



The Ladies Wine and Food Society of Melbourne (Inc.)
REG. No. A0022942F

2024 PRESIDENTS DINNER

MONDAY 22 APRIL 2024

THE ESTELLE, NORTHCOTE

Every two years, the first function on the Ladies Wine and Food calendar for the year, and a much-anticipated event of the Society, is the Presidents Dinner. In 2024, the Presidents Dinner was held at The Estelle Restaurant in High Street, Northcote. Estelle is a much-loved venue by members of the Society, and the evening did not disappoint.

Estelle has a beautifully appointed private room for functions on the second floor. After arriving at the restaurant and moving through the bistro in the 'French style', members climbed the stairs to be greeted by staff Neasa and Nat, serving canapés accompanied by sparkling from the Ladies cellar.

Canapés

Crumpet, honey, pear and stilton

Goat's cheese churros, truffle honey

Bread and Whipped butter

NV Andre Clouet Grand Reserve Brut



From the outset, the dishes for the evening all demonstrated the innovative approaches of the Estelle kitchen on traditional and European cuisines. The crumpet with honey, pear and stilton cheese has the base inspired by a traditional recipe for Polish, a traditional bread making process in Poland. The stilton and pear were finely diced and drizzled with local honey.

Churros are, as we all know, are a traditional Spanish dessert or 'donut'. However, served as a canapé they were flavoured with creamy goat's cheese in the base 'donut'. The 'truffle honey' was flavoured with truffle shavings. The truffles sourced as all ingredients at Estelle from local Australian producers. The truffles in this case came from Truffle Hill in Western Australia, a small independent producer. To infuse the honey with the truffle flavour, truffle shavings are placed in a steamer and heated to 50 degrees Celsius before blending with the honey.

Andre Clouet Champagne, made from 100 percent pinot noir grapes, held up to the robust flavours in the canapés.

Estelle always commences the meal with bread and butter. The kitchen has a philosophy that bread and butter make a precursor for a great meal. Estelle's bread is light and aerated as is the whipped butter. The ladies were told that whipping the butter makes it a great spread on the bread bringing out fabulous flavours from simple ingredients.

Entrée

Grilled quail, hot honey, sweet corn, black garlic

2009 Joh Jos Prum Wehlener Sonnenuhr Spatlese Riesling

2008 Joh Jos Prum Wehlener Sonnenuhr Spatlese Riesling

The Estelle kitchen has a reputation for using fresh, local, seasonal produce which inspired the entrée for the evening. Quail is well known as a starter because of its bite size poultry flavours that run a close race with the full flavours of larger poultry meats. The delicate Maryland of quail meat was grilled, bringing out sweet flavours. This was partnered with the slightly sweet taste of the corn mash. However, the flavours were counteracted with the savoury flavours of the hot honey and black garlic. Hot honey is not only hot in temperature, but in flavour. Chillies are fermented into the honey with soy, garlic and salt to create a blend of sweet and savoury. As black garlic is not as acidic as white garlic, it added to the complexity of the dish. The flavour of the garlic is tempered by pickling the garlic in a fermentation prior to cooking it.

The quail dish was chosen to accompany the intended wines for the evening, two consecutive vintages of JJ Prum Wehlener Sonnenuhr Spatlese Riesling. The wine committee often seeks to purchase wines that can potentially be paired for tastings. In this case, we had a rare opportunity to compare two wines from the same maker, of the same grape variety, made from grapes from the same vineyard. With 2009 being the warmer vintage (also regarded as one of the great vintages for German wines), the wine was richer with tropical characters and great complexity as it developed in the glass. It seemed a touch sweeter than the 2008 wine which was from a cooler, later ripening year, and featured more minerality and acid to balance its sweetness. Personally I thought that both wines were drinking incredibly well, with their slight sweetness matching the sweet components of the quail dish: the sweet gamey meat, and accompanying corn and honey. While a Spatlese wine is on the dry end of the spectrum of German Rieslings, people who are not familiar with such wines can find their sweetness a challenge. In Germany, they are paired with a very wide variety of savoury dishes, being regarded as highly versatile. These are long living wines where further cellaring will continue to reward.



Main

Lamb rump, charred capsicum, olives, capers

2010 Domaine Henri Gouges Nuits St Georges 1er Cru Les Chaignots

2010 Domaine Henri Gouges Nuits St Georges 1er Cru Les Pruliers

Lamb is not a dish often had by the Ladies at functions. So, when the dish was offered by Estelle for the dinner we decided to take the opportunity to enjoy a different approach to the tradition. The dish was a combination of many ingredients from different cultures and cuisines. Head chef Gill described the lamb as a combination of flavours and styles from the Mediterranean, Provence and Marseille. It was inspired by his experiences working in Germany, Italy and France.

The lamb was roasted and pink in colour. Many members were intrigued by the puree accompanying the dish. Was it bean? Semolina? Why was it included in the dish? It turned out to be eggplant. Gill explained that the puree was used as a palette cleanser for the combination of flavours in the dish.

This was a rare night of very close wine comparisons. With the main course, red Burgundy (France): same maker, same vintage, same grape variety (pinot noir), the only difference being the vineyards (both premier cru rated vineyards). In Nuit St Georges there are no grand cru vineyards (the highest quality). This does not diminish the quality of some of the premier cru vineyards, some of which are unofficially regarded as grand cru in quality. So we learnt that Le Pruliers, being located to the south of Nuit St Georges, is known for wines with more muscle and drive compared to the vineyards of the north (such as Les Chaignots) which produce silkier and more elegant wines. Wines were not served blind, as the exercise in noticing wine aromas, flavours and textures was challenging enough. Both beautiful wines which developed in the glass and have much life ahead of them. One wine writer suggested, of the Les Pruliers, drink 2022-2075!

Dessert

Coconut semifreddo, pineapple, lemon verbena granita

Everyone loves ice cream, and all Australians fondly remember the inclusion of pineapple in any Summer dish, whether it is entrée, main or dessert. However, it is a long time since any of the Ladies had seen pineapple included in a dessert, as most relegate pineapple as a canned fruit used in dishes of those endless progressive dinner parties of the 70s.



However, in a nod to Australian tradition that Estelle is known for, the macerated and pickled pineapple topping on the semifreddo was a treat. We all know how many Italian milk bars across Melbourne had a rock-solid frozen version of an indeterminate Italian version in their chest freezers. However, at Estelle the humble Italian dish is taken to the next level. The use of coconut as a base is the start. Again, if we were expecting the regular icy lemon granita,

we were disappointed and equally delighted. The Estelle kitchen has also provided a twist on the traditional. By using lemon verbena as a flavour, the granita with a milk base is freeze dried to create a form of 'granita popcorn'.

No wine was served with dessert, so as not to confuse with an additional flavour in an already complete dish.

The ladies finished the evening with a 'tete a tete' with Head Chef Gill who explained some of the intricacies of food preparation and the development of dishes unique to Estelle. As a long running venture of Scott Pickett, Estelle branches out with a range of offerings throughout the week including 'Sunday night roast' and 'Tuesday steak night', all providing a contemporary take on the traditional Australian suburban favourites. I am sure many of the Ladies will return!

Kathy Henty-Ekers

Food Master

Janet Harper

Wine Master

