

SCOTT GREENBERG

VineGuy



# P.S. I love you!

The initials P.S. can represent a lot of things. Most commonly, it means Post Script, as in a follow-up to a previous message. Or it can stand for Petite Sirah, a diminutive, purple teeth staining grape that can be magically transformed into a red wine that delivers a combination of suppleness and power in each sip. In this case, it means both.

Last month, I hosted (and wrote about) a charity event that was held in conjunction with the Restaurant Association of Metropolitan Washington to raise money for the D.C. Central Kitchen. It was such a successful event that we decided to do it again (thus the "post script") with the assistance of PS I Love You, a California-based organization dedicated to spreading the gospel about the greatness of Petite Sirah.

Assistance is really an understatement. Within two weeks of contacting Jo Diaz, PSLIY's executive director, more than a dozen vintners jump on the fundraising bandwagon, each sending samples of their wares. Donors included Biale, Bogle, Earthquake, EOS, Ernhardt, Foppiano, Lolonis, Mettler, Rosenblum, Silkwood, Victor Hugo and Vina Robles. Surprise guest, Lou Foppiano, owner of Foppiano Vineyards (Sonoma County's oldest continually owned family winery, founded in 1896), blew into town just to join us for a few hours.

If you're not familiar with Petite Sirah, here is a brief primer. In the late 1800s, Dr. Durif, a French nurseryman, played matchmaker between Syrah and a little know varietal from the wrong side of the trellis, Peloursin. He named the new varietal after himself. Durif was later renamed when it was relocated to sunny California, where the varietal does very well in the moderate climate.

Petite Sirahs typically possess notes of black raspberry, blackberry and blueberry fruit (and occasionally black pepper) on the nose and palate. They also tend to be big wines with significant tannins and acidity because the berries are smaller and therefore have a higher skin-to-juice ratio. While most Petite Sirahs are meant to be drunk within a few years of their vintage, some have been crafted for the cellar and can last the better part of a decade. Petite Sirahs are very food-friendly and pair well with game fowl, flavorful meats such as roasted lamb and ox tails and, thanks to the acidity, fattier meats such as Osso Bucco and braised veal cheeks.

While I enjoyed all of the wines, space only permits me to mention a few of my favorites from the tasting. Retail prices are approximate.

■ **2001 EOS Estates Winery Reserve, Peck Ranch Vineyard, Paso Robles, Calif.** (\$20) — Nose of smoked meats and black cherry fruit with ultra-ripe black plums and cassis on the

long, elegant finish.

■ **2003 Rosenblum Cellars Picket Road, Napa Valley, Calif.** — (\$23) Prominent nose of black plums and game meat that leads to well-integrated flavors of cassis, black currants and Asian spices with a full-throttled finish.

■ **2004 Michael-David Philips Earthquake, Lodi, Calif.** — (\$27) This wine shakes, rattles the nose with bacon fat and black cherry and rolls with cherries and blueberries on the palate. A remarkably long finish with hints of licorice and cedar.

■ **2002 Silkwood Wine, Stanislaus County, Calif.** — (\$35) This wine has a very deep, dark purple color and exotic scents of cinnamon, cassis and licorice on the nose. Juicy and well-balanced with flavors of ripe blackberries and cassis with just a hint of pipe tobacco on the smooth, long finish.

■ **Lastly, for an after-dinner treat, try 2003 Bogle Petite Sirah Port, Clarksburg, Calif.** (\$18/375ml) — Selected grapes were left on the vine late into the harvest to achieve maximum sugar (brix). The resulting fortified wine is richly complex with aromas of jammy black fruit and cedar. Ripe blackberry jam and plums linger on the palate and seamlessly melt into a smooth finish with chocolaty notes on the backend. This wine was made to pair with a chocolate tort.

Wine tip: While raising money never tasted so good, there are a few things to remember when attending an event with multiple wines. The first rule of tasting wine is to spit, spit and spit.

Pull in a healthy sip while sucking air in as you go (this is the only time a noise like this is socially acceptable). This aerates the wine in your mouth and gives your tongue full exposure to the flavors. Let it roll around your mouth for a good 20 to 30 seconds. Next, do the unthinkable and SPIT. Most wine tastings will have plenty of buckets around just for this purpose (in France, many chateaux keep sawdust on their floors during tastings and patrons literally spit on the floor).

If you need to clear your palate before going on to the next wine, drink sparkling water or eat a table cracker. Try to avoid food since it can alter your perception of the wine. If you're trying a lot of wines, have a sip of champagne after every 10 wines to refresh your palate. And remember, there is a reason it is called a wine "tasting" and not a wine "drinking." You will get a lot more enjoyment out of the event if you can remember it.

Got a wine-tasting tip? E-mail it to me at [scott@vineguy.com](mailto:scott@vineguy.com).



Courtesy of McCormick & Schmick's Seafood Restaurant

# More than the shell

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who could not get enough oysters. At the Reston McCormick & Schmick's oyster-shucking contest, Giacomini opened and ate 90 oysters in 10 minutes.

Washington-area oyster enthusiasts have much to be grateful for: Plenty of area restaurants offer oysters on the half shell or cooked oysters in some guise with selections of varieties culled from East and West Coast waters; these are farm-raised and cultivated since wild oysters are scarce.

Connoisseurs may disagree about which variety they prefer, but they will surely declare the oyster's flavor is as complex as that of a fine wine, and indeed, they may spend time matching appropriate wines to their oyster favorites. Old Ebbitt Grill hosts an annual, two-day Oyster Riot for sampling oysters with wines that nabbed top honors in an international contest. This year's Oyster Riot, Nov. 18 and 19, sold out almost as fast as a U2 concert.

Yet with all its celebrity and passionate admirers, the oyster does generate some antipathy. Why? Some people can't imagine swallowing a slippery raw oyster — the yuck factor. Others may balk at hefty retail price tags for oysters on the half shell.

## MCCORMICK & SCHMICK'S OYSTER PO' BOY

- 3 to 4 tbsp. vegetable oil, or more as needed
- 12 shucked oysters, prepared for frying
- 2 (8-inch) soft submarine rolls, split in half and toasted
- 4 oz. tartar sauce
- 2 cups shredded iceberg lettuce
- 8 tomato slices

1. Heat the oil in a large skillet and fry the oysters until golden brown. Coat the inside of each roll with the tartar sauce. Place the lettuce and tomato slices on the roll.
2. Place the oysters in the roll and fold the top of the roll over. Serves 2.

## CLYDE'S OYSTER CARPET BAGGERS HORS D'OEUVRES

- 2 each 8-oz. filet mignon
- 12 each select oysters
- 12 each crostini (recipe follows)
- 4 oz. béarnaise butter (recipe follows)
- oyster flour (recipe follows)
- 4 oz. buttermilk

1. Soak oysters in buttermilk one hour before frying.
2. Drain oysters and toss in seasoned oyster flour.
3. Grill filet mignon to medium rare temperature and hold.
4. Spread béarnaise butter on crostini.
5. Fry oysters 2-3 minutes until crispy and cooked through. Drain.
6. Slice filets into 12 slices, lengthwise.
7. Place 1 slice of tenderloin on each crostini. Top with a fried oyster. Serves 12.

## BÉARNAISE BUTTER

- 1 pound whole butter (soft, unsalted)
- 2 oz. dried tarragon
- 1 oz. diced shallots (1 large shallot)
- 2 oz. red wine vinegar
- 2 oz. white wine

1. Combine tarragon, shallots, vinegar and wines in a small sauce pan.
2. Over medium heat, reduce until dry.
3. Mix together tarragon mixture with the butter.

4. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Hold until needed. (Best to make a day ahead.)

## OYSTER FLOUR

- 2 cups flour
- 2 tbsp. corn starch
- 2 tbsp. corn meal
- 1 pinch Old Bay seasoning
- 1 pinch dry thyme
- 1 pinch salt
- 1 pinch pepper
- 1 pinch cayenne pepper
- 1 pinch paprika

Combine all well.

## CROSTINI

- 12 bias cut slices of baguette
- olive oil

Drizzle olive oil over bread slices. Bake at 350 degrees until toasted.

## MCCORMICK & SCHMICK'S OYSTERS ON THE HALF SHELL

- 6 oysters
- 1 tsp. chopped parsley
- 1 wedge lemon
- Crushed ice
- Cocktail sauce:**
- 1 cup commercial chili sauce
- 1/2 cup catsup
- 2 tbsp. horseradish
- 1 tsp. lemon juice
- 1 tsp. Worcestershire sauce
- 1/2 tsp. dry mustard
- 1/2 tsp. black pepper
- 1 tsp. Tabasco sauce
- 1/4 tsp. salt

Place a decoratively folded napkin on a serving plate. Place crushed ice on the napkin. Place the oysters on the ice in a circular presentation. Accompany the oysters with a wedge of lemon and cocktail sauce. If desired, top with horseradish. Serves 1.