

DINING

Eat well, fork over less at award-winning restaurants

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SPECIAL WRITER

When it debuted 20 years ago, the *WINE SPECTATOR* magazine honor roll of award-winning restaurant wine lists and menus worldwide cited a grand total of 18.

Today, the list includes more than 2,750 restaurants in 48 states, 40 foreign countries and territories. In Michigan 49 restaurants received awards; half are located in Detroit and its suburbs including Ann Arbor.

What this means is that globally, expectations of diners are much higher and restaurateurs and chefs have raised their standards to meet them.

However, it does not necessarily equate to expensive or very expensive pricing.

Since the *WINE SPECTATOR* recognizes wine as a crucial aspect of fine dining, it created three award levels. The Grand Award, of which there are none in Michigan and only 91 in the world, recognizes restaurants offering upwards of 1,250 selections on the wine list, backed by cellars holding many times that.

A quick review of Grand Award restaurants reveals that, in general, both the menu and wine list are expensive or very

expensive. Great special occasion considerations, but not spots answering the thought of, "Hey, let's just go out for dinner tonight."

Best of Award of Excellence restaurants have many fine wines backed by cellars of breadth and depth. The Earle, 121 W. Washington, Ann Arbor, (734)994-0211, and The Lark, 6430 Farmington, West Bloomfield, (248)661-4466, are the only area restaurants in this category.

Award of Excellence restaurants have very good lists and a number of area restaurants now hold this distinction.

Eating out scorecard

What caught my eye in all this "listing" was the potential to fork over less in an award-winning restaurant with both a moderately or inexpensively priced wine list and a moderately priced or inexpensive menu.

It's often called the "restaurant game," but one we all like to play. If you order wine with your eating-out experience, you know well how it boosts the bottom line!

Winners on everyone's eating-out scorecard are sensibly priced restaurants with savory food and a savvy wine list.

Although the Aug. 31, 2001

WINE SPECTATOR Award of Excellence winners, with both moderate menu pricing and moderately priced wines are listed by location:

■ Ann Arbor — Cafe' 303...One Flight Down, 303 Detroit Street, (734)865-0700

■ Bingham Farms — Morels, 30100 Telegraph, (248)642-1094

■ Birmingham — Forte', 301 S. Old Woodward, (248)594-7300

■ Detroit — The Century Club, 333 Madison, (313)963-9800

■ Milford — Five Lakes Grill, 424 N. Main Street, (248)884-7455

■ Pontiac — Parkway Grille, in the Detroit Marriott at Centerpoint, 3600 Centerpoint Parkway, (248)648-6034

■ Southfield — Sweet Lorraine's Cafe', 29101 Greenfield, (248) 559-5985



issue of the *WINE SPECTATOR* lists its global award winners, it does not reveal a price category for its distinctions of inexpensive to very expensive when it comes to food.

Editors at the magazine were, however, forthcoming. Here's their breakdown for the total meal cost per person for three courses, tax and tip, but without wine.

Inexpensive: less than \$25
Moderate: \$25-\$50
Expensive: \$50-\$75

Very expensive: more than \$75

On this scale, The Earle, that Best of Award of Excellence winner mentioned above, is moderately priced for both wines and menu.

It offers the best opportunity in the area to fork over less on both food and wine.

Ultimate deals

In Detroit, The Traffic Jam and Snaug, 611 W. Canfield, (313)831-9470, is an Award of

Excellence winner with both an inexpensive menu and inexpensive wine list. Weber's Restaurant, 3061 Jackson Road, Ann Arbor, (734)665-3636, another Award of Excellence entry, has a moderately-priced menu and an inexpensive wine list.

How important are awards?

For chef/owner Brian Polcyn of Five Lake's Grill, award recipient for five successive of the six years he has operated the restaurant is a true recognition of the mission statement for his Milford bistro-style eatery.

"Before I opened my own restaurant, I was chef at The Lark, the Golden Mushroom and Pike Street," he reminded. "It's easy to cook expensively. The challenge is to cook high-quality food and offer it at moderate prices. That's always been my goal. This is not New York City or Boca Raton, Fla. Metro Detroit is a working class area. I opened my restaurant in Milford and had to give people a very good reason to come here."

"For the wine list, Sommelier and Manager Ron Edwards chooses wines that are not on everyone's tongue. These wines in our cellar are exceptional values and a diner can find many

wines at \$30 and under. Yes, there are some at \$200 and more. Those are for special occasions, when I get the chance to create a menu for people who honor me by asking me to cook for them and help them celebrate."

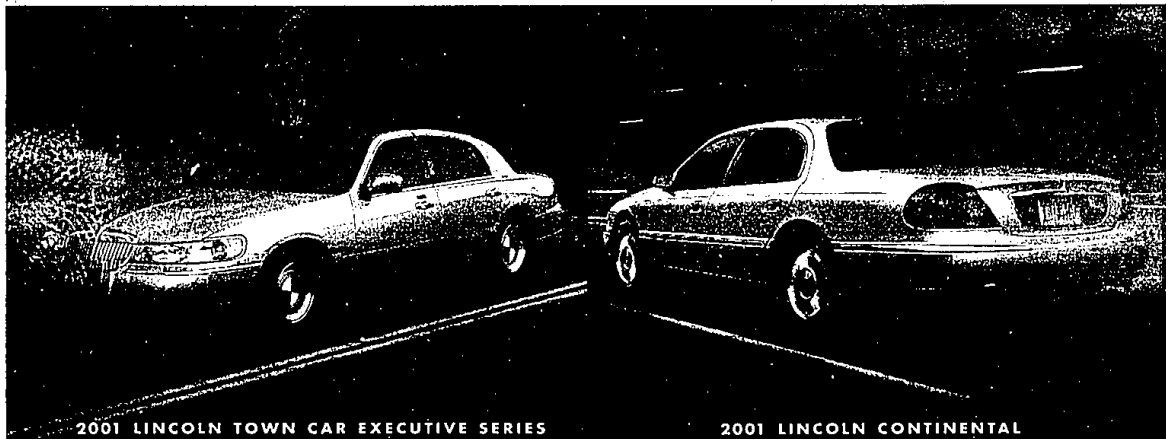
Penny Zywick, general manager of Birmingham's Forte', noted how excited the staff and, in particular, Sommelier Michael Korn and Executive Chef Tim Voss were to receive the award for the second year in a row.

"Because I watch how hard Michael works to find the coolest wines with great value for the money, I'm very pleased for him," Zywick said. "Both Michael and Tim are artists in their individual ways and this recognition is important because they've dedicated their life to the restaurant business. Both of them are so into food and wine."

Frank Taylor, Director of Food & Beverage for the Marriott Centerpoint is elated to be honored since Parkway Grille has only been open nine months.

"I am very happy to receive such a prestigious award in such a short time," he said. "My goal is to continue to build and make the Parkway Grille known throughout the city for its great service and then the food and wine."

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