

Sunday, April 15, 2001

FOCUS ON WINE



RAY & ELEANOR HEALD

New Napa wine kid on the block

If you're into what's hot and what's not from Napa Valley, you know that Oakville Ranch Vineyard wine is definitely hot. So hot, it's garnered near cult status with downright difficult-to-find wines.

Keep reading — there's good news ahead. Oakville Ranch was founded in 1989 by the late Oracle Corporation partner Bob Miner and his partner Randy Lewis, now of Lewis Cellars.

Miner's widow Mary now owns Oakville Ranch and decided not to expand the brand. Bob's nephew Dave Miner, president of Oakville Ranch Vineyards, made his first fortune at Oracle,

then anchored Patrol Software, which sold for \$34 million in 1993.

In 1998, Dave, now 41 years old, and his wife Emily, along with his parents Ed and Norma, founded Miner Family Vineyards to make small lot, hand-crafted wines, sourcing fruit from Oakville Ranch, Ed and Norma's vineyard and selected California vineyards.

"Our label focus is high-end, reserve-style wines reflecting the unique characteristics of individual vineyards, where specific varietals grow best," Dave said.

Miner Family Vineyard's winery is located along the Silverado Trail in the Napa Valley in the town of Oakville. The state-of-the-art winery is augmented by 20,000 square feet of newly-constructed caves for barrel aging and storage, ample room for the anticipated growth of Miner to 30,000 cases over the next four or five years.

Miner wines are stylistically different from Oakville Ranch, yet when a Miner wine using Oakville Ranch Vineyard fruit is compared with the Oakville Ranch bottling, threads of similarity from the vineyard are apparent.

Chardonnay in cab country

The backbone of Miner Family wines is the 75-acre Oakville Ranch vineyard. Located in what is arguably some of the best cabernet sauvignon land in Napa Valley, it is home to such great reds such as Dalla Valle Mays and Joseph Phelps Backus Vineyard.

"When my uncle and aunt purchased Oakville Ranch vineyard, much of it was planted to chardonnay, often in the same row with cabernet," Dave Miner explained. "Everybody told them to tear out the chardonnay and plant cabernet. They didn't."

With tender loving care, the vineyard, at an altitude of 1,000 feet, began to produce fruit for some of the most highly acclaimed chardonnay from the Napa Valley.

Taste comparisons

Only 1,400 cases of 1999 Oakville Ranch, Vieta Vineyard Chardonnay, Napa Valley \$38 were made. It's delicious with apple and tropical fruit tones then full, rich and creamy with good length. Compare it with 1999 Miner, Napa Valley Chardonnay \$32 that's 1/3 Oakville Ranch fruit and a

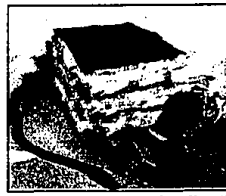
Please see WINE, D3

LOOKING AHEAD

What to watch for in Taste next week:

- Wielding knives
- Recipe to share

hometownnewspapers.net



DePalma's

PHOTO BY BRIAN MITCHELL



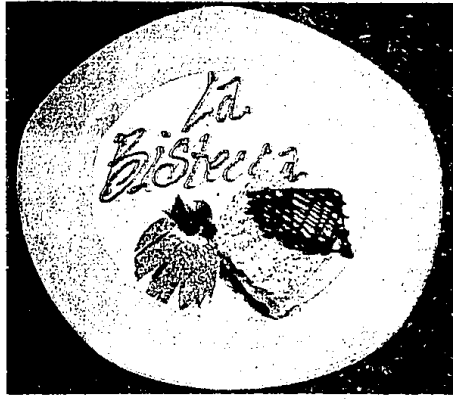
Fonte d'Amore

PHOTO BY BRIAN MITCHELL



Marco's

PHOTO BY BILL DEXLER



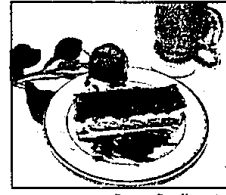
La Bistecca Italian Grille

PHOTO BY PAUL HIRSHMANN



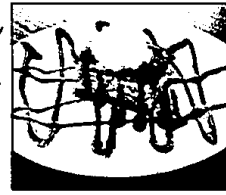
Cafe Cortina

PHOTO BY BILL DEXLER



Rose's

PHOTO BY PAUL HIRSHMANN



Compari's

PHOTO BY PAUL HIRSHMANN



Area chefs create classic Italian dessert

BY RENEE SKOGLUND
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Delizioso. Bella. That's how Louise Angelosanti of Livonia described the winning tiramisu created by Chef Eriq Lukasik of La Bistecca Italian Grille in Plymouth Township for the Observer's recent Taste of Tiramisu contest.

Angelosanti was part of an eight-member taste panel assigned the glorious task of sampling tiramisu from seven area Italian restaurants: La Bistecca Italian Grille, DePalma's Ristorante, Fonte D'Amore, Marco's, Cafe Cortina, Compari's, and Rose's. Spoonful after spoonful, the judges, who included Master Chef Joe Decker of Schoolcraft College, sampled some of the most delicious and beautifully presented tiramisu this side of heaven.

"A very nice mocha coffee flavor. Also a nice piece of chocolate lattice on top," commented Angelosanti on Lukasik's creation.

"Cream is all one flavor. Pretty light. Sponge cake is lightly soaked. Nice flavor. Syrup is not overly sweet. Sauce is good," wrote Decker.

"The sauce was special," said judge Dorothy Banks of Plymouth.

Indeed, Lukasik's version of the famous Italian dessert was special. Presented on a plate blanketed with just the right amount of an espresso-flavored crème Anglaise and crowned with a dark chocolate lattice, it was edible art.

For those who have never tasted tiramisu, perhaps it's best to say what it is not. Tiramisu is not pudding, not custard, and not cake. It's all of that, but with the added lightness of whipped cream, the richness of mascarpone cheese, the bite of chocolate and espresso, and the sweet smoothness of a fine Italian liquor.

"People say it's rich, but then they take one bite, then another and another," said Rena Tonin, owner of Cafe Cortina in Farmington Hills.

Also known as "Tuscan Trifle," the dessert — whose basic ingredients are eggs, mascarpone, ladyfingers, cream, espresso coffee, liquor, sugar



PHOTO BY TOM HAWLEY

Winning chef: Eriq Lukasik of La Bistecca shows off his grand prize, a hand-painted apron from the Observer.

and chocolate — was initially created in Sienna, in the northwestern Italian province of Tuscany. Legend has it that it was created for the Grand Duke Cosimo de' Medici III and dubbed zuppa del

duca, or the "duke's soup."

By the 19th century, the dessert's fame had spread to England. However, eventually it was perfected in Treviso, near Venice, in the northeastern province of Veneto. Treviso is now known for its canals, beautiful frescoes and ... tiramisu. Fortunately for Americans, the dessert has crossed the Atlantic and is now featured in restaurants across the nation.

Legend has it that after one bite of tiramisu you swoon. In fact, the literal translation of "tira-mi-su" is "pick me up." It's the perfect ending after a heavy meal, said Lukasik. "The Italians are always thinking about digestion. They would consider tiramisu a 'digestive.' The espresso and liquor will wake you up."

Making the perfect tiramisu is part art and part science, said Lukasik. The cream has to be whipped to a consistency firm enough to incorporate the mascarpone, and the ladyfingers (known in Italy as "savoiardi") must be "kissed" with the espresso and liquor rather than soaked. Ingredients must also be of top quality. Lukasik uses only Callabaut chocolate from Belgium, imported mascarpone and Amaretto di Sarano.

As for technique, Lukasik said, "I try to blend both the Old World way with the precision of culinary expertise." He also credits La Bistecca's pastry chef, Scot Breazeale, for creating the espresso-flavored custard sauce that accompanied his tiramisu.

"He was a big help in helping me plate it for the contest. I felt his help put our tiramisu over the top."

In addition to Chef Lukasik, the Observer would like to acknowledge the talent of all the chefs who participated in the Taste of Tiramisu contest: Chef Marco Conte of Marco's, Chef Jeffrey Hoffman of Cafe Cortina, Chef Frank Blevins of Fonte D'Amore, Chef Enrique Martinez of DePalma's, Chef Chris Constantino of Rose's and Chef Tony Yankin of Compari's.

Grazie. Your tiramisu was delizioso, bella, truly a touch of heaven.

See recipes on page 2D

For outdoor flavor, sear chops inside a heavy skillet



MAIN DISH

MURIEL WAGNER



MURIEL WAGNER

Thoroughly heat it before you add the foods. Pork or lamb chops and tender steak fillet work well. High heat sears the outside brown and keeps the inside pinkish but not rare. Lower heat makes for less browning and more evenly well done meat. It's a super fast way to get well-browned juicy meat without adding fat.

PAN-BROILED LAMB CHOPS, ITALIANO

4 (5 ounces each) loin lamb chops (loin cuts have 40 percent less

fat than rib cuts)
1/2 cup fat-free Italian dressing
1 tablespoon fresh lemon juice
2 tablespoons olive oil
1 1/2 teaspoons chopped fresh rosemary or 1/2 teaspoon dried

Blend dressing, oil and lemon juice.

Trim fat from chops and marinate in dressing 15-30 minutes in fridge.

Coat a cold large, heavy skillet with cooking spray. Place over medium to high heat until hot. Drain chops and pat dry. Add to skillet and cook for about 5 minutes on each side or until your choice of doneness. Serves 4.

Nutritional information per serving: calories, 222; fat, 10.2 grams; saturated fat, 4 g; cholesterol, 87 mg; sodium, 160 mg. Food Exchanges: 4 lean meat.

Use your skillet for quick and easy vegetables too.

PAN-GRILLED VEGETABLES

2 teaspoons olive oil
1 large onion, sliced

1/2 teaspoon minced garlic
1 large red, or green, bell pepper, seeded and cut into strips
1 large zucchini, sliced, or 2 cups sliced cauliflower florets
1/2 teaspoon dried thyme leaves
Salt and pepper to taste

In a 12-inch non-stick skillet over medium-high heat, warm oil until hot but not smoking. Add onion, garlic, bell pepper, and zucchini or cauliflower. Sprinkle vegetables with thyme and salt and pepper, if desired.

Adjust heat so mixture cooks rapidly but does not burn. Cook, stirring frequently and breaking onion slices into rings, until slices are nicely browned and beginning to char slightly, 8 to 10 minutes.

Serves 4-5 as a side dish.

ZUCCHINI-MUSHROOM SAUTÉ

1 tablespoon olive oil
1 small onion, chopped
1 1/2 cups coarsely sliced fresh mushrooms

1/2 teaspoon chopped garlic
4 medium (8 1/2-inch) zucchini, cut into 1/2-inch cubes
1/4 cup chicken broth, or vegetable broth
1 tablespoon finely chopped fresh basil, or 1/2 teaspoon dried basil leaves

Salt and pepper to taste

In a 12-inch non-stick skillet over high heat, heat oil until hot but not smoking. Add onion and mushrooms. Adjust heat so mixture cooks rapidly but does not burn. Cook, stirring 4 minutes. Add garlic; continue cooking until mushrooms are nicely browned, about 2 minutes longer.

Stir in zucchini, broth, basil, and salt and pepper, if desired. Cook, stirring frequently, until zucchini pieces are just tender, 6 to 9 minutes longer.

Serves 6 as a side dish.

Recipes from "Simply Italian: Over 100 easy-to-make, zesty, satisfying favorites," by Ruth Glick, Surry Books, Chicago, 1999, \$14.95

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