

# Great Restaurants

# Great Wines

A long, long time ago, in the land of the Ancient Greeks, Dionysus, or Bacchus as he was known to the Romans, was the god of the vineyard and the wine. He was worshipped by prince and pauper alike as the god of joy and ecstasy, of fertility and fruitfulness. (At the same time, he was viewed as a heartless god, savage and brutal to any who challenged him.) A five-day festival was held in his honor: a wild, ecstatic celebration that took place in springtime when the grape vines burst into new growth. All business ceased, prisoners were released from their cells, and everyone gave themselves up to the pleasures of wine and song. The theater that was built to honor Dionysus still stands in Athens today, testimony to the long-time love affair that people everywhere have had with wine.

And our passion continues. Of course, we don't worship a wine god like the people of legendary Greece did, but we continue, nevertheless, to marvel at the pleasures, nuances, and complexities of wine that 5,000 years of winemaking have produced. We enjoy our wine alone, we sip it with cheeses and hors d'oeuvres at a party, and we sa-

vor it as an integral part of a meal. The right wine paired with deliciously prepared food is a rite and a festival of its own, a delight and celebration no matter what the occasion. And when imbibed in pleasant surroundings, whether charming and simple or formal and splendid, we always have an affair worth remembering.

We're lucky here in the Greater Philadelphia area. With so many exciting, beautiful restaurants that offer excellent service and ambiance along with great food and great wine, we have a plethora of choices for our wining and dining experiences. In fact, some of the very best wine cellars of the world can be found right here in the Delaware Valley. The following local restaurants have wine lists which show imagination, breadth, depth, and skill in matching interesting wines with their menus. All of them provide old, bold, and exquisite vintages for the experienced wine drinker as well as softer, easier wines and expert advice and suggestions for the novice.

Whether you're headed for Philadelphia or West Chester, Medford, Almonesson, Mount Laurel, or Cape May, remember, wine isn't just for

by Leah McClellan

those who know wine. It's for everyone—connoisseur, neophyte, and the just-barely interested—who enjoys the luxury and indulgence of the world's oldest beverage.

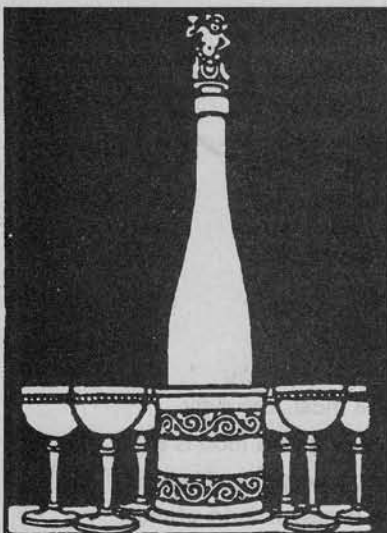
## Beau Rivage

The restaurant's name means, appropriately enough, "beautiful shore," and the tranquil setting for this country inn is charming indeed. Nestled in a wooded area overlooking Lake Pine in Medford, New Jersey, Beau Rivage offers a unique wine cellar as well as delicious, classic French cuisine. No matter what your palate prefers, if you luxuriate in sipping your wine far from the crowd, Beau Rivage is for you.

According to owner/chef Gerard Gehin, the restaurant's cellar offers "almost everything" in the way of wine. "We have the best wine list in the area,"

Gehin asserts, and his confidence is not unfounded. In 1992, Beau Rivage was the proud recipient of the DiRoNA award (Distinguished Restaurants of North America) which is presented to an elite 1 percent of restaurants in the United States, Canada, and Mexico. This award "reflects the highest standards for food, wine and spirits, service, atmosphere, and value." Beau Rivage was also rated "excellent" by *Wine Spectator* from 1989 to 1997 and "Best French" by *New Jersey Monthly* from 1987 to 1997.

Beau Rivage's diverse wine list features a breadth of affordably-priced representatives from almost every major growing region around the world. With French Burgundies forming the core of the collection, unique wines from Switzerland, Portugal, and Spain are also stocked. Rich, deep Cabernet Sauvignon from California vineyards large and small are stocked side by side with fruity Oregon Pinot Noir and Washington State Chenin Blanc. Chef Gehin chooses his wines carefully and samples them regularly to ensure their quality. A Hermitage Crozes, a Sylvaner Hugel, a Louis



Latour—there are wines here for all tastes and all budgets. In addition, their charming cellar, a storage place for all these special wines, can also be reserved for private parties.

Whether your dinner is a rich-flavored *Filet de Boeuf Wellington* or a delicately-seasoned *Coquille St. Jacques Dijonaise*, an expert server is well-trained to assist you with your wine choice. You can even decide on a special wine and then select your dishes to compliment it. Whatever your pleasure, from vintage Ports and elegant Sauternes to well-aged Burgundies, over 500 selections and 15,000 bottles (\$20 to \$200) please both the connoisseur and neophyte alike at Beau Rivage. You can be sure to find something you like.

## The Washington Inn

If a salty sea breeze and Victorian charm is more to your liking than fresh-scented pine forests, be sure to stop by The Washington Inn in Cape May, New Jersey. A restored 1840's plantation that features imaginative, contemporary American cuisine, the Inn's wine cellar has frequently been recognized for its extraordinary selection and has been the recipient of a number of awards, including the *Wine Spectator* "Award of Excellence" and *New Jersey Monthly's* "Best of the Best" in the "Readers' Choice Awards."

Like Beau Rivage, The Washington Inn can accommodate almost any taste. Chardonnay, Pinot Noir, and Cabernet Sauvignon from major California vineyards are featured side by side with French Red Burgundy and Australian Shiraz-Cabernets. Unlike Beau Rivage, however, the focus is constantly changing. "We don't have an allegiance to any particular area," says owner Michael Craig "We search around the world for good wine. We taste, we sample, and if we like it, we buy." Two growing areas with excellent wines at excellent prices that are hot right now and featured at the Inn are South Africa and Chile.

The Washington Inn also offers a fine assortment of wine by the glass, and their servers are well-trained with solid suggestions. If, however, choosing from over 450 selections of wine by

the bottle is intimidating to you, or if you're celebrating a special occasion and want to pair an unusual wine with your meal, Craig urges you to speak with the maitre d' or himself. "We enjoy talking with novices and connoisseurs alike," he says. "It's part of our job and an integral part of what we're all about."

To help you truly enjoy your wine experience, Craig has a few words of advice culled from years of learning and experimenting: "Learn and make it fun, let price influence your decision, and don't be afraid to ask questions. And remember, whether you're experienced or inexperienced with wine, we welcome you at The Washington Inn."

### *Auletto's Caterers*

Auletto's Caterers in Almonesson, New Jersey, has three things in common with all great restaurants: outstanding food, an inviting atmosphere, and a wine list that passes the inspection of even the most ardent expert. The difference is that Auletto's is an on-premise caterer that hosts every imaginable social function from wedding receptions and anniversary parties to class reunions, business functions, and pool parties. While impeccably-landscaped outdoor areas, a serene lake, beautiful gardens, and classical music create an ambiance that is perfect for any occasion, the wine cellars always take center stage at Auletto's.

During the first hour of any affair, guests gather in the cellars to sample and enjoy as many wines as they like. Cheeses, caviar, smoked seafood, cured meats, and bread accompany the wines. Throughout dinner, a cart with at least eighteen bottles is brought to each table. The steward assists guests with their selections and will also bring out a special bottle on request. After dinner, dessert wines and cordials are wheeled from table to table, and guests may sample what they like.

"Our mission for the wine cellar is to give everyone from the novice to the en-

thusiast the opportunity and the atmosphere to taste and enjoy wine," says Jim Auletto, owner and second generation caterer and wine fancier. "Although our collection includes some of the very best wines from around the world, our guests drink to enjoy, not to impress. Everyone has fun."

With over 300 choices and 12,000 bottles, the showcase cellars are well worth a browse. Under the careful supervision of wine cellar manager Joseph DiAdamo, a wide selection of Barolos and Barbarescos from the Piedmont region of Italy form the core of the Italian wines. The French section, with all regions well-represented, especially Burgundy, is next. American wines, including California Chardonnay and Cabernet Sauvignon as well as wines from Oregon and Washington State, are stocked. You can even taste heady, earthy Czech wines or spicy German Gewurtztraminer. DiAdamo keeps all cellar employees and servers in touch with the wine with

### *DiLullo Centro*

Some good things just don't get any better. At DiLullo Centro, located at 1407 Locust Street in Philadelphia, guests can dine in the delightfully romantic wine cellar where owner

Toto Schiavone has stocked an impressive selection of wines, mostly Italian reds.

"Touching the bottles is always better than just reading the label," says Toto, and he encourages diners to examine the collection. The cellar, which accommodates ten to sixteen guests, is a pre-dinner relaxation exercise and the very essence of charm. Dark wood walls

and a terra-cotta floor are warmly lit with a lovely, overhead chandelier. For guests unsure about their wine preferences, Toto encourages them to select a few bottles and then let their well-trained server help them decide. Whether you prefer a gracious, medium-range red such

as a Nebbiolo or a big, complex Barolo, DiLullo's offers an enjoyable wine experience for everyone. Add to that the ample portions of excellent food, the affordable prices, and the upscale casual atmosphere and you've got, as Toto puts it, "the best Italian restaurant in town."





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frequent tastings and constantly monitors the aging process.

"The majority of wine consumed tends to be light in style," observes Auletto. "But we often open a special wine from the aging cellar for the guest who asks for it." He notes that novices often enjoy something light and fruity, perhaps a White Zinfandel, a Frascati, or a soft German Riesling, whereas a more experienced wine enthusiast might choose a well-aged Barolo.

Providing your special guests with wine is easy at Auletto's. With the Auletto family's half-century of experience in selecting the wines for their cellars and with unlimited tasting included in the price of the affair, every guest goes away a bit richer for the experience.

## La Famiglia

*Wine Spectator* calls the wine cellar at La Famiglia "one of the finest in the world," and if you enjoy sipping your wine in a luxuriously elegant European atmosphere, La Famiglia, located in Philadelphia's charming historic district, should be your next dining destination. With a southern Italian menu refreshed yearly with new recipes from Italy, La Famiglia combines great wine, excellent food, and outstanding ambiance and service to create a memorable experience.

Owner Giuseppe Sena claims that his buying method is pretty simple. "If it tastes good, I buy it," he says. And the list is huge. His restaurant specializes in Italian wines, and, since Italy has been producing wine for some 4,000 years, they've certainly got great winemaking down to a science.

Piedmont Barbaresco is very good right now and so is the Gavi, according to Sena. Popular wines range from nice, soft Sangiovese blends to the hearty, tannic Barolos. With careful planning, Sena is able to choose young wines that move fast and others that will age well and be good for some years to come. "My reputation speaks for itself," adds Sena. "We stay on top of things for our many friends and followers."

Servers at La Famiglia are carefully trained to assist guests with their wine selections. They have a tasting at 12 p.m. and 5 p.m. daily to stay in touch with the wines and be ready with solid recommendations. Sena encourages all guests to ask questions and request the assistance of the sommelier for special occasions and unusual wine-food pairings.

## The Dilworthtown Inn

If it weren't for the fabulous food at The Dilworthtown Inn, the wine list itself would justify a visit to West Chester, Pennsylvania. With 850 selections on hand and 10-12,000 bottles cellared at any given moment, The Dilworthtown Inn

truly earns the *Wine Spectator* "Award of Excellence" it has received yearly for the past ten years. The January 1997 issue of *Philadelphia* magazine calls the wine list "so reasonably priced, it's shocking," and that's not the only reason to take your taste buds to West Chester. While the selections have great breadth — wines are featured from all major growing regions of the world — there is also depth. A diner may choose from any of 120 American Cabernet Sauvignons and 80 Chardonnays or delight in the possibilities of over 80 Bordeaux Chateau, many of which are first-growth vintages. For special merry-making, over 60 thoughtfully-chosen champagnes and sparkling wines are available. And these are just the highlights. Matthew Caine, sommelier, says that the Inn is expanding their collection of French Burgundies right now and are searching for the best. "A wine is good if it's an accurate representation of what it's supposed to be," he says. And what that means, for those of us who aren't quite in the know, is really, really good wine to be enjoyed right now.

"We have some big name Bordeaux and California Cabernets, but you don't have to spend a lot to savor a good wine," says Caine, "More than anything, we want our guests to enjoy their wine experience, and \$25 to \$30 will get you something good that is representative of its class."

The Dilworthtown Inn has been extending warm hospitality since 1780. With their only lighting provided by candles, gas sconces, and roaring fireplaces, the atmosphere of country charm provides the perfect backdrop for any occasion. A traditional continental menu featuring rack of lamb, Lobster Thermidor, and Steak au Poivre combined with Thai and Asian influences delivers an exciting American-Fusion experience. But whatever your dinner choices, the servers are well-trained to help with wine requests. And if you

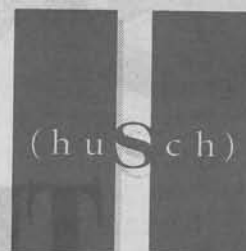
want to savor something really special or even tour the wine cellars, speak with the Inn's sommelier. Recommending wines to compliment your menu choices is his entire purpose; he knows the wine list and the wines.

## *GG's at the Doubletree*

GG's at the Doubletree Guest Suites in Mount Laurel, New Jersey is a small, well-hidden jewel. While their wine list is modest, the choices are excellent, and the prices very reasonable. With some better California wines dominating the list, several excellent white Burgundies, red Bordeaux, and fruity Beaujolais as well as fine Pinot Grigios round it out. Executive Chef Joe Stewart recommends a "very-ber-ry" Saintsbury Pinot Noir from California or any of several choices from Napa Valley's Cakebread Cellars. With over 60 selections on hand, a very nice bottle can be had for \$30 to \$40, with the range from \$24 to \$60. "Our wine list is constantly updated," notes Chef Stewart. "We are constantly sampling and tasting." GG's offers Creative American Cuisine that features specially prepared seafood, game, and chops. The servers and bar manager are well-trained and can assist you with your wine choices

No matter where you choose to dine and no matter what the occasion, a delicious meal and fine wine is always a celebration—it cheers and warms the heart and sort of reminds one of the treasures of living. Perhaps Dionysiac ecstasy isn't quite (yet!) a part of your mealtime itinerary. But someday, perhaps, with the perfect wine sipped with the perfect culinary creation, you may truly, as Dionysus' followers did and as Cicero put it, "Live with joy."

husch in Narberth features the talents of executive chef John Anderson. A C.I.A. graduate, formerly of Striped Bass, John has created a menu that's bold and



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