



A Nichols Worth of Wine

January 2007

Around Town

Change is often for the better, and this expression could not ring more true in the case of the new wine program and the addition of John Furrie to the staff of *Tony's Off Third* in Old Naples. Hired as wine manager in October, the transformation from a deli/catering operation that also sold wine is evident the moment you walk through the door.

I have always enjoyed Tony's as a great spot to grab a quick cappuccino early in the morning or to browse the broad selection of wines, but felt as though something was often missing in the wine store. That something was a constant presence of a wine expert with personality, knowledge and passion. Owner Sukie Honeycutt, has now covered all the bases of her food and wine empire by bringing John on board to oversee the wine program. This is a welcome addition to what now is one of the two true wine merchants in downtown Naples – the other being Peter Rizzo's Old Naples Wholesale Wines.

The mere fact that I no longer have to stand in line to buy wine at the take-out counter, behind three coffee customers ordering double, tall, skinny lattes, in itself would be enough to keep me coming back. To now have a wine pro – in this case a seasoned wine pro that is a certified sommelier - in a word, is refreshing. John is as excited by the new release of an obscure \$15 Chilean malbec as he is about an upcoming winemaker dinner featuring an all pinot noir pairing with the fabulous food of the adjacent Ridgeway restaurant.

Tony's has completely revamped the tasting program from what was essentially a cocktail hour to an educational, yet friendly and accessible opportunity to experience newly released wines from around the globe. The tastings are designed as a series in a classroom setting that began last month with wines from Bordeaux. Starting with wines of Pomerol and the Right Bank, moving this month to a comparison tasting of old world versus new world, it will finish in February with Left Bank wines. Future tasting series will focus on six or seven of the twenty regions of Italy. Formal tastings are held Monday's mid-month and are limited to about twenty-five people on a first come basis, so best to book early.

Perhaps the newest and biggest change to Tony's makeover is John's hand-picked daily selection of eight different wines sized and priced in two ounce, half glass and full glass options. On a recent visit, I tasted my way through a Verdicchio at \$1.50 to a Gevrey-Chambertin priced at \$3.25 for the two-ounce pour. The other six selections included wines from California, Washington State, New Zealand, Germany, Spain and Chile.

Tony's also stocks one of Naples largest selection of big bottles, including labels from Duckhorn, Caymus, Swanson, Jordan and Taittinger. If you're in need of the perfect wine accessory or gift, they have what is probably the widest selection in the area.

Tony's off Third is located at 1300 Third Street South. John Furrie can be reached at 262-7999.

In the Vineyard

The grapes have been picked, much of this year's white wines are in the bottle, and winemakers are in a collective sigh of relief. While the weather certainly provided its own set of challenges with this season's harvest, for many vintners immigration and labor shortages linger foremost in their minds. Despite the unpredictability of the weather, growers and winemakers know that more vintages than not will favor them. Attracting and keeping a viable workforce due to a host of issues, political and otherwise, is a whole other story.

Congressional gridlock during the mid-term election saw the opportunity to pass comprehensive immigration reform slip away as the employed number of temporary field hands dwindled. A robust U.S. economy allowed cheap labor, mostly from south of the border, to migrate to better paying, less back-breaking jobs in the construction and service sectors. Increased mechanization has helped to offset the shortage of vineyard workers, but mechanical harvesting has its limits, especially in the case of finer wines which require selective hand picking. Further fueling the issue, unprecedented growth in wine output in America in the past five years has created an even greater call for seasonal migrant workers.

Although vineyard managers are somewhat reluctant to over-emphasize the problem, due perhaps to the questionable legal status of many migrant workers, it has been estimated that shortages approaching 25% were seen in some wine regions of California this year. Wine industry employers now cite the lack of an effective guest worker program that would allow farm workers to come and go across the border as potentially the single biggest threat to the industry.

During annual peak growing periods, California agriculture employs close to a half million non-supervisory workers, at least half of whom are not authorized to be employed in the U.S. Balancing the need to secure our borders while not closing them to unauthorized workers is a daunting challenge for farmers and politicians alike. The stalled legislation between the Senate and the House (HR 4437) is an enforcement-only approach which does not include a guest worker or legalization program and would make it a felony to employ undocumented workers.

The doomsday scenario is a continuing shortage of pickers and grapes left to rot on the vine, neither of which is welcome news for winemakers. One thing for certain is that unless and until our elected leaders come up with a solution that addresses meaningful immigration reform and permits a guest worker program, the wine industry and consumer alike may be in for higher prices and fewer bottles lining the shelves.

Did you know...

Sales of Pinot Noir in America have increased an incredible 120% in the past two years, driven primarily by the new super ripe, fruit forward style being adopted by many winemakers, increased wine sales to a younger market, and continued reference to the movie "*Sideways*."