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Appetite: Dining with two European winemakers

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PHOTO BY VIRGINIA MILLER

There's nothing quite like dining with the person who made the wine you're drinking -- intimate and focused, it gives one a special insight into what's in one's glass. Earlier this month, I met with three Napa-Sonoma winemakers [1]. Recently, I had the chance to spend time with two Europeans from the unparalleled regions of Bordeaux and Kamptal. Look for these wines in local wine shops -- or ask that your shopkeeper stock them, they're that good.

LAURENZ V., Austria - The Gruner Veltliners and Rieslings of [Laurenz V](#) [2].'s -- whose name is pronounced "Laurenz Five" -- hail from one of my favorite wine-making countries. I adore these two varietals when they come from skilled hands, and those of Laurenz Maria Moser V certainly qualify. He comes from five generations of winemaking, and his

grandfather was the legendary Professor Dr. Lorenz Moser III [3], inventor of the Lenz Moser Hoherziehung trellising system that caught on across European vineyards.

Lunch with Moser entailed colorful stories and many a laugh -- the man is hilarious. It also meant a line-up of gorgeous Gruners from a terraced landscape in the Kamptal region [4], north of Vienna. His wines are stainless steel-fermented, a technique which yields a crisp, bright Gruner profile.

We tasted through seven Gruners, from a juicy 2009 Laurenz und Sophie Singing to his Charming line (years 2005-2009). I was partial to the 2005, full and balanced with acidity and apple spice, as well as the 2006 with its clean nose and creamy yet mineral taste. We even sampled a honeyed 1980 (!) Gruner to witness the possibilities of a Gruner aging -- contrary to popular opinion, they can mature quite prettily.

We ended with a lively citrus-apple 2009 Prinz Von Hessen 'H' riesling and a lush, grapefruit-touched Johannisberger Klaus Riesling Kabinett Trocken. The two reflected the range of beautiful wines that come out of Austria.

Chateau Palmer, Bordeaux, France - When one is invited to a personal dinner with a winemaker from Bordeaux, France, it's a requirement to jump at the opportunity. During three plus hours with Bernard de Laage at Berkeley's Claremont Hotel [5] we tasted twelve Chateau Palmer [6], de Laage's blends of equal parts merlot and cabernet sauvignon with just a touch of petit verdot. Comparing vintages side by side, we were able to gain a deeper appreciation of the inflections and strengths brought by each harvest.

For me, the stand outs were the lush 2000 Palmer, the less aged but still bright 2005 Alter Ego -- a robust, young expression of Chateau Palmer -- an opulent and exuberant 1999 Palmer, and the musty, full, smoky but acidic 2002 Palmer. I actually couldn't find a single low point in the 1998-2006 line-up.

The evening, part of Berkeley Wine Festival [7] (check out its site for future dinners), was over the top -- spectacular views of the San Francisco Bay from the back room of Claremont Hotel's Meritage restaurant. Twinkling lights on a warm night made a brilliant partner to rising star chef Josh Thomsen [8]'s menu. I was duly impressed with all his dishes, and wouldn't be surprised if we see a lot more from him in coming years. My top dish of the five course dinner was the Maine sea scallops topped with Hudson Valley foie gras. Served over rhubarb-balsamic compote and endive, it was the dining pinnacle of the night. But for sheer satisfaction, I'm giving my points to Thomsen's succulent Creek Stone beef short rib.

All in all, a happy marriage of wine, food, people, and setting.

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Appetite Food and Drink Virginia Miller

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[1] <http://www.sfbg.com/2011/06/07/tour-de-tasting-room>

[2] <http://www.laurenzv.com>

[3] http://translate.google.com/translate?hl=en&sl=de&u=http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lenz_Moser&

amp;ei=AqX_TafSEuLciALa8YyfBQ&sa=X&oi=translate&ct=result&resnum=4&
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a&hs=165&rls=org.mozilla:en-US:official&prmd=ivnso
[4] <http://austrianwineusa.com/2010/08/10/the-kamptal-region/>
[5] <http://www.claremontresort.com/>
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