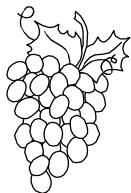
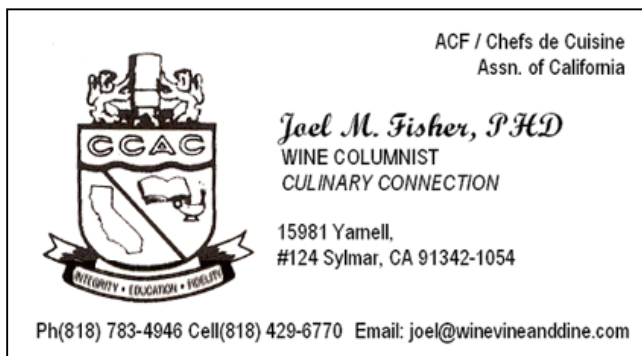


FROM THE GRAPEVINE

BY [JOEL M. FISHER](#)



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VINTNERS, BROKERS AND AUCTIONS

BY
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Greystone, home of the [Culinary Institute of America](#), Napa and site of Napa Premiere – mid-winter barrel tasting for the trade and press sponsored by the [Napa Valley Vintners Trade Association](#) drew all aspects of the wine community on a rainy February Saturday. Beginning at a too-early time for most weekend sojourners, 165 wine makers presented their samples prior to the Premiere Auction. Aware I needed energy I grazed the cheese tables where the food servers were still preparing. They took pity on me, and I tried not to gobble, when a gruff voice spoke my name into my ear. I turned around to greet Mike Miller, the former, but no longer, historian from Belgrade.

On my first cruise through the barrel hall I stopped at wineries I knew to be Miller's wine clients. From him, I had purchased wines in the past and tasted several in Los Angeles. The vintners and wine makers lauded him for his efforts on their behalf in Southern California. Tribute was paid for developing accounts involving small wine producers and "growing" them. One of these clients, Jeff Hansen, the larger than life winemaker from [AMICI CELLARS](#), a former Los Angeles photographer, summoned me back after I had consumed enough cheese to begin my wine tasting. He described their winery, introduced partner Bob Shepard, and talked of pairing wines with food at their home that night.

Never having experienced their wines, I tasted my way through their 2003 **Rutherford Cabernet Sauvignon**. The wine has great fruit, almost purple colors and aromas of dark berries with vanilla spice. Nicely structured, rich and complex with a long finish, this was an excellent beginning for the day.

Hansen spent 10 years at Spring Mountain and Flora Springs wineries. The man is big, with a burning passion for wine – great wines. He is convinced that his wine will be good if the fruit from which it derives is equally good. To that goal he assisted Amici to locate several 2-4 acre vineyard sites in which to grow different varieties: 1000 cases of 2001 Cabernet, 400 cases of Zinfandel, 165 cases of Pinot Noir and 2000 cases of the 2002 Chardonnay.

As a friend of Mike's I had been invited to dinner at the partner's home north of Calistoga and into the mountains. Nineteen of us met to enjoy a meal cooked by winery executive chef John Adamson. We began with Seared Dayboat Scallop, with bitter greens and blood orange vinaigrette paired with the 2003 **Amici Chardonnay**. The apple and white peach aromas and spicy flavors balanced by crisp acid and a long finish tasted burgundian. Dinner moved on to a "Wine Barrel" Grilled Rib-Eye, with garlic smashed potatoes and a gratinee of creamed spinach.

This attracted two wines: the *Cabernet Sauvignon* 2001, with berries, plums, chocolate on the nose and a full bodied flavor. The rare **Amici Meritage** 1997, was a blend mostly of cabernet and merlot. With black fruit on the nose and a palate of berry, currant, plums and some vanilla this had soft tannins and was lovely.

Dessert, a Meyer Lemon Tart, with an **Amici Chardonnay** 2000 from Napa finished the feast.. The wine was bone dry, providing a generous mouth feel with green apples and citrus tones. and a nose of nutmeg, cinnamon and all-spice

I appreciate Mike Miller arranging for me to join the party. Mike is, indeed, his own legend.. He markets other well respected Napa wineries, such as Flora Springs, Long Vineyards and Origins to mention a few. A good broker to know...

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