



## wine and dine

Eat, drink, and get to know your winemaker. | by Teri Citterman

**B**rian and Karen Ferris were attending their first wine dinner. They're devoted fans of Mark Ryan Cellars and sought out a chance to drink the wine, meet the winemaker, and learn more. Terry Matthews, a recreational collector and fruit winemaker, was there with his girlfriend Shelly, who'd given him the dinner as a birthday gift. We were all strangers, sharing a table at a raucous, make-new-friends event at the Waterfront Seafood Grill in December.

Winemaker dinners are an excellent way to explore wine, divine food, and new acquaintances. Dinners are scheduled year-round and range in price from about \$75 to \$200, depend-

ing on the winery and the host restaurant. There are all types of dinners—a social affair with strangers or intimate occasions for two, such as a recent Barolo wine dinner at Assaggio Ristorante. The owner, Mauro Golmarvi, hosted a wonderfully warm and personal experience with small tables set for two and four. The attention was on the food, the wine, and the person you were with. Between each course Italian winemaker Maurizio Anselma of Anselma Winery spoke about the intricacies of the wines, then left the guests to experience it on their own.

In contrast, diners at the Waterfront were buzzing with questions for Mark McNeilly of Mark Ryan Winery in Woodinville and Trey Busch of Basel Cellars in Walla Walla. The winemakers paired a collection of hand-selected wines with an array of dishes prepared by Waterfront chef Barry Credeur. Though there are no rules, nor any one way to do a wine dinner, the most conventional method is to finish each glass

**Winemaker dinners** Vintner Trey Busch (top left) expounds on merlot; Busch and Mark McNeilly (above) brandish their bottles.

by the time the next course arrives. But another way is to save wine in each glass to try with each of the different dishes, so you can taste how the flavors of the different wines are revealed with each dish.

The dinner opened with lobster soufflé accompanied by a 2005 Mark Ryan Chardonnay, followed by pork tenderloin with whipped sweet potatoes and spiced apples paired with a 2004 Basel Cellars Columbia Valley merlot. As the conversation at our table turned toward homeless kids and volunteering, we enjoyed the next delicacy, five-spice duck with warm fingerling potatoes and frisée salad. This was paired with two syrahs—different as night and day. The 2004 Mark Ryan Wild Eyed syrah, made with five percent viognier, in Rhone fashion, was big and ripe compared to the 2004 Basel Cellars Lewis Vineyard syrah, a complex, black-peppery wine. Our tablemates were split in terms of who liked which wine better; but we all agreed that, though distinctively different, when paired with the duck, both syrahs were equally delicious.

Conversation moved to the pungency of Indonesian durian fruit and the sensuality of Oregon pinots. Karen had been learning about wine through her local wine retailer. "As you get to know them and they get to know you, you begin to trust their recommendations, and when they call you up and



# AZURA

Contemporary Asian Bistro and Sushi Bar  
1216 Pine . Seattle 206.264.0133

## Flirt because you can Mix and mingle on Valentine's Day at Azura Asian Bistro

You may be single, but that doesn't mean you're alone! Azura invites you and your friends to a lively night in its ultra chic open dining room and sushi bar on Valentine's Day. Come on in and flirt because you can, not because you have to

Feast on Chef Ed Tang's passed appetizers of Kobe Beef sliders and endless creative sushi rolls.

We'll have the champagne waiting too!

## Feb. 14 - 7 p.m. to 2 a.m

### \$30 per person

(includes appetizers and glass of champagne)

21 and over - Please call to reserve your spot: 206.264.0133

where land and sea come together  
Pine and Melrose - Capitol Hill  
Dining • Cocktails • Happy Hour

## crush

say they've got one case left of something they know you'll love, you eagerly hand over your credit card." Next up was pan-seared filet mignon with radish, fava beans, and grainy mustard sauce, perfectly paired with two big, juicy blends, 2004 Mark Ryan Dead Horse and estate-vineyard signature 2003 Basel Cellars Merriment. By this time, we were all fast friends and planning our next wine experience together. The chef appeared center stage and threw out a "How's everybody doing?" The howling applause sounded more like the audience at a Mötley Crüe concert than a wine dinner. As the evening wound down, Terry ordered a 20-year-old Porto Roche tawny port and we finished with a fried banana-stuffed crepe in a rich, smooth chocolate sauce. We raised our glasses and toasted new friends, great food, and fabulous wine. ✨

### WINEMAKER DINNER TIPS



To find out about upcoming wine dinners, visit Web sites such as [www.seattlewinesociety.org](http://www.seattlewinesociety.org) or [www.winesnw.com](http://www.winesnw.com), or sign up to receive mailings from your favorite winery or wine store.

- 1 Save a little of each wine** so you can try a sip with each course. This is a fun way to learn about food and wine pairing, and allows you to see how the wine changes with exposure to air. Oftentimes the wine you think you like best is not your favorite at the end of the night.
- 2 If you really love the wine dinner's featured winery, you can request a seat at the winemaker's table** when you make your reservation.
- 3 Eat!** Eat a significant lunch with some starch, and eat lots of bread through the dinner. Going famished to a wine dinner is the best way to ensure a relentless headache in the morning.
- 4 Arrange for transportation home** so you can really enjoy yourself and not have to worry about driving.