

Tom Finneran: From Russia With Love—it doesn't look good...



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The Cellar: Standout Wine + Food From Mohegan Sun's WineFest 2013

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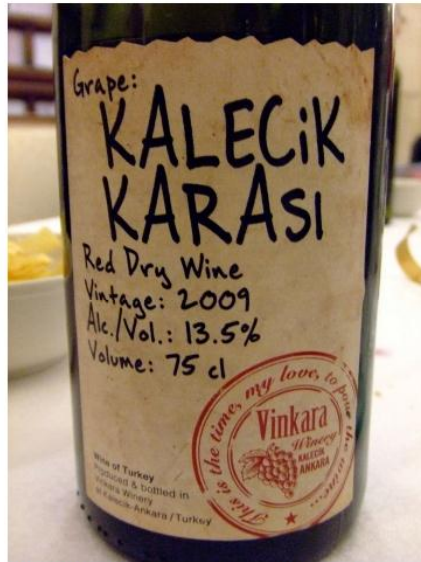
Steffen Rasch, GoLocalProv Wine Writer + Sean DeBobes, GoLocalProv Dining Critic

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This past weekend thousands of wine enthusiasts flocked to Mohegan Sun for the 2013 WineFest. With celebrity chef demos, tastings, and myriad other events for the entire weekend, it was heaven for wine and food lovers. For Wine Writer Steffen Rasch, it led to some great discoveries; for Food Critic Sean DeBobes, it revealed some fine culinary work in the region. See what their standouts were, below.

Wine Standout #1: Turkish wine from Vinkara

A WineFest 2013 standout for me was having my first taste of the indigenous Turkish grape varieties Kalecik Karasi and Narince – both from the Vinkara Winery. Vinkara is a (by international standards) small Estate located in the Kalecik Region close to the Turkish capitol of Ankara. While new to the international stage, the popularity of Turkish wine is growing rapidly. The reason for this is twofold, as Turkish wines have a little bit for everyone. For enthusiasts and Sommeliers who by their very nature always are on the hunt for the 'next big find', the hundreds of indigenous varieties are intriguing. However with international varieties such as Riesling, Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon being grown here too, the everyday wine consumer has plenty to try as well. Oh, and as with most wines from newly emerging wine regions these wines are great values.



The Turkish winery, Vinkara, surprised with intriguing varieties, particularly indigenous grape varieties Kalecik Karasi and Narince.

Wine Standout #2: 2007 Il Fauno Di Arcanum

Best for me was a fantastic red wine which at \$25 probably was the best red value of the event. I'm referring to the 2007 Il Fauno Di Arcanum from Tuscany, Italy. I had this massively complex Bordeaux style blend (57% Merlot, 24% Cabernet Sauvignon and 19 Cabernet Franc) at the Elite Cru tasting which featured some amazing wines from all over the world. For being an Italian, this wine is on the lush side filled with ripe dark cherries, blackberries and velvety tannins. There is however an unsweetened, dusty dark chocolate note, as well as acid, running throughout core of the wine keeping it rustic and lively. Just unbelievably delicious and balanced.

Wine Standout #3: 2004 Gloria Ferrer Royal Cuvee

Finally, the third standout was a fantastic Californian sparkling wine – the 2004 Gloria Ferrer Royal Cuvee. Priced at around \$25 a bottle, this wine is a fantastic value. It is made exclusively with free-run juice from Pinot Noir and Chardonnay grapes (67% and 33% respectfully) sourced from Gloria Ferrer's Carneros Estate. After having been aged for more than 5 years (en tirage), the wine has gained noticeable yeasty notes which is intergraded perfectly with green apples, cream and lemon – in one word this sparkling wine tasted like an extra lemony, lemon meringue pie. Not bad for \$25!

Food Standout #1: Chowder from Octagon

I started off with a new take on chowder, dragon chowder that is. Octagon in Mystic prepares a cream based chowder with lobster, bacon, alligator, skate wing and Sam Adams. This was smoky and robust in flavor. Certainly a memorable mix. While this combo sounds like it may not be for everyone, the flavors worked great together. You could taste a concert of flavors while each ingredient managed to make an appearance on the palate as you enjoyed the bowl.

Food Standout #2: Winter fare from Vivo

Vivo from Hartford went with some classic winter fare. Veal shanks received a braising treatment in beef stock, rosemary, thyme, and Cabernet Sauvignon. The shank was delicate and full of flavor. Chef accompanied this with a Chevre mashed potato. A great choice that held its own alongside a a boldly flavored piece of veal.

Food Standout #3: Sliders from Restaurant Esca

My favorite of the day was take on the slider. Sous Chef Stefan Rarus of Restaurant Esca in Middletown, CT put on quite the show while assembling this large single bite meal. Chef started with a soft and sweet brioche roll. A delicious morsel of pork belly confit (prepared in duck & pork fat) was wonderfully complimented by a house made apple jam with cinnamon, nutmeg, and clove.

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