

The weekly newspaper for the Italian American Community

L'Italo -Americano

San Diego

Thursday, July 1, 2010

[Sipping Around Carlsbad](#)

by Frank Mangio

Carlsbad is a lovely beach and BBQ town and a city that I have called home for many years. It never occurred to me until recently that in casting around for a story on a North Coastal San Diego community that seemed to be dominating the social wine scene, Carlsbad gets the nod.

Active, events-driven wine shops like Carlsbad Wine Merchants, Wine Loft and La Costa Wine Company compete with restaurants and resorts. New wine and dine places are going up in both the downtown district and village style shopping centers in new communities like Bressi Ranch.

Wine shoppers keep coming back to well run specialty centers like The Forum and Carlsbad Premium Outlets. The city even has its own winery by the sea with Witch Creek Winery, releasing 24 hand-crafted wines from its location on Highway 101. A few blocks away on

Carlsbad Village Drive, the classy, richly appointed PAON Restaurant and Wine Bar is attracting a big following with its steady stream of stylish wine events, including the legendary Frenchman Stephan Asseo of Paso Robles' L'Aventure.

The winery was a perfect fit for the restaurant's California-French cuisine and European style service. PAON was recently named the Best Restaurant in the San Diego area for 2010 by San Diego Magazine. The wine list has an abundance of Cabernet and Bordeaux style blends. L'Aventure has been a Paso signature winery for some 13 years and tonight was spotlighting its new release 2008 Estate Cuvee (\$85.), a blend of 50% Syrah, 36% Cabernet and 14% Petit Verdot, served with an Angus Veal entrée. Asseo's pledge is to make "balanced wines for your pleasure." He asserted that "Paso Robles is one of the few wine countries that French Bordeaux style wines co-exist with French Rhone style wines. This is why I left France. I could not do a wine like the Estate Cuvee there due to restrictions on blends. I don't have a formula when I make this wine. I do have the freedom to create what the harvest, the earth and the weather have given me. I try all the grapes in my vineyard, come up with 5 or 6 blend combinations before choosing the best that I have tasted. 2008 was not the best for the cabernet, so I made this blend mostly Syrah. You can see and taste the strength in the 15.9% alcohol and the purple/black tones

and flavors, with the long, spicy finish. This is an enormously balanced wine which will get even better with aging.”

It was an adventure (which is English for L’Aventure) to engage with this firebrand of fine wine. We hope to see more of Stephan Asseo and his passionate love of French style wines.

I was also fascinated by PAON’s well-cared-for retail wine shop, presently at 170 carefully selected bottles of fine wine, soon to be up to 400 bottles. It’s managed by Jen Graves who has been crafting her abilities for a number of years in San Diego. Not a day later, PAON hosted an important Italian wine tasting in cooperation with Maddelana Brands of Southern California, representing many fine Italian vineyards and wineries. As many of my readers know, Italian wines are more earthy, acidic and made to compliment food, than their California brethren. Names to know from this tasting included: La Montecchia from Veneto, Marotti Campi from Marche and Fornacina from Montalcino in Tuscany.

Other interesting Carlsbad locations for great wine and food are: the new Tommy V’s in Bressi Ranch, Vigilucci’s two locations, West and Bistro West and the Mediterranean Café. All will reward you with a Carlsbad style wine and food experience.