

THE HEDONIST'S GAZETTE

Press

October 2005

This charity event to benefit the scholarships established in my name at the Culinary Institute of America was held at one of Napa Valley's hottest restaurant, Press, an impressive California interpretation of a great French bistro. Owners Leslie Rudd and Reuben Katz have created a beautiful setting with great food, a knock-out bar, and a huge wood-burning fireplace where the rotisserie chickens are cooked. The only disappointing dish was the over-cooked Taylor Bay scallops. The steak tartare, the wonderful butter lettuce salad with Heirloom tomatoes, and the Sonoma Valley organic chicken were all superb, with the latter one of the finest I have tasted in America. The l'Amis Louis-inspired potato cake was very good, but not quite on par with the original in Paris. Nevertheless, it was a noteworthy clone and well-worth another visit to this restaurant. The quality of the dry-aged New York strip steak was also first-class, offering intense flavor as well as that smoky meatiness of aged beef. Kudos to Chef Keith Luce.

The drinks began with an old fashioned, artisanal gin made by Leslie Rudd, his Distillery 209 cocktail. I rarely drink hard liquor, but I must say this was the smoothest gin I have ever had. Served straight up and ice cold, it was pretty amazing ... but what do I know about such things? We then moved to a **Marcassin 2000 Chardonnay**, but, unfortunately, both bottles were badly corked. Next came the **2002 Beaux Frères Pinot Noir Upper Terrace**, the wine my brother-in-law and I produce. As usual, I can not comment on that wine. That was followed by three splendid reds, all distinctive. The **2002 Colgin Cariad**, which was decanted by Press's impeccable wine staff, was spicy, rich, concentrated, and young, but typical of Napa's 2002 vintage ... beautifully fruit-driven, full-bodied, and opulent. **Domaine Pégaü's 2000 Châteauneuf du Pape Cuvée da Capo**, shipped from my cellar, may have been suffering from transit as it was slightly more closed than previous bottles have been. Nevertheless, it was a huge, old style, Grenache-dominated Châteauneuf du Pape offering notes of garrigue, kirsch liqueur, earth, and pepper. It was nicely complemented by the **Sine Qua Non 2000 Incognito**, a blend of primarily Grenache and a small dollop of Syrah. Pure and rich, with some spice as well as gorgeous amounts of blue and black fruits, and a broad, expansive palate, it offered a stunning New World counterpoint to Pégaü's old vine Grenache. We finished with a fully mature **1970 Graham's Vintage Port**.

I will definitely visit Press again as I love the style of high quality raw materials prepared simply by the chef and his team. There is no question that Leslie Rudd and Reuben Katz have managed to secure some of the finest products in the United States, and present them in a brilliant interpretation of a French bistro.

[Press](#), Route 29, St. Helena, CA; tel. (707) 967-0550

Menu:

Course 1: Steak tartare; Taylor Bay scallops; Hog Island oysters in a leek and crème fraîche

Course 2: Butter lettuce salad with Heirloom tomatoes

Course 3: Whole Sonoma Valley organic chicken cooked on a wood-fired rotisserie, with roasted potato and garlic cake "Chez l'Amis Louis"



Course 4: Dry-aged New York strip steak with King Trumpet mushrooms and hand-cut

VINTAGE	WINE	RATING
2000	Distillery 209 Gin Marcassin Chardonnay (corked)	?
2002	Beaux Frères Pinot Noir Upper Terrace	?
2002	Colgin Cariad Proprietary Red	96
2000	Domaine Pègaü Châteauneuf du Pape Cuvée da Capo	98+
2000	Sine Qua Non Incognito (primarily Grenache)	97
1970	Graham's Vintage Port	92

Note to Readers about the Hedonist's Gazette

The abbreviated, spontaneous, and visceral tasting notes and numerical ratings in this section should not be confused with professional, structured tasting notes from specific peer group tastings or cellar tastings. The Hedonist's Gazette notes emerge from casual get-togethers, with the food and company every bit as important as the wines. I do not consider these tasting comments as accurate or as pure in a professional sense, but they are part of a wine's overall record. In short, focus, so critical in a professional tasting without food or other distractions, is clearly on a different level in such "fun gatherings." —Robert M. Parker, Jr.

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