

THE WASHINGTON PANEL

MAY 2011 • 3.95



A Napa Valley Classic

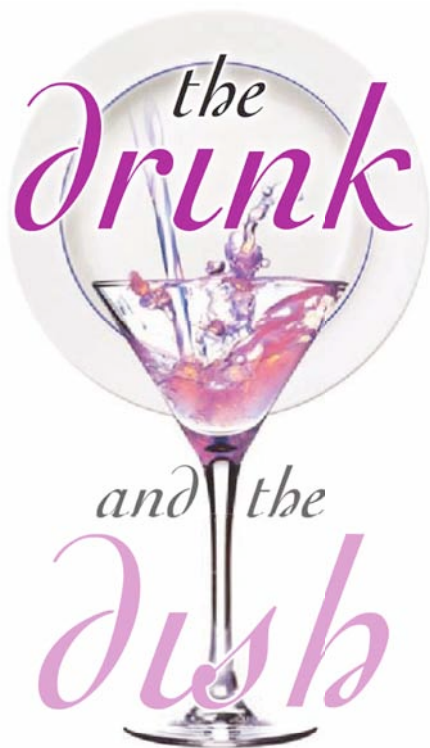
Jean-Charles Boisset's
Raymond Vineyards

Owner Jean-Charles Boisset and winemaker Stephanie Putnam in the Raymond Vineyards cellar.

INSIDE: Results of the 2011 San Francisco World Spirits Competition!



SAN FRANCISCO WORLD
SPIRITS COMPETITION



BRIDGET ALBERT TREKS TO MICHIGAN TO **TRATTORIA STELLA**, A RESTAURANT LOCATED IN THE BASEMENT OF AN OLD STATE MENTAL INSTITUTION, FOR SOME

True Hos

As my husband Jamie and I made a five hour drive recently to the Traverse City restaurant **Trattoria Stella** in The Village at Grand Traverse Commons, my imagination got the best of me. We were on our way to have dinner in the basement of a former insane asylum now converted into one of the top restaurants in the Midwest.

I could hear echos of hospital doors slamming shut a century ago—the wind tearing through the rooms on an otherwise calm night. My friend Terry Brick, a local, assured me that this would be a unique and tasty dining and cocktail experience. As we entered the basement of Building 50, it was a relief to let go of these past visions and be greeted warmly by the staff.

As Jamie and I happily ate our lamb brain ravioli, we sipped on Del Maguey Chicicapa mezcal and Tezón Silver tequila. The bar was stocked with boutique and local spirits, while our plates featured local meats and produce. Through my conversations with staff, I learned that mezcal and tequila are spirits frequently enjoyed by the guests and staff of Stella's.



Myles Anton, Executive Chef and Beverage Professional and proprietor Amanda Danielson of Trattoria Stella.

Chef **Myles Anton** and mixologist/proprietor **Amanda Danielson** graciously shared their love for agave spirits and their passion for Stella's.

Bridget Albert: I know that Traverse City is the cherry capital of the U.S., but talk to me about other local produce and meats that are available.

Amanda: Michigan is the second most agriculturally diverse state in the nation (next to California) and I hardly think cherries are our best feature. They're good, but they have nothing on Michigan tomatoes, strawberries, celery, peaches or apples.

I respect the seasonality of Michigan and the produce you can only get by foraging, not cultivating—like ramps, mushrooms and autumn berries. Berries, in fact, are probably the best of Michigan, from the wild and invasive autumn berry to the more typical blue-, straw-, and blackberries. And, don't forget the grapes! We are producing some truly world class-wines from Riesling, Cabernet Franc, Gamay Noir and other cool climate varieties on both peninsulas, at the base of which lies Traverse City and Trattoria Stella.

Myles: Over the past seven years, we have developed relationships with more than 40 local farmers. During the summer, 90 percent of our vegetables and fruits come from the surrounding 40 miles. The magic of Traverse City is the accessibility of all these

farms. Combine that with the local wine scene, and it's a home run! The heirloom tomatoes, beets, etc., that I procure every summer are unrivalled in my opinion. Not only are they phenomenal products but they travel under an hour to our doorstep.

B.A.: Chef Myles, what have you learned from butchering your own meats?

If it's a simple, less refined style (think worm in the bottle), then it needs to be dressed up for the dining room by any means necessary, which can mean strongly flavored ingredients that will help cut the heat: sweet tropical fruit, umbrellas, etc. However, complicated cocktails often ruin the finer examples of great spirits by masking their

pital-ity

photos by Michael Poehlman

Myles: Last fall I realized that the next logical step was procuring whole animals (pigs, lambs, steers) locally and butchering them myself. Whole-animal butchery makes sense environmentally, spiritually and financially. The heritage pigs I deal with are superior animals to the IBP bulk loins and tenderloins that most of the world uses. Utilizing all of these animals has decreased Stella's footprint on the environment, challenged my creativity as a chef and exposed our guests to unique cuts and preparations. At the end of the day, it makes my soul feel good to show the ultimate respect to these animals, and to celebrate them wholly. Most importantly, they taste superior.

B.A.: Amanda, how do you approach mezcal in a cocktail?

Amanda: It depends on the mezcal.

Heritage Yorkshire-Duroc pork loin with house made Nduja (spicy, spreadable salami famous in Calabria) with tomato relish and fennel pollen.

individual virtues. I generally craft cocktails using only those spirits that rank in this latter category; therefore, like to keep it simple. I key in on the main characteristics of the base spirit, then select ingredients to enhance it. And, it has to look good. The smokiness in the Del Maguey Chichicapa for instance jumps out at you. I want that to persist in the final cocktail, so my other ingredients have to work with it and cannot overpower it.

B.A.: What would you both consider the most balanced tasting tequila/mezcal dish and cocktail pairing? What should be avoided?

Amanda: What grows together often goes together, and with tequila and mezcal, I think of pork prepared with simple equatorial flavors and ingredients. Also, pork takes well to both salt and smoke, which are common characteristics in fine examples of both spirits. Spice is okay, but don't overdo it or you won't taste anything—restraint



THE DRINK: Collo di Cavallo

While having nothing to do with a traditional Horse's Neck cocktail except for the spiral and bitters, I like this version because it really honors the mezcal while presenting it in a very sexy way. Blood Orange rind is so beautiful with its variegated shades of crimson and orange. Collo di Cavallo is simply Italian for Horse's Neck. Then there is the—perhaps not so obvious—*Godfather* reference, but we thought Testa di Cavallo a bit too grim for our hospitable dining room. —*Amanda Danielson*

Recipe: Place a spiral twist of blood orange in a short glass. In a shaker tin, stir with ice two ounces Del Maguey Chichicapa single village mezcal with two dashes of orange bitters. Strain over a spiral.

is key. High-acid fruits like tomato and citrus work well. Avoid anything with cream or a lot of melted cheese. Texturally, you'll end up with something like fresh cement on your palate and have to go running for a beer. In my opinion, the American tendency to turn everything into a big cheesy mess really undermines the nuance of every other ingredient in the dish.

Myles: I generally pair spirits with cuisine from climates and regions that reflect where those spirits originate. I chose pork with a spicy southern Italian sausage from Calabria to pair with the mezcal.

B.A.: Give me a grocery list of items that bring tequila or mezcal to life.

Myles: Fresh citrus: lime is the obvious, but lemon, blood orange, grapefruit—most work well, even pineapple, especially if it's grilled.

Salt: sea salt or kosher salt, never iodized.

Something sweet for smokier styles: honey, agave nectar, even maple syrup—Michigan of course—but in minute quantities.

The syrup left over from candying citrus.

Tomato: think Bloody Maria, salsa, etc. ■■

