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The Grazing Gourmet Returns For Wine Tasting Event At Romano's

The Grazing Gourmet is back, lured out of their kitchen by a new development at one of our local restaurants. Read on...

The first monthly wine pairing at Romano's on August 26 was an unqualified success. A succession of great wines accompanied by delicious food left participants complaining in the best of possible ways.

The wines were so good it was a problem deciding which was the best.

The accompanying food was so delicious that everyone overate.

The evening started with a Negroni, a cocktail composed of campari, gin, a splash of vermouth, a twist of lemon. Classic Italian, some liked it and some didn't but no one could complain about the authenticity. Slightly bitter, slightly sweet, cleansing...it was just right.

Then the lights went out while Stan Caputo, owner and manager of Romano's, welcomed the group and introduced the winemaker, Tony Tiso of La Serenissima Vineyards in Sunshine Summit. As waiters lit candles, diners speculated whether the kitchen ran on gas or electricity and the first course and wine were served. Predictably, it was bruschetta and a mozzarella/tomato/basil appetizer. Good if not great, the food was completely overshadowed by the wine, a dark Cabernet Franc

(2007). The appearance and complex nose of the Cabernet Franc belied the bright, clear taste of the wine, reassuring those who thought we were beginning with an overwhelming beverage,

A succession of wines and dishes followed at a perfect pace, each introduced by Stan and Tom, in an evening that was so interesting few remarked the eventual return of electricity. There was crab stuffed salmon accompanied by asparagus and homemade aioli and a white wine, Anes (2009), whose crisp but rich flavor and interesting overtones just shoved most white wines off the shelf. The Arnes, a little known Italian grape that has largely been pushed out of production by the more popular red Barolo and other "best sellers" is best drunk the year of production.

A pasta with a startling heady puttanesca sauce of tomato, anchovy, olives and other, as strong and flavorful and complex as the accompanying Cabernet Melot, was served next. Several diners told Stan that this dish should be on the regular menu—except for the initial bruschetta, none of the dishes served appears on normal evenings.

An outstanding osso bucco with wild mushroom risotto on the side well complemented the true clear Cabernet Sauvignon (2006), yet another incredibly

good wine. This was an 82% Cab, as opposed to the California standard of at least 75% of a varietal grape to be able to use the appellation. The lure of the wine, according to Tony, is not simply the quality of the Cabernet grapes but the additional blend added by each individual winemaker.

Finally there was a light (thank goodness) dessert of cantaloupe and wild Julian blackberries accompanied by a sweet dessert wine from another vineyard which, while good, was a bit too far down the line of overeating and drinking to be fully appreciated.

Billed as "heavy hors d'oeuvres," this evening's food was plentiful to excess while the wines were enough to more than enough for just about anyone. La Serenissima's syrah was available for tasting at the bar (free of charge) as well but perhaps too much had already been drunk to appreciate it properly.

Romano's will feature wine pairings the last Thursday of each month. Next month is Jenkins' winery. Make your reservations early.

"The Grazing Gourmet" is a local resident who has graciously agreed to visit the numerous eating establishments in the area [there are 25] and offer up their opinion of the food and service they receive. The opinions expressed are entirely those of the Grazing Gourmet and do not necessarily represent the tastes or feelings of the management of the Julian News.