures above is one that should be further explored: the matter of the restaurant charging two to two-and-a-half (sometimes three and four) times the cost for a bottle, thereby making wine of high quality a true luxury when dining out. True, this is not as dramatic a return as the 10 times figure realized for a glass of Cribari, but it is far above the profit margin realized on food and certainly well above most business practices, service-oriented or otherwise.

It is argued by many that more prudent mark-ups would result in increased sales and thereby not hurt profits as much as a short-term vision would suggest. Indeed, it is a common practice in many California restaurants to add a mere \$1 surcharge to the shelf price of a bottle, an eminently fair practice. The only local eating establishment that practices this that I am aware of is the fine Traffic Jam and Soug on Second Avenue in Detroit. Thank you, Richard Vincent.

table talk

Bow-Wow Ball

A strolling supper, donated by Detroit-area chefs, will highlight the Bow-Wow Ball, to benefit the Michigan Humane Society, at 7:30 p.m. Saturday, April 9, at Somerset Mall in Troy. Restaurants participating include Sebastian's, Opus I, London Chop House, R.I.K.s Total Cuisine, Mackinac's, Appetizers, Van Dyke Place, the Whittier, Roman's and Home Sweet Home, Escalibur, Midtown Cafe and the Rattlesnake Club. The evening (black tie optional) also features a fashion presentation, live auction, coffee, desserts and dancing to the Bugs Boddow Band. For tickets at \$50 per person, call the Michigan Humane Society at 872-3400.

Travel-Holiday

Macrus Red Fox Restaurant in Bloomfield Township is the recipient of the 1987 Travel-Holiday Marketing Award for the fourth consecutive year. The award was accepted by Robert J. Macrus, chairman; Martin A. Kreger, president; and John H. Wood III, executive vice president/general manager of Macrus Restaurants and Pastry Shops. Travel-Holiday gives the annual awards for excellence in the complete dining experience, with emphasis on food, service and decor.

Daily specials

Chef Michael Jacobi of the Blue Sky Bar-B-Q in Southfield prepares daily specials based on traditional recipes of the Southwest United States. Among these are mesquite-grilled trout or lamb chops; quail, and Cornish hens—alternatives to the restaurant's standard fare of ribs, chicken and shrimp.

Dixie music

Doug Jacobs and the Red Garter Band are regulars now, along with the Sunday brunch menu, through April at the Omni International Hotel in Detroit's Millender Center. The band plays from 11:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. Sundays for the brunch crowd.

at the hotel's 333 East Restaurant. Brunch is \$15.95 for adults, \$8.95 for children under 12.

Where to lunch

A new book, "Let's Do Lunch — Where to Go for Lunch and What to Do After," gives recommendations for restaurants within a day's drive of the metropolitan area. The book is available in local bookstores for \$7.95. It also may be ordered by mail or phone. Send a check (add \$1.50 for mail order) to: "Let's Do Lunch," 5567 Westwood Lane, Birmingham 48010, or phone 851-3455.

Medieval feast

The Hotel St. Regis in Detroit has extended its dinner theater program for a single performance of "The Canterbury Tales" by Geoffrey Chaucer. A series of selected tales will be dramatically read by professional actors during an authentic eight-course medieval feast in the main ballroom of the hotel on Monday, Feb. 29. Hors d'oeuvres will be served at 6:30 p.m.; dinner theater performance begins at 7. Tickets are \$65. For more information, call Maria White at 873-3000.

International

Hardee's quarter-pound hamburger is now available with a choice of three different International Burger Toppings. The Mexican comes with spicy meat sauce, cheese, onions, lettuce and tomato; the American with lean, thin-sliced ham and American cheese; and the Italian with tangy tomato sauce and real mozzarella cheese.

Get acquainted

Through February, the Kingsley Inn in Bloomfield Hills is honoring diner's cards from any restaurant that offers one complimentary dinner when a second dinner of equal or greater value is purchased. The offer is good until 11 p.m. Sundays-Thursdays. Reservations are required.

Flambe cookery

Benji's Fish & Seafood Restaurant in Sylvan Lake keeps alive the tradition of tableside cooking. Among flaming dishes offered two nights a week are appetizers (shrimp pernod and scampi flambe), entrees (scallops flambe, sole amandine, steak Diane and flaming steak teriyaki kabob) and desserts (cherries jubilee and bananas flambe). Classical caesar salad also is served tableside.

French toast

Five types of French toast, in addition to French champagne, is available at the Radisson Suite Hotel's brunch at Periwinkles Restaurant in Farmington Hills. Several hot entrees, scrambled egg dishes and many other offerings are on the brunch menu. Prices are \$8.95 including a champagne toast for adults, \$5.95 for children 6-12; children 3 and under are free. Champagne also may be ordered in a cocktail or in a mimosa.

Annual cuisine

Fourth annual Cuisine Extraordinaire, sponsored by Children's Hospital of Michigan's Auxiliary, will be held 6-9 p.m. Sunday, Feb. 28, at the Roostertail in Detroit. The cuisine features international food prepared by 18 members of the Chef de Cuisine Association. Chefs will provide hot and cold hors d'oeuvres, entrees

and desserts. Fine wines will be for sale, and there will be dancing to the Mark Phillips Band. Tickets at \$60 may be ordered by calling Diane Cuper at 745-5325. Proceeds benefit Children's Hospital.

New sushi bar

Sushi Iwa Hyatt, an authentic sushi bar and restaurant, has opened at the Hyatt Regency Dearborn. The 65-seat restaurant offers sushi dishes and other Japanese food. It is in the area formerly known as Giulio and Son's Sports Bar. Sushi Iwa Hyatt is open for lunch and dinner weekdays, for dinner Saturdays and from 10 a.m. to 10 p.m. Sundays. For reservations, call 593-1234, Ext. 2450.

Hot Dawg!

The Chicago Dog is a specialty at Hot Dawg . . . & More in Farmington Hills. Owner Larry Freedman said he offers "the real Chicago dog, a pure beef delicacy created totally free of fillers and additives." It is served on a steamed puppy seed bun and topped with mustard, relish, chopped onions, tomato slices, hot peppers, dill pickle spear and celery salt. The interior of the new fast-food operation is by Gluckman Features of Southfield. Hot Dawg! features original artwork, stained linen mosaics (assemblages) and a color scheme of pink, peach, aqua and lavender. Jazz and classical music is played throughout the day.

— Compiled by Ethel Simmons

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