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Issue 22

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Charles Schlussel's recipe for gumbo using ingredients from Absolutely Fresh. Photo by Jacob Herrman.

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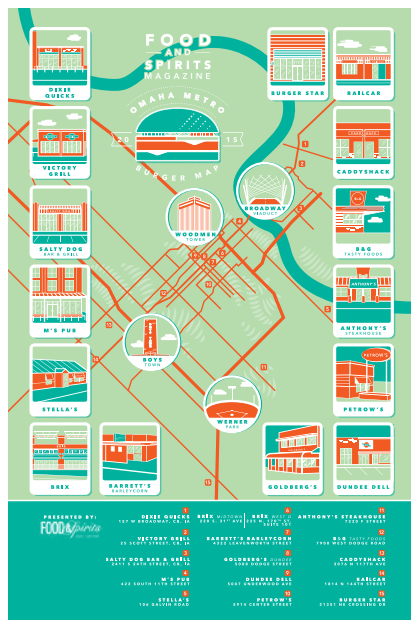
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Jason McLaughlin Jason is a Certified Cicerone, a ranked ‘National’ as a BJCP judge (Beer Judge Certification Program), is a craft beer aficionado, a writer for the Nebraska Beer Blog, and award winning homebrewer living in Lincoln. Jason spends time traveling around the country judging beer competitions, and attending related events. Beer tasting and evaluation is his passion, and he can appreciate a great example of any style regardless of hype.

Eddie Morin I’m Eddie Morin. I’m from Omaha. I run B & G Tasty Foods, and I like eating food, playing video games, and dinking around with my wife and kids. I used to not be so fat. That’s all I really think there is to me.

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Railcar Modern American Kitchen

A hidden gem of Omaha's restaurant scene

story and photos by Erik Totten

"I think restaurant customers in Omaha want something unique and high quality without having to pay a lot for it. They want food made from scratch and they want to know where it came from."

Although **Railcar Modern American Kitchen**, located at 144th and Blondo, is easily seen from the road, it feels like a hidden gem that seems to have been a bit overlooked in the recent bustling Omaha restaurant scene. Tucked into an unassuming strip mall at **Stonehenge Center**, Railcar delivers great, freshly made food (with much of it sourced from local suppliers) from the warm and welcoming atmosphere you'll find when you walk in the door.

With menu items like **Grass Run Farms** short rib stroganoff (veal demi, red wine, truffle oil, green beans, crème fraîche, portabella mushroom, house-made gnocchi and pistou) and local pork shank osso bucco (wild mushroom arancini, tomato stew, roasted carrots and pan roasted Brussels sprouts), Railcar specializes in from-scratch cookery, using local foods that epitomize comfort classics. Along with a robust selection of salads and sandwiches, you'll also find more diverse offerings with shrimp and duck gumbo, pasta saltimbocca, Thai chicken flatbread and jambalaya paella finding a



home on the menu. Many, many vegetarian and gluten-free options are also available on their normal menu.

“Our goal is to provide high-quality food made from scratch, while also supporting the local economy,” executive chef and owner **Jared Clarke** explained.

“Local food should be approachable every day and not a once-in-a-while special occasion.”

“We listen to the customers and our producers while also researching timeless classics that we can modernize.”

With Omaha demanding more from its restaurants, he’s wise to listen. The city’s tastes – and expectations – have evolved in recent years to place more emphasis on just those things.

“I think restaurant customers in Omaha want something unique and high-quality without having to pay a lot for it. They want food made from-scratch and they want to know where it came from,” Jared said.

“That’s my goal: local food should be approachable every day and not a once-in-a-while special occasion.”

Jared, from **Fairbury**, Nebraska, began his culinary training at Southeast Community College and the University of Nebraska at Lincoln where he received a degree in Culinology. His early cooking experiences came from cooking for family and friends while in college and working at the first Chili’s in Lincoln.

“I took a shot at it and loved it right off the bat,” Jared said.

He began professionally cooking in Lincoln at several places, including the **Rocco Theatre** and **Misty’s Steakhouse**, before moving to Chicago in 2005. While in Chicago, Jared worked for Lettuce Entertain You Restaurants before settling in at Cooper’s



"With Omaha being a train town, I thought it would be a great idea to continue to embrace the idea of 'American' food as a melting pot of cultures and food."

Hawk Winery and Restaurant. Jared and his family arrived back in Omaha in 2010 where he was executive chef at **Blue** for a year before helping launch a version of **Tanner's Bar & Grill** in Wisconsin. While doing some restaurant consulting work, Jared developed the Railcar concept.

"Railcar's concept comes from the dining car era of the railroad. Some of the best chefs in the country worked on trains making gourmet meals while being jostled around," Jared said.

"With Omaha being a train town, I thought it would be a great idea to continue to embrace the idea of 'American' food as a melting pot of cultures and food."

With its cozy atmosphere, Railcar has many nods to Omaha's roots as a train town, which was such an essential part of our early development. Vintage fixtures and train memorabilia adorn the



walls, while the open seating area and industrial elements give it a more contemporary feel.

"The idea for the interior was not to look exactly like a train car. The seating and tables are in place like they would be on a train, but the service we provide is a little more upscale and personable without losing the casual atmosphere," Jared said.

"We have some timeless pieces, but nothing over the top."

While continuing to develop Railcar's interior and food, Jared also has his sights on a new opportunity with **Timber Wood Fire Bistro**. The new restaurant has plans to be open this spring in **Countryside Village** and will provide the same type of high-quality, from-scratch cooking that Railcar excels at. "I'm always looking at opening a restaurant in neighborhoods that need them," Jared said.

"You shouldn't have to go too far to find good food."

RAILCAR MODERN AMERICAN KITCHEN

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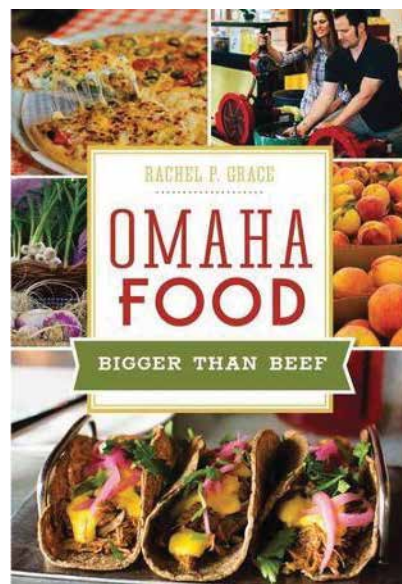
Catching the Train to Omaha Food on Midwestern Railway Journeys

by Ann Summers

A Review of *Omaha Food: Bigger Than Beef* by Rachel P. Grace

You are entering a zone – not a zone of danger, but of food. For your journey, the new book, *Omaha Food, Bigger Than Beef*, is a kind of train ticket, and you are on a train traveling through Omaha and food and also through time. Your conductor, author and blogger, **Rachel P. Grace**, is neither creepy nor menacing, rather, friendly and cool. The train stops and you and your fellow passengers find yourselves in a restaurant, bar, dive or classic eatery and a realm where pleasure is putting good food and drink into your mouth. Each stop will reveal food with a context, a background, and will make a connection somewhere deep inside your hungry soul. You can think of Rachel Grace as a kind of Omahan Rick Steves from *Rick Steves Historic European Railway Journeys*, only not quite so dorky, or so I've heard from her passengers.

Omaha Food starts where all historic trips through the Midwest start: with the railroad. Donkeys ages ago, all major cities began with ports and shipping, but their modern history, in the words of Mongo from *Blazing Saddles*, “got to do with where choo choo go”. With no exception, Omaha and its geographical centrality, (midway in the U.S. between western cattle country and hungry growing cities) was poised to be an urban hub, bringing beef in on the hoof, processing it with cheap immigrant labor and offering it up to the world. Midwestern cities suffered from superlative disease, and tried their dandest to become the biggest, bestest and mostest something in order to distinguish themselves from other Midwestern cities.



“In this book, Rachel takes us way back with a unique and wonderful collection of Omaha’s historical facts and photos of a beefy nature.”



Grilled wild prawn vermicelli bowl at Saigon Surface

"Our history has landed us in the middle of a kind of all-inclusive, culturally diverse, community-driven food renaissance."

Perhaps despite the fact that they weren't New York or somewhere thought of as cool, these new-birthing choo-choo towns may well have filled the role as America's pregustator.

In this book, Rachel takes us way back with a unique and wonderful collection of Omaha's historical facts and photos of a beefy nature, which show us that there were big dreams and even bigger dreamers at work here. Early chapters feature old signs, menus, stockyards and exchange buildings, even an early pic of that most Omaha of carnivorous delights, **Omaha Steaks**, when it was **Table Meat Supply Company** (Mmmm.... table meat!) down on 17th and Douglas. Back when, the *gemeinschaft* of the city hit fairly few notes. But because of the sustained higher than average immigrant population (in 1900 half the city had off-the-boat parents – remember when that was a good thing?) the makeup of Omaha did blossom out from its Native American and Northern European core. It wouldn't take long before anyone could go out for a cheeky curry.

"South 24th Street with its taquerias and its Salvadoran specialties has long been serving hungry diners of all backgrounds in Omaha."

But early on, in order to feed all these hungry working folks that were busy making new companies and fueling the economy, we see that Omaha developed a kind of parallel food economy. Old school Italian steak houses like **Johnny's**, **Gorat's**, **The Drover**, **Anthony's** and **Cascio's** are the classics, some of which succumbed to down economies like **Marchio's**, and some, like **Piccolo's**, reincarnated into a new avatar/food truck.

As the *Omaha Food Train* rolls forward in history, our conductor points out the high spots. South 24th Street with its taquerias and its Salvadoran specialties has long been serving hungry diners of all backgrounds in Omaha. From **Scheelytown** (now **Hanscom Park**) and its Czech and Polish workers and **Dinker's Bar** feeding them great burgers (and numerous great bars for those looking to get their schicker on), we move to the higgeldy-piggledy streets of the Vinton Street Commercial Historical District where yet more fabulous burgers sprang up and **Louie M's**, which opened originally as a breakfast place for those wanting to hop on not a train, but a streetcar and get to work.

Our train steams onward into the steaming plates of Czech-style dumplings and the likes of baked goods in Omaha's Little Italy (yes, we have one). Then we stop off for some North Omaha soul food (in the South, we just call it food) in places like **Big Mama's Kitchen**. It's a wild, educational and very, very filling ride. It's a

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hodgepodge, but one with chops – and it got Omaha the title of “Home of the Reuben Sandwich,” arguably the best sandwich ever invented – so don’t tell me the city became this tumult of hungry, well-fed people by accident. The hard-working, hard-playing folks that settled here were not known for being abstemious.

“Omaha – it’s a cool place, no matter what your coastal relatives tell you.”

We see how new food bloggers like Rachel, who writes at FatInOmaha.com, are essential to a food tour that points us straight to best diversity the O has to offer: awesome Pho (**Saigon Surface** and others – sorry, you’ll have to read it), awesome gyro’s (**John’s Grecian Delight** and others – sorry, you’ll have to read it), outrageous dim sum (**Grand Fortune**, also the best chicken feet in town as my own 10-year old daughter attests), the best country café Cajun outside of N’Awlins (**Dixie Quicks**) and crazy good curry fries (**Amsterdam Falafel**).

Want to know how Omaha feels about food now? We like it a lot. How do we like our Reubens? Huge and authentic, Blackstone-style from **Crescent Moon** with a tall craft beer next to the plate. Ice cream (yes please) is preferably homemade, butter brickle from **Ted**



Patty melt at Kitchen Table



Mussel platter at Dario’s Brasserie

and Wally's. We love beer, dive bars, and craft cocktails (work hard, relax easy). And pizza (as *Food & Spirits Magazine* staff saw during Omaha's Best Pizza Review) is typically a hybrid: floppy and foldy, with lots of meat and if possible, from **Sgt. Pfeffer's**. In other words, our history has landed us in the middle of a kind of all-inclusive, culturally diverse, community-driven food renaissance.

I could go on, but I don't have to; Rachel Grace already has this tour lined up and all the good stops are circled. You're saved from being on some crazy food train with Ozzy Osbourne as your bat-biting conductor who lets you off any old place or directs you down any old alley. Lucky for us, *Omaha Food* isn't that kind of tour.

"Solid travel advice is hard to come by these days... Better get your ticket out and pick up *Omaha Food, Bigger than Beef.*"

Stop me if you've heard this one. When we moved to Omaha in 2000, we met a friend of a friend for drinks who'd grown up here and told us that it was "impossible to be a vegetarian in Omaha". Maybe he had no imagination (or no garden) but that is certainly not true now. From farm to table (we're in farmland, you know), we get the best here. The *OF* Train stops at **Kitchen Table** and many others who will make you delicious food from local farmers, or points out some old-timey, new-fangled family farm shops, CSA's or farmer's markets. At any rate, great produce, veggies and fruits, cheese, pickles, cured meats and all manner of healthy, tasty goodies are right here. It's an ex post survey that might surprise you.

How does our train leave us? Like I said, full and happy, but also full of information, history and a love of community. Omaha – it's



Reuben sandwich at the Crescent Moon



Strawberry cream torte at Avoli Osteria

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a cool place, no matter what your coastal relatives tell you. The **Old Market** is new again, **Benson** has gone from shabby to chic and the new hotspots around **Blackstone**, **Midtown Crossing** and **Aksarben** are drawing diners and shoppers, and dare I say, hipper more inclusive crowds, both old and young. At the end of the journey, *Omaha Food* is bigger than beef and it has, in a way, developed the perfect tasting palette. So, if you're ready to enjoy a Midwestern-size helping of history, food, care and craft...

Oh, and want to know what she'd eat (Shhh, it's a secret!) if our conductor was going to spend some time with her perfect meal? Rachel very graciously told me that if she had to pick one, she would say: the mussel platter and frites at **Dario's Brasserie** with a Belgian beer, Spaghetini Carbonara or Bolognese Bianco at **Avoli Osteria** with an Italian beer or wine, and dessert of the day (like the strawberry cream torte or chocolate berry tart) with a craft cocktail at the **French Bulldog**. Like the professional guide she is, Rachel did not second-guess herself, but she did add, "I thought it over and realized, of course, it doesn't matter [in] which order one visits these three gems. Might as well have some cured meat at the Bulldog while you're there, too. It's so good."

Solid travel advice is so hard to come by these days, and I know a good tour when I see one. Better get your ticket out and pick up *Omaha Food, Bigger than Beef.*

The Joy of Gumbo

story by Charles Schlusell, photos by Jacob Herrman

How would you like it if you knew you could absolutely knock the socks off your next dinner party guests? If you're like me, I'm guessing the answer is a loud and resounding, "Yes!"

Seeing your friends and family completely enraptured in a delectable gumbo, and then later having request after request for your recipe, always makes for a wonderful way to end the evening. This recipe for gumbo is just such a recipe and in the words of the late PBS Cajun cook Justin Wilson, "I Guar...un...tee," you'll love this one.

I originally created this recipe not quite a decade ago. Since its original debut, I've had reports over the years of the recipe going out from here and being enjoyed at various places across the country. Just last year I received a call from two of my best friends in Virginia who had served it for a party and all the guests were begging for a copy of the recipe.

There seems to be something a bit magical that tends to transform people's countenance into one of complete bliss and happiness at the mere mention of the word "gumbo". On the other hand, I would be utterly derelict in my duties as a food writer if I failed to mention that occasionally the word could have a quite different effect. Whispering the word gumbo in certain situations has sometimes been known to cause hearers to stampede into what we food professionals have dubbed a "gumbo frenzy". Understandably the power of gumbo is a powerful player in your food arsenal, but treated with proper respect and reference it will reward you with wonderful culinary memories and gumbo tales of your own to tell for years to come.

One of the secrets to the wonderful flavor of gumbo is roux. A roux is a thickening agent used in sauces, gravies and stews. It is normally made with equal parts of flour and butter, or in this case, vegetable oil. The rich and nutty flavors a roux imparts to the gumbo become more intense and pronounced the longer a roux cooks. For the best flavor, the roux must be constantly stirred until it turns a dark brown somewhere between the color of milk and dark chocolate.

Once you start whisking the roux you cannot stop for a minimum of twenty minutes, being mindful to get into all the corners and throughout the pan. If you do stop stirring even momentarily, you risk burning the roux which will make it unusable. If all this sounds a little dire and foreboding, an easier alternative has been promoted by Mr. Alton Brown. I've tried this technique a couple of times and it works like a charm. Simply whisk one cup of canola oil and one cup of flour in a dutch oven, bake it uncovered in a 350 degree oven for one and a half to two hours, whisking only two or three times while cooking till it turns the dark brown color you desire. Lastly, once you whisk in your chicken broth, bring it up to a boil and continue whisking to fully activate the thickening power of the roux and then immediately drop it down to a low simmer. Leaving it to boil for too long can cause the roux to break (separate and thin out).

The wonderfully delicious and succulent wild caught shrimp in the photos were supplied to us by our good friends at **Absolutely Fresh Seafood**. They also carry the andouille sausage we used in the recipe, which comes straight from Cajun country in Louisiana. This is some of the best I've ever tasted, evidenced by the fact that our wonderful photographer, **Jacob Herrman**, had me seriously wondering if we'd have any left for the photo shoot.



Shrimp, Andouille and Chicken Gumbo

6-8 servings

INGREDIENTS

- 1 lb. medium sized raw shrimp, shelled and deveined
- 1 lb. andouille sausage, sliced 1/4" thick
- 1 lb. boneless skinless chicken thighs, cut into 1" cubes
- 1/4 lb. tasso ham, 1/4" dice (tasso is Cajun style smoked pork shoulder, smoked ham may be substituted if tasso isn't available)
- 1 cup flour
- 1 cup vegetable oil
- 2 cups chopped onion
- 1 cup chopped green pepper
- 1 cup chopped celery
- 5 cloves minced garlic
- 1 Tbsp. Tony Chachere's or any Cajun spice mix
- 1/4 tsp. salt
- 2 qt. chicken broth (room temperature)
- 14.5 oz. can diced tomatoes with juice
- 10 oz. can diced tomatoes with green chiles with juice
- 2 bay leaves
- 2 Tbsp. Worcestershire sauce
- 1 Tbsp. Frank's Red Hot sauce or any Louisiana style hot sauce
- 1/2 cup chopped green onions

DIRECTIONS

Make a dark roux: Whisk oil and flour in a large Dutch oven or a heavy stock pot over medium heat. Stir slowly and constantly for 20-30 minutes until the roux turns the color of chocolate.

Stir in the onions, green peppers and celery, stirring often until they are softened, about 8-10 minutes. Add the garlic, Cajun spice and salt stirring for 30 seconds. Whisk in the chicken broth in a slow stream, turn the heat up to high, whisking until it come to a boil, then reduce to a simmer. Stir in the next five ingredients and bring back to a low simmer. Add the sausage, chicken and tasso simmering for 30 minutes.

Stir in the shrimp and cook for about five minutes until the shrimp turn pink and tails curl. Season to taste with salt and pepper.

Stir in file' at the table and serve over rice garnished with green onions.





Healthy Seasonal Eats and Treats

by Kent Cisar

A local guide to making better choices for your body



The Holiday season brings with it shorter days, colder weather, work parties, friend's parties and family gatherings. It can be easy to indulge in everything. Our city and surrounding areas offer ways to eat, drink and be healthier quite often, giving you an opportunity to enjoy your favorite pastimes. Here's this writer's guide to making a few better choices without sacrificing your palate or your waistline.

Beverages

A healthy holiday starts with our beverages. Cold weather and coffee go hand-in-hand.

Fox Hollow Coffee at Papillion Parkway and Blondo Streets is my favorite coffee shop in the city, and lucky for me, it's right down the street. Coffee lovers can reduce their calorie intake with Fox Hollow's huge variety of sugar free flavors. "Customers can come in for a sugar free caramel latte with skim milk and reduce their calorie intake without sacrificing flavor" says owner **Cindy Lear**. Fox Hollow has a distinctive 'fit frappe,' "it's a coffee drink with no caffeine (unless asked for), protein milk, and it's low in sugar. Customers can get it in vanilla or chocolate" adds Lear. Fox Hollow also has fruit smoothies for those looking for a fruity, healthy beverage. To find Fox Hollow's sugar free coffee and smoothie flavors, check out foxxollowomaha.com

"Coffee lovers can reduce their calorie intake with Fox Hollow's huge variety of sugar free flavors."



The **Juice Stop** is another smoothie specialist and has several locations across the metro. Juice Stop's menu is massive. They can be used as a low fat, low calorie breakfast or lunch replacement during the holidays says **Malia Mayer**, co-owner of Juice Stop. "Our 'knock out' is popular because it's our lowest calorie option, and those still looking for holiday flavor could try the 'slap shot'. A popular choice because of its crisp cranberry taste". For menus and locations; visit www.juicestopomaha.com.

Soup Saving Calories

With the abundance of events and temptations to eat out, eating well when at home is even more important. Soup lovers have a terrific option just north of the Metro with **Soup-N-More**. **Rebecka and Allen Fleischman** started their family run business back in 2010 out of a desire to feed their family healthy home cooked meals. "Our grandson can pronounce everything that's in our soups," Rebecka says. They have several flavors with creamy pot pie being their best seller. Their soups are full of natural ingredients.

"Soup lovers have a terrific option just north of the Metro with Soup-N-More... They have several flavors with creamy pot pie being their best seller."

A regular size mix makes one and a half to two quarts of soup while their family size mix makes three and a half to four. "Our soups are an excellent healthy choice for people during the winter as they can stay warm in a crock pot for up to 48 hours and can be refrigerated once fully cooked for 5-7 days," Fleischman added. Soups still in the package can be stored for 4-5 years. Customers can purchase their soup by visiting the website at www.soupnmore.com



"Peppermints are not only good as after dinner choices, but can also be used as an aperitif that can help you quell an appetite."



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Provide a Healthy option at Pot Lucks

The days of bountiful baskets and bags of fresh foods from local farmers' markets and road side stands may be well behind us, but that doesn't mean we have to sacrifice everything. A visit to **Tomato Tomato**, near 156th and Center Streets, has local and regional vendors that can help your healthy holiday eating habits.

"Several eateries offer smaller plates and top-notch taste... choose a happy hour and make it a meal."

I've had the excellent barbecue, hot and pizza sauces they sell. You've got access to a fine selection of meats including free range chicken, beef and bison. Vegetable lovers may be able to find

potatoes, turnips, mushrooms and even carrots to add to their winter cooking stable. Visit their website at tomatotomato.org for updated hours and updates.

The Spice is Nice

Cinnamon is a common flavor this time of year and according to the U.S. National Library of Medicine, it may help with the treatment of muscle spasms, infections and the common cold. Sprinkle a dash in your coffee, your oatmeal, even your salsas for an extra layer of flavor. I prefer the richer, more lasting flavor of Ceylon cinnamon that I get at the **Savory Spice Shop** in **Rockbrook Village**.

I also visit Savory Spice to add a healthy kick to my holiday eating. Chiles can speed up your metabolism, which is handy during this time of year. Savory has a large variety of peppers in dried, powder and sauce form. They give you guidelines on the labels for their heat level and how to use them. **Debbie Akuryek**, co-owner of the Rockbrook Savory Spice told me the ancho, aleppo



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and urfa peppers are their most popular. Customers can test both the aromatic and taste bud appeal of each variety before purchase. To check out Savory's spice selections, visit savoryspiceshop.com/nebraska/omaha.

Portion Sizing on your evenings out

Not only is portion sizing important in your potlucks, it's also important when deciding dining out options. Several eateries offer smaller plates and top-notch taste. A few of my favorites are: **Heritage Food and Wine** downtown, **Mula** in the **Blackstone District** and **España** in **Benson**. Another calorie counting strategy is to choose a happy hour and make it a meal. I'll head to any **Roja**, **Shuck's**, **Plank** or **Jackson Street Tavern** downtown, or **Ponzu Sushi** and **Grille** in **Aksarben** for an early, flavor packed dinner without expanding my belt loop as much.

"The holiday season in Omaha is full of festivals, family gatherings and fantastic foods... it's easy to stray off the healthy track."

Caving to the Candy Crush

If you can't escape the candy crush, then take a step back in time at **Hollywood Candy** on 12th and Jackson where you can pick up a peppermint variety of your choice. Peppermints are not only good after dinner choices, but can also be used as an aperitif that can help quell an appetite. If peppermints are not appealing, then Hollywood has a bevy of gum choices that can keep your jaws active and take away an eating temptation. To learn more visit hollywoodcandy.com.

The holiday season in Omaha is full of festivals, family gatherings and fantastic foods. From the **Lot 2** chocolate donut holes, a **Gerda's** peanut butter roll, or that favorite candy of yours that Mom only makes this time of year, it's easy to stray off the healthy track.

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Once a Prawn a Time in Omaha

by Jessica Clem

Once a prawn a time, in a **Whole Foods in Omaha**, there was a delicious assortment of shrimp, waiting to be taken to a loving home. Each shrimp had his or her own story, told in great detail by the cheerful fishmonger. “This one was caught safely and with great care to the surrounding environment, brought in the day before yesterday,” she would say with a smile, holding it up by its translucent tail. A happy, hungry customer would pick up this little shrimp along with several of his cooler case friends, and the customer and her family ate happily ever after.

“Through education and informed choices, consumers can help impact the way the seafood industry manages its practices.”

Stories like these don’t have to be the stuff of shrimp tails. But without a movement towards sustainable sourcing of seafood by consumers, fisheries, markets, and stores worldwide, the consequences will be devastating.

In the world’s oceans, the tiniest minnow is the key to a healthy ecosystem. There is a delicate balance in the food chain, one that can wipe out entire populations if upset.

And currently, our oceans are on the brink of disaster.

Sustainable seafood is defined by Ocean Wise as “species that are caught or farmed in a way that ensures the health and stability of that species, as well as the greater marine ecosystem.” Overfishing is a reality that is threatening more than just the availability of tuna sashimi. Over 90% of large predatory fish, vital for overall oceanic health, are gone from ocean waters. Nearly 158 million tons of seafood is reeled in every year, with the last 10% of tuna, sharks and swordfish being fished every day (www.oceanwise.ca).

There is still hope to repair a bit of the damage overfishing has wrought on the oceans. Through education and informed choices, consumers can help impact the way the seafood industry manages its practices.

Even all the way in Nebraska.

Thanks to the Internet, people are empowered with an abundance of information technology in ways unheard of even ten years ago.

Consumers have the power to research their food and find out where it was raised, how it was harvested, all the way to what it ate. It has never been more important to find out how our buying choices affect the environment, especially in terms of seafood.

"Oceans play a huge role in the overall health of the planet," said **Jonn Forslund**, associate seafood coordinator for the Midwest Region of Whole Foods.

"If we want to have wild caught seafood sources 20 years from now, we need to educate consumers on the importance of buying sustainable seafood. That's why Whole Foods is committed to environmental stewardship. We want customers to understand where their food came from."

"Consumers have the power to research their food and find out where it was raised, how it was harvested, all the way to what it ate."

Whole Foods makes buying sustainable seafood easy with a rating system designed by their partner, the Monterey Bay Aquarium. Used with wild-caught seafood, this system uses a four-color rating system to show customers sustainability information. Seafood with a blue label means it is certified sustainable by the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC). A green label means the seafood was sourced from "well-managed fisheries; caught in ways that cause little harm to habitats or other wildlife" (www.wholefoodsmarket.com). A yellow label signifies product that are from fisheries where there are questions about how it is managed. There is also a red label





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warning, but you won't find these products in Whole Foods. A red label product is deemed overfished, or caught in ways that damage the surrounding environment. "Our signage tells a great story about the product," said Forslund.

"Even our lowest rated items are going to be highly rated overall in the industry."

"As far as the 'stay clear of' list, be cautious of products from Russia, Japan and wild caught items from China."

Another resource for seafood hungry consumers in Omaha is at **Absolutely Fresh**, seafood store and supplier to a number of stores and businesses, including their own **Shucks Fish House and Oyster Bar**. In 1979, Absolutely Fresh was run from a refrigerated truck on the corner of 70th & Dodge. A reputation for "absolutely fresh" seafood, and friendly, knowledgeable staff propelled their growth into hundreds of stores, catering operations and restaurants in town. If anyone knows sustainable seafood, it's the staff at Absolutely Fresh.

"We would say that 99% of what we sell can be considered sustainably caught, and we certainly make an effort to see that this is the case," said **Brian Leimbach**, retail market manager.

"Any farm raised product, such as salmon or shrimp, is sustainable, and are excellent alternatives to wild caught species. As for wild caught products, like king salmon, halibut, and gulf shrimp, the regulations in place for the harvesting of these species are very stringent, and allow for the continuous repopulation of each annually."





The overwhelming amount of information available online can be difficult to navigate when customers try to research sustainable seafood. "While there is a lot of good information available [online], there is also an equal amount of misinformation, much like politics," said **Brian Manzer**, wholesale manager and buyer.

"It is important to pay attention to the country of origin, as not all countries are as stringent in harvesting regulations. Certainly, North American, European and most South American caught seafood will be sustainable. And of course, farm raised or aqua cultured fish and seafood from reputable suppliers falls into this category too, such as the Faroe Islands Salmon we sell."

The best solution if you are unsure?

"Ask the person you are buying it from. If it is sustainable, they will be proud to advertise it," said Leimbach. "If it isn't, you more than likely will encounter hesitation in their answer."

"No matter how far away the ocean seems from our landlocked state, there is incredible power in our consumer dollars."

The managers and staff at Absolutely Fresh are experts at helping customers understand what they are buying. "At our fish market (119th & Pacific), when somebody walks in for the very first time, sometimes we do see the deer-in-the-headlights look on their face," said **Greg Lindberg**, owner of Absolutely Fresh.

"We take those folks in hand, talking through the different types of fish and shellfish. For example, we'll explain that the lighter/whiter the flesh of the fish, generally, the lighter the taste. Halibut, cod and sole are very light in color and correspondingly light in flavor. Darker colored fish, such as salmon or tuna, tend to have more full flavors. NOT FISHY, though. If it tastes fishy, it ain't Absolutely Fresh."

From buying to cooking, customers can expect a full learning experience when buying from Absolutely Fresh. "If a person is good at cooking in general, they will be a whiz with seafood, given the chance. Just cook the fish about 2/3 the time as, say, a ribeye," said Lindberg.

"Seasoning and saucing are biggies too; the spice of life, quite literally. That's why we make our own spice blends to go with fresh fish. And we take the time to explain to our customers which flavor profiles go better with salmon vs. cod."

It is also important to know what NOT to buy. "As far as the 'stay clear of' list, be cautious of products from Russia, Japan and wild caught items from China," said Manzer.

"Many fish are endangered in parts of the world, but plentiful in other areas, like orange roughy, which is plentiful in New Zealand, but nearly impossible to get fresh nearby. True beluga caviar also falls into this category as it is illegal to import."

No matter how far away the ocean seems from our landlocked state, there is incredible power in our consumer dollars. The way we buy seafood can impact the overall industry in incredible ways. While it may seem intimidating to navigate the murky waters of sustainability, the staff at Whole Foods, Absolutely Fresh and other places, are here to help guide your choices. "It is incredibly important to move trends toward sustainability," said Forslund.

"The time to act is now."

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Charcuterie board at M's Pub

THE SUPPER CLUB

Old Market Progressive Dinner

story and photos by Angela Nichols

Publisher's Note: Omega Omega Omega (Tri Omega), the culinary fraternity at the Institute for the Culinary Arts at Metropolitan Community College, strives to provide students with opportunities to apply and develop their skills through unique experiences. One of these experiences is the Supper Club. The Supper Club selects a restaurant once a quarter and works with the chef of the restaurant to provide a unique dining experience to challenge the palate and minds of the students with the unique ingredients and techniques found in that chef's kitchen. The article and photography for this article are also done by students.

A progressive dinner in the Old Market was the theme of the 2015 fall quarter Supper Club. M's Pub, Le Bouillon and V. Mertz each created a three course meal, complete with wine pairings and a dessert. Three groups of diners started at a different restaurant and rotated to the next, which allowed everyone to eat a course at each establishment. The buzz of excitement was in the air as this was the first time many had dined at these restaurants. They were more than ready to see what the chefs had created for them.

M's Pub, is located at 422 South 11th Street. Open since 1972, it is the oldest restaurant in the Old Market. The interior is fresh and bright with a warm welcoming staff.

The first course was a beautiful charcuterie board laid out on the table with smoked salmon mousseline, duck prosciutto, Moody bleu cheese and pickled vegetables. The mousseline was creamy and smooth with light flavors that didn't overshadow the salmon. The peppered duck prosciutto was a bit smoky with a touch of spice from the pepper and melted in your mouth. The Moody bleu cheese had a little smoke and was a bit firmer in texture, which made it a perfect choice for a lot of the creamier components on the board. Pickled Brussels sprouts, briny olives, okra and peppers balanced it all perfectly.

The second course was an escargot pot pie. Inside the flakey puff pastry was a rich, creamy herb sauce, smoky escargot and succulent shrimp.

The third course was a lamb chop and ground lamb sausage with pickled peaches, couscous and a yogurt dipping sauce. The lamb was rich in flavor, cooked and seasoned perfectly and placed on a bed of creamy couscous. A pickled peach and cardamom carrots added the right amount of tartness to the rich dish.

Dessert was a port Concord grape tart with crème anglaise and edible flowers. The grape was a bright balance of tart and sweet that paired perfectly with the lush crème anglaise. The edible sugared flowers were a beautiful touch.

Le Bouillon, located at 1017 Howard Street, is an artsy, light, eclectic space with a Parisian atmosphere that focuses on the comfort food of France.

The first course served was an **Imperial** wagyu steak tartare and socca. The tartare was very flavorful, with a smooth and silky mouthfeel and a surprisingly light horseradish note. The pickled onions and parsley crema were a nice balance to the lush beef. The soccas (chickpea crepe chips) were a nice crisp vehicle to enjoy the entire dish in one luxurious bite.



Parisian gnocchi with roasted lamb, fall vegetable and parsley at Le Bouillon

A s'more inspired dessert at V. Mertz



The second course was a Parisian gnocchi with roasted lamb, fall vegetable and parsley. The gnocchi was made from Rosa Maria goat cheese and pate a choux pastry which was light and fluffy. The carrots and parsnips were crisp and sweet while the roasted lamb was tender and rich.

The third course was called *pot on fire*, which is a variation of stew made with wagyu beef, duck liver and fall vegetables. The wagyu short ribs were hearty and perfectly tender. Foie gras (duck liver) added a luxurious richness to the dish. The carrots, Brussels sprouts and leeks lent a nice vegetal note while the polenta added a creaminess to the stew.

“As the meal came to an end, the students met up to discuss the creations... every restaurant outdid themselves.”

Dessert was a variety of pastries that included madeleines, financiers, rich chocolate tarts and lush raspberry cheesecake. Each of these pastries were a delectable ending to a delicious meal.

V. Mertz, located at 1022 Howard Street, is a fine dining French restaurant tucked in the heart of **The Old Market Passageway**. It has an intimate atmosphere with some of the best service in Omaha. In addition to the three courses and dessert, V. Mertz also offered an amuse bouche with a play on jalapeño cheddar popcorn, a tasting

of the previous course and an intermezzo of cantaloupe sorbet with olive oil and nasturtium juice.

The first course was a three bean salad with tomato jam and ricotta cheese. The beans were local and very fresh. The ricotta was rich and creamy and added a perfect texture to the salad while the tomato jam added a wonderful acidic note.

The second course was a stunning salmon with melted heirloom tomato. The coffee rub added a bit of smoky depth to the savory, fatty salmon which was perfectly cooked. The melted tomato, cucumber and micro mint gave a beautiful acidic balance to counteract the rich fish.

The third course was a maple smoked duck with bleu cheese, dates and parsnips. The crisp savory duck was very tender and paired well with the sweet fig and date compote. Parsley root purée added a fresh, herbal flavor to the dish.

Dessert was a play on s'mores with toasted marshmallow ice cream, ember caramel and hibiscus flowers. The ice cream was beyond creamy with cocoa nibs that added a textural contrast. The smoky caramel was reminiscent of a campfire which paid homage to its inspiration.

As the meal came to an end, the students met up to discuss the creations they had enjoyed and it was unanimous that each and every restaurant outdid themselves. M's Pub, Le Bouillon and V. Mertz all gained new customers that night from the students and guests who dined with them during this special supper club.



Salmon with melted heirloom tomato at V. Mertz

Sodas Which You May Not Be Entirely Aware Of

Green River by Eddie Morin

Okay folks, here we are again. Your favorite quarterly column showcasing rare and desirable sodas is finally back. This time we will be exploring **Green River** – I’m quite excited about this featured soda. First, we will look at a bit of the history behind Chicago’s original Green River soda, then we will objectively scrutinize its packaging, and lastly, we will actually be pouring the Green River into my mouth, revealing the treasures contained within. Enough prattle, on with the adventure.

The back of the bottle boasts the phrase, “Rich in History” and “Today, we celebrate Green River’s rich history!” Bah, I’ll be the judge of that. I have never taken a soda’s word for anything and I’m not about to start now. Heading over to the official Green River website, we can see if this soda can back up its claim. Right away, it is made clear that this soda was introduced in 1919. That’s a super long time ago. In a few more years, I’d imagine they will be having quite the centennial celebration over at the bottling plant (barring any unforeseen Armageddon, of course).

Alright, so it has been around a while. I’ll give them a point for that. Next, the website claims that Green River was an immediate success during Prohibition. I guess we will have to trust them on this one. There are no customer testimonials from 1919 to confirm or deny this. If there was one, I think it would go something like this:

“As the emerald liquid crosses my lips, I am immediately introduced to a crisp lime taste... the lime flavor is slightly artificial, but the flavor is grand.”

“Well, since the government is taking away alcohol, I decided to switch to Green River soda. I had grown accustomed to getting blitzed out of my gourd every night after work on the railroad, but drinking a sugary green liquid is surely just as rewarding. I may not be rotting my liver any longer, but rotting my teeth will do just as well.” - Phineas Gauge, 1919

And that’s about it as far as the history goes. You can click on “Photos & Fun Facts” on the website, but it won’t really enlighten you any more. Sure there are literally three facts, but none of them are fun. What is sort of neat is a list of the Green River catchphrases used throughout the years: Snappy Lime Drink; Have a Green River; Wherever you go; Most Refreshing; Lighter, Less Sweet, Lively Lime; The Original Lime Drink; Where refreshment flows; Caffeine free since 1919.

What I like about this list is that nearly all of the catchphrases are terrible. I kind of like the “Have a Green River” phrase. It makes me think of an old farmer at a general store. “Did you just come in from harvest to purchase next year’s seed? Well, take a second and have a Green River.” The rest are all terrible. Either the publicity guy at The Schoenhofen Brewery was a dull human or he was trying to sabotage the company. By far the worst one though, is the

current phrase. Caffeine free since 1919? That isn’t exciting at all! Get with it, Green River. I shake my head in disgust.

Well, enough about the history, let’s look at the bottle itself. Starting at the top, the cap itself is green (how appropriate) and says “The Original Green River”. Hey, that’s pretty good. Not a lot of room on a bottle cap. That’ll do.

“While I cannot agree with the ‘rich history’ of Green River, I can wholeheartedly recommend it based on aesthetics and certainly on flavor.”

Moving on down, the bottle itself is clear, showcasing the bright green soda inside. Another good move. The label has a green background with what I interpret as a moon setting on the horizon and reflecting off a river with what looks to me like two palm trees on the shore. I’m not sure the palm trees are appropriate for a soda coming out of Chicago, but the image is nice. I can’t help but be reminded of Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*. Perhaps Mr. Kurtz would have fared better in his savage enterprise if he had had some Green River? Anyway, I like everything about the soda’s packaging.

Now, onto what really matters – the taste. As I write this, I am cracking open a freshly chilled bottle, lest you be nervous about the credibility of my memory. As the emerald liquid crosses my lips, I am immediately introduced to a crisp lime taste. If I am honest (Am I even capable of being anything but?), the lime flavor is slightly artificial, but the flavor is grand. You will not be convinced that you are drinking something procured from fresh limes, but what you do get is an even richer bounty. The lime flavor has transcended the realm of actual fruit and in fact entered a higher plane of existence. My taste buds are quivering in equal parts delight and terror. They have encountered something approaching Nirvana, but is it too good to be true? Let’s not forget the story of Icarus who flew too close to the sun and plummeted to the sea. Will I somehow be punished for tasting the glory of Green River?

What an adventure! While I cannot agree with the “rich history” of Green River, I can wholeheartedly recommend it based on aesthetics and certainly on flavor. Its history can basically be boiled down to, “it’s really old,” but don’t let the lack of an exciting past deter you from trying this soda. You can try this and many other curious varieties at **B & G Tasty Foods**.



It's Not Just Noodles and Eggs

The underappreciated and often neglected food of *Blade Runner*

by Eddie Morin

Disclaimer: If you think you're going to read an article about the food in the 1982 quasi-hit film, Blade Runner without bumping into a few spoilers, you are a fool. I just want to get that out of the way. If you haven't seen Blade Runner, you've already been screwing up anyway though, so you can probably still read this. End of Disclaimer.



Director Ridley Scott is no idiot, so when making *Blade Runner*, he knew the fastest way for it to become a blockbuster dystopian sci-fi film was to subtly barrage the audience with tasty food. I surveyed all my closest buds about what food or food related items they remember from *Blade Runner*. Of course everyone remembered the noodle bar and the hard boiled eggs. Who could forget those? Some even remembered the Coca-Cola signs around 2019 Los Angeles. What nobody realized was that there is an almost constant overshadowing importance placed on food. While you thought you were enjoying the gritty set design

and human versus artificial intelligence conflict, you were really just thinking with your tummy. Don't get me wrong, *Blade Runner* is great, but it couldn't have reached where it is without food.

Let's dive right in. Almost immediately (4:50 into the movie), Dave Holden is seen giving Leon Kowalski a Voight-Kampff test in the Tyrell Corporation headquarters. Our eyes are drawn to the intense concentration in Holden's eyes, and his perfectly groomed hair. What we don't notice is the thermos with hot coffee on the table or sandwich hidden to the side. Holden has clearly been working hard and is probably planning on eating this sandwich as soon as he's finished with Leon. The sandwich is cut into perfect squares and appears to contain some type of spread – maybe egg salad? Well, Dave Holden never gets to indulge, as he is shot by Leon. However, right before the scene changes, we see that the thermos itself was indeed pierced by one of Leon's bullets. It is hard enough to cope with the immediate loss of Holden, but we have to deal with the blasted coffee as well? I can see why this movie sucks you in so hard right from the start!

"Are there any food indications that point to Rick Deckard being a replicant himself? Why isn't Gaff ever seen eating any food?"

A few minutes later (7:36), we see a slight reflection of a Coca-Cola sign in the Los Angeles cityscape. This isn't just a sign with Coke's name on it; it also says, "enjoy". Whoa. I'm not sure I'm ready for the aggressiveness that this product placement has taken. Anyway, we are going to see a lot more from Coca-Cola, so I'll leave it alone for now.

At 7:52 we are already to the most iconic food scene in *Blade Runner* – the noodle bar. As Rick Deckard waits for his turn at the bar, we see another patron pouring himself some tea while he enjoys his noodle bowl. We have a new angle at 8:23 and can see



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"Apparently Coca-Cola is completely dominating the cola wars in 2019."

many alcohol bottles lined up in the background of the noodle bar. Nothing is identifiable. What Ridley Scott is clearly saying here is, "Hey, these people need to relax sometimes too, buddy."

Finally, at 8:39 Deckard is able to claim a spot at the bar. He orders four of something, but is firmly denied and only allowed two. Things must be tight in 2019. He also requests noodles with his two of something. As the noodles are delivered in their bowl and Deckard prepares his chopsticks, Gaff interrupts him and calls him away. Deckard never receives his two somethings, but does elect to take his noodles in the police cruiser (spinner) with him. Here you can see that there is nothing in the noodles but noodles themselves. 2019 is tight indeed. As Rick and Gaff head to the police station, observant viewers will notice a neon Cuisinart sign (10:01). It depicts a tomato dancing its way into the processor and is then sliced to bits. Perhaps this is an early glimpse into what will happen to Deckard's emotions if he does not focus on his future task.

When Deckard is commanded to sit in Chief Bryant's office, he is offered a drink. Bryant pours a bit of Johnnie Walker Black Label whisky (11:52). The bottle is almost the same as it is now, but the bottom is flared out. This whisky makes a few more appearances before the film is over.

If you missed the Coca-Cola sign at 15:43, you aren't even trying. This is one of the largest advertisements in the film. Apparently Coca-Cola is completely dominating the cola wars in 2019. I will be surprised if their prediction is wrong once 2019 rolls around.

Next, our buddy, Rick, is headed over to the Tyrell Corporation (21:03) himself to ask some questions of his own. He ends up administering the Voight-Kampff on Rachel who does not know that she is a replicant. It takes Deckard over 100 questions to determine that she is in fact a replicant. What else would you expect from a state-of-the-art Nexus Six? What is very interesting, however, is the very last question Deckard asks Rachel. This question involves a meal of raw oysters and boiled dog. Rachel does not answer and I feel the same way. What do you say to that? Boiled dog? I mean, sure it's eaten places, and I'm not really here to pass judgment, so can we just move on?

At 22:29 and a 23:12 we see Coca-Cola signs again.

Deckard is back at his place at 32:22 where he pours himself some whisky. Based on the tightness of his cheeks when sipping, I'm willing to bet it's Johnnie Walker again.

More Coke signs at 37:00 and 39:35.

Still in Deckard's apartment at 42:42 when we finally see the Johnnie Walker Black Label bottle. I was right! The bottle is actually pretty cool. Obviously, the angles exhibited at the bottom of the

glass bottle reflect on the harshness of society in the world of *Blade Runner*.

By 49:26 Deckard has made his way to Taffy Lewis' club. Here we can see a plethora of alcohol bottles behind the bar and drinks in the customer's hands. As you would expect, people go a bit gonzo at Taffy's place.

Deckard ends up chasing Zhora out of Taffy's and at 55:28 they race by two neon signs. One is a Schlitz sign, the other is a Budweiser sign. I believe this parallels the pursuit of Rick and Zhora. Budweiser is clearly winning as Deckard will eventually snuff out Zhora. Leon looks on in angst. He must be a Schlitz guy.



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After retiring Zhora, Rick Deckard needs a drink to calm his nerves. At 59:56 we see the same Schlitz sign and a different Budweiser sign behind the street bar, but Deckard orders a Tsing Tao! Perhaps there is a twist in store for us! There is indeed. Deckard is confronted by Leon himself, who is eventually retired by none other than Rachel! If the three beers foreshadowing this event hadn't prepared me for this surprise, I may have fallen right out of my seat. Thanks for the heads up, Ridley!

Things calm down a bit and we don't see another food reference until 1:13:10 while Priss is in J.F. Sebastian's home. J.F. is a warm character who invites Priss inside for some food. After making Priss feel at home, we see him asleep at his dining table with an uneaten sandwich in front of him. I assume he made one similar for Priss. What a good guy... poor J.F. Sebastian.

A bit later in J.F.'s apartment (1:16:11), we see the second most recognizable food reference in *Blade Runner*. This occurs when J.F. offers to cook breakfast for his guests. As he is boiling eggs (the symbol of life) Priss reaches in and grabs one to demonstrate that she is indeed artificial. She tosses it to J.F. who cannot hold on. This shows the ultimate physical superiority of the replicants over humans, and sadly it is J.F. who will ultimately be sacrificed. To further exacerbate the issue, Priss helps herself to some cold slices of what looks like possibly tomatoes from J.F.'s refrigerator (1:18:30). The last moment before the scene change we can see little dribbles of tomato juice on Priss' chin.

Blade Runner marches on, but the food sightings are becoming quite scarce. This must be Ridley Scott's way of slowly letting go of our hands. He's saying, "You're on your own now. I have coddled you long enough."

As J.F. Sebastian is heading up to meet Eldon Tyrell, the godfather of genetic engineering, we are given the final verbal food reference of the film (1:22:22). Tyrell says to J.F., "Milk and cookies kept you awake?" That son of a bitch. First we are comforted by food and now we are being mocked with it? I trusted you, food!

Before we can say goodbye to *Blade Runner*, we need at least one more Coke ad, right? At 1:30:00 we see the final Coca-Cola sign as a faint screen on the side of the Off-World blimp. Coke is really just ramming it down our throats now.

And that's it. I know you must be overflowing with questions. I am too. Are there any food indications that point to Rick Deckard being a replicant himself? Why isn't Gaff ever seen eating any food? What is Taffy Lewis' favorite drink? For answers to these questions, you'll need to look inside yourself. I want to keep helping you, but then you'll never learn.

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Facebooking Reality

The Responsibility We All Share

by Jill Cockson



In 1992, Madonna wrote the original *Fifty Shades of Grey*, entitled *Sex*. There was an uproar (as expected) from the conservative community regarding the dark and explicit nature of the book. In a television interview regarding the negative response from conservatives, Madonna said, “I don’t care what people say, as long as I keep them talking.”

Her quote has stuck with me, and recently I have been considering the comprehensive power of negative press, and how it pertains to the future of the bar/hospitality industry.

People put down spirits brands for several reasons, ranging from a simple non-preference for the flavor profile (which has nothing to do with quality), to atrocious labor and/or environmental practices involved in the production of said brand. It is important for hospitality professionals to understand what they are potentially doing (and NOT doing) when they focus on the negative aspects of a brand.

We have an ethical obligation to relay correct information regarding brands that we do and don’t carry. Quality of a product should never be expressed based on personal preference. Opinions about the quality of a product should always be based on how that product stands up to standards for the spirit category. I don’t have to like Bourbon to know what a good representative of the category should taste like.

The right to an opinion is earned through extensive personal and formal product education. That being said, not every product is intended to be a premium product. The cost of producing and marketing a product is a complicated thing to manage. There is a range of product quality precisely because there is a corresponding range in target consumers. A product is not objectively good or bad, but it is good or bad for a particular business, depending on the target consumer. A product is simply appropriate on a particular shelf, or not. If a product is not a fit for the demographic you want to reach, then you simply don’t carry the product. Enough said.

But what about brands that are associated with unethical labor or environmental practices? Are we not obligated to speak out? As millennials take over the driver’s seat of the economy, we need to consider how they get their information, and how that information spreads.

Of course, we want to refrain from supporting brands whose practices are a threat to human life, human dignity, or our natural resources. Yes, we want to speak out to those brands that, as a community, we do not approve. However, it is critical that we are very careful about where we get our information. Did you read just one article, or a Facebook post from someone you trust? A tweet? Did you research the issue outside of that one source? It is critical to consider that, unless you have seen something with your own eyes, you could be guilty of falsely slandering a company or damaging a brand.

“Instead of focusing on the bashing of products or producers for what they are failing to do, focus on the products and producers who ARE meeting your standards.”

That said, please consider the triple power of positivity. Instead of focusing on the bashing of products or producers for what they are failing to do, focus on the products and producers who ARE meeting your standards. In doing so, 1) You inform consumers of issues they should be paying attention to without running the risk of slandering a producer; 2) You donate an ad campaign to a product you care about, thereby assisting them to continue those ethical practices that are often more expensive; 3) You take away the continued (albeit negative) ad campaign for the producers you do not wish to support.

For example, I carry del Maguey mezcal because of their outstanding quality, their eco-friendly farming practices and their dedication to protecting the land rights and community values of the villages who produce for them. In that statement, I indirectly tell a customer what concerns I have about where my products come from. I thereby imply why I might not be carrying another brand without having to talk about that brand at all. Last (but not least), I give a shout-out to a great product!

Every time a brand is mentioned, regardless of what is being said, that brand remains relevant. An unintended effect of negative campaigns is that they consume valuable time, energy and social media ad space that could be used to promote brands we support. Every time you talk about the bad guy, YOU ARE STILL TALKING ABOUT THE BAD GUY! They are keeping us talking and in doing so, they block other brands from becoming contenders. It’s the oldest trick in the marketing book and it’s time we all stop falling for it. Cheers!

Death of a Salesman

by John Finocchiaro

The wine world is filled with romantic imagery. Vineyards ripe with grapes glistening in the morning sun, cellars awash with the beautiful damp aromas of juice aging patiently in oak barrels, tasting rooms animated by swirling glasses and lively, intellectual conversation...you get the picture. At the risk of bursting the wine bubble, there is another side to all things vino. Mind you, it's not "the dark side," just another side. It is the business side.

Somewhere in the middle of the metamorphosis from fruit on the vine to wine in your glass is a salesperson. This person is responsible for bringing the goods from the winery to your local wine shop or restaurant. The wine peddler carries a bag. He is armed with sample bottles, a few stories and a pen. He spends far more time pounding the pavement than he does pounding down glasses of vino. His mission is to sell something. Anything.

He hears the word "no" a lot. He racks up a lot of miles. No matter, there's always another account to pitch, until the long day is done. Tomorrow he will do it all over again. And the next day. And the next.

"At the risk of bursting the wine bubble, there is another side to all things vino... It is a means of earning a living and providing for one's family."

To the countless employed within the industry, wine is more than simply a celebratory beverage. It is a means of earning a living and providing for one's family. It is to be perfected, protected and respected. It is a way of life. The work comes first, the celebrations will follow.

I am most fortunate to have been born into such a wine family. Perhaps my immigrant grandfather, Louis Finocchiaro, Sr., in his heavily accented Sicilian voice, said it best in a recorded interview from many years ago:

"Wine, it's in our veins. You know, we come from the country where wine is an ordinary food, a necessity practically, you could say. Everybody has wine. And it always was my ambition that if this country ever come to get wet (repeal prohibition) I wanted to be one of the first ones. So, when the country went wet I had the first car of wine of anybody in the state of Nebraska...(and) I bought a farm in Council Bluffs, I raised grapes and I made wine."

Over the course of time our family grew and the industry changed. The keys to Finocchiaro Wine Co., Inc. were eventually passed on to my uncle Vince and my father, Louis Jr. Together they would carry the load for roughly the next half century.

Recently my uncle Vince passed from this earth. Vincent Salvatore Finocchiaro was the ultimate old school salesman, a man with a sample bag, a pen, lots of stories, shined shoes with worn soles, and passion and dedication to his family. Through it all, wine played a major role. The hard work and heavy responsibility that he, my father and my grandfather bore did not go unnoticed. I know; I was there. And my words of gratitude to those three men will never be enough.

There is no tragedy to this story, no Willie Loman, only vivid memories of a job well done, day after day, year after year, for generations. Multi sports star Bo Jackson in the now famous "Bo Knows" Nike ad campaign used to say "Just Do It". To my grandfather, Louis Sr., my father Louis, Jr. and my uncle Vince, I say "*salute*" – you did it.



(Left to right) Louis Jr., Louis Sr., and Vincent Finocchiaro.

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Justin Swanson (aka Justin Pants), a bartender at House of Loom, took second place at the Woodford Reserve competition earlier this year.

Portrait of a Bartender

Justin Swanson

by Binoy Fernandez

This issue I find myself near a hotel in downtown Omaha, searching out a looking glass. Through that looking glass I go, and I wait for permission to go through a wall. Behind this wall of unopened liquor bottles lies a dimly lit bar, a bartender in a three-piece suit mixing drinks for a mishmash of people, some of them dressed to the nines. Welcome to the Wicked Rabbit.

“He’s one of the few I’ve seen who doesn’t lose his cool, technique, or quality while making a cocktail and being six deep at the bar.”

A tall, lanky, blonde haired figure joins me. I order a Martinez cocktail, he grabs a Manhattan, and we drift off to a table to sip on our drinks and chat. While I have a notebook and pen with me, I don’t take many notes. I’m sitting with **Justin Pants**, as he tends to be known, a bartender from **House of Loom** who seemed to come out of nowhere at the Woodford Reserve competition at the end of September. He took second place, with only his lack of competition experience keeping him from snagging the winner’s spot from **Luke Edson** of the **Berry & Rye**. He’s definitely someone to keep your eye on and get your drinks from.

Though twenty-nine, Justin is still fairly new to the world of bartending. He started as a barback at House of Loom a little over

two years ago, restocking and cleaning up after the likes of **Ben Rowe**, who now manages the Rabbit. In the crucible of a venue that does craft cocktails and deals with the volume of a busy event space, Justin learned under the age-old industry practice of the “sink or swim” theory – what some might call trial by fire. He’s one of the few I’ve seen who doesn’t lose his cool, technique, or quality while making a cocktail and being six deep at the bar.

It was probably this aspect that first caught my attention, even before I tried any of his drinks. The ability to maintain your technique and calm when under pressure to get drinks out as fast as possible is something that is difficult to do. When I asked him about it, he reiterated a lesson I went through myself: you just put your head down and focus on one drink at a time.

“Justin is of a different philosophy, and again, this probably comes from the unique environment that House of Loom represents.”

His philosophy about bartending is something to think about. All too often, at the craft cocktail bars, you run into bartenders that are extremely knowledgeable about cocktails, but they can’t really talk to their customers. Or, they’re the other way around: a bartender that can talk, but they can’t make a drink worth a damn. Justin is of a different philosophy, and again, this probably comes from the unique environment that House of Loom represents, where it’s just as likely to get an order for a Ramos Gin Fizz as it is a rum and coke, Redbull and vodka, or a shot of bourbon whiskey. He mentioned an attitude for a bartender that I really liked: *affability*. In the end, he mentioned that being a bartender is about hospitality, about serving a customer. It’s nice when you can walk into a place you’ve never been and immediately feel welcome. It’s about the interaction and dialog before anything else.

“When it comes to creating drinks... Justin learned a different way: start with a flavor you like.”

When it comes to creating drinks Justin takes a different approach than a lot of bartenders. A lot of us, when we try to come up with a drink, first always consider what kind of base we are going to use. Do we want to build a rum, whiskey, gin, vodka, or tequila base? Justin learned a different way: start with the flavor you like. Take his drink for the Woodford Reserve competition: Bourbon My Sweetie Pie. For this drink, he started not with the bourbon base, but that he liked sweet potatoes. Starting with a purée of yams with brown sugar, he added bourbon, then some Benedictine D.O.M. and hot water (yes, it’s a warm drink!). That alone wasn’t enough, though. He figured out how to add marshmallow to the mix, giving the mix a baked marshmallow topping. Put all of this together and you get the flavors of Thanksgiving. This is a drink that has all the balance of a proper classic, yet the innovation of a modern mix. It captures the essence of fall. You can find it on the menu at House of Loom, along with Justin behind the bar.

Around this time in the conversation he’s moved from the Manhattan to the Blood & Sand; another classic, but swapping rye whiskey for the more peaty flavors of monkey shoulder scotch. If you haven’t tried this drink out... well, you probably should – even if you aren’t a big fan of scotch. As we shift gears on drinks, the night mellows out a little bit. A group of people materialize at the end of the bar, and another group seems to wrap up a meeting, getting ready to go out into a cold November rain that threatens to turn into snow.



Justin’s drink for the Woodford Reserve competition:
Bourbon My Sweetie Pie.

Beer Chat

by Jason McLaughlin



Boiler Brewing Company, located inside downtown Lincoln's Grand Manse Building, opened in February.

If you love better beer and call the 37th state in the Union home, then the "Good Life" surely has had deeper meaning to you with each passing year as of late. Simply put, Nebraska is making great beer.

Last September saw two of our finest breweries, **Zipline** and **Nebraska Brewing Company**, take home gold medals at the Great American Beer Festival in Denver, Colorado. Several other local breweries also grabbed awards from top competitions with their fermented efforts. Our hard working men and women in rubber boots are making some of the best beer in the nation and the nation is taking notice.

"There are now more than 20 breweries in operation across Nebraska; 2016 will likely see that number rise to over 30."

With as good as it's been, things are about to get even better. There are now more than 20 breweries in operation across Nebraska; 2016 will likely see that number rise to over 30. Let's take a closer look at a few things we have to look forward to.

Boiler Brewing Company (Lincoln)

Barring no unforeseen buildout delays, Boiler Brewing Company is poised to become Lincoln's newest brewery this February in the beautiful **Grand Manse Building** near 10th and O Street in downtown Lincoln. Built in 1904 and listed on the National Registry of Historic Places, the Grand Manse location was once the home of the U.S. Post Office and Federal Courthouse. The brewery and taproom will be located in the former boiler room in the basement with a capacity of around 100 people.

If there is such thing as a perfect business partnership for a startup brewery, this is likely it. The team is a culmination of building owner **Monte Froehlich** of U.S. Property who specializes in redeveloping historic properties, **Alpha Brewing Operations** founders **Jon Marco** and **Matt Rennerfeldt** who design and manufacture turnkey brewing equipment, and brewer **Tim Thomssen**, who is currently one of the winningest homebrewers in the nation. All combined, this is surely a recipe for greatness.

While Tim has been brewing at home for just half a decade, he recalls that, "After the first couple of years, my enthusiasm for brewing increased to a full-blown passion. I suppose I've brewed at least 20 years worth of beer in those five years". He adds, "I started regularly entering homebrew competitions in 2013. I've been lucky enough to win quite a few competitions as well as a surprising number of regional and national series championships".

Tim's most recent accomplishments include being the current reigning Midwest Homebrewer of the Year, High Plains Homebrewer of the Year and Masters Championship of Amateur Brewing Grand Champion. His biggest win of his amateur brewing career was announced during last September's Great American Beer Festival, where Tim's Raspberry Berliner Weisse won the Sam Adams Longshot competition. The Longshot is a nationwide homebrew competition hosted by Boston based Sam Adams Brewery. Thousands of entries are judged and three winning homebrewers' beers are reproduced and distributed across the entire nation in a specialty Sam Adams six-pack. "With the awards come high expectations. I am already rolling up my sleeves and working hard to live up to those expectations. I thrive on that," says Tim.

"It took just a few short years for demand for Infusion's beer to outgrow their brewery and taproom's capacity in Benson."

Boiler Brewing will operate on an Alpha Brewing Operations automated 10-barrel, two vessel steam brewhouse with eight 10-barrel fomenters, two 10-barrel brite tanks and a little room to expand. They will also have a one-barrel pilot system with five two-barrel fermenters. Tim explains of his shiny new equipment, "With Alpha Brewing as a partner, you can be sure that we will have all the bells and whistles that any brewmaster would envy."

Initially, Boiler Brewing plans to only serve beer on draft in their taproom or in growlers to go, which will be followed by local distribution of kegs to bars and restaurants. Beyond that, Tim says, "Down the road we will package beer in cans or bottles for retail sales that will hopefully find their way to a refrigerator near you." Known for creating bold and flavorful beers, Tim has an extensive catalog of his award winning recipes that beer lovers can expect to see. "Since we have the one-barrel pilot system, it will be a lot of fun

keeping new and experimental beers coming out on a regular basis. I will be able to use some crazy and fun local ingredients at one-barrel scale that would likely be impractical at 10-barrels or larger."

Infusion Brewing Company (La Vista)

It took just a few short years for demand of Infusion's beer to outgrow their brewery and taproom's capacity in Benson. Luckily, expanding isn't anything new for owner **Bill Baburek**. Bill founded Omaha's craft beer scene when he opened the multi-tap **Crescent Moon Ale House** back in 1996 and as Bill says, "We kinda set the pace and laid the blueprint for all the other beer bars that would follow years later." Now a multi-level complex known as **Beer Corner USA**, the bar grew to also house a German bier hall called **Huber-Haus**, a quaint Belgian beer tavern called **Max & Joe's** and **Beertopia**, his specialty bottle shop offering over 700 varieties of craft and import beer from around the globe. This craft beer paradise Bill created on **Farnam Street** has also become a permanent fixture on *Draft Magazine's* Top 100 Beer Bars in America list. With all of that, Infusion's success really comes with very little surprise.

Bill opened the original Benson location for Infusion Brewing in 2012 as a modest seven-barrel brewery with a tap room. The main focus was on producing quality beer with plans to one day have just a few accounts around town. "Things started to blow up a bit when we started distributing our beer in February of 2014. We were expecting maybe 15 to 20 accounts, but in the first six months we had over 50. A year later we had nearly 100 accounts and our Vanilla Bean Blonde was experiencing increasing demand, especially from retailers wanting it in bottles. We knew we had to do something, so we began to look for additional space in order for us to be able to brew our beers efficiently for packaging and statewide distribution," said Bill.

Now Bill is in the process of completing the expansion of an additional production facility at 6275 South 118th Street in **La Vista** that will allow him to keep up with demand. It will also include a taproom that offers their whole lineup of beers, as well as brewery tours for the adoring public. As Bill says, "That location was chosen

The original Infusion Brewing Company location in Benson features a modest seven-barrel brewery and a tap room.





The Clements, founders of Vis Major Brewing Company, hope to open their doors sometime in mid 2016. Photos by Jason McLaren

for a number of reasons: the space itself, proximity to our main distributor, the Interstate (I-80) and other production breweries. The last reason gives craft beer lovers an opportunity to visit three production breweries just minutes from one another.” He hopes to be brewing by April in his new 20-barrel brewhouse, which will have an initial capacity of 5,000 barrels per year and room for expansion that could push capacity well beyond 20,000 barrels annually.

Infusion also purchased a bottling line from Zipline Brewing Company and hopes to have bottles on the market by May. The initial releases will include four of their beers in six-packs; Vanilla Bean Blonde, Radial IPA, Dominican Brown Ale and their seasonal, which Bill says, “Will most likely be our Splish Splash Tart Cherry Wheat.” Later, the core lineup is planned to be followed up with additional seasonals and some four-pack specialty releases. Godspeed to Baburek and his craft beer empire.

Vis Major Brewing Company (Omaha)

In yet another great story of homebrewers chasing their dream, Vis Major Brewing Company is the vision of husband and wife, **Tom and Lindsey Clements**. The couple brewed their first batch of homebrewed beer just four years ago while living in Chicago. They knew right then that the only sensible option going forward was to first, master the craft of brewing and second, start their own brewery. Lindsey explains, “Since then we’ve returned to our home state with a focus on creating recipes that challenge the palette. In the fall of 2014 we began sampling to the public, developing our brand, building our network, scouting locations and writing our business plan. Each step has been filled with lessons and it’s exciting to see our passion come to life.”

Over the last four years Tom has been brewing nonstop, working on perfecting techniques and recipes. Lindsey says of the future lineup, “We have designed beers big in flavor and complexity that will entice the true craft beer lover while offering ‘an adventure in a glass’ for someone new to craft beer.” In the meantime, Lindsey has worked the past three years in sales for a local craft beer distribution company. The experience has allowed her to get a grasp on the local markets. This should prove invaluable while building their brand.

At the moment, the Clements are in the process of finalizing a location in the **Midtown Omaha** area and hope to open their doors sometime in mid 2016. Lindsey adds, “Our hope is that our taproom is a communal space where passion and ideas will be fostered.” They will operate on a three-and-a-half-barrel brewhouse with five, seven-barrel fermentation vessels and a brite tank, which will give them the ability to produce up to 850 barrels annually. As demand rises they have a plan, “With an emphasis on quality over quantity, we plan to focus on fostering a community following rather than extensive distribution. We anticipate outgrowing our initial system and plan to upgrade to a production system as demand for our product increases,” Lindsey added.

“Our hope is that our taproom is a communal space where passion and ideas will be fostered.”

They have settled on their core five flagship beers that will be served on tap, with an additional three taps dedicated to rotating specialties. They also plan to bottle limited releases and seasonal beers in a 750ml format. Beyond just beer, you can expect a well thought out beer cocktail program as well as a selection of wine, cider and light bites. Looking into the future, Lindsey shared, “Our goal isn’t to be the biggest brewery in Nebraska, but we want to make an impact on the industry. We aspire to join Nebraska Brewing and Zipline with gold-medal wins for our beer. The long-term plan is to distribute throughout the Midwest.”

And what’s with the name? Lindsey explains, “Tom came up with the name Vis Major, which is Latin for ‘Act of God’. It is inspired by the history of fermentation by Belgian farmers. At the end of harvest, farmers would crush and boil remaining grains and leave them in open casks. Wild yeast unknowingly blew in, fermenting the wort, but they believed it was an act of God that turned it into beer.”

Avoiding the High Cost of (Wine) Education

by Mark Gudgel

Anyone who has ever sat in gridlock on the 405, or even just hit I-80 at the wrong time of day, has in the very least considered the merits of becoming a small airplane pilot. When I investigated this possibility however, a friend of mine who in fact is such a pilot estimated that his training had taken seven years, over 1,500 flight hours and cost around \$45K. So as much as I hate Dodge Street at 5:30, if the alternative costs \$45K, I'm just going to have to get used to it.

And so it can be with wine as well. A well-credentialed friend of mine who runs a local wine bar estimates that in the past three years alone, he's spent well over \$10,000 honing his palate, tasting and learning his way into the industry, often drinking juice that's as old or older than he is. But what about the rest of us? What about the layperson (or lay-wine writer) who wants to learn about wine, but can no more afford to become a sommelier than he can afford to become a pilot? Are we destined to a lifetime of watching *Somm* and drinking Two Buck-Chuck, wishing like hell that we too might finally taste that "fresh cut garden hose" of cinematic lore?

"Are we destined to a lifetime of watching *Somm* and drinking Two Buck-Chuck, wishing like hell that we too might finally taste that 'fresh cut garden hose' of cinematic lore?"

Actually, there is another way. In 2015, I read around fifteen books on various wine-related topics, but few of them have lent me anything of applicable value when I sit down to do a tasting, and fewer still bring me the joy of holding a glass of excellent wine up to my lips. Over time I've found that there's really no substitute for tasting wine if you want to learn about the stuff, but tasting doesn't necessarily have to break the bank. For the aspiring aficionado of

Friday night tastings at Brix runs from 6-8pm and tastings range greatly in what they have to offer.

viticulture, there is a good alternative to spending most of your paycheck on bottles and glasses of wine, a way to taste relatively large amounts of quality juice without waking up in the morning with nothing but a whanging headache and buyer's remorse to show for it.

In the Omaha area, a number of places offer regular free wine tastings and, at the risk of overcrowding some of my favorite weekend stops, I'm going to list them here. However, before I do, a note on etiquette that has very little to do with wine: The places that offer tastings of their wines are not doing so out of the goodness of their heart nor their passion for spreading the gospel of fermented grape juice. They, like all businesses, are in this to make money. If you attend any of the paid tastings in town – and there are plenty of those – I think it's perfectly reasonable to walk in, pay your fee, sip the juice and bid adieu without a second thought.

If you're attending a free tasting, however, remember that these places have opened up their product to you in the hopes you'll like something enough to buy it. Admittedly, I don't buy a bottle at every free tasting I attend, but I often do, and I never leave without buying at least a glass or something to eat. So, if you find yourself hitting up these free tastings with me and you don't want to put the place out of business, please consider making some kind of purchase from the vender.

All of the regular tastings I know about are on weekends, so out of some innate sense of fairness, I'm going to list these in the order in which they typically occur. My first stop after work on Friday evenings is often **Trader Joe's**. On most Friday afternoons, TJ's predictably uncorks four bottles: two red and two white, and unfortunately, they serve them in those same little plastic shot glasses that you were given pink fluoride in when you were in kindergarten. The wines served are generally in the \$6-\$12 range, and more often than not are wines sold exclusively in Trader Joe's stores.

"In the Omaha area, a number of places offer regular free wine tastings... it's often a chance to try some really high-end stuff."

The last time I visited, they were sampling a young Meritage (pronounced merit-edge) and a really nice Cab Sauv for reds, and a Chardonnay and a sparkling for the whites. While the wines you try at Trader Joe's are unlikely to surface on the menu of your favorite restaurant, they tend to taste a lot of classic varietals, making it a pragmatic way to expose your palate to a wide variety. Best of all, Trader Joe's sells relatively good wine at relatively low prices, making it an easy place to pick up a case or two of wine. You know, for future reference.

My next Friday night stop occurs only sporadically, and is sometimes replaced by a Saturday afternoon tasting in the same location. In order to find out when and what they're tasting, I





With a range of wines wide in varietal and location, the Winery is a great place to add to your knowledge of wine.

recommend you sign up to get on the mailing list at **Brix**. With two locations (I typically go to the one in **Midtown** though they do have a **Village Pointe** location convenient for those who live in East Lincoln) it's easy to hit up on the way home from work, or as a destination later in the evening. Often, the Friday night tasting at Brix runs from 6-8pm, and tastings range greatly in what they offer.

One night they tasted Silver Oak Cabernet Sauvignon, which runs around \$70-\$80/bottle retail. More recently they were tasting the latest vintage of the cult wine "The Prisoner" which runs around \$50 in price. Other nights, they've tasted ten different Zinfandels, half a dozen cabs – whatever they feel like offering that night. It's never disappointing and it's often a chance to try some really high-end stuff. An additional perk is that, at least when I've been there, they've been tasting their wines out of Riedel crystal glassware. If you're learning about wine, a Brix tasting is a great stop as they are often either offering a range within the same varietal, or something you might not normally splurge on. They also have those "evil vending machines" that disperse wine by the ounce. With half off every Monday, that's another good way to taste a lot of wine on a budget.

"Wherever you're at in your knowledge of bottled poetry, the more you taste, the more you'll appreciate it... that education may be the sweetest drink of all."

The other three tastings I like to hit up all start at noon on Saturday, which can be something of an inconvenience to rabid Husker fans like myself, yet makes perfect sense the other 40 weeks out of the year. My first stop is typically **The Winery**, one of the oldest and most established wine shops in Omaha. I like to arrive early, around 11:30, and eat a late breakfast or early lunch in their incredible deli. I don't like going into a day of tasting on an empty stomach and the food is truly excellent (try the soup du jour, the Ruben, or a breakfast sandwich on a toasted croissant).

A handful of friendly regulars are likely to join you there and the ambiance is a relaxed one – perfect for casual tasting. On a typical Saturday, The Winery opens four wines; two red and two white, and they serve them in glass glasses, neither crystal nor plastic. The best part about this tasting is that the owners, veritable viticultural encyclopedias unto themselves, are always present, have selected the wines and, if not swamped, are happy to discuss them with you. Wines tasted range in cost from \$10-\$50+ per bottle and they range just as widely in varietal and location, so it's a great place to

add to your knowledge of wine. If you sign up to get their emails, you'll soon learn about other free tastings they sometimes hold with winemakers in addition to their list of sales, which is a great place to find a bargain bottle.

More recently, I was clued into **Whole Foods** as another free tasting that is definitely worth hitting up. In late October, I visited one afternoon, only to find them tasting *sixteen* different wines. I had to do a lot of taste-and-spit (I drove there from The Winery) but I found it an excellent opportunity to taste a wide variety of varietals and styles made all around the world. Their staff were super friendly, the bottles ranged from around \$10-\$20 in price, all of it served in a seemingly endless wave of plastic shot glasses, and the crowd that gathered to taste made for some pleasant conversation as well. I've only hit this one up a few times, but I'd be remiss if I left it off my list of recommendations.

The final stop on your Saturday tasting tour – or possibly the first depending on how you work it – should be **Vino Mas**. Though admittedly I haven't been there in quite some time, their web page (vinomas.com) confirms for me that they're still doing free Saturday tastings. Located on 144th street, my wife and I were members of their monthly wine club before we moved twenty miles in the opposite direction, but I still try to swing back by when time permits. For the rabid Husker fan, they have televisions, so if you're trying to figure out how to fit wine tasting in on a Saturday in the fall, this might be among your best options. Helpful and knowledgeable, the staff will be happy to guide you through your tasting on a Saturday afternoon. The wines tasted vary greatly, but they are always good. Located right next to **Blue Sushi**, my wife and I would often grab lunch before or after a tasting.

After so many years of "racing to the top" and "leaving no child behind," it's not unreasonable to think that we may have grown accustomed to the utter devaluation of education in our society. Yet those who seek knowledge because they truly desire it, and not because they're being force-fed or tested over it may nevertheless find that it comes at quite a high price.

With luck, this primer on complimentary tastings has helped to reduce that expense for budding local oenophiles. No doubt there are other free tastings in our metro area that I have yet to encounter, and if you know of one, by all means please shoot me an email. Those listed above are the ones that I frequent, and a good place to start for someone who is transitioning into the world of wine from, say, the world of Busch Light, as was the case for me not long ago. Wherever you're at in your knowledge of bottled poetry, the more you taste, the more you'll learn to appreciate it, and knowing that you don't have to take out a second mortgage to get that education may be the sweetest drink of all.

The wines tasted at Vino Mas very greatly, but they are always good.





Bubbly 101

by Mark Gudgel

Having the holidays almost upon us signals the coming of many traditions. From the onset of a hard Nebraska winter to various religious observations, and from a zealous embrace of all things capitalistic to the popping of countless corks across the globe as the advent of 2016 is celebrated with toast after toast of sparkling wine. What will be held high in those glasses varies almost as widely as the people holding them, and most of it isn't "champagne," but sparkling wine.

What is sparkling wine and how do you know which one is right for ringing in the New Year your way? As we prepare to transition into 2016, knowing something about what comes between the pop and the headache may help enhance the overall experience.

"What is sparkling wine and how do you know which one is right for ringing in the New Year your way?"

Sparkling wine can be, and is, made virtually everywhere. From the famous Champagne region of France to right here locally, where both **James Arthur Vineyards** (just north of Lincoln) as well as **Soaring Wings** (just outside of Omaha) are bottling their bubbly for consumption here in Nebraska. Traditionally, sparkling wine was made using a secondary fermentation to create the fizz, though today that which is not made in the "methode champenoise" is often simply injected with gas.

Regardless of how it gets that way, fizzy wine wasn't always so popular; the infamous eponym Dom Perignon, a French monk

who no doubt unwillingly lent his name to the French Champagne house of Moet and Chandon post mortem, would have, like the rest of his fellow Champenoise at that time, consumed almost entirely red wine and would have cringed at wine with bubbles in it. The famous monk was indeed a vintner – and a good one – yet one of his most ambitious pursuits was never realized: his effort to find a way to remove the hated bubbles from his wine, especially in the spring when live yeast strands began predictably to awaken. In other words, the ritzy, rapped-about stuff we pay as much as \$200 per bottle for would most likely have been dumped in the gutter by its own namesake. I suppose if you run out of aged Gouda, you could always pair your Dom with a generous side of irony.

Just because it wasn't en vogue to drink sparkling wine in the late seventeenth century doesn't mean the stuff isn't mighty tasty today, and one can't deny the tiny rush you get from popping the cork on a bottle of champagne. Champagne, of course, is a region in France, east of Paris, and bordering Germany. For wine to truly be "Champagne" it must come from that region; famous examples include the aforementioned Dom, as well as Veuve Cliquot and countless others.

When it first became "a thing," sparkling Champagne tended to explode in the bottles, or else blow the corks, with some estimates ranging as high as 90% of the product being destroyed prior to delivery, which may help explain the high cost (at least back then). Today, however, both Champagne proper and champagne as erroneous slang for all wines sparkling are readily available from all over the world, in a variety of styles, costs and more. Clearly, there's a lot to know. The following, divided into tips for consumption,

vocabulary and types of sparkling wine, will hopefully assist you in ringing in 2016 on a foaming high note.

Tips and Etiquette for Drinking Sparkling Wine

1. You're not in the fraternity anymore and you didn't just win the Daytona 500, so don't shake the stupid bottle before you pop the cork. Yes, if you do, you will create a pseudo-sexual explosion that your eighteen-year-old self would have thought was hilarious, but if you're old enough to buy alcohol, you should be well past the age to know better than to spray people with wine in public. In fact, the less pomp and circumstance that goes into removing the cork, the better it holds its form. Try wrapping a towel around the cork and slowly twisting the bottle and cork in opposite directions. Far less Hollywood, but far more appropriate for a casual New Years gathering.

2. Always serve it chilled. That's all. But it's a rule so be sure you do it. Nobody wants warm bubbly. Seriously. Buy some ice.

3. When it comes to storage, sparkling wine can be tricky. While most wine doesn't do well in heat or pressure, this is especially true of sparkling wine, so take good care of it. Also, unlike most wines, sparkling wine corks can't be stuffed back into the neck of the bottle (or worse, screwed back on), so if you go to bed before you kill the bottle, try sticking a silver spoon, handle-first, in the bottle neck to help preserve the carbonation until it's time to make mimosas. (I have no idea why it works but it truly seems to.)

4. Pour slowly. It's carbonated, remember? If you dump it at even the same rate you might fill a different type of wine, you'll wind up covering your friends' hands in sticky liquid.

5. Imbibe responsibly. Yes, it's totally cliché to say that, but sparkling wine drinks like Diet Sprite, and it's far too easy to consume far too much of it. And while it's a great idea to celebrate the New Year, you don't want your first memories of 2016 to be shared with Bob the Truck Stop Fugitive in a jail cell... or do you?

Vocabulary

If you find yourself the one shopping for sparkling wine this holiday season, there are a few key terms you probably ought to know, from different sizes or "formats" to a handful of common

expressions. The following may help (or may just confuse the hell out of you).

Balthazar: A 12-liter bottle, see also: 16 bottles of champagne in one. Also the name of the guy who tells Romeo that Juliet is dead, even though she isn't, inspiring him to commit suicide in front of her undead corpse out of grief. Jerk.

Blanc de Blancs: Sparkling wine made entirely of white grapes, almost assuredly chardonnay.

Blanc de Noirs: Sparkling wine made entirely of red grapes, most likely Pinot Noir, Pinot Meunier, or a blend of the two. Note: It still appears very light in color, because it spends almost no time on the skins to give it pigment.

Brut: Sparkling wine with very little or no sugar added. See also: knuckle-dragger.

Capsole: The twisty wire thingy with a cap that holds the cork in. Large, overpriced beers often have these too.

Champagne: A wine region in France, and also the wine made in that region. Not a legitimate synonym for fizzy wine.

Corked: The stank of soggy cardboard, which carries from the nose over to the palate, and indicates that the contents of a bottle are defunct. Unless purchased from criminals, this wine should be returnable (provided you didn't drink nine-tenths of it first).

Jeroboam: Four bottles – or two magnums – of wine. Also the name of the King of Israel from 922 to 901 BC, which is fun party trivia only if people have already had four bottles of bubbly.

Magnum: Two bottles of wine, or 1.5 liters.

Methode Champenois: The method of the people who live in Champagne. That is, the traditional method of making this stuff.

Methuselah: A huge bottle, holding eight bottles of wine, or four magnums. According to the book of Genesis, he lived to be 969 years old, most likely the product of a strong heart brought about by drinking a glass of red wine nightly.

Nabuchadnezzar: Twenty bottles of wine, ten Magnums, five Jeroboams, two and a half Methuselahs, and a partridge in a pear tree. *Note: do not get hit in the face with this cork.*

Sec: Technically, this means dry, but with sparkling wine it actually means less-dry (has more sugar) than brut. It's sort of like when you ask if you can do something and your significant others says that's "fine." You both know that isn't fine. So it is with sec. We both know that isn't dry.

Sexual Confusion: Kind of low-hanging fruit, granted, but a wine term all the same. In fact, sexual confusion actually has even more to do with wine than you probably think. Technically speaking, it's the process of distributing pheromones amongst grape vines to confuse male grape moths and keep them from breeding. It's an alternative to nasty chemicals. So just in case you thought you were the only one whose ability to breed was being negatively impacted by the wine industry, think again.

Split: Half of a half of a bottle of wine, and or 1/80th of a Nabuchadnezzar. See also: a gulp.

Types of Sparkling Wine

The next thing you ought to know



is that you are in no way limited to true Champagne (unless your father in law expects it, at which point, don't skimp). There are tons of great wines available that, while not from Champagne or even France, will work well to bring in the New Year or to toast that special someone. Here are some examples.

Cremant (pronounced cray-mon) is a fun take on sparkling wine, typically though not exclusively produced in France and hailing from outside the Champagne region. The name once indicated less fizz and a more creamy texture, but today that isn't always the case. It's also often made from grapes other than the rigid few varietals (Chardonnay, Pinot Noir, and Pinot Meunier) found in true Champagne.

"No wine made in the United States is true Champagne, but it doesn't have to be Champagne to be wonderful."

Prosecco is an Italian take on sparkling wine that is often served as an aperitif. Originally from the Veneto region, Prosecco isn't typically made in the traditional "methode champenois," making it significantly cheaper to produce and thus, to purchase. Dollar for dollar, it's often a pretty solid buy when it comes to bubbly... if you can get past the fact that these guys switched sides between the First and Second World War. I mean, who does that?

The Germans call their bubbly *Sekt*, and while it's often very dry and quite enjoyable, most Germans seem to prefer Champagne (and owning French Champagne houses), making the export of Sekt a rather niche industry. Nevertheless, there are some great Sekts out

there if you can find them, perfect for pairing with a nice Christmas kielbasa.

The Spanish, too, have fizzy wines, and theirs is typically deemed *Cava*. Cava ranges from dry to sweet, comes in white or rose, most often utilizes the usual labels (brut, sec, and so forth) and comes in the standard formats. Most of it comes from Catalonia, a region of Spain that is currently attempting to secede, which would make it the 197th (and single poorest) country in the world.

Finally, we here in America produce our own variation of sparkling wines. Some, like *Chandon* (yes, that Chandon) are infamous, while others like *Peju*, are virtually unknown. Both are excellent. Schramsberg is one of the oldest producers of sparkling wine in the United States and their wines can be found easily at a variety of Omaha locations. No wine made in the United States is true Champagne, but it doesn't have to be Champagne to be wonderful. The stuff that didn't suffer a long ocean journey is often better off for it. Plus, you know, #drinklocal and all that.

Whatever cork you ultimately decide to pop this holiday season, and wherever you decide to pop it, being conscious of its source, and of the history and traditions of that place, is a great way to enjoy it. You don't have to be a snob to know what kind of wine you're drinking, to know your Prosecco from Champagne and simple toasts are relatively easy to learn in almost any language. As airplanes and the internet increasingly shrink the size of our planet and the distance between us all, ringing in the New Year can become a means of embracing the cultures that bring us, amongst so many contributions, wonderful carbonated wine. So Happy New Year! Ein glückliches neues jahr! Feliz año nuevo! Bonne Annee! Shana tova! And most of all, cheers!



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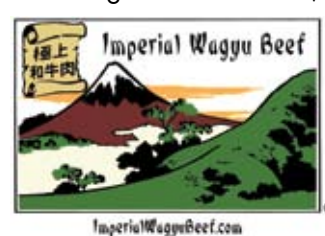
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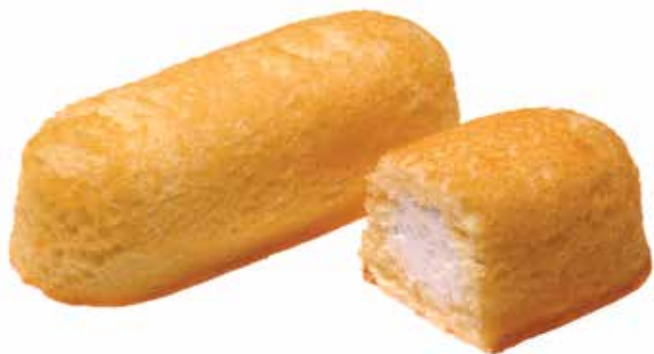
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THE DUMPSTER

Knowing Your Hash from a Hole in the Ground

by Michael Campbell



If the big bomb hits tomorrow or ISIS hackers succeed in melting down our power grid, I'll be happy living off the three-day supply of leftover minestrone my wife made. There's half a roast chicken in the fridge too. If trouble lasts longer than that, things are going to get dicey.

Without electricity, I'll have to use up what's in my freezer before it spoils: three packages of edamame, some leftover hot dog buns and a bottle of Jägermeister. Actually, the Jäger will keep indefinitely, but it's best cold so I'll finish it out of respect.

"In a pinch I could make a week's worth of cinnamon tuna cookies."

All those ingredients in my pantry that seemed so important when I got them will start to look a little precious now: the three colors of whole peppercorns, the quinoa I only dipped into once, large and fine sea salt, six kinds of rice including cannaroli, sushi rice and some long-grain rice in a fancy package about the size of a cigarette box. I have a bag of dried garbanzo beans, flax seeds, enough dried lavender blossoms to make lavender tea (or lavender martinis!) for a year, a pretty-much full bottle of fish oil pills (they seemed like a good idea at the time but it turns out they taste like fish oil) and two boxes of panko, because I was at the store and didn't know I already had panko.

Armageddon is hard.

I also scrounged up two cans of tuna, a box of whole oats, some flour and sugar, and three tins of cinnamon. In a pinch I could make a week's worth of cinnamon tuna cookies.

On the brighter side, I have a fine stash of booze and a dozen limes, so I'll starve smiling.

Grocery stores will have plenty of food, but when the power goes down their doors slam shut. Stores are unable to sell anything without their computers, you know. God forbid anybody learn to count money or do inventory by hand. Store managers will stand by while the ice cream melts and the red meat turns brown. Knowing my neighborhood, looters will bust down the doors before the first day is over, scurrying home with ice cream dripping through their fingers. The 300-pound security guy standing next to the day-old doughnuts ain't gonna chase nobody.

Survivalists recommend we stock up enough food for a minimum of seven days, three months is better, a year is good. Actually, they don't really want us to stock up. They want to take over the world while we stand begging at their cellar door. It's no coincidence that the people who stash food also stash guns.

Canned food? Most of it lasts only a year. There is a long list of people on Survivalist.com who claim you can eat food way past its expiration date, but one doesn't have to browse the website very long to get a clear sense of the brain damage caused by eating expired food.

"Freeze-dried foods last pretty much forever. Just add water."

The solution, they say, is to rotate your canned items: eat the oldest stuff and replace it with new stuff. In other words, to maintain a year's supply of canned food you have to eat—and replace—a day's worth of canned food every day. After 365 days of year-old corned beef hash, I'll be begging for the world to end.

Freeze-dried foods last pretty much forever. Just add water. But if you can afford a year's supply of those dear little meal packets, you can afford a private plane to fly you to where the real food is.

My plan isn't to stash food. I plan to stash a list of the people who stash food. I'll list them in order of culinary creativity, because I don't want to kill a guy for ten cases of pork and beans.

Is there any food you can store indefinitely? According to reports, marshmallows, Twinkies and scotch.

That'll do.

Or, instead of me having to stock a year's worth of processed food and instead of me having to kill my neighbor to steal his pork and beans, how about you politicians try harder to get along? A world of fresh food is worth it.





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