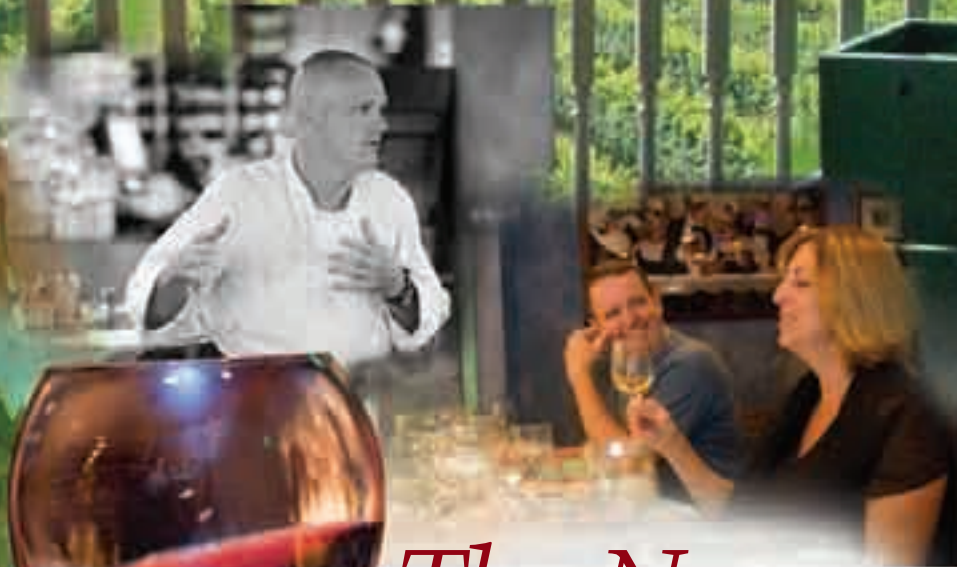


feature

Wine Tasting Dinners



The New 'Social Event'

Friends are gathered. Anticipation grows.
The last of the reservations are seated.
The chef introduces the wine host. *And
the fun begins...*

Wine tasting dinners have been around for a long time. But they are no longer the domain of the wine connoisseurs. The image of a 'stuffy' affair is long gone. Today the event is an adventure in the discovery of great foods paired with perfect wines, all shared with fun-loving friends.

It's a social evening that generally lasts about three hours. As each course is offered, the wine host will delight guests with stories that may include the personality of the vintner, the location of the winery, and the perfect description of the wine and its accompaniment to the food being served.

The chef, of course, plays the key role in the staging of this discovery. For it is the chef who savors the wines; then chooses the perfect food, the most thoughtful sauce, the eye-pleasing presentation, all to create a tantalizing combination that delights all the senses.

The combinations are often surprising. And the event is always fun. You can never go home from the wine-tasting dinners without a food that you will most certainly try again and an exciting list of new wines to share with others.

First Dinner

I attended my first wine tasting dinner with a few wise words from a friend. Lachelle Beazley-Scarlato was unable to attend. Encouraging me to go on with another friend Cheryl Strader, she offered the following:

"Ellie, the word is dry... not "ooooo... it's so sour!" Remember that with each course you will be given a new wine. So if you really like one or two, be very careful about drinking another glass. You have many courses to go. Otherwise, just have fun!"

I was very nervous. After all, what in the world is a child of the 60's raised on Boone's Farm Apple doing at a wine-tasting dinner in a fine restaurant? Well, the rest is history. It was a wonderfully fun evening. And the pairing of wine and food was an astonishing discovery in taste sensations.

Dessert brought my most amazing lesson. The dessert was a very delicate, sweet, caramel topped pastry. When they poured the wine, I was prepared to pucker up and try not to say, "ooooooo... how sour!" But there was no need to worry. The wine was perfect. It was so well balanced for the sweetness of the dessert that I smiled and could barely speak.

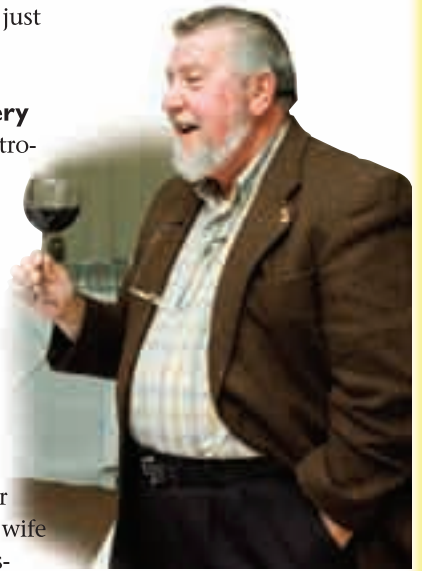
This wine-tasting adventure was just the beginning.

Vandiver Inn and Fiore Winery

The **Vandiver Inn** was our introduction to wine-tasting dinners in Havre de Grace. A group of friends, including photographer Mark Gardner, excitedly anticipated our first course. None of the others had been to an event like this. It was a real test of friendship since they mostly preferred beer!

John Muldoon, proprietor of the Inn, introduced local Vintner Michael Fiore. Michael, with his wife Rose, own **Fiore Winery** in Pylesville, Maryland. It's the only Harford County winery at present. As he enticed us with comments and notes of each of his wines, we were truly entertained. Michael is a Master Vintner. And his wines have won many awards. And this night, he shared his knowledge, wit and passion.

Susan Muldoon, proprietor and chef, created the most perfect complimentary dishes. It soon grew difficult to decide which course, or which wine, we liked better. At one point the phrase 'flavor explosion' was used by a guest. It was repeated frequently. Dessert was a beautiful Chambourcin Truffle by Patisserie Lucie's, a local gourmet bakery.



Served with Fiore's Chambourcin wine, we giggled with delight as we savored the last of the evening's 'flavor explosions.'

The event was a wonderful camaraderie of adventure and discovery. We talked and laughed and so enjoyed Michael Fiore's enthusiasm. The beautiful fall evening in the pavilion at the Vandiver Inn was an evening we hope to repeat.

Aquatica's Taste of Italy

The next dinner that photographer Mark Gardner and I attended took place at **Aquatica's Gourmet Seafood Restaurant**. Chef Mark Laubner allowed the anticipation to build as we waited for everyone to be seated. As Chef Mark introduced us to Todd Ruby, an independent fine wine broker and our host for the evening, our journey of discovery began.

From the moment the first course arrived, we were mesmerized by the perfect blending of wines and foods. Again, it was difficult to choose a favorite. One of the courses neither Mark nor I were very eager to try — scallops! Chef Mark's

with Apple-wood Smoked Bacon Bechamel was absolutely delicious.

Through this new adventure, we were teaching our palate to appreciate new tastes and textures.

The scallops were served with Frascati Superiore, "Villa Simone," Villa Simone 2005 creating an outstanding combination. Todd explained that Frascati was once Rome's pride and joy. This evening, we tasted the Villa Simone Frascati that is recapturing the lovely original flavors and returning it to its extraordinary popularity.

The evening continued with much sharing, laughter and moments of silence as we savored the wonderful blend of tastes and aromas of well-matched food and wines. As you can well notice, I am not a connoisseur. And that, my friends, is the joy of this new social event.

Gather a few friends and reserve your place at the next wine-tasting dinner. Prepare to share an evening of such fun and delight that you'll be anticipating the next dinner before you leave the first one.

Just remember those sage words: pace yourself. There are many delicious courses with beautiful wines to match. And I promise that you'll never once wrinkle your nose in dismay or be tempted to say, "ooooo... it's so sour!" You may have your favorites, but it will all be worth the discovery.



Pan Seared Sea Scallops over Crimini Risotto



A special appreciation goes to **Mark Gardner**, of *Mark Gardner Photography in North East*, for his creative work on this piece. Visit his site at www.gardnerphoto.com or call him at 443-309-3102.



Additional Information

Aquatica Gourmet Seafood Restaurant, 931 Pulaski Hwy. (Rt. 40), Havre de Grace, call: 410-939-7686 or their website: www.AquaticaRestaurant.com

Mike and Rose Fiore at **Fiore Winery**, 3026 Whiteford Road (Rt. 136), Pylesville, MD 21132 or their website: www.FioreWinery.com or call: 410-836-7605 or 410-879-4007

Patisserie Lucie, located on Pulaski Highway behind Aquatica Restaurant, call: 410-939-2650

Vandiver Inn at 301 S. Union Avenue, Havre de Grace or their website: www.VandiverInn.com or call: 410-939-5200