

Beer vs. Wine

FOOD MATCHINGMAGEDDON



Lambic or Malbec? IPA or GSM? Pilsner or Pinot Noir?

Thirsty guests attempted to reach a consensus in the heated grape vs. grain debate at Columbia Firehouse's Beer-Wine Throwdown, an intra-Neighborhood Restaurant Group showdown obliging wine director Juliana Santos and beer director Greg Engert to pair six small plates with a wine and beer (respectively) to determine the supreme sip.

Two inspired pairings really stood out.

The tanginess of a tomato, water and Virginia feta salad met its match in both the **2008 Bodegas O'Ventosela Viña Leiriña** (smart Spanish blend) and **Weihenstephan 1809 Berliner Weisse**, a wheat-based beer that brought "bright fruit notes" and balance to "the salty tang of the feta," as per Engert's instruction.

Decadent tuna tartare tacos were tempered by a mineral-driven dry **2009 Schloss Gobelsberg "Gobelsburger" Riesling** (Santos loves to turn on wine drinkers to this food-friendly style of wine, especially those who deem all Rieslings as too sweet) and **Brewery Ommegang Hennepin**, a saison-style spiced beer from New York.

The affable and knowledgeable duo kept the trash talking to a minimum, but Santos did joke, "When they start making beer that deserves to be cellared for five years, tell Greg to call me."

I called a few rounds for vino and a few for brews, and, unsurprisingly, found no clear-cut winner. But I relished the satisfying opportunity to sip, nosh and repeat.—**Kelly Magyarics**



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conspicuous goat cheese (encore!). Lemony skate swims in a sea of crushed hazelnut-lem-on-brown butter sauce, all anchored by a remarkable roasted potatoes, beets and smoked bacon hash (bravo). *3195 Wilson Blvd., Arlington; 703-465-9360. L Tue-Sat, D daily, LN Mon-Sat, Br Sun* ☎ 🍷 🍴 🍷

☎ **RAY'S THE STEAKS \$\$\$** • The more spacious layout (two dining rooms; one accepts reservations, the other remains walk-in friendly) means there's more room for commingling of the carnivorous masses, whether they be gourmet beer-draining businessmen or mohawked youths studiously examining sommelier Mark Slater's burgeoning wine collection (100-plus well-traveled bottles, most very easy on the wallet). Deviled eggs heaped with steak tartare and hollandaise provide a clever play on picnic fare. A roast beef-like slab of picahna plays possum until plunged into a scorching salsa verde (much more satisfying than the pabulum served at many Latin American establishments). Luscious strips of hanger steak are all-natural juices and unadulterated might (absolutely mouthwatering). A generous scoop of roasted bone marrow (surreally fatty intro, livery finish) and garlicky persillade propel regular steak into another dimension. *2300 Wilson Blvd., Courthouse; 703-841-7297. D daily* ☎

☎ **SETTE BELLO \$\$** • This place is no culinary temple; it's more like a gastronomic fun park. Floor-to-ceiling windows ensure that those who come to be seen are—leaving

passersby to gaze in longingly at the feasting and frivolity taking place within. Sunken sofas opposite the bar are ideal thrones for oversized personalities come to play. A snack-sized portion of polpetta reveals a cluster of mini meatballs rolled in breadcrumbs, a spicy tomato sauce at their feet. Coils of shaved fennel and leafy tufts of arugula partner up for a bitter-fresh promenade across the palate, while a sheet of shaved Parmesan ensures salt receptors don't feel left out. Freshly torn basil, pearls of smoked mozzarella (a little goes a long way), diced tomatoes and a confident tomato ragout drive a bowl of herb-laced fettuccine. *3101 Wilson Blvd., Arlington; 703-351-1004. L, D, LN daily Br Sun* ☎ 🍷 🍴 🍷

☎ **THIRSTY BERNIE SPORTS BAR & GRILL \$\$** • Strip-mall sports bars aren't usually known for their rillettes, saucisson sec or homemade bratwurst. Then again, most sports bars didn't snag wandering chef-cum-charcuterie merchant Jamie Stachowski to help launch their concept. Meanwhile, chef Andy Cieslowski continues to put his own stamp on the menu. Whenever available, jump on the charcuterie, as Stachowski is a whiz when it comes to kielbasa (seared bulbs of Polish sausage are sublime), country pate (herb-spiked liver sporting the faintest ring of fat possible) and everything in between. Their hot pastrami sandwich sports pickled red onions, piles of pepper-cured brisket (fantastic) and melted Swiss pressed between nutty, whole-grain pumpernickel. Plain old pierogies go gourmet via a tangy farmer's cheese filling, and seduc-

tive riesling-brown butter sauce pleasantly goosed by golden raisins (well played). *2163 N. Glebe Road, Arlington; 703-248-9300. L Tue-Fri, D, LN daily, Br Sat-Sun* ☎ 🍷 🍴 🍷 🎵 🍷

Culpeper co.

☎ **FOTI'S \$\$\$** • Foti's continues to walk a fine line between quaint exurban gem and commuter-luring dining haunt. The scene can be as serene as a night in your own study—assuming you have access to a gourmet chef and coveted wine library. Or as lively as the evening owner Frank Maragos entertained patrons with yarns about Greece and his barrel-chested, meat-carving pater familias (a man Maragos fondly describes as "a humble butcher"). Cornmeal-crust ed okra and grilled shrimp are buoyed by a seductive sweet corn-tomato-cream medley. Brie smothered in peppers and olives swings from creamy rich to boldly ripe with each bite. A veal duo of braised cheeks and grilled loin (pure, steak-y bliss) marries the majesty of beef to the spoils of the garden. *219 E. Davis St., Culpeper; 540-829-8400. L Tue-Fri, D Thu-Sun, Tue* ☎

Fairfax co.

☎ **2941 \$\$\$** • Chef Bertrand Chemel has made modernization his top priority. Epic tast-