

The Wine Guy
Jeff Richards' wine column for Saturday 2/19/05

Red Newt raises the bar

The Wine Guy column by JEFF RICHARDS

The new bar at Red Newt Cellars Bistro is beautiful.

After David Whiting and his brother, John, ripped out the original bar, they needed to come up with a new design that would better serve the business. They spent the better part of a whole day before John sketched out a shape they thought would work.

The four-sided tasting bar utilizes oblique sides to create a unique hardwood station that seats up to 12 customers. John crafted the bar using a combination of maple and red oak hardwoods to create the stunning addition to the dining area. Several coats of lacquer were applied to the maple to protect the surface.

There is even a brass foot rail near the base of the bar for added customer comfort as they sit perched on stools.

Although the bistro lost six to eight seats for regular dining, 12 were gained at the tasting bar.

"We wanted the wine bar to have its own space but still be part of the dining room," Dave says.

The bar provides an ideal way to sample wines while getting something to eat. "We wanted to do flights since the beginning," says Dave. Over the years they have collected some great Finger Lakes wines to include on their Bistro wine list. Now they are able to offer them by the glass at the bar rather than sell them only by the bottle.

Dave paired similar wines to be tasted side-by-side in eight different flights using the wines they have acquired over the years. Some flights are horizontal, that is, the same grape type from different wineries.

Others are vertical flights, like the Red Newt Cellars Riesling Reserve flight that includes tastings from Red Newt's 2003, 2002 and 2001 vintage Riesling Reserve wines.

There are eight recommended flights, four each for red and white. If you are adventurous, you can create your own unique flight by pairing any of the 24 wines offered by the glass. According to Dave, the reason the bistro now can offer 24 different wines by the glass is because of the investment in a vacuum system that preserves the wines.

Depending on the flight you choose, you may be sampling wines going back to the 1999 vintage. Although you may not be able to buy these wines any more, you certainly can savor a bottle with dinner during your next visit.

If you are not interested in trying a flight, you can order a glass of wine to go with the lighter fare that's offered at the wine bar.

Red Newt co-owner and Chef Deb Whiting has created a wine bar menu with 10 items including soups, cheeses, sausage and even a chicken and wild mushroom pot pie. Dave selected wines from Red Newt's inventory to accompany the new dishes. Each flight lists a suggested appetizer from the new wine bar menu.

When the bistro -- with new wine bar -- reopened Feb. 3, I could not get past the first two menu offerings because they sounded so good. The sauteed chorizo (sausage) and apples over collard greens was spectacular. The apple cider reduction added a lot of sweet fruit taste.

To go with my first appetizer, I took the off-dry Riesling flight, all 2003 vintages. The Red Newt Cellars' Riesling has a lot of citrus and lemon in the nose and taste, with a crisp finish. It was a great complement to the mild, yet spicy, sausage.

The Hosmer 2003 Riesling is sweeter, with peach in the nose and orange and apricot flavor. Wow, did that go well with the cider reduction! The Fox Run Riesling had citrus and lime in the nose with a mineral and lime finish.

My next appetizer choice was the house-made ravioli resting on collards, filled with garlic mascarpone and topped with dried cranberries and roasted garlic cream sauce. The ravioli, with its sweet, smooth, creamy sauce and garlic filling was subtle, but flavorful.

I paired a Cabernet Franc flight with this dish. The 2002 Anthony Road selection has vanilla and oak in the nose, with dark cherry flavor.

The Red Newt Cellars Cabernet Franc has smoke, leather and cranberry in the nose and taste, with a little tannin hanging on the tongue. It is a fuller, richer wine than the previous one.

The 2001 Cabernet Franc from Prejean has lots of fruit in the nose with a rounded fruit flavor, reminiscent of a ripe fig.

The new tasting bar is perfect for those who want to have a light but elegant meal with some exceptional Finger Lakes wines.

Jeff Richards' wine column appears monthly. For comments or questions, he can be reached at 607/271-8279 or 800/836-8970, ext. 279, or e-mail: jrichards



JEFF RICHARDS/Star-Gazette
Co-owners David and Deb Whiting toast the new wine bar at Red Newt Cellars Bistro, with 24 wines by the glass and an appetizer menu