



Parcelas wines at the ready.

A Hedonistic—Rebalaisan Event to Remember, Part 1

HAD COVID-19 NOT HAPPENED, nine of my friends and I were to attend the 40th Anniversary of Wine Spectator's 40th Wine Experience in New York City. Marvin Shanken canceled the event, calling it his most difficult business decision of his life. Since all 10 of us had the dates saved, I suggested we do our own event locally and all agreed. Two of the 10 were unable to attend based on COVID-19 related concerns, but the remaining eight started with bringing two bottles of the same wine for each of the five events. It should be noted that each participant has excellent-to-outstanding World Class cellars, so the choices measure quality of wine and the compatibility of the wine with the food menu, as well as the willingness to share the best of their cellars. All attendees received A+ ratings on all three dimensions.

We started the event on Thursday, October 22 at Gregg Mason's house in Royal Melbourne. Gregg's friend, Mario Longobardi (former owner and chef of Arenella's in Arlington Heights) agreed to prepare a world class multi-course dinner for us. We started

with his outstanding artesanal salami, accompanied by Fontodi's Meriggio (Sauvignon Blanc). The first course was clams cooked in white wine and broth sauce which was served with the best Savennières any of us had ever had and it was the first for all. This Chenin Blanc was the 2018 Thibaud Boudignon Clos de la Hutte with great minerality and an endless finish—truly a perfect match.

The second course was shrimp scampi in a garlic butter wine reduction sauce accompanied by

the 2012 Paul Lato Chardonnay (Pisoni Vineyard). The richness of the fruit married well with the shrimp. The following course was Calamari Puttanesca which was married perfectly with Italy's rarest white wine—Valentini's Trebbiano 2010. I have made several trips to Italy just to find this wine, and I have not always been successful. The veal Saltimbocca was 'out of this world' and was made better with the 2006 Il Poggione Brunello di Montalcino and the 1990 Barolo from Marchesi di Barolo. The filet was paired beautifully with the 2013 Giacomo Conterno Barolo Cerretta in magnum. The 2000 Mauro Veglio Barolo Vigneto Rocche perfectly accompanied the Pasta Carbonara. We finished the reds with what is known as a *Vino da Meditazione*. It was a 2013 Tommasi Amarone which went perfectly with our cheese course.

The finale was the 1988 Rayne Vigneau Sauternes which closed a great evening of food and wine and set the bar very high for the next two days.

We started the next day in Wynstone where David Varwig hosted the tasting of the five famous wines of the Catena Zapata Adrianna Vineyard Vinos de Parcela. These wines are two Chardonnays—Bones and Stones and three Malbecs. All are near or at the pinnacle of wines from these grapes. I have long been a great fan of Catena Zapata wines and have a good relationship with Nicolas Catena, the owner, and his daughter Laura Catena who is president of Catena Zapata. Her sister Adrianna Catena started the Parcela project with Alejandro Vigil, Catena Zapata's chief winemaker over a decade ago and over the past three years facilitated a tasting of the new vintage of these wines with a group of people who visited the winery with me in 2017. The assistant winemaker or import director came to us each year,



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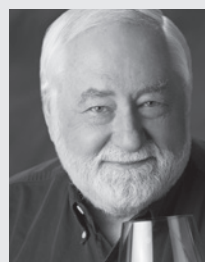
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but because of COVID-19, this event was not held this year so one of our group, Danny Kent, suggested we do a vertical of these wines from our cellars. To accompany the wines, we paired high-quality salmon and bread and cream cheese for the whites, and sirloin steak for the reds. We had all had these wines previously, but it was great to have several vintages of some at the same time.

We started with the 2015 Stones which is reminiscent of a Grand Cru Chablis with its stony minerality. Other attributes include flavors of baked apples, Bosc pears, quince, vanilla, and baking spices. The 2014 Bones was richer and bolder and was slightly preferred by half of us which is a common divide in preference. The 2016 Stones was similar to the 2015 and enjoyed by all. All agreed that the 2015 Bones was one of the best-ever. Regarding age-ability, the owners indicate on the back label that these wines can be enjoyed relatively young or aged for decades. For hosting one of these events, I was given two bottles of the first vintage of Stones-2009. My wife and I had both in 2020 and I think they were tied as the third-best white wines of my life, and cost 1%-6% of the two wines I preferred to them—making the 2009 Stones the greatest price-quality ratio wine I've had.

We had two of the Malbecs, the 2014 River Stones and the 2011 Mundus Bacillus (first vintage). Clearly these are two of the greatest Malbecs. The 2014 River Stones (5,400 bottles) is concentrated and powerful with firm texture and great balance, strong minerality, and abundant tannins built for the long haul. The Mundus Bacillus is very rare and not only the greatest Malbec, but one of the world's greatest wines with fabulous concentration and acidity. It has abundant flavors of red and black fruits. The high tannins show superb management permitting the wine to age effortlessly for decades. These wines are roughly \$150 and \$260 respectively. The Mundus Bacillus is without a doubt my favorite Malbec in the world and it is consistently so making it a great value. More lies in store in the next article. A Votre Santé. 🍷



Barrington resident Jim Bryant is pursuing his passion and love of wine as an international wine consultant. This follows a 30-year career in senior financial and general management positions at two Fortune 100 companies. He is the owner of James R. Bryant L.L.C.; contact him at profwino@comcast.net.