

New posts every Tuesday, sometimes more often

WINE WRITING'S ETHICAL THICKET

Why does wine writing tolerate murky ethics and apparent conflicts of interest that wouldn't be acceptable in other areas of journalism? The new AnnArbor.com is the latest media outlet to ignore such concerns.

HAS TERRY STINGLEY FOUND MICHIGAN'S "IDENTITY WINE"?

Kalamazoo retailer Stingley believes Cab



Franc has the chops to become our state's flagship. And he's organizing a one-of-a-kind event to help make it happen.



FIVE TO TRY FROM LMS

Lake Michigan Shore's beach bash showed off a bevy of wines that

include the state's best-yet Sauvignon Blanc and a surprisingly good hybrid version of Muscat.

REGIONAL FIX FOR LOCAL NEEDS?

Michigan State University is supporting regionally-based online courses to replace its

Now the wine menu has similar definition icons but they are located next to the wine listing itself and the tabulated booklet format is gone. The current presentation is reminiscent of what you would expect for a nice wine bar.

Also new on the food menu are suggested wine pairings for small plates and entrees. This is actually very helpful for customers even if you are a wine geek. It can relieve the time it takes to peruse the wine menu and, alternatively, gets a glass of wine going so you can peruse the wine menu. I think this was a very smart move on the Jonna's part.

Staff has come and gone most notably the recent departure of executive chef, Brandon Johns, who had a 10% ownership in Vinology and also emphasized the 'slow food'[1] method of cooking. He began his tenure in May of 2008 and left to start his own restaurant in the old Bella Ciao environs on West Liberty. (Could be giving Eve Aranoff of 'eve' The Restaurant fame a run for her money?)

Kristen explained that Chef Brandon had a very focused vision of what he wanted from the kitchen which was to produce a fine dining, white table cloth experience. She stated that his tenure came at a time when the economy was bottoming out and simply did not work for either party although they tried to make it work.

The new executive chef, Robert Courser, from Chen Chow Brasserie in Birmingham still embodies the same vision for localvore ingredients but seems more committed to the Jonna mission of pairing food with the wines. He also brought with him James Wilhelm, also of Chen Chow, as executive sous chef so perhaps this will bring more harmony and consistency to the kitchen.

Kristen also reiterated her father's sentiments in just how difficult and tough the Ann Arbor market has been. She stated that Ann Arborites are an incredibly loyal group of individuals and have a great sense of community. They have voiced their opinion on everything from the name of the wine bar itself, to questioning why they chose Ann Arbor as a site for the wine bar, the food menu, the wine menu, to not requiring education on wine, etc. I mean, they simply were not prepared for this type of reception and really who would be. But what you don't know, you don't know.

Vinology has received good reviews and continues to try to capture a diverse group of customers. She realizes that they are not going to be an Earle or Chop House but that was not the intention. She would like Vinology to be thought of as a 'wine friendly' establishment offering 'world cuisine' while providing education in a fun and unobtrusive manner.

Of interest to Michigan wine drinkers is that Kristen will be a judge at the upcoming Michigan Wine & Spirits Competition in August. This will be the third time that she has judged this event and each time she has been involved with the competition she has come away with new inspiration for the wine menu. Kristen also sat on the Michigan Grape and Wine Counsel for two years alongside Donald Coe of Black Star Farms.

Currently Vinology has 5 Michigan wines on the menu out of 150 slots as follows: M. Lawrence-Sex sparkling wine; Left Foot Charlie-Pinot Blanc; Black Star Farms-Cabernet Franc, and St. Julien-Crème Sherry. Kristen typically adds more Michigan wines on her Fall menu and promotes Michigan Wine Month in April with several Michigan wine tastings and generally revamps the menu twice a year.

It is uncertain how long it will take for Vinology to get their groove on in Ann Arbor. The Jonna's definitely have displayed their tenacity to make this operation work and have the financial wherewithal to continue their presence in the community. Obviously this was not a slam dunk for the duo but they have stuck around so maybe it is time to give up the hazing A2 and accept the not so new kid on the block.

Vinology Wine Bar, Restaurant and Retail Shop is located at 110 South Main Street in Ann Arbor, Michigan.

Daily happy hours are from 4 p.m. - 6 p.m. and Wednesdays after 9 p.m. to close. From 4 p.m. - 10 p.m on Sundays they offer 50 wines by the bottle at 50% off. The wine tasting series will continue throughout the summer and into the Fall months.