

Hello Spanish Table wine friends!

While I'm a bit tuckered out today, I want to thank all the folks who attended last night's wine tasting at [Gaudi Braseria](#) & made it so much fun... Candlelight bounced off the Mediterranean blue trim & buttercup yellow walls while wine & conversation flowed, making this a cozy affair that really took our minds off the cold--that is until it was time to leave! After all the guests departed late in the evening, we sat down to a midnight family-style dinner of *fidua* with Gaudi owners Jo & Juan Luna, and started eagerly planning our next event. So for those of you who we couldn't squeeze on the list this time, never fear--there will be more!

The crowd loved last night's wines from Spain's Mediterranean coast which featured a really interesting mix of varietals from Garnacha to Tintorera, & from rare regions such as Costa Brava. While all the wines were received extremely well, I'll reveal below the unanimous winners (all three were under \$12!!!)

And if our chilly winter has left you pining for some spice & sunshine, you might consider cruising to Morocco this April with Spanish Table owners, Steve Winston & Sharon Baden.

Lindblad Expeditions has invited Steve & Sharon to be guest lecturers on a [15 day cruise](#) to Portugal, Spain France and England's southern shore. Each night they will share their travel stories & present wines with a different regional focus as you travel on the high seas. And the good news is that while you get educated, the wine is complimentary! For more information & to sign up, check out Lindblad's website at <http://www.expeditions.com>

Salud! **Catherine**

HARIRA (Moroccan Bean Soup) from **The New Book of Middle Eastern Food** by **Claudia Roden**

The national soup of Morocco, *harira* is usually the dish that breaks the daily fast during the month of Ramadan, but it is also perfect "two pot" meal during the chilly months. Claudia Roden is one of those cookbook writers who I inherently trust, so enjoy her version of this classic Middle Eastern dish!

2 marrow bones, washed (optional)
1 lb lamb or beef, cut into 1/2-inch pieces
1 lb small whole onions, peeled, or 2 large ones, coarsely chopped
1 cup chickpeas or beans (haricot, navy, or fava), soaked overnight
3/4 cup large brown lentils, washed
1 lb ripe tomatoes, chopped
4 stalks celery with leaves, diced
1 Tbs tomato paste
1 tsp pepper
1/2 tsp saffron threads or powder
Salt
5 Tbs all-purpose flour
3/4 cup rice or crushed vermicelli (optional)
3/4 cup chopped cilantro
1/3 cup chopped flat-leaf parsley
3 lemons, cut into wedges

Blanch the bones in boiling water for a few minutes & throw out the water. Put the meat & bones in a large pan with the onions & the chickpeas or beans. Cover with about 12 cups water & bring to a boil. Remove the scum & simmer, covered, for 1 1/2 - 2 hours. Add the drained lentils & tomatoes, the celery & tomato paste, pepper, ginger, saffron & simmer for a further 15 minutes, adding water if necessary. Add salt when the lentils begin to soften. This part of the cooking can be done hours in advance.

In a small pan, beat 2 cups of cold water gradually & vigorously into the flour so as not to have any lumps. Add a ladle of broth from the soup & stir over low heat until the mixture begins to boil. Simmer for 10 minutes until it thickens.

If you are adding rice or vermicelli to the soup, it is best not to put it in long before serving, as it gets bloated & mushy. Stir in the rice & cook 15 minutes, or the crushed vermicelli & cook 5 minutes.

Pour the flour-and-broth batter into the soup, stirring vigorously. Add the chopped cilantro & parsley & cook a few minutes more, until the soup acquires a light, creamy texture.

Serve with lemon wedges.

BY POPULAR DEMAND: TOP WINES FROM THE GAUDI TASTING

#1 Espelt Saulo 2005, Costa Brava \$10.99

I've had the chance to enjoy this two times in a week & I just love it. This estate is down the road from famed El Bulli, & the story is that importer Eric Solomon made everyone pull over on their way to dinner when he saw these untapped vineyards. Marc Lafage who also makes Las Rocas & LaFage Grenache signed on as the talent behind the project & he brings his usual fresh, scintillating style to a wine region we rarely see here in the states.

"(A 50/50 blend of garnacha and carinena) Dark red. Inky, expansive aromas of pure, fresh red and dark berries. Open-knit raspberry and blackberry fruit and an absence of obvious tannins make this lush blend delicious right now. Subtle spice notes on the finish. A killer deal." -**Stephen Tanzer's International Wine Cellar**

#2 Bodegas Alto Almanzora Este 2005, Almeria \$9.99

First time available! If you love chocolate, berries, & Andalucia then this is the wine for you... Here's a sampling of Grenache, Cab, Syrah & other varietals anchored by old-vine Monastrell, all from the coast between Granada & Almeria. Substantial but with plenty of luscious fruit.

"(A blend based on 60% monastrell) Deep ruby. The nose offers a complex array of red and dark berries, with complicating floral and herbal qualities. Fresh cherry and cassis flavors are deep and sweet, with firm tannins adding structure. Finishes with a bright jolt of cracked pepper and impressive length. There's lots going on here for the money." -**Stephen Tanzer's International Wine Cellar**

#3 Vinedos de El Seque 2006, Alicante \$11.99

Another great wine from Juan Carlos Lopez de la Calle, winemaker & owner of famed Rioja estate Artadi. While Artadi focuses on Tempranillo, & Artazuri showcases Grenache, this newest project is all about old-vine higher elevation Monastrell. Alicante has a low rainfall & also extremely unfertile soil which means we get to enjoy old vine goodness that comes from deep in the earth. This has a rich nose of dark currants with traces of iron & minerals along with dark chocolate. Intensely flavored with licorice & a silty texture plus a touch of blueberry, El Seque is certainly something Monastrell lovers should add to their wine rack. The previous two vintages have garnered 90 & 91 points from Mr. Parker, so don't wait until the scores to come out--it will be gone!

NEW & NOTABLE

Santa Ema Merlot, Maipo Valley \$10.99

We don't see much Merlot here at Spanish Table, but we always get requests for it... Thank goodness Chile has the answer to our grape dilemma! Santa Ema's journey began when founder Pedro Pavone Voglino emigrated from Piamonte, Italy back in 1917, & now the family has been making wine in the Maipo Valley for nearly a century. This drew me in as soon as I saw the dark rich color & my tasting notes read, "one wow of a nose." Soak in aromas of coconut oil & spice, then dive into plush blackberry, blueberry, & marionberry... I almost forgot that I've been prejudiced against Merlot for all these years!

Bodegas Mano a Mano Venta La Ossa 2005, La Mancha \$14.99

"Opaque violet. Sexy, oak-spiced cherry and cassis aromas offer an array of Asian spices, vanilla

and mocha. Suave dark fruit liqueur flavors are velvety and seemingly tannin-free. Gains focus on the sappy, sweet finish. Oaky, yes, but also packed with concentrated fruit." **-90 points, Stephen Tanzer's International Wine Cellar**

Cortes de Cima 2004, Alentejo \$18.99

The Jorgensens sailed the world to find the perfect winery & where did they land but Portugal? Carrie Jorgensen hails from California (but is of Azorean descent) & her wines possess a great modern expression with sexy fruit & vanilla.

"A finely balanced wine that shows structure as well as rich fruits. It has ripe red fruits, spice and toast that hang well together, the fruit held in check by the structure of the wine. This would be worth aging for two years or more." **-90 points Wine Enthusiast**

COLLECTOR'S CORNER

Michael Florentino Vintage Port 2005, Columbia Valley WA \$24.99 500 ml

I've been getting the occasional call from Washington winemakers that are growing Iberian varietals over the past four years or so, but when down-to-earth Michael Haddox showed up smiling with a bag of his small production wines, his earnest enthusiasm was infectious. Haddox gained his winemaking skills at Columbia Crest & Silver Lake but now has built an incredible facility for upstart vinologists at his gorgeous [Winemaker's Loft](#). As he sid in one interview, he was initially quite skeptical about fulfilling his vision in North Prosser Business Park, but managed to "turn a field of dirt into a field of dreams."

What impressed me most was that Haddox uses only Portuguese varietals: Touriga, Tinta Cao, Souzao, & Tinta Madeira. What also really impressed me was the price. This is vintage port, but in the same price range as an LBV, plus it's drinkable now unlike most young vintage ports. When I asked Mike how long he would advise people to age his port, he said, "I'd tell people to pop one open every year!" and at \$25 you really could. So for all the people who want the structure of a vintage port but without the searing tannins a new release unleashes, who crave the spicy richness of a port that's beautiful in its youth, this wine is hard to resist adding to the cellar. A chance to taste what a pioneering spirit can achieve!

Vinyes Mas Romani Artigas 2005, Priorat \$40.00

A hit at last night's tasting!

"(60% garnacha, 35% carinena and 5% cabernet sauvignon) Bright ruby. Floral-accented strawberry and raspberry aromas are brightened by piquant minerality. Focused, brisk red fruits deliver a spicy punch and show impressive sweetness. Fine-grained tannins hold things together and carry through the long, vibrant finish. This is quite pretty." **-90 points, Stephen Tanzer's International Wine Cellar**

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