

BAILLIAGE — CHARLESTON

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Enjoying life on the border – a feast of Alsatian food and wine

By Bailli Elect Paula Traktman Duncan

Over the past 150 years, the borders of the Alsace region have changed at least four times – shifting the regions “home” from France to Germany and back again. Thus, it is no surprise that Alsatian specialties truly represent one of the original “fusion cuisines”, featuring strong influences from the cuisine of both countries. The October 19th Chaîne des Rôtisseurs Bailliage de Charleston, SC and Société Mondiale du Vin (Mondiale) event showcased this fusion well, and the attendees were treated to the superb cooking of Chef Chris Licata, our Vice Conseiller Gastronomique, and the array of superb wines chosen by our Host and Vice Echanson Nick Palmer. Alsatian food is hearty and has its origins in “peasant” dishes of the Middle Ages that were built around local proteins and produce. The food that we enjoyed on October 19th kept its “peasant roots” but was certainly elevated in its execution and presentation!

Chef Licata prepared a generous charcuterie board that featured a variety of cheeses, pâtés and sausages, along with apples, grapes, breads and preserves. Guests were greeted with a glass of a lovely sparkling wine, Lucien Albrecht Crémant d’Alsace, which was a superb complement to the charcuterie as well. The Albrecht is unusual in that it is 100% Pinot Blanc and was an amazing accompaniment to the charcuterie. It has tons of fruit and a rich backbone but is dry on the finish. All of the food was beautifully presented in buffet style, and guests filled their plates (and glasses) at will and were able to enjoy the food, wine and lively conversation at various venues on porches and patios of our hosts, Vice Echanson Nick and Dame Dorothy Palmer. The weather was perfect for this Alsatian garden party, and the Palmers’ lovely home featured interesting architecture and décor and stunning views of the Charleston marshes and wildlife.

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With an open kitchen, attendees with a glass of wine in hand gathered around the cooking island to watch and hear our personal Chef for the evening, Vice Conseiller Gastronomique Chris Licata, describe each of the dishes he had prepared. The three main dishes included the iconic “Choucroute Garnie” featuring sauerkraut, pork tenderloin, apples, caraway seeds and juniper berries - all prepared with generous amounts of Gewürztraminer wine. The Choucroute Garnie was paired with a Trimbach Pinot Blanc - another rich wine with low acidity and a note of white flowers - and Kronenbourg 1664 beer was also available.

The guests also enjoyed Coq au Riesling, a stew that featured chicken thighs, leeks, mushrooms, Dijon mustard, crème fraiche and parsley, all braised in Riesling. This delicious dish was paired with a Gustave Lorentz Riesling Reserve which sported an elderflower and lime note.

Chef Licata also prepared a dish called “Baeckeoffe”, which showcased lamb, wild boar, beef and knockwurst along with potatoes, carrots, leeks and herbs. The casserole was paired with Hugl Zweigelt, an Austrian red packed with spice and fruit with cherry aromas, which was served slightly chilled.

Alsatian food is rich in flavor and in substance, and the two desserts provided a wonderful and fruity change for our palates. Chef Licata prepared a beautiful Apple Tart and an inviting and flavorful Cherry Clafoutis. A Reserve late harvest German wine, a Rudesheimer Magdalenenkreuz Spätlese Riesling, was a wonderful complement to these desserts. The wine, with its gold tint and scent of dried hay and nutmeg, added an elegant note to finish the meal. The participants in this lovely Sunday afternoon event included many Bailliage de Charleston members and four guests new to the group. These guests all remarked on the camaraderie, warmth and spirit of the event - which made the excellent food and wine even more pleasurable. That exemplifies the Chaîne - yes, we’re learning about cuisine and wine, but we’re also celebrating the importance that shared meals play in building a strong sense of friendship and community.

Vive la Chaîne!

