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Issue 29

MAGAZINE | OMAHA EDITION



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CULINARY ARTS**

FOOD & Spirits

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No. 29

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LETTER FROM THE PUBLISHER



Welcome to the 29th issue of Food & Spirits Magazine, the first of 2018. As always, we're proud to present the issue in front of you and we hope you enjoy it. It's packed full of some great articles and photos of many of the wonderful food and spirits experiences that can be found in our thriving city.

Kent Cisar kicks off the issue with his comprehensive article on where to go on 'date night' for every month

of the year. In his article, "Destination Date Night," you'll find a month-by-month guide for an enjoyable night out for you and your significant other, or family or best friends. 12 of Omaha's finest establishments are mentioned in the article, along with some ordering tips and suggestions.

Sage Student Bistro, the student run bistro at the **Metropolitan Community College's Culinary Program at the Institute of the Culinary Arts**, has long been a well known destination in the foodie community and in this article by Sheri Potter you'll find out why. Her article offers some insight into what the students experience while working at Sage, while also describing the delicious array of dishes that can be found at the bistro.

You won't be disappointed in our regular columnists as they also provide their usual topnotch expertise translated into entertaining articles for your reading pleasure: In his regular recipe column, **Charles Schlussel**, once again delivers with a seasonal favorite that hits all the right notes. His recipe for blue cheese stuffed tomatoes will get you running to the store to buy some **Maytag Blue Cheese** and get cooking. **Edward Berna**, and his column, "Shifting Paradigms," focuses on community development of local food systems and what we can all do to help – certainly something to remember with the start of a new year. **Eddie Morin** gives you a light-hearted review of Triple Cola, while **Jill Cockson** provides a realistic comparison of the art of hospitality and how it relates to Asian martial arts. Finally, **Michael Campbell** serves up all the crazy diet fads in his humorous take on what is for many a reoccurring annual resolution.

For spirits, we've got our annual happy hour map that offers you a guide to the best happy hour specials to be found in the Omaha area. Be sure to take a look and then start your tour. In what has become another annual article, **Mark Gudgel** gives you his take on some of the best Cabernets he had in 2017. As always, it's very informative while at the same time being concise. If wine is your thing, you'll also want to take a look at Mark's other article, "The Ostentatious Parlay."

I also wanted to mention the next event Food & Spirits Magazine has coming up. On February 11th we'll present the **3rd Annual Omaha Doughnut Shootout** which will take place at **The Waiting Room Lounge, Krug Park and Reverb Lounge** from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. Tickets can be purchased at Etix or Reverb. If doughnuts are your thing, you'll want to be there.

Thank you to all of our writers, designers, photographers and otherwise creative people that help put this magazine together for Omaha on the regular. The magazine wouldn't be here without them. Likewise, our advertisers make it all possible. Last but certainly not least, thank you dear Omaha readers for letting us do this. We sure love it and we hope you do too.

***Erik Totten – Publisher**
Food & Spirits Magazine*

EXPERTS PANEL



Edward G Berna

Leo Adam Biga

Michael Campbell

Kent Cisar

Jessica Clem



Jill Cockson

John Finocchiaro

Mark Gudgel

Eddie Morin

Charles Schlusel

Edward G. Berna Edward Berna is founder of Paradigm Gardens. He is fascinated with local food systems, intensive plant production models and plant nutrient density. His connections to year round local food production fuels most of his foodie desires. Edward enjoys experience travel and learning from others and their heritage experiences

Leo Adam Biga Leo Adam Biga is an Omaha-based author-journalist-blogger. His books include *Alexander Payne: His Journey in Film*, *Crossing Bridges: A Priest's Uplifting Life Among the Downtrodden and Memories of the Jewish Midwest: Mom and Pop Grocery Stores*. The University of Nebraska at Omaha graduate contributes articles to newspapers and magazines. His work has been recognized by his peers at the local, regional and national levels. Sample his eclectic writing at leoadambiga.com or www.facebook.com/LeoAdamBiga.

Michael Campbell Michael Campbell is a songwriter and humor essayist. His "Dumpster" essays close every issue of *Food & Spirits*. *Are You Going To Eat That*, a collection of sixty humor essays, was released in 2009, and *My Turn Now*, his most recent album of 13 original songs, was released in 2015. Learn more at michaelcampbellsongwriter.com.

Kent Cisar Kent Cisar searches the local and national scene for unique ingredients and flavors to bring to the table here in Omaha. He'll catch his own fish from Florida, ship farmer's market shrimp from Louisiana, stash jams from the Pacific Northwest, or find the best cut of meat from a Nebraska farmer. Kent believes that regardless of where the it comes from, good food is meant to be shared.

Jessica Clem Jessica Clem is a freelance writer based in Omaha, Nebraska. A marathon runner and food writer, her favorite way to get motivated to finish a project is the promise of a craft beer. She has a B.A. in English, and an M.S. in Urban Studies, and enjoys traveling, finding typos on billboards, and the smell of a real book. When she is not eating or running, she works as a producer and account executive for Omaha Video Solutions.

Jill Cockson Jill Cockson is a veteran bartender of 20 years, and co-developer of The Other Room, Nebraska's only James Beard-nominated cocktail program. She is also the owner of Rabbit and Turtle Beverage Corp., producers of Colonel Jesse's Small Batch Tonic, and has most recently established Atomic Hummingbird, Inc., a hospitality group dedicated to developing focused hospitality concepts in Kansas City, MO. Their first venue, Swordfish Tom's, is scheduled to open in the crossroads of Kansas City in April, 2017.

John Finocchiaro John Finocchiaro is a former owner of Finocchiaro Wine Company, Inc., a Nebraska wholesale wine, spirits, and beer distributorship dating back to 1935. He also formerly co-owned Johnson Brothers Finocchiaro, LLC. John is a former Certified Public Accountant and a Certified Specialist of Wine.

Mark Gudgel Dr. Mark Gudgel is a wine writer and educator who holds credentials through the Wine & Spirit Education Trust (WSET) and is working towards becoming a Master of Wine. His interest in wine was sparked on his honeymoon to Napa and Sonoma. Gudgel and his wife, Sonja, have co-authored several articles as well as a book on the wineries of Nebraska, to be released in the spring of 2017. Gudgel is a regular contributor to Food & Spirits Magazine and American Winery Guide, as well as the blog he maintains with his wife, www.itheewine.com. Mark and Sonja live in Omaha with their children and their dog.

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.

Charles Schlusel Professional head shaver, Reckless adventurer, Erstwhile Semi-Pro skydiver (amateur lander), Fanatical tomato lover, All round awesome cook extraordinaire!



DESTINATION *Date Night*

by Kent Cisar

A month by month guide for an enjoyable night out for you and your significant other

It's a brand new year full of optimism and opportunity. During that goal planning remember to take care of yourself and those around you as well. We are fortunate in Omaha to have so many magnificent eateries to choose from for enjoyable evenings out. This article presents 12 of the best date night opportunities in the metro.

January – Timber

Timber Wood Fire Bistro in Countryside Village provides a welcoming ambience by the nature of how they cook. Walk in and you can see, smell, and hear the wood burning ovens firing up an array of cuisine. I'd recommend asking a fellow couple to join you on a double date here so you can expand your appetite range. Any one of their wood fired pizzas makes an excellent starter. If you're a seafood fan like me order the crab cake or Maine steamed mussels plate for a fantastic first course.

Move to the main course and you'll find one of the most diverse selections of protein menus in the Midwest. Currently you can choose from steelhead, lamb chops, duck, salmon, scallops, pork tenderloins and more. The chefs here know how to use fire and heat to create not just the right flavor, but provide the perfect sear

on a meat that greets you as you begin your bite. They strike a fine balance of a flavor enhancer yet stop short of overpowering the palate with smoke.

February – Dolce

If course style dining is your date night preference then **Dolce** at 12317 West Maple Road is worth checking out. Dolce has a date night menu that can also be ordered a la carte. Dolce has a risotto of the day and a taste of the moment, a different dish created daily, allowing their chefs to achieve the highest level of culinary versatility. The second course brings a daily made soup and a couple of salads. The third courses bring steak, short rib, chicken and pork into play. If you've paced your appetite properly you'll conclude with a dessert course. Dolce's flexibility allows diners to frequently return to the restaurant and continue to expand their palate.

March – Charred

Sometimes palettes don't get along. Sometimes there's indecision about where to go one night. In those times a burger and fries can be the best decision for a date night. **Charred Burger and Bar**

at 1150 Sterling Ridge Drive (just south of Pacific between 120th and 132nd) is a perfect choice. My girlfriend and I have been here several times and have had good service and excellent fare. You'll find 9 burgers on the main menu and one on their specials board. Charred only uses wagyu beef for their burgers and the quality is palpable. Charred uses their namesake by charring scallions, cheese, and greens to add an additional layer of flavor to your burgers. Their aiolis and sauces enhance your experience even more by using **Brickway** beer for their cheese sauce, putting a roasted garlic aioli on their classic burger, or the whole grain mustard aioli which holds up well to the bursting flavor that is their Omaha edition. It's also important not to sleep on Charred's sides. Their cheese curds are good, their onion rings are significantly above average, but their fries are spectacular. They come out hot, seasoned well and if you can siphon a little sauce from your burger it will add the finishing touch. If you need a date night that requires a one course experience before a movie or a show, or just a quick bite out after work, Charred can step up to meet your needs.

April – Baela Rose

Baela Rose is another date worthy destination in **Dundee**. It opened in 2016 with the innovative minds of **Kyle and Rose Anderson**. The couple's desire to connect local farmers' food with classic culinary techniques have quickly made Baela a standout in the metro's culinary scene. I met Hillary Nather-Detisch several years ago through a young professional's organization called All About Omaha. I'm fortunate to run into her at the Omaha Farmer's Market on a regular basis to exchange travel stories and cooking ideas. She loves Baela because of the fresh produce and changing menu. A quick look at their current menu and you'll

find that the Andersons do not sit still with their offerings. As I write this piece I find pumpkin, brussels sprouts, cauliflower, winter squash, oranges and cranberries being showcased. Baela Rose's ability to pickle a variety of vegetables and work them into dishes is extraordinary. "It is really delicious food and hard to find an equal in the community" Nather added. Baela Rose brings a fresh and classically creative approach to their dining. Their food is equally stellar for presentation and the palette.

May – Enzo's

Florence may not be at the fore front of a date night idea, but **Enzo's Italian** at 8510 N. 30th Street is a short drive off Interstate 680 and well worth the stop. If you like traditional homemade Italian food then Enzo's is in your lane. **Chef Enzo Zurlo** has a menu full of Italian favorites. Their pasta selection is straight forward with exceptional quality. If your favorite pasta dish is cannelloni, lasagna, ravioli, scampi or carbonara, Enzo's has you covered. Parmesan patrons can rejoice in choosing chicken, pork, or veal. I've tried my hands at making saltimbocca's before but can't come close to Enzo's. With chicken or veal they add prosciutto, asparagus, mozzarella and a spectacular sage gravy. If you choose Enzo's on a weekend I'd encourage you to make a reservation. I'd also get a good workout in and eat a light lunch. Your appetite will be rewarded here.

June – Stirnella

Visiting the **Blackstone District** near 40th and Farnam is a good idea any time, and especially for a date night. **Stirnella** at 38th and Farnam is a cornerstone of the district and with good reason. Stirnella's menu can take you on a cross country and international





odyssey of flavors. A shared approach at Stirnella is wise to explore the menu. You'll be hard pressed to find a Johnny cake as creative and tasty as the one Stirnella has. The duck confit, cotija, mole and roasted pear give this traditional east coast cake a Southwestern flair. Stirnella takes a southern snacking staple and turns it into a delicacy with their popcorn chicken made with hot sauce, buttermilk and house pickles. The main courses offer a flat iron steak with a bordelaise sauce or a ribeye with a chimichurri sauce. You can also order lamb with salsa verde or ocean trout incorporating squash and sweet corn. If you have the travel bug but not the opportunity to break out of Omaha for a bit, Stirnella will satisfy your wanderlust palette for a date night.

July – Mark's

Mark's Bistro in Dundee opened in 2003 but it feels like it's been there for generations. It's hard to beat their patio dining

experience in the summer. If you can't make it on a patio worthy day, fear not. Their second floor restaurant offers a rare elevated dining perspective in Omaha. Mark's cuisine matches the ambience which makes it a dynamite date destination.

Mark's is well known for their mac and cheese and for good reason. It's rich and satisfying, yet also versatile. When you arrive please take a look at their specials board to see what the daily embellishments are. "The variety of the menu allows you to order separate dish or make a fun date night shared course combination. My boyfriend (the author) and I like to get an appetizer, share a couple of different entrees and then usually settle on the Smores brownie for dessert." said Melissa Wulf. Melissa and I travel all over the country and our eatery explorations are a big part of our enjoyment.

Mark's first courses offer a nice array of flatbread, fondue and even tater tots. Don't overlook their sandwich selection

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as their sliders are excellent (house made pickles make such a difference). If you find a risotto on the menu it's also worth diving into. Currently there's a butternut squash and lobster/scallop varieties. On this last visit we had a Ricotta Tortelloni for our entrée. It was 5 magnificently large tortellonis balanced with pumpkin-ginger crème, house-cured bacon, forest mushrooms, balsamic, pine nuts, crisp sage and chili oil all in one entrée. The earthy flavors met the balsamic and bacon and then your palette was popped at the end. This dish is one of the best I've eaten anywhere in the country in 2017.

It's also important to save room for dessert at Mark's. Melissa and I, as mentioned above, have a hard time straying away from the Smores brownie. If somehow that doesn't tempt you inquire about their ice cream flavor of the day.

August – Hiro 88

Hiro 88 opened in Omaha in 2003 and brought with it a new era of Pan-Asian cuisine. Its first location opened at 129th and Maple and the success of that restaurant led to a downtown opening at 13th and Jackson. Hiro's most recent locale is just northeast of 180th and Q streets. At each venue you'll be greeted by a distinct atmosphere created specifically for that area. You'll also find remarkable consistency in quality and an expansive menu. Hiro 88 is perfect for a sushi loving couple or for a couple where one partner is a sushi enthusiast and the other is not so fond. Ray and Lindsey Miller have been friends of mine for years, and even though they live a good ways west, they prefer the downtown location as it's walking distance from the Orpheum and has great happy hour specials. "We love to go there for our favorite appetizers, gyoza and bacon jalapeno crab rangoon, my favorite sushi is the Husker roll, and their delicious peanut butter chicken (which is our kids' favorite as well)", said Lindsey Miller. She brings up a great point as this menu is kid friendly as well so parents who may not be able to find a sitter for an event can bring their kids to an exciting place to eat and don't have to worry about their kids finding something fun to eat. It's a great way to expand kids' taste buds as the presentation

of each dish is a visual treat. If you have difficulty deciding on a dish check out Hiro 88's website at www.hiro88.com. They offer a menu concierge that allows you to pick your flavor profile and the site will recommend a dish for you. For those who like to do prior research on their dining destination, the concierge is an innovative way to provide a satisfying meal to their guests.

September – Au Courant

Au Courant is located in the heart of a bustling Benson scene at 6064 Maple Street. If you would like top of the line food quality and creativity in a buzzing environment that fits the neighborhood then Au Courant should be at the top of your list. It brings together New European techniques with local ingredients to provide guests with a global farm to table feel. Au Courant's menu changes regularly so do check their website at www.aucourantrestaurant.com. At the time of this writing late fall favorites were all over the menu including turnips, carrots, mushrooms, leeks and beets. Pairings such as black bass with carrots, barley, and bagna couda show Au Courant can



change with the seasons and still have a high end course like black bass shine.

If you and your date are willing to take a leap and put your ordering in the hands of the chef then order the six course chef's tasting menu. By doing so, the chef and server take you on a journey of culinary exploration. When you come across a dish or ingredient that may not be familiar with do ask questions as the staff is extremely knowledgeable. The tasting menu is a brilliant dining experience when your ideas of food can be challenged yet satisfied, your eyes be amazed by brilliant presentation, and your mind be educated about the cuisine and preparation before you. If this is the experience you seek, then a date at Au Courant is a must.

October – Della Costa

Della Costa moved into the Midtown Crossing Brix space and immediately added a new dimension to the area. We are fortunate to have several Mediterranean choices here in Omaha. What sets Della Costa apart is their diversity of offerings from the region. From small bites to salads and sandwiches to a main course, Della Costa expands your possibilities. The seafood offerings include a few not often found here such as octopus, corvina, even red mullet. Their preparations of mussels, squid, and shrimp are also top of the line. The mussels with ouzo cream, pancetta and rosemary give these creatures a depth of flavor while keeping their ingredients to a minimum. Squid stuffed with chorizo and accompanied by a lemon/thyme broth gives the squid a spice with a clean citrus finish. I've cooked my share of clams with white wine, but Della Costa's Manilla clams with sherry, garlic confit, oregano and anchovy butter is a combination I wouldn't even consider, let alone execute to the level this kitchen does.

If seafood isn't your desired direction check out their lamb or chicken sharmas, lamb tagine, or roasted chicken with dates,

grapes, and pistachios. Della Costa's pasta preparations are also on point. Try their ricotta gnocchi, bucatina putanesca with fennel sausage, pappardelle with Portobello, Serrano, and arugula or a unique and flavorful pancetta and apple ravioli. Della Costa's desserts are also reason to rejoice with baklava, a strawberry semmifredo, pine nut tart and more. Della Costa offers a date destination for those who wish to set sail in the Mediterranean but return to their home at night. A few hours at this Midtown Crossing location provides guests with a temporary getaway to the beautiful sea.

November – Spezia

Spezia located at 3125 S. 72nd Street is unassuming on the outside but the atmosphere is a comfortably classy. Spezia's steak selections range from the straight forward wood grilled strip to a garlic and herb roasted tenderloin with burgundy au jus. My college friend Angela Cooper and her husband Quinn are a couple of my favorite foodies. They regularly push the envelope of kitchen possibility. Angela gives Spezia high marks because, "it's creative

food with amped up flavor from the wood-fire grill and the ambiance is fantastic. I love all the little nooks and crannies—it feels very intimate and inviting." Cooper's favorite dish is the gnocchi—"it has all my favorite flavors with cremini mushrooms and fresh baby spinach, and the gorgonzola cream is perfection" she says. Her husband likes the rack of lamb and the diver scallops.

Each time I go to Spezia I have a hard time ordering anything else but the sesame fried Florida grouper. Grouper is my favorite fish to eat and it's not often found in the Midwest. Spezia's rendition is a substantial fillet whose batter is dynamically crunchy yet still allows the bountiful flaky fish to shine. My advice is to not sleep on Spezia for an excellent evening.



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December – M's Pub

M's Pub is a place of a lot of magnificent memories of mine. I love Downtown Omaha. I like M's classy yet comfortable vibe. My girlfriend and I returned for the first time post fire on Thanksgiving Eve. It looked like M's, felt like M's, and most importantly, it tasted like M's. The menu is diverse and refined yet reasonable for any demographic to dine there. M's portions are ample so plan your appetite accordingly. We started with the baked mushrooms. It's a simple yet spectacular dish of perfectly cooked mushrooms, piping hot havarti cheese and garlic butter. It's hard for me to shy away from the lavosh, but do pay attention to what the specials are. We saw several come out of the kitchen and they looked tremendous. We saw a vegetarian pot pie hit the window that was difficult to turn down.

M's dessert menu is worth saving room and asking your server about. Our server had high praise for the cheesecake, and we

probably would have chose it if I didn't have to return to their carrot cake. I'm in the carrot cake camp and M's has always had a good one. This rendition though is better than ever, and probably the best dessert I've eaten in 2017 in the 11 states I visited. It's chock full of raisins, walnuts and even shreds of carrot. The pecan fondant layers in the middle add even more depth, and the cream cheese frosting on the outside is the capper.

I personally am glad M's is back and in their original location. It's been a great date destination for over 40 years, and after a brief hiatus, has returned to upper echelon status of Omaha eateries.

You can use these recommendations once a month or once a week. All of the above establishments have menus that will allow you to explore a new experience on your next visit. Each one can make your date night as unique and entertaining as the company you keep.





SAGE

STUDENT BISTRO

HITS ALL THE RIGHT NOTES

by Sheri Potter | photos by Kelly Schroeder

Textbooks say multiple star fine dining restaurants have three defining qualities:

1. Delicious and beautifully plated cuisine.
2. A wait staff that provides top-notch service.
3. A welcoming atmosphere and luxurious ambience.

That is what the textbooks impart to every student going through the **Metropolitan Community College's Culinary Program at the Institute of the Culinary Arts (ICA)**. Each quarter a group of students at ICA take on the challenge of making those defining qualities come to life at the **Sage Student Bistro**, a student run restaurant located on the Fort Omaha Campus in Building 22. Readers of this article may wonder just how students pull this off week after week. My assignment was to find out.




A walk up the steps to the Bistro leads my group into the ample foyer of building 22, we could see the glowing tea lights adorning window ledges and dancing festively on white linen topped tables. Our arrival to the Bistro was early, a bit before service had started, we peered into the Bistro though the glass doors. What several in our group already understood as we observed the servers centering each tea light while giving quick swipes to smooth any remaining wrinkles on the starched white linen table coverings, these were ICA students.

Upon arrival at the Bistro several hours earlier this group had polished bins of silverware and rows of glasses until they gleamed, folded perfect corned napkins, covered each table with linen cloths then placed the glasses and flatware in precise positions. Reservations were reviewed and assigned by the student managers who serve as front of the house managers. Waiter wallets are passed out, table assignments discussed, freshly ironed aprons are given a quick tie and the brigade that makes up the front of the house were now ready for tonight's service. Oh, I forgot to mention, during all this activity plates of foodwill arrive from the kitchen ready for tasting.


Tonight's menu features a "student Prix Fixe menu" a set price of \$30.00 for a full 5-course dinner. The featured student chefs appear from the kitchen to explain each of the five courses, the servers taste and commit to memory as best they can the flavors of each dish for the evening's prix fixe menu.

The Bistro doors open and I am jolted out of my thoughts about what has happened in the hours before in the dining area. Our group is greeted warmly and welcomed to Sage Student Bistro; we are lead to one of those perfectly set tables, one right in front of the coveted fireplace. We had made our reservations early and requested this seating. (Reservations for the Bistro can be made on Open Table.com. Reservations are suggested as seating is limited, however walk-ins are always welcome).

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Most would agree, there is nothing quite as pampering as fine dining, and I was ready for this evening to begin. Our server greets us and offers to take our drink order, explaining the wine list like a true sommelier. He arrives back at our table, wine key in hand and makes pleasant small talk as he opens our bottle of 2012 Grand Veneur Côtes du Rhône Rouge, then pours a small sip for me to taste. “Lovely” I remark as glasses are poured, another server has filled our glasses with water, menus have appeared and each of us takes a moment to review. Our server is ready to take our order, carefully explaining the items on the menu, he then introduces the prix fixe menu, the moment I was waiting for.

You see, earlier in the week I had spent time interviewing the two students tasked with developing this week’s prix fixe menu. Two student chefs would be preparing the five courses; you might

say this week is a right of passage in the culinary program at ICA. My mind went back to my interview with Francesca D’Angelo, a second year student in the culinary program. This evening’s prix fixe menu was Italian themed, when I asked her about what was the inspiration for the prix fixe dishes Francesca answered they were inspired by the foods prepared in her home by her mom when she was growing up, childhood memories of all the foods she loved, with a few twists. She remembered helping cook meals at the stove when she could hardly reach to stir the contents of the dishes being prepared. Her passion she said was to create food memories with her cooking in the future.

My reminiscing was interrupted by the voice of our server, “Your amuse bouche,” our first course was being placed in front of each of us. An eye appealing combination of house made lemon thyme ricotta with grapes and a sprinkling of parsley on



a crusty baguette was placed before me. The ricotta was delicate and fragrant, the bold notes of lemon swept over my tongue on the first taste. It provided just enough flavor combinations to awaken the taste buds, which were now begging for more. I shared with the group when I interviewed second year student chef Katy Jetter, the student chef paired with Francesca for this week's prix fixe, she had remarked this menu had come together quickly. Katy frequents the Italian restaurants found in Omaha and loves them all. She had recently made trip to Italy, which allowed her to experience the authentic flavors she and Francesca were striving to attain.

As if by magic the table was cleared of dishes, soup spoons had been placed and steaming bowls of mussels in a light broth with tomatoes and garnishes of microparsley were being set before us. The bright flavors of the tomatoes were the perfect backdrop for the fresh steamed mussels, they had a slightly sweet flavor, softness combined with tiny bit of chew, and was that a hint of the Mediterranean Sea I tasted?

As we finished up the soup course someone remarked if the soup course was an indication of the dishes that would follow, they could hardly wait for the next dish to arrive. I realized what Francesca and Katy had worked on in their initial brainstorming session had become a flavorful reality. Each of these aspiring student chefs had mentioned they loved the challenge they had found in the kitchen. Katy loved the "mise en place" or in layman's terms, the orderly method of preparing ahead for a dinner service each evening. She enjoyed tweaking recipe flavors, testing and tasting until they were perfected. Francesca enjoyed the teamwork of the restaurant kitchen and

the fact that in the Bistro kitchen everyone has a voice. She mentioned all hands are needed to get dishes prepared and plated perfectly for guests and she loved being a part of that process. Both were excited to present their food to real guests. Many hours of study and preparation had taken place to get to this week, prix fixe week with Francesca D'Angelo and Katy Jitter's names on the menu.

I hardly noticed bowls were removed and now, more brightly polished silverware was again placed and awaited the next course. A line-up of servers were surrounding our table and setting dishes in perfect plate positions for the viewing of our third course. I could view the classically formed and butter crisped potato gnocchi resting in a bison and pork bolognese sauce. All conversations ceased as each member of my party noshed the first bites. Crosses between humming and mumbled "mms" were the only sounds escaping for a full minute. The light, slightly potato flavored gnocchi was the perfect vehicle for the well thought out bolognese sauce; I could almost see Katy adding the spices to the mixture getting it just perfect.

Our table conversation went back to how the chefs are trained at ICA to be able to provide such a level of excellence. I was happy to explain the fearless leader in the kitchen each evening is chef Oystein Solberg, his expertise is taught with hands-on application for the student chefs. Solberg generously shares his know-how to eager students in the kitchen as they come in to prepare for the evenings service. One might call him the well-loved "Chef Du Mentor" for the ICA culinary students.

I was now alerted to the next course by the fresh silverware being placed and the parade of servers marching toward our



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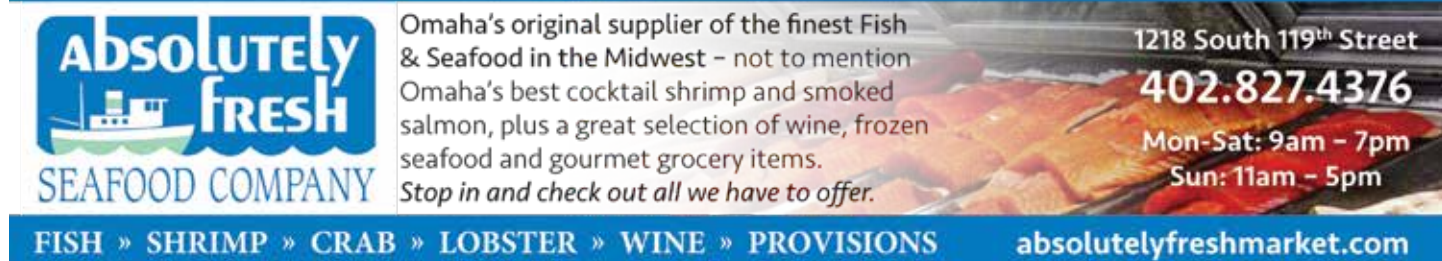


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table. Right behind the servers walked Katy Jetter in her crisp, white chef coat. As the plates were deposited in front of us “chef” Katy explained the 4th course, “A pan-seared grouper sitting atop zucchini in a saffron and caper broth and topped with micro greens” She then exhaled quickly and smiled in pride. This is a moment serious students at ICA in the culinary program dream about . She answered questions about her plans for the future. “More school, going thru the Baking and Pastry program at ICA to become a more well-rounded chef.” Admitting to us her favorite moments had taken place during this prix fixe week.

“ The evening together with friends dining at the Sage Student Bistro was one to remember.”

As I pushed my fork into the grouper, I felt the crisp breaking of the seared skin, it melted into soft folds, and I was taken away to the seaside as I took my first bite. The zucchini had a slightly salty favor provided by the capers in the broth base and it paired well with the delicate grouper. I could taste Francesca’s influence in this dish, comforting and homey, like her mom’s kitchen I would bet.

We lingered over the last bites feeling satisfied with all the flavors we had experienced. Dishes were cleared from our table, crumbs removed with table crackers, then our server suggested coffee. Out of the corner of my eye I saw two additional servers with a tray of beautiful desserts. Course five was introduced. Our server didn’t ask the “Did you save room for dessert” question, he could tell from the murmurs about the table we were all up for this last delightful course. The server explained each of the four plated desserts on the tray with attention to each flavor we would be experiencing. The prix fixe dessert was part of the selections. We could choose any of them! Each of the desserts are made fresh each evening by the students in the Baking and Pastry Program.

Not wanting to miss out on this last course, I selected the spiced apple cake, so delicious, moist with a tender crumb. It was nearly too beautiful to eat. But I savored every last bite.

The evening together with friends dining at the Sage Student Bistro was one to remember. Francesca and Katy certainly have a great start on their culinary journeys. The Sage Student Bistro gave them the opportunity to shine as students and future chefs; the team in the back of the house supported their efforts and the team in the front of the house allowed their amazing dishes to be delivered in the best possible manner.

If I had to grade the students at ICA for the evening’s dinner service they would get an A+ from me. And Sage Student Bistro hit all three of those defining qualities and was well deserving of several stars that evening.

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Seasonal CRAVINGS

by Charles Schlusel | Photos by Patrick Wright

I take my job as a food writer very seriously indeed, but I believe my calling is to help you not only produce deliciously crave-able food, but above all else to realize that food is the vehicle we use as transportation to a destination that we all crave even more than scrumptiously delicious morsels with which to stuff our faces. That destination is creating memories and spending time with loved ones and acquaintances new and old.

Of course our goal is to create food that looks and tastes incredible, but when we find ourselves amidst all the hustle and bustle and crazy avalanche that a New Year can create, let's instead decide to foster and craft an ambiance of joy that will allow us all to deeply connect with family and friends.

The next question is how? How do we let go of the stress inducing trappings that come as we try to get ourselves ready for event after event? I'm glad you asked, how about a remarkably easy yet equally tantalizing recipe to put into your regular party going repertoire?

Longtime Food & Spirits Magazine readers will know of my somewhat fanatical love affair with tomatoes and this recipe combines that love with another of my great loves, cheese, to be specific cheese with a blue hue. I created this recipe years ago during the holiday season. The cold winter months mean that we have more than half a year till we can celebrate "Tomato Day" (check out my past FSM article, "Viva La Tomato!"). This recipe allows us to satiate our longings for those ephemeral first bites of



Blue Cheese Cherry Tomatoes

1 pint heirloom cherry tomatoes
1 cup sour cream
1/2 cup mayonnaise
8 oz blue cheese - crumbled
1/2 tsp garlic salt
1/2 tsp fresh lemon juice
1/4 tsp fresh cracked black pepper
1/8 tsp kosher salt
2 Tbsp fresh chives - chopped
kosher salt and fresh cracked black pepper to season
insides of tomatoes

Directions:

Cut the tops off the tomatoes and scoop the insides out with a small melon baller or a small measuring spoon. Sprinkle the inside of each tomato with salt and pepper. Mix the next seven ingredients together and place inside a large sealable sandwich bag. Remove the air, seal the bag and then cut a small corner off one of the bottom corners of the bag. You can now use the filled bag to easily squeeze the filling into the tomatoes. Arrange the filled tomatoes on amuse bouche spoons or on a serving platter and then sprinkle with the chives.

summer as we endure the cold clutches of old man winter. I've made this most holiday seasons for almost a decade and it never fails to be a palate pleaser.

Two cases in point, I recently served this as an amuse bouche for a dinner date. An amuse bouche is a French phrase that means something to amuse the mouth, it's a small bite of food served in a tasting spoon that the chef sends out to welcome diners and whet their appetites and set the stage for the flavorful dining adventure to come. My date for the evening had told me he wasn't a blue cheese fan but wanted to try it based on the track record of past dishes of mine that he had enjoyed. He said he really enjoyed the combination of flavors and then subsequently commented a few weeks later when I was again making the recipe about how the aroma of the blue cheese had changed from repelling him to enticing him.

Case number two, the daughter of one of my best friends was home from college for one of our annual holiday extravaganzas and as she was picking up appetizers, she commented that she had never tried my blue cheese stuffed tomatoes because of an aversion to blue cheese. I found her back in line a little while later scooping up a couple more of the delectable orbs and knew that my mission here was complete. Two conversions in one month from blue cheese haters to blue cheese cravers!

Now, while the cherry tomatoes we get in the cold winter months never compare to the wonder-ful flavor bombs we get in

August, the newer heirloom cherry tomatoes we can find in most of our local supermarkets can definitely hit that sweet spot until their tastier cousins hit the farmers markets this summer.

So, my FSM readers and friends, here's a recipe that's so fast and easy it can have you in and out of the kitchen in less than half an hour. You'll be on your way in no time to your next party with little to no stress. So, as you walk into your friends home this holiday season you can con-centrate on the important issues at hand, how to be a better listener and a better friend and how to create an atmosphere where memories of love and joy are remembered for years to come.



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Shifting Paradigms: SHAKE OUT AND START UP

by Edward G. Berna

Closing one calendar year and transitioning into another seems to have a renewing effect on most of us. Many people begin to focus on health and wellness changes for the New Year.

Over the past year, I have been presenting ways for readers to accomplish change with my column, “Paradigm Shift: Connecting Communities and Local Food.” 2018 is a critical time for everyone to continue or begin to make changes. I have seen some wonderful successes and horrific, tear-felt emotional failures. We all know that the retail models of today are being challenged. I have termed 2018 as the “Year of the Shake Out and Start Up”, which is dependent upon the CommUnity!

*Retail failure of our local produced foods systems is **NOT AN OPTION!***

Now, more than ever, we must begin to continue to challenge every aspect of our food buying decisions. It's not only a personal commitment to our own health and wellness, but that of our loved ones, children, grandkids and generations to come.

It's dependent upon CommUnity PRIORITY, just like public safety, economic security and economic growth models. Here in the Heartland it's a priority to help protect “The Good Life” philosophy.

***How do we do that?** We vote at least three times a day with our food dollars. Incredible residual effects could be had by conveniently and strategically supporting some factor of the local scene more often.*

- Something as simple as supporting a local farmers market and buying local produce or value added products, such as hot sauce or baked goods.
- Buy into a seasonal Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program
- Buy through one of the local food hubs, with the help of your friends on your block, church group or bingo card club.
- Support local eateries that support local sourcing. Vote with your food dollars—not only do they support the local product—these eateries have a tendency to hire and support the qualified and educated people who share this passion. Experience the impact first hand!
- Grow your own garden—this is by far the BEST OPTION! When one grows a garden one learns to appreciate nature, and when that happens, we begin to learn more about ourselves.
- This next option is by far the easiest! Volunteer or donate your time, money or value added resources to a LOCAL group of food system development. There are many groups out there working hard each day to serve the various needs within our CommUnity.

“Using local food production as the catalyst will provide support for the local “clean” food movement to transform the health of our Communities.”

In past articles, I have encouraged the need for our CommUnity to re-imagine what the local food system should look like.

Small-scale entrepreneurship is a proven strategy to revitalize rural and urban Communities alike. By working together we can bridge the gap of geography. Rural entrepreneurship can use their resources to produce a product that can then be bridged into larger urban markets and vice-versa. Using local food production as the catalyst will provide support for the

local “clean” food movement to transform the health of our Communities.

Cultivating this entrepreneurship will overflow further into health, wellness, economic and job creation. It has a powerful multiplier effect beyond just money.

“Paradigm Gardens has become an urban pick up spot for those wanting to support the local food movement.”

What do we use as metrics to define a healthy community?

The local food movement is the responsibility of EVERY MEMBER of our CommUnity to cultivate and support. We start by first presenting awareness! Obviously, everyone may not agree with this statement or even care. Some will only begin to pay attention when it affects their pocketbooks.

Collectively, we must use the potential of food to transform our Communities and tap into the ability to make a difference in the world around us.

Paradigm Gardens and Lone Tree Foods are beginning to do this in 2018. Paradigm Gardens has become an urban pick up spot for those wanting to support the local food movement.

Lone Tree Foods, a farmer-owned company connecting local farms with wholesale and bulk buyers in Eastern Nebraska and Western Iowa. Their mission is to provide convenient and reliable access to local foods for both professional and individual buyers.

Lone Tree Foods has provided the production, aggregation and distribution system for rural producers. Now, the relationship with Paradigm Gardens has allowed urban ease of use to tap into the system. In the few short weeks of implementation, we have seen a steady increase of supporters. As we build further scale and efficiencies, the local foods production system will be able to serve more and more rural and urban entrepreneurs and their supporters.

Tap into the ability to make a difference in the world around us. Collectively, we must use the potential of food to transform our local environment.



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Sodas in Which You May Not Be Entirely Aware of:

TRIPLE COLA

by Eddie Morin

This one really pisses me off. We are looking at Triple Cola this week. Oh, on the surface, it seems like a fine beverage out of Mukilteo, Washington. It proudly proclaims, “Drink it for Vim & Vigor.” Sure, buddy, like I’m running low on vim. The fine print on the side of the bottle has these recommendations:

1. Use Triple Cola to revive any time of the day
2. Enjoy ice cold

Let’s look at recommendation number two first. Enjoy ice cold. Oh yeah, really. You mean this isn’t the only cola ever in the whole world that I shouldn’t warm up? Ok, great. I’m glad the makers are already assuming I’m a moron and don’t know how to serve soda. The first recommendation gives me free reign to drink the beverage that I have purchased with my own money any time I feel like it. How generous of them. I’ll tell you what, Mr. Cola Brewer – I don’t need your permission to drink this cola whenever I like. I don’t take any orders from my beverages and I’m not about to start now.

That’s pretty much all there is to the bottle. The rest of it is quite ordinary. Now that I am thoroughly cranked up, let’s crack it open and have a sip. Tastes like cola. Maybe a little sweeter than your average cola, but really nothing remarkable. I can taste the cane sugar and that is almost always welcome. I would have no problem drinking this with my meal (or ANY TIME I WANT). While it is tasty, I question the implied claim that it has exactly

triple the amount of cola in it than your standard Coke, Pepsi, or RC (the *singlecolas*).

There certainly isn’t triple the amount of soda, so the maker must mean that it has triple the amount of cola flavor in it. If this is indeed the case, I’m just not tasting it. I do believe this may in fact be just a marketing trick! We have already touched on the standard single colas, but I happen to know there was a soda called “Double Cola” a while back. This was the same deal – just a marketing trick. Coke, Pepsi, and definitely RC are not holding out on you. They are already cramming every ounce of flavor into each bottle that they can. You mean to tell me, some rinky-dink backwoods operation like Double Cola has solved the mystery on how to slam more cola flavor into each bottle? No way. But I do give some credit to Double Cola for being witty. Trying to find an edge. But Triple Cola? Come on. Not only did they steal the idea to sell yet another cola flavored soda, but they stole Double Cola’s marketing gimmick.

Well you know what? I’m just counting the days until someone else brings forth the Quadruple Cola. You wanna play that game? Sure, you’re on top now, but this is a crumbling tower, my friend. I hope for your sake, Mr. Triple Cola, you get your money and get out quick. But you don’t deserve it. You deserve to die penniless and impotent. Get this crap out of my face.



THE ART OF HOSPITALITY

by Jill Cockson

When I was 10 years old, I earned my first-degree black belt in Taekwondo. My instructor, Ken Brooks, had a reputation for earning respect. He gave us the tools to succeed, and the personal room to fail; the choice was ours. I didn't know it at the time, but my early exposure to martial arts was the foundation of my passion for hospitality. 'Martial' means 'same'. 'Art' means 'different'. What seems like a contradiction in 'martial art' is actually the perfect embodiment of the paradox...the constant push and pull—the Yin and the Yang—that both work against and require one another for balance.

A critical component of most martial arts is the constant attempt to perfect 'The Form,' which is a sequence of stances and maneuvers assigned to each level for the individual artist to then apply his/her skill and style to, over and over, for both physical practice and mental exercise. The goal of perfection is asymptotic. Practicing the form teaches discipline, humility, attention to detail, patience, focus, and respect for the ever-present room to improve. Ten artists can perform the same Form with ten very different results. The movements are muscle memory, but the execution is all passion. In

a similar sense, service constitutes the same, 'martial' component of the required movements of The Form. Hospitality, then, is the artful way that service is carried out. If hospitality is to be sustainable, it must come from passion.

There are fundamental components of service that we all recognize. The average exchange with a guest has a certain Form: There is a greeting. There is an explanation of options. An order is placed. Products/services are delivered. There is a financial transaction. Goodbyes and gratitude are exchanged. These are the basic elements of a service exchange; It would be quite easy to follow along with these recognizable motions in a silent film portraying a server/bartender, and a guest. As a hospitality professional, I have come to appreciate the value of both the motions, and the WAY those motions are carried out. Everything from tone, timing, attitude, eye contact, body language, knowledge and humility is critical, and the requisite levels of each need to be adjusted for the needs of individual guests. I often say that the true hospitality professional rarely gets to be himself/herself. Forget your personality that you think is so great, and become an equalizer of experience for each guest.



True hospitality is ethereal. The more you think about it, the more elusive it becomes. Try too hard, and it becomes contrived. Don't try, and it disappears completely. The consummate host is in the center of the room, and not in the room, at the same time. You have to look for your place in the dialog, and you have to know when to shut up. You are a mirror, answering reflectively to the individual needs of your guest. Within the parameters of your brand, you want the line of hospitality to be invisible, as if the guest is serving himself/herself with zero effort. As a hospitality ambassador, you are an interpreter of body language, and your goal is to offer services before your guest is even aware they are in need. You want the guest to leave with an incredible experience, and the inability to articulate what, exactly, made the experience incredible. Hospitality is the ideal exchange rate between the desires of your target clientele and the products/services that meet those desires.

I'm not sure whether my natural inclination to seek balance and truth in the world was the cause vs. the effect of my interest in martial arts. The same inclination also led me to study philosophy in college, where I encountered the same principles of Yin and Yang—albeit reworded as 'Virtue Between Vice' or 'The Art of Dialectic', etc. I often joke about my philosophy degree resulting in my ability to make a lot of drinks. The fact is, however, that my appreciation for truth helps me to maneuver every guest to the best of my ability. Hospitality is just another manifestation of Yin and Yang—the balanced push and pull between a guest's expectations and our brand. Every guest is a potential exercise in The Form: an opportunity to practice, and to improve, to choreograph a memory, and to disappear into it, at the same time.

OMAHA 2018 HAPPY HOUR

Everyone loves happy hour and we're no different here at Food & Spirits Magazine. We've created a map of some of the tops spots in the Omaha Metro to satisfy your happy hour cravings. We'll see you there!

1 BRICKWAY BREWERY AND DISTILLERY, 1116 Jackson Street, Omaha

Brickway Brewery and Distillery is located in the heart of Omaha's Old Market District. They brew and distill on-premise and offer 15+ beers and 6+ spirits in the tasting room. The tasting room is open 7 days a week and now offers a full food menu. Brickway specializes in bringing quality products to an ever-changing market. If beer is what you desire, they set the benchmark no matter the season. From their flagship Pils to the tasty Coffee Vanilla Stout and an ever-changing list of seasonal beers, they pride themselves on quality. Don't forget about the spirits either. The American Single Malt whisky and Bourbon are the most popular.

Brickway offers knowledgeable tours Thursday - Sunday as well as one of the best happy hours in town. Mon-Thursday is \$4 session series beers from 2pm - 7pm. Friday 1/2 price growlers, Saturday Bloody Mary's and Beermosa's \$5 all day, and Sunday \$4 session series beers all day.



2 CEDAR OMAHA, 8726 Countryside Plaza, Omaha

Cedar began offering happy hour specials in 2018 and quickly made our list of some the best happy hour special in the area. They offer a wine happy hour from 3-5:30 Monday - Thursday, which is 50% off any bottle of wine to stay or to take out. They also offer some tasty gourmet snacks to accompany your wine. The snack offerings always change but on a recent visit they had Au Courant pimento cheese spread, Brün Kow cheese and crackers (salami optional), Omaha Steaks pepper jerky and house mixed nuts.



3 CHARLIE'S ON THE LAKE, 4150 S 144th Street, Omaha

The famous happy hour is what they do at Charlie's. Happy hour is Monday thru Thursdays on the patio or in the bar from 3 pm to 6 pm. All of their amazing appetizer are half price and they feature \$1.00 off all adult beverages. The patio waterfalls and fountains can be enjoyed May thru October. Monday night they also feature open wine night - all the open wine bottle are placed on the bar for you to enjoy at \$4 per glass of wine - until they are all gone!



4 DUNDEE DELL, 5007 Underwood Avenue, Omaha

For those craving some food along with great prices on happy hour drinks, Dundee Dell offers up a happy hour that has the best of both their spirits and food offerings. As if that wasn't enough, you can take advantage of their happy hour pricing every day of the week from 2-6 pm. Dundee Dell is known for their high quality well liquors and during happy hour well drinks are only \$3. Additionally, any of their drinks, including their nationally-renowned Scotch selection, can be had for \$1 off. If food is more what you're looking for, Dundee Dell has you taken care of with their world famous two piece fish and chips for only \$7.99 and their most popular appetizer, the fried pickles, for half price at \$3.99 for six big dill pickles.



5

FLEMING'S PRIME STEAKHOUSE & WINE BAR, 140 Regency Parkway, Omaha

Fleming's offers a special 'five six seven' menu for happy hour, which runs from 5 – 7 pm nightly in the bar. Selections from the menu start at \$6 and include choices from five different cocktails, five different wines by the glass and five appetizers. For cocktails, the 'purely fresh margarita' and 'emerald isle' are available for \$6, the 'whiskey peach martini' and 'blueberry lemon drop' for \$7 and the 'debonair martini' for \$8. Happy hour wines include a sauvignon blanc and chardonnay for \$6, a pinot noir and cabernet blend for \$7 and a cabernet sauvignon for \$8. Blue Moon seasonal beer is available for \$3. For food, Fleming's has you covered with a roasted Portobello mushroom ravioli or house-made burrata for \$6, sweet chili calamari for \$7 and tenderloin carpaccio or filet mignon flatbread for \$8. Additionally, the 'prime burger' can be had for \$8.



6

HERBE SAINTE, 1934 S. 67th Street, Omaha

Located in Aksarben Village, Herbe Sainte is happy to announce their all night happy hour every Monday from 4 - 10 pm. They also offer happy hour Tuesday through Thursday from 4-6pm. Reverse happy hour Friday and Saturday from 11pm-2am. Their specials include \$1 off all beers, a daily cocktail for \$6, \$5 house wines (red, white, or rosé), and 25% off all of their fresh from the Gulf oysters and peel and eat shrimp. Their regular hours are Monday through Thursday 11am-2pm and 4-10pm, Friday and Saturday 11am-12am, and Sundays we offer brunch from 12pm-4pm and stay open until 8pm. Herbe Sainte is a New Orleans themed restaurant and cocktail bar. From classic drinks and dishes like the Sazerac and crawfish étouffée (a vegan étouffée is available as well), to more modern recipes like the 'bywater' or crawfish cheesecake with a spicy meunier sauce — they've got something interesting for everyone to enjoy. Herbe Sainte was opened in October of 2016 by SamFam, LLC which includes Ron Samuelson, formerly an owner at M's Pub, and his two nephews Justin and Aaron Halbert. They are very excited to be a part of this community and look forward to serving all of Omaha.



7

JAMS, 7814 Dodge Street and 1101 Harney Street, Omaha

Jams, an Omaha restaurant legacy, is an American grill that offers a melting pot of different styles and varieties of food dishes containing high-quality ingredients paired with the optional cold drink or creative cocktail. The original Jams Midtown is located on 78th & Dodge and offers great drink and appetizer specials from 3-6pm, Monday thru Friday. Happy hour appetizers include: herbed ricotta & bacon crostini, bbq chicken quesadilla, house-ground meatballs, short rib tacos, fish tacos and our famous ginger pork potstickers—all just \$7. Happy hour drink prices range from \$4-\$7: seasonal beer, Jams sangria, Kentucky punch, P.G. martini, Jams cosmo, Beverly Hills bubbly or dirty tini.

Jams Old Market opened in 2015 and boasts the best patio in the Old Market where you can enjoy drink happy hour drink prices on seasonal beer, Jams sangria, Kentucky punch, P.G. martini, Jams cosmo, Beverly Hills bubbly or dirty tini with prices that range from \$4-\$7. Happy hour appetizers include: bbq chicken quesadilla, firecracker shrimp, caprese pizza, house-ground meatballs and short rib tacos. All \$7. You won't go wrong with Jams happy hour, Monday thru Friday, 3-6pm. Voted 'Best Happy Hour' in the OWH Omaha Choice Awards.



8

J. COCO, 5203 Leavenworth Street, Omaha

J. Coco's happy hour is Monday thru Friday from 4 pm-6 pm. Their drink specials don't disappoint; \$5 red and white wines, \$5 classic cocktails, including Mules, Manhattans and Martinis, and \$3 tap beers. To go with your happy hour drink, J. Coco also offers up some delicious food specials, all for just \$6. You can't go wrong with the short rib tacos, Portobello fries, roasted dates and tater tots, but there are many more selections to choose from.



9

LITTLE ESPANA, 11036 Elm Street, Omaha

Little Espana has a \$6 happy hour Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays from 4 pm to 6 pm. Their happy hour special include both tapas and drinks. For tapas you can choose from fresh mozzarella rolls, various types cocas (Spanish flatbread), fried calamari rings and marinated grilled chicken skewers. Happy hour drinks include house red and white wine and house sangria every day, and a special on each day. Monday is all specialty drinks, Wednesday is the house fresh margarita and Friday is the cran-apple martini and the lemon drop martini.



10

MANTRA, 6913 Maple Street, Omaha

Mantra Bar and Grille offers one of Omaha's best happy hour menus. The "edgy" yet "elegant" environment is attractive to all clientele. Happy Hour is Monday thru Friday from 4:30 till 6:00 pm featuring: \$4 Margaritas, \$4 house wines, \$6 Signature C Mantra Craft cocktails, as well as \$6 selected sharable plates. Looking for a fun brunch get together? Mantra's highly popular brunch offers a wide spread of delicious brunch food items with their own Mantra twist. "Endless" Mimosas on Saturdays and Sundays come in three fun flavors and are \$16 and only a penny for each refill. They are open Mondays at 4:30, Tuesday thru Friday 11 am till 2 pm then open back up for happy hour at 4:30, Saturdays at 10 am all the way till late night drinks, and do it all over again Sunday morning at 9 am. Don't forget, Sunday and Monday nights after 3 pm are half priced bottles of wine.



11

RAILCAR, 1814 N 144th Street, Omaha

At Railcar Modern American Kitchen, they specialize in the classic American dining experience. Made-from-scratch comfort food, craft cocktails and a friendly, knowledgeable staff, all delivered in a warm, cozy atmosphere. Stop in to try their house-smoked ribs with a signature cherry barbecue sauce, or their succulent prime rib (Fri& Sat night), or their house-baked apple pie topped with rich vanilla ice cream. Railcar makes the promise that once you've dined there, you'll travel back for more.



12

TIMBER, 8702 Pacific Street, Omaha

Come experience the delicious wood-fired cuisine at Timber Wood Fire Bistro. With a roaring hearth and warm atmosphere you'll feel at home the moment you walk in. Enjoy their wood oven-baked sour dough bread service with herbed California olive oil or locally whipped butter. Try one of their pissaladière — French style pizzas — wood fired to perfection. Select from one of the fresh-from-the-fire entrees including their house-made rigatoni with roasted vegetables, herb crusted bistro steak and cedar planked steelhead salmon. All of their meals are made-from-scratch and served with care by an experienced staff.



Everyone needs some down time to unwind with your pals, have a bite to eat and enjoy a beer, a glass of wine or a well-made cocktail. There's no shortage in Omaha of happy hours to enjoy, so make the rounds and have a few rounds with friends as you follow the happy hour map from Food & Spirits Magazine!



FOOD & Spirits

**1. BRICKWAY BREWERY AND
DISTILLERY**
1116 Jackson Street, Omaha

2. CEDAR OMAHA
8726 Countryside Plaza, Omaha

3. CHARLIE'S ON THE LAKE
4150 S 144th Street, Omaha

4. DUNDEE DELL
5007 Underwood Avenue, Omaha

5. FLEMING'S PRIME STEAKHOUSE & WINE BAR
140 Regency Parkway, Omaha

6. HERBE SAINTE
1934 S. 67th Street, Omaha

7. JAMS
7814 Dodge Street and
1101 Harney Street, Omaha

8. J. COCO
5203 Leavenworth Street, Omaha

9. LITTLE ESPANA
11036 Elm Street, Omaha

10. MANTRA
6913 Maple Street, Omaha

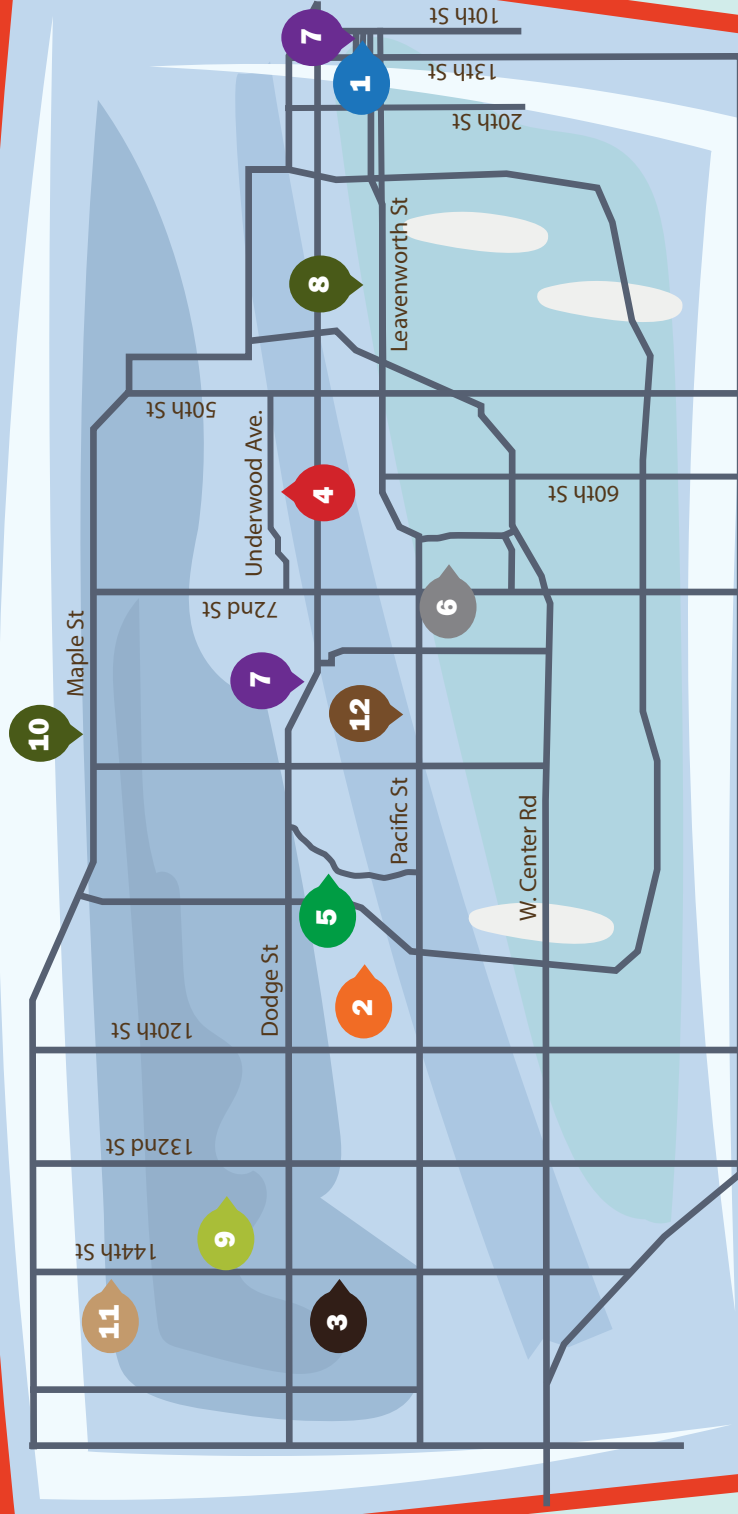
11. RAILCAR
1814 N 144th Street, Omaha

12. TIMBER
8702 Pacific Street, Omaha

OMAHA

HAPPY HOUR

2018



"THE OSTENTATIOUS PARLAY"

by Mark Gudgel

"When I made this wine, I needed a creative outlet, and a financial outlet. I needed to be independent. I needed to make my own mark, I needed to make my own wine."

I first met Sam Smith at Smith-Madrone, the winery that bears this last name, a few years ago on a trip to the Napa Valley. The winery, naturally, also bears the last name of his father, Stu, and uncle, Charley, who were among the early post-prohibition Napa Valley pioneers, establishing their Spring Mountain winery years before the infamous "Judgment of Paris" that broke the dam and led to a flood of wineries springing up over the past forty years.

Sam is amiable yet stoic, with a handshake like a vice grip and a coozie in his back pocket at all times. His blue jeans and baseball cap accurately suggest an agriculturalist, while his broad shoulders are evidence of a relentless work ethic. Sam has traveled the world as part of his duties at Smith-Madrone, but spends most of his time up on Spring Mountain, tending to grapes, making wine, and showing visitors around. To an outsider like me, it sounds idyllic, but Sam knew it couldn't last forever.

"I was working at a restaurant in Tasmania as a somm, and a couple from Texas were in. I was describing for them what it takes – buying the land, planting the grapes... pick, harvest, wait two years in barrel, bottle it, wait another year..."

The woman's eyes got big, and she said "That sounds like a pretty big bet." Her husband added: "That's like a parlay, a pretty big bet." Then his wife added, in her beautiful Carolina accent, "That's an ostentatious parlay, a *huge* bet."

Years later Sam's wine, Curly St. James, was released with the phrase "The Ostentatious Parlay" written below the name. "For me, it's the ostentatious parlay... it's gonna take a lot for me to

win, but if I do, it's a big win," Sam told me.

One look at a bottle of Curly St. James suggests immediately that it's different from most of the wines that people send for me to review. The bottle's shape is reminiscent of the grand cru Chateau Haut-Brion, while the golden wax that replaces the more traditional foil sets it off from a distance. Up close, the label is a finely detailed work of art. The words "Meraki" "Mudita" "Querencia" "Fernweh" and "Eunoia" appear in faint gold lettering around the edges, each one in a different language, each one meaningful to Sam. He was kind enough to take the time to explain them to a one-language yutz like me.

"Meraki" he began. "That's to do something with all of your heart, all of your love, all of your soul."

"Mudita: that's the opposite of schadenfreude. It's getting pleasure out of other peoples pleasure."

I want people to get pleasure out of this wine. People looking for something different and unique should get pleasure from this wine, and that will bring me pleasure."

"Querencia means your life is your work, and you put all of your life and your soul in your work."



“Fernweh is a homesickness for a place you’ve never been. For me, that means I can’t wait for people to try this wine in eight, ten, thirty years. I have this uncontrollable urge to get somewhere I can’t be, and that’s all I could find in the languages of the world to describe that feeling.”

“Last is Eunoia, which is essentially the rapport between a speaker and his audience. As a winemaker, I have to have a rapport with the people who drink my wine.”

These tiny words, inscribed upon the label, in essence sum up who I know Sam Smith to be. He’s thoughtful. He’s an artist. And he’s passionate about his craft. He desperately wants people to try – and love, this wine. Ultimately, the attention to detail paid to the appearance of the bottle is but a hint at what’s inside. Sam’s first and current vintage, the 2013, is incredible. Equal parts Cabernet Sauvignon and Cabernet Franc, it’s a bold, dark monster, with an elegant streak lurking below the surface. 14.5% ABV, it’s pretty clearly Napa from start to finish – and there’s nothing at all wrong with that.

With my glass resting on the countertop, I took in the bouquet from a good three feet away. The deepest ruby coloration you can imagine, it was beautiful even before it reached my palate. Upon tasting it, bright purple fruits abound, blackberry and currant,



a hint of jammy razz, and the scent of leather that I find almost always leads to structure on the palate. Red fruits and more purple and black ones in the mouth, with undeniable pipe tobacco notes and more of the saddle leather revealed by the nose. The fine yet persistent tannins draw out the finish and linger on the gums. A

“Fernweh is a homesickness for a place you’ve never been. For me, that means I can’t wait for people to try this wine in eight, ten, thirty years. I have this uncontrollable urge to get somewhere I can’t be, and that’s all I could find in the languages of the world to describe that feeling.”

fruit bomb like this needs a lot of acidity and tannins to balance it out, and yet this one indeed hits the mark. This is a beautiful wine. This is an ostentatious parlay. And with a boutique production of only 120 cases, for the lover of great wine, this is an opportunity not to be missed.

While Curly St. James is currently available only online, the entire Smith-Madrone portfolio can be found at **The Winery** right here in Omaha. Sam also told me that he plans to attend **VinNEBRASKA**, which will be held on April 13 to 14 of 2018. Tickets are available at www.vinnebraska.com. While Sam won’t be pouring this wine at the event this year, it’s still worth coming to meet him, and to taste the wines of Smith-Madrone that were the precursor to the soon-to-be-infamous Curly St. James.



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THE GREAT AMERICAN CABSAUV

Review 2017

by Mark Gudgel



I had “The Library Club” over at my house again, everyone having chipped in a bit of money to taste through some older wines that none of us individually would be likely to splurge on. Not for the first time, a guest perusing my cellar inventory was quick to point out that I drink an awful lot of Cabernet Sauvignon, and in particular, American Cabernet. “You need to branch out,” he said matter-of-factly, sipping at a glass of 1996 Caymus CabSauv. Do I?

I love domestic Cabernet Sauvignon. The name means “Savage” and there’s something about the combination of new-world terroir and American winemaking that so often renders these wines

as elegant monsters, a seemingly paradoxical juxtaposition of characteristics for which I and so many others adore them. Say all you like about the merits of a well-nuanced Right Bank Bordeaux or a delicate Willamette Valley Pinot Noir – I like those too, I really do. But if I had my way, I’d drink a bold, rich, American Cabernet about five nights of every week. And, as it turns out, I have my way.

Since I devote a disproportionate amount of my time to drinking domestic Cabernet Sauvignon versus other wines, for the second year running I thought I’d share a list of the best, most interesting, stand-out American Cabernet Sauvignons I had the pleasure of tasting in 2017. When possible, I’ve listed the Omaha-area

establishment where I'm most likely to pick up a bottle in case you want one too. From time to time I remark upon "QPR" which stands for Quality-Price Ratio.

“It's winter now, and Cabernet Sauvignon is precisely the thing to keep you warm”

The prices I list are based either on what the winery lists online or, when they don't, Vivino's estimate. To know precisely what any wine will cost, you're best bet is to ask the person selling it to you.

I know that Cab Sauv isn't everybody's favorite wine the way it is mine, and I assure you that I'm already working diligently on an article about a terrific Willamette Valley producer for the spring issue of Food & Spirits Magazine. That said, it's winter now, and Cabernet Sauvignon is precisely the thing to keep you warm – in case you needed an excuse. Below are my favorites from 2017. Enjoy!

Abeja 2014, Washington State (\$52)

Available online from the producer

This is the second year in a row that Abeja's Cab has made my list, so they're batting a thousand. Abeja is, simply put, quickly becoming one of my very favorite Cabernets. Abeja means "bee" en Espanol, and symbolizes a simple yet profound respect for agriculture and the earth. This summer, I'm heading to Washington to taste wine, and this is one place that's a priority for me to visit.

Bold and full in body with flawless deep Cabernet color and an inviting nose, what really lunges out at me both on this vintage and the previous are the ornate and diverse patterns of spices that linger amidst the more obvious dark purple and black fruit flavors. Those spices, ranging from hints of cinnamon to ginger bread to something I couldn't quite place — thyme? sage? — create a nuanced sense of complexity, and are what makes Abeja so incredible to me. Originally recommended to me by my friend Jay, the Washington wine guru, I now recommend this wine to everyone I meet.

Barnard Griffin 2015, Washington State (\$17)

Available at Noli's Pizza

I did a feature in this magazine a few months ago on Rob Griffin, one of the original Washington State wine pioneers. The short version is that this guy is amazing, and not only has incredible passion for what he does, but also the skill to back it

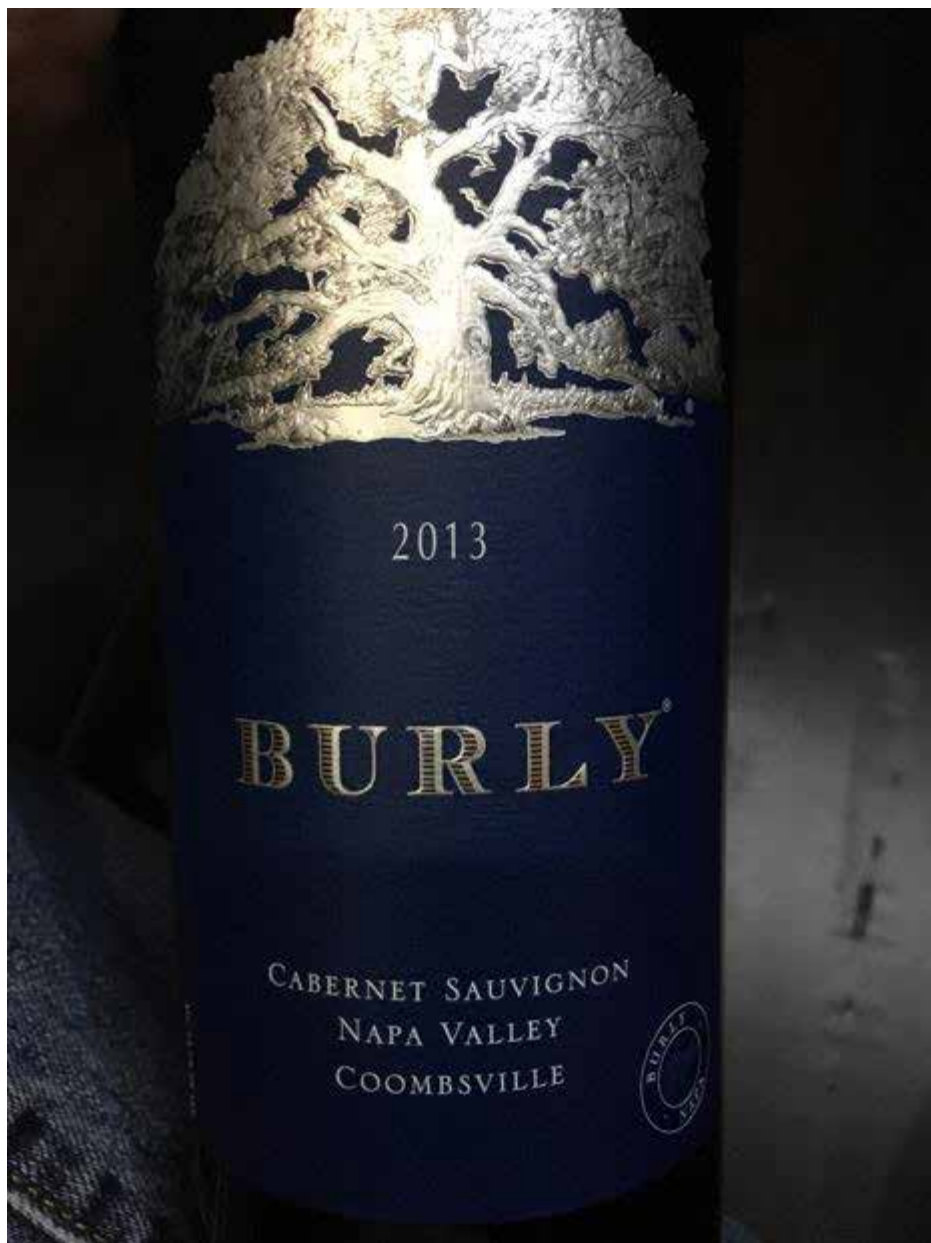
up. Equally cool is his commitment to keeping his wine reasonably priced, which is how a bottle of wine that lands in my top wines of the year can cost less than a couple of movie tickets, giving this wine an outstanding QPR.

Dark yet approachable with an innate smoothness and impeccable balance erring on the side of being fruit-forward, this is a crowd pleaser that even wine snobs will enjoy. Blue fruits and traces of oak persist throughout. Undeniably Washington, it's undeniably good.

Burly Special Selection 2013, Napa Valley (\$130)

Available at Omaha Wine Company

It was Hank McCrorie, the proprietor of Burley, to whom I first admitted that if I had my way, I'd drink Cab almost every night, to which he replied "I do have my way, and that's precisely what I do." And just like that, this article was born. Hank is a kind man, and I make it a point to see him whenever he's in town. He's almost always at the Omaha Wine Company shows, and I would highly recommend you take the time to pay him a visit.





Hank's "normal" Cab, which is anything but, is amazing stuff, while his Special Selection is utterly astounding. Winemaker Massimo Monticelli tastes through all eighty barrels of Cabernet and chooses only the best ten for the "Special Selection" label. The results are undeniable. I feel often that at times my words fall short of description. All I can say here is that if you are, like me, a love of Napa Cabernet, then this wine will absolutely blow you away.

Chankaska Creek 2014, Minnesota(\$60)

Available online from the producer

A friend and I were driving back to Omaha from Minneapolis, where we had both just taken our Wine and Spirits Education Trust (WSET) Level II exams. We were both a bit nervous about the results, if I'm being completely honest. Though in multiple-guess format, the test was tougher than I had expected. Fifty questions from a bank of thousands and I got asked a question about the flavor profile of silver tequila? I wouldn't drink tequila with your mouth, and there was nowhere to write in "it tastes like vomit," so I just took a guess. That was this sort of thing that concerned me about an exam for which I had studied for more than half a year. We had taken the time while in Minnesota to check out a few Minnesota wineries, and we had been duly impressed with the quality of their wine. In light of this, on the way back, we made sure our charted course took us past one more: Chankaska Creek.

This is Chankaska's first Cabernet, and that bodes well for future vintages. Though made in Minnesota, this wine is 100% Napa Cab when it comes to fruit, and is in fact taken from a prized vineyard of Andy Beckstoffer. An herbaceous nose, the body is black cherry, blackberry, and hints of powdered cocoa. Aged for 20 months in 70% new French oak, this is one of the wines that has me so downright impressed with the Minnesota wine scene. Oh, and both of us passed our exam with merit, despite my absolute disinterest in tequila.

Chateau Montelena 2014, Napa Valley, (\$50)

Available at Winestyles

If you're reading a lengthy article on Cabernet, then there's probably not much I can tell you about this place that you don't already know. Famous for Chardonnay (either see the movie *Bottle Shock* or read George Taber's *Judgment of Paris*), they also make extraordinary, old world style Cab. The reserve this year was phenomenal as well, but I like this one for its friendlier price point and undeniable quality.

Brightly colored with a flash of cherry on the nose, this wine is impeccably clean with a gorgeous gleaming ruby hue. The nose took me back to Calistoga and is truly a classic Napa sensation. On the palate, beautiful vanilla notes rest comfortably behind pronounced flavors of cherry, which in time open up to become black currant, chokecherry, mild raspberry, and more. Fruit driven in youth, it will lay down well and ultimately give way to more old world characteristics that linger just below the surface. A beautiful wine, I enjoyed it a great deal, and it paired brilliantly with beef tips.

DeLille Four Flags 2015,

Washington State, (\$68)

Available at Whole Foods, and will be featured at VinNEBRASKA

DeLille is another one I was introduced to by my friend Jay in Washington, and another repeat wine on this list. Last year, to feature them in this article, I had to have them send the wine to a friend in Kansas City who then brought it to me in Omaha because DeLille couldn't ship to Nebraska. Then just a month or so ago I was walking through Whole Foods and saw a bottle of their wine on the shelf. And now that they have distribution here, I'm going to be sure everyone knows it, because they make excellent wines.

Washington State Cab from start to finish, it's somewhat delicate on the nose, and utterly astonishing on the palate, opening into a wide variety of flavors ranging from baking spices to dark blue and purple fruits, a delicate kiss of something like butter toffee, subtle walnut, more vibrant raspberry, and more, along with formidable structure from well-integrated tannins and tremendous balance and age-ability. Like the Abeja, this is one of those wines that has me gaga over Washington State.





Euclid 2013, Napa, (\$100)

Available online from the producer

Yet another repeat offender on my list of favorites, I'll go out on a limb and say that you'll likely see the next vintage on next year's list as well. Mike Farmer and his son, Lucas, are set apart as a winemaking team by a combination of pedigree and passion. The result every year is a handful of barrels full of some of the best Cabernet, Syrah, and Merlot I've ever tried. I'm especially infatuated with their Cabernet, which is priced modestly considering its quality. If I was going to join a wine club and I could only choose one, I'd make it Euclid.

Honestly, I don't even need to drink this wine. I could just sit here and smell the nose all day and I'd be happy. Beautifully nuanced and focused on ripe red and purple fruits, despite its youth the 2013 Euclid Cab Sauv is drinking exceptionally well. Nicely balanced, erring in favor of the beautiful red fruits in the profile, there are hints of delicate leather and maybe eucalyptus hiding somewhere in there, and enough acidity to keep the mouth permanently watering. Finely-integrated tannins hold it up nicely and linger upon the palate, lengthening the finish. I'd pair this with steak or, at Mike's suggestion, some really great tacos.

Fitch Mountain 2014, Sonoma County, (\$18)

Available at The Winery

This is the small, unadvertised label of Mike and Nicol Duffy who own Optima, one of the best small wineries in Sonoma. You'll see this Cab, and also the Merlot, around town in places that serve great wine—I had the Merlot with dinner at Stirnella just the other night. The truly stunning thing about it is that it comes from amazing winemakers and excellent fruit, and still costs what it does. This is another absolutely astonishing QPR for this year's list.

This particular Cabernet I served recently at an event, and it was very well-received by a diverse crowd of imbibers. Still quite young and certain to benefit from decanting or cellar time, the dark purple fruits and leathery qualities, along with a very drinkable nature and, again, the low cost, make this a wine to be sure you don't miss.

JH Collection: The Debate 2013, Napa Valley

Available at the Omaha Wine Company

My crush on Jean Hoefliger is well documented at this point, and for good reason. Not only is he one of the best winemakers in the world, but he is also an amiable, charming, thoughtful human being. Evidence of this rests in the fact that these wines are made purposefully to inspire civil debate amongst people in these turbulent times. Jean believes, as do I, that people need to sit around the table and talk more, and like Jean, I, too, believe that wine can be that thing that brings us to the table.

In the last edition of Food & Spirits Magazine, I wrote a longer article about the entire JH Collection that is available in Omaha. While you can get my lengthier tasting notes on all three Debate wines there, what you really need to know about these wines is that to find a winemaker of Jean's caliber working with cult fruit like this isn't easy, and often costs five, ten, event twenty times what these cost. The Missouri Hopper, Dr. Crane, and To Kalon vineyard bottles vary in price, and are each extraordinary in their own right. If you're considering a splurge, consider The Debate.

*Jean believes, as do I, that people need to sit
around the table and talk more, and like Jean,
I, too, believe that wine can be that thing that
brings us to the table.*

Kelleher 2012, Napa Valley, (\$95)

Available at the Omaha Wine Company

If you're driving up-Valley on Highway 29, away from San Francisco, then not far past the town of Napa, on your left, you'll see a familiar name: "Brix." This Napa Valley establishment is an absolutely terrific restaurant, very worth visiting, and behind it is



planted ten acres of Cabernet affectionately referred to by those who tend it as the “Brix Vineyard.” As the sun sets atop the Mayacamas in the west, the view of the vines at twilight as surreal. This is a place I tell everyone to visit.

From that Brix Vineyard comes this bottle of wine, which I’ve told many people this year might be one of the best I’ve had. Opulent without overstatement, the balance and smoothness of this wine, straight out of the bottle, is something to write home about. In reviewing my tasting notes for several years back on this one, the word I kept using was “balanced”. Left bank Bordeaux in some ways, totally Napa in others, this is one all Cab lovers simply have to try.

Kenefick Ranch Chris’s Cuvee 2014, Napa Valley, (\$65)

Available at V. Mertz

Kenefick Ranch is one of those wineries that I know I need to visit soon, but in the meantime, Chris Kenefick is in Omaha regularly enough for me to get my fix. One of my favorite small producers in Napa, when you see Kenefick Ranch wines, I encourage you not to pass on them. In particular, I’ve found Chris’s Cuvee to be consistently excellent from year to year. Until I do get out to visit them in person, this excellent bottle of wine will remain my link to this wonderful small producer.

It is a hint of dark chocolate, from start to finish, that really sets this wine off for me. The nose takes time to open up, while the dark purple bordering-on-black heart fades to vibrant ruby hues around the edges. On the palate, beautiful blackberry and darkest plum, hazelnut, supported by ultra-fine tannins lending substantial structure, make it a force of a wine, a young one that I think will age terrifically. The finish lingers like that note of a piano that never truly seems to end, and may still be resonating by the time the next key is struck, by the time the next sip is taken.

Keswick Vineyards Estate Reserve 2013, Virginia, (\$65)

Available online from the producer

Last year, when I reached out to Keswick Vineyards, the winemaker there sent me a vertical that ranged from 2009 to 2013. While each wine was certainly unique, I was impressed by the consistency of the quality from year to year, as well as the seemingly age-worthy nature of the wines. Complex yet easy to enjoy, this wine helped me to quickly understand why the Virginia wine scene is starting to gain momentum. While I normally go to Virginia for other things, the next time I’m out there I’ll be sure to make visiting Keswick Vineyards a priority.



The 2013 is an elegant, graphite-laden, well-structured Cabernet in which the dark lingering fruits are almost an afterthought. Old world in character with a bouquet that you can smell from a considerable distance, if you’re looking to be introduced to the wines of Virginia, I can think of no better ambassador than this one.

Ledson Howell Mountain 2013, Sonoma County, (\$100)

Available online from the producer

From a winery that we visited on our honeymoon, and the same vintage as our marriage, this wine was destined to be a favorite of mine even before I tasted it. Howell Mountain is in Napa, but the Ledson winery is in Sonoma, where Steve Noble Ledson built it years ago. This past year, Sonja and I had the immense pleasure of having lunch with Steve and several members of his stellar staff, and it was an honor I’ll not soon forget. The Ledson winery is an incredible story—the family an incredible family—and the people that Steve has surrounded himself with at his passion project are all humans of the highest caliber. The winery sustained mild damage in the recent fires, with an impressive blaze roosting above it on the mountainside. Check it out online, or visit them in person to support this extraordinary Sonoma producer.

While this wine had me at the big, deep, rich nose, or maybe even before that with the nostalgia, it didn’t stop there. The terroir is evident in this wine, as the brooding mountain fruit from what is one of Napa’s premier AVA’s was softened slightly at



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the hands of a skilled artisan. An array of flavors opened up over time, and with a quick decant, including blackberry, blueberry, deep dark cherry, and hints of refined leather. I told Sonja that this is one of the finest wines I have tried all year... possibly in my lifetime.

Mountain Terraces Vineyard Lex's 2014, Sonoma County

Wines are difficult to acquire, but worth it if you have the time and resources.

Some of my best memories are those of times that I didn't have a plan, and one such memory comes from my visit to Mountain Terraces. Perhaps sometime I'll have room to tell that story, though for now, I'll focus on the wine. Perched two thousand feet up on Moon Mountain, Mountain Terraces offers a spectacular view of the San Francisco Bay, and some truly incredible wines to go along with it. My recommendation, if you're traveling, would be to reach out to them about staying at one of the two well-furnished houses that overlook the vineyards up there. I can think of no better place in all of wine country to make camp. And equally important if you want to try Mountain Terraces wines is the fact that staying there is the only way I know of to get your hands on them.

Simply put, the Lex's 2014 is a killer Cabernet. I inhaled deeply the nose and I knew that instantly, my face lit up with pleasure. On the palate, opulent, deep purple, high-elevation mountain fruit comes along with rich cocoa and a sense of place that could only come from Moon Mountain. A medley of fresh berries lingers in long-grain tannins upon the palate, well into the finish. Smooth and balanced even in its youth, this wine will, in my estimation, age forever.

Palmaz 2013, Napa Valley, (\$165)

Available online from the producer

The Palmaz winery in the south end of the Napa Valley was one of the most extraordinary things that I saw in 2017. State-of-the-art technology and stunning architecture combine in a winery that produces some of the best wines I've ever had. The winery juxtaposes space-age tech with Argentine heritage and an upscale sense of dignity, and to make things even more extraordinary, Christian Palmaz was one of the nicest guys I've ever met. For more, you could read my review in American Winery Guide, or just take my word for it and add Palmaz to the top of your short list of places to visit.

This is a dark, full-bodied Cabernet with incredibly smooth tannins and impeccable balance, driven by dark purple and black fruits and layered in complex notes of everything from leather to cedar to baking spice. It drinks perfectly now, but will age for at least as long as I will, and probably far more gracefully.

Pine & Brown Rutherford 2014, Napa Valley, (\$70)

Available at V. Mertz and will be featured at VinNEBRASKA

Fellow Nebraskan and Omaha native Tom Rees has really set himself apart in the world of wine, in my opinion. Pine & Brown, named for the street corner in Napa where both his house and tiny winery are nestled, is fast becoming a cult wine on account of Tom's painstaking viticultural craftsmanship. This is the second vintage of a Rutherford-specific Cabernet from Pine & Brown, but the first that I've tried, and it makes my mouth water for future vintages.

Bright fruit, yet still imposing in every way, the Rutherford dust makes for a somewhat leathery combination of flavor and



mouthfeel, while deep purple fruits and hints of vanilla do what they can to expand the horizons of the palate. The long, lingering finish is incredible, and made for an awesome experience pairing this wine with cheese and light charcuterie, though to be sure, this is a steak wine.

Prairie Berry 3 Red Necks, South Dakota, (\$19)

Available online from the producer

One of our family's holiday traditions has long included a stay in the mountains over the New Year, and often when those mountains are the Paha Sapa, the Black Hills of South Dakota, we like to visit Prairie Berry. That time of year, there's always a fire crackling, and we enjoy sitting near to it and sharing a glass of wine and some cheese. While this producer is perhaps more famous for their "Red Ass Rhubarb", our favorites are typically the vinifera, and this Cabernet exemplifies why that is.

Bright and vibrant from nose to finish, it's less imposing than some of the monstrous, brooding Napa beasts on this list, but no less satisfying, with minimalist structure and ample cherry and vanilla flavors. It's ready to drink now. As Cabernet goes, this is a crowd-pleaser, a great wine for the patio, and a terrific food wine. Sonja says: "It's an easy drinker, not overpowering. It's a Cab for people that don't like as aggressive a Cab as you [I] do."

Silverado Vineyards Estate 2013, Napa Valley, (\$40)

Available at Costco and will be featured at VinNEBRASKA

Sonja and I had driven past Silverado Vineyards countless times on our various visits to the Napa Valley before we stopped in. When we finally did this past winter, we wondered what had taken us so long. We spent an afternoon with Jon Emmerich, barrel tasting and listening to him talk about the evolution of the property, where he has been the winemaker for many decades. Instantly, we became fans of Jon's terrific wines, and while Silverado makes some truly extraordinary high-end Napa Cabs, in particular Solo and Geo, I chose the estate for my list for its extraordinary QPR.

The body of the wine reminded me of time spent on the Silverado Trail, for which the vineyards and winery were named in 1981, the year of my birth, thirty-six years and a day ago now. A familiar depth and richness that my mind associates with only the best of memories was as enticing as it was nostalgic; gentle French oak, refined leather, black fruits such as blackberry, currant, and

black cherry, subtle baking spices, and a certain herbaceous quality commingle beautifully upon a bed of fine tannins. The wine is balanced, structured, and delightful from start to finish. I have no doubt that it is age-worthy, and yet it is drinking so wonderfully now that I'm not sure I have the self-restraint to find out.


Smith-Madrone 2014, Napa, (\$52)

Available at The Winery and will be featured at VinNEBRASKA

Another of my well-documented winery obsessions is Smith-Madrone. The combination of great memories and terrific wine makes every glass of Smith-Madrone one that I savor. The final winery to find its way onto this list for a second consecutive year, when people visit Napa, I always steer them towards Smith-Madrone, and when people are looking for a great bottle of wine locally, I often point to this one. Founded in 1971 before it was hip to own a winery in Napa, the Smith brothers have been making wine for longer than most people have been drinking it, and it's no exaggeration to say that they've perfected the craft.

The 2014 vintage had an uphill battle to fight, between drought and earthquake, and yet the 42-year-old high elevation vines at Smith-Madrone still bore some truly extraordinary fruit. This wine is, in my opinion, as close to Pauillac as Napa gets, coming in at a low 13.9% ABV and blending 85% Cabernet with 8% Cab Franc and 7% Merlot. Velvety and smooth with concentrated dark fruits and subtle, integrated earthy notes, I find it difficult to imagine a more satisfying Cabernet.





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Surh Cellars 2008, Napa, (\$55)

Available at The Winery

I met Don Surh at The Winery, where he was doing a tasting that was open to the public. We chatted for a while, mostly about cooking, and I promised to send him some morel mushrooms, a covenant that I struggled to make good on but ultimately with some effort was able to fulfill. And while normally I attempt to review the current vintage of wines for this list, this was the vintage Dave had on the shelf at The Winery when I bought the bottle there this past year, and so this is the vintage I reviewed.

This is a beautiful wine, so inky-dark in color that I was at first surprised, given the bottle age, that it had not paled much if at all over nine years. I shared it with Sonja, and we were greeted by an amazing nose of deep purple fruits, coffee, and earth. Upon the palate, a Napa Cabernet that was almost velvety in its mouthfeel, reminiscent of an excellent Merlot. Understated at times, I got notes of deep purple and black fruits persisting throughout, with hints of cinnamon spice, mushrooms, earthy notes, cedar, and English tea leading into a long dry finish.

Varozza 2012, Napa Valley, (\$85)

Available at Corkscrew Wine and Cheese

Several months ago, I helped to put on an event at Corkscrew that we called "VivinOmaha" where we encouraged people to come and use the Vivino app to rate wine as we tasted through a vertical of Varozza Cabernet, running from 2006 to 2012. I had visited Varozza in the past, their historic winery and terrific hospitality instantly making me into a believer. The event was a lot of fun, and of course everyone was truly impressed with the wines. From that tasting, this one emerged as my favorite.

The Varozza 2012 Cabernet is, as one somm-friend of mine put it, "just a beautiful expression of the varietal." More than that, it's got a sense of place. The small estate vineyard on the ancient Varozza property, tended by Jack Varozza, produces sought-after fruit that, in this bottle, has been turned into a dark, bold, and extremely well-balanced Cabernet. I appreciate that Varozza releases their wine with substantial bottle age, though I have half a case of this in my cellar and, having tasted older vintages of Varozza, I plan to let it age a bit longer.

Yount Ridge 2014, Napa Valley, (\$96)

Available at The Omaha Wine Company

I'd never seen this producer before the Omaha Wine Company show this past spring, but from the moment I tasted their Cabs I realized they were one I wanted to become more intimately acquainted with. Relative newcomers to the Napa Valley, and especially to the Omaha wine scene, Yount Ridge's winemaker, Celia Welch of Scarecrow fame, is rapidly making an incredible impression. Like Jean Hoeffliger's The Debate wines, when you consider what the winemaker and fruit could command, you recognize quickly that this wine is not only extraordinary, but also boasts a great QPR.

The wine has an indefatigable structure, supported like a marionette by beautiful, fine-grain tannins that hide seamlessly within, doing all of the work without drawing attention to themselves. A nose of subtleties, including blackberry and hints of cinnamon, leads into a beautiful, full-bodied wine with a profile of leather and pipe tobacco, baking spices, dark cherry, plum, and blackberry. At the end, a faint touch of vanilla leads into a long, lingering finish that never seemed to be entirely gone

from my mouth before the next bite of steak made it in. As age-worthy as any wine I've tried recently, it's drinking beautifully right now, but will surely reward your patience if you let it sit for a few more years.

So that's it, another year of suckling at the teat of Dionysus reduced merely to words upon a page. I tried to narrow nearly five hundred Cabs from 2017 down to twenty-two that I hoped my Cab-loving readers would fall in love with as much as I did. From the usual suspects like California and Washington, to lesser-known wine regions in Minnesota, South Dakota, and Virginia, there's a glut of really good Cabernet being made in this great nation, and I'm trying to help sort out the standouts, to separate from so many great wines that are available those which I believe are truly extraordinary and special. The above is my attempt at continuing that endeavor. Thanks for reading it.

Please check out the local Omaha establishments who carry these wines, or order direct from the winery online to support these great producers. As the winter bears down, I hope some Cabernet will be equal to keeping us all a little warmer, the perfect pairing with anything from a grass-fed Sandhills filet to a rousing round of Settlers of Catan or, for the more daring, Cards Against Humanity. Whatever you're pairing it with, enjoy these American Cabernets for all that they have to offer. And should you find one you especially like, as always, I'd love to hear from you. Cheers!

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*photo by Sarah Miller

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The DUMPSTER: TAKE A LOAD OFF

by Michael Campbell

Thanksgiving gluttony skidded right past Christmas indulgence and T-boned into New Year's revelry. Cookies and cocktails everywhere every day. I can't say no—that'd be rude.

So here I am, as wide as I am tall, psyching myself up for another annual New Year diet. Judging by the relentless advertising, we're all in the same shape. "Get a Whole New You!" they promise, when what they mean is Get Rid of Half the Old You.

I've tried all the fad diets. I'll save you some trouble and list the winners and losers. Wait — in this case, the losers are winners. Anyway, whatever.

I started with the Atkins Diet: bacon and eggs for breakfast, smoked salmon with cream cheese for lunch, and steak sautéed in butter for dinner — what's not to like? Sure, you give up bread, potatoes, chips and candy, but you get to replace that with sausage and Slim Jims. I lost five pounds the first week. Unfortunately, I looked fatter because my kidneys were swelling up like balloons and I was peeing rainbows. I quit and called it a win.

Like Atkins, the Paleo Diet is meat-heavy, because you're only supposed to eat what a caveman might. I picture cavemen gnawing noisily on giant turkey legs cooked over a fire, but more likely they ate tree bark and bugs because turkeys were too hard to catch. If you stick

to this plan you'll lose weight just from having to chase down your dinner.

The Mediterranean Diet is heavy on nuts, fruits, fish and oils. They motivate you to lose weight by putting you in a Speedo. Because Italy has a long Mediterranean coast, I added a lot of pizza, pasta, and wine. Turns out that's how I got fat in the first place.

I skipped the Dr. Andrew Weil Diet. First, he's fatter than me. Second, he's dead. You can have chocolate and wine on this diet, so at least you'll die happy.

Likewise I didn't try the Baby Food Diet, because every baby I ever met was fat. They might as well call it the Buddha Diet.

According to the Brown Fat Plan, "yellow fat" is jiggly, soft, and makes you look old. "Brown fat" is good, melty and slides right off of you. To turn yellow fat to brown, you eat carbs some days, switch to protein other days, while flipping back and forth between being Democrat and Republican. Like the 17 Day Diet, which changes up your intake every 17 days, this is supposed to keep your metabolism in a fat-burning way because it is always guessing. But my stomach wasn't fooled: it is attached by a system of nerves to my eyeballs, which were watching what I ate the whole time.

I liked the Personality Type Diet because it is not about eating. They administer a questionnaire which reveals your relationship with your food. Their results revealed that I have a "fat attitude." A *fattitude*.

The French Women Don't Get Fat Diet: Like a French woman, I did not get fat. And like a French woman, I ended up terse and crabby.

The Mediterranean Diet is heavy on nuts, fruits, fish and oils. They motivate you to lose weight by putting you in a Speedo.

Raw Food Diet supporters believe cooking food makes it toxic. Your food can be lukewarm, but not over 118 degrees. While there is no proof that cooking food is bad for you, there is ample evidence that you can lose a lot of weight from botulism.

The Cabbage Diet worked great for me. Sadly, I couldn't show anyone my lithe physique because they were kept away by my cabbage farts.



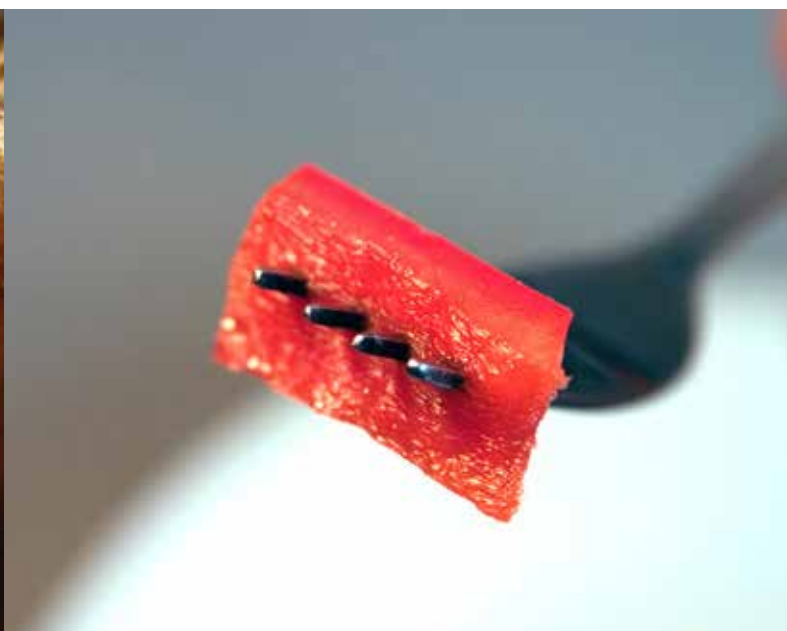


Jared Fogle lost a lot of weight eating only Subway sandwiches. I followed his example, until his example included child porn and prison.

On the Shangri-La Diet, I was encouraged to eat all the same crap I always do, but first drink 500 calories of oil. If it upsets your stomach, all the better. There is zero evidence this works except for creator Dr. Seth Roberts saying it does. Plus, Dr. Seth fails to clarify he is a Ph.D., not a doctor doctor. Of all the diets that don't work, this one is the easiest.

Some Badly Named Diets: The Ayds Plan had a perfectly clever name until it was overshadowed in the '80s by AIDS, which could cause even greater weight loss. And there's the Morning Banana Diet which, to my relief, is not a euphemism.

I already have a new plan for next year: on the day before Thanksgiving I'm going to staple my mouth shut until January 2.







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