

FROM THE GRAPEVINE

BY Dr. JOEL M. FISHER



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MARCH 04 CULINARY CONNECTION

Once upon a time there used to be a wine shop named **Bel Air Wines** nestled at the intersection of Beverly Glen and Little Santa Monica. I loved browsing through their well-priced offerings, buying the occasional bottle or gourmet treat like caviar, which for better or worse my children loved.

Flash forward fifteen years. That store is long gone but the owners' son, Bob Golbahar, is the proprietor of one of Los Angeles's top wine stores – **Twenty Twenty Wine Merchants**. The West Los Angeles store is located on Cotner Avenue, which is emerging as an Angeleno wine lover's Mecca as it is also home to **The Wine House** and **Wally's Wine Storage**.

Twenty Twenty has more than 100,000 bottles in inventory, and recently I spent a couple fun hours browsing around. Some good selections could be had for under \$20, and I found notable Cabernets that ranged from \$27 to \$3,000, Pinot Noirs from \$30 to \$400, and Zinfandels from \$17 to \$135. The store has a particularly wonderful Bordeaux collection that encompasses the rare, the old and the best of the current offerings.

As an example of just how deep their stock is, I looked for **Robert Jasmin's** hard-to-find *Cote Rotie*. Rarely have I seen more than one or two selections of this wine at any one store. Here I found fairly priced bottles from 1998, 1999, 2000 and 2001. I bought myself a 2001 bottle for under \$40.00.

Bob also runs a wine storage facility at Twenty Twenty, where collectors can rent temperature-controlled space for between 24 to 2500 cases. For additional information call 310-447-2020.

I recommend that you drop by the store some time and browse around. You never know what you may find. While you're there, say hello to Bob and tell him how you heard about his shop.

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We get to welcome yet another star chef to Hollywood. Some of you may remember that I worked with the Hollywood Palace for years. Well, the Palace is

now [Avalon Hollywood](#), owned by Bostonian club owners John Lyons and Steve Adelman. They have dramatically updated the club and hired a chef capable of real innovation – Keith Silverton.

Chef Silverton, 43, began his career under classically trained chef and [Cordon Bleu](#)-instructor Musa Kalles. Silverton opened the famous Cutters at Pike Place in Seattle before becoming Chef of the National Training Team for [Restaurants Unlimited, Inc.](#), where in a mere five years he oversaw the launch of 13 restaurants, including the noted [Skates on the Bay](#) in Berkeley. He left the corporate side and logged successful stints at San Francisco's Fourth Street Grill, Stars, Bruno's and the Park Hyatt at the Embarcadero. The Water Grill finally lured him down to Los Angeles as sous chef, but he quickly moved on to become executive chef first at Cyrano and then Dominick's. And now, he is the top chef for the elegant new [Spider Club](#) of Avalon Hollywood.

When talking about the transition from the Bay Area to Los Angeles, Silverton commented that “coming from San Francisco is more challenging. There are little finds all over that town: small, clean and creative.”

My lovely companion and I had a chance to sample Keith's cooking one night at the Spider Club. Keith proved to be as much of a zealot about superlative service and style as he is about food, and his excellent wait staff should do him proud.

Our tasting started with a lovely, delicate mushroom soup laced with truffle oil. The Caesar salad that followed was made with white anchovies and ground Parmagiano Reggiano cheese to pack a flavorful punch without being too showy. I was quite pleased just after two courses. This guy is good.

We next sampled calamari with lime, Serrano chiles, and beer. The heat of the chiles and lime balanced the “cool” of the calamari and beer. The first entrée we tried is one of Keith's favorites – Maui ribs, a Hawaiian recipe that used a Korean barbecue sauce. The flavor was terrific, but not enough so to overlook the questionable or argumentative quality of the meat.

We next nibbled crab cakes – which were an addictively rich blend of Dungeness crab, guacamole salsa, scallions, cream and eggs – and the shrimp cocktail, made with flavorful Mexican white prawns. I concluded with beautifully prepared oysters. The Malpeques and Kumomoto oysters had distinct yet light flavors that nicely complemented each other. They were quite fun to slurp. (A fork was intentionally not provided.)

Keith wrapped up with Kona coffee and crème brulee, and we rolled ourselves home after a three-hour tasting.

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I recently took two of my [Art Institute](#) wine classes on a field trip to Santa Barbara wine country. Fifty of us made the trip, and I am deeply indebted to Chef Daniel Drumlake and Donald Satuloff for helping me with the event. Our first stop on a

rainy Friday was [Zaca Mesa](#). I found the *2002 Estate Bottled Viognier* full of peach and mandarin orange aromas, with zesty fruit on the palate. It should be consumed relatively soon but could lie down for up to two years. Their *2001 Toyon II* (\$10) proved to be very jammy, which they themselves observed, with some nice perfumes on the nose. I liked last year's Toyon release better, but given its extremely modest price I bought half a case. My daughter and her husband find this to be the perfect casual wine to go with a home pasta dinner. The *Z Cuvee 2001* (\$16), a blend of five Rhone varietals, is lovely and very food friendly. It's drinkable now, but could be cellared for a couple years. Last, I had the treat of pre-tasting a favorite of mine, the *2000 Estate Bottled Syrah* (\$20). This wine has a nose full of licorice, berries, vanilla and spices, and would pair wonderfully with game dishes or Provencal cuisine.

Our next stop was to [Fess Parker](#). I liked the sharp *2001 Chardonnay* (\$28), which had tropical fruit on both the nose and palate. It's more Burgundian than some earlier efforts. I think the *2000 Syrah 'Santa Barbara County'* (\$18) is also coming along nicely. It had a blend of fruit, spice and mint on the palate, with herbal undertones and strong tannins. We concluded with the *2002 Late Harvest Muscat Canelli* (\$12). The sweet dessert wine positively dripped with lush honey, peach, apricot, white grape and citrus flavors.

On our last day of the trip, we visited Iris Rideau's [Rideau Vineyards](#). Iris comes from New Orleans and is a first-class Cajun and Creole cook. She does special dinners at the wineries for hundreds. Among the wines we tasted that day, I found the *2001 Tempranillo* (\$25) to be very nice. The dry wine possessed a full flavor and a slightly acidic finish. The *2001 Syrah* (\$23) was more strongly acidic on the palate but had a nice nose of sweet pineapple and pear. Also notable were the smooth *2002 Viognier* (\$25) and the dryly tropical *2002 Fleur Blanche* (\$24).

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Enjoy. If you have any questions on any of the wines I write about, please feel free to contact me via the [Culinary Connections](#)

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Cheers.

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