

Ardivino's Desert Crossing Banfi Wine Dinner



Front: Pamela Phelps along with Malena Ardivino, Chef Helena Ritz Unzueta, Robert Ardivino and staff.

Ardivino's Desert Crossing restaurant sits high on a hillside separating Texas and New Mexico. Spectacular sunsets and city lights can be viewed from the dining room. This venue provided the perfect ambiance for pairing the excellent wines from Castello Banfi Winery with the almost spiritual culinary creations of Chef Helena Ritz Unzueta. Chef Helena has been at the helm for the past five years and has a well-deserved excellent reputation. Hosts Robert Ardivino and his sister Malena graciously greeted us on arrival.

Pamela Phelps, District Manager, represented Castello Banfi, an Italian vineyard located 125 miles north of Rome in the famous Montalcino district. A brief history of the Castello Banfi Winery is worth noting here: Castello Banfi is a rarity among Italian wine estates, not just because of its size (some 7,100 acres, of which around 2,400 are planted with vines), its composition of single vineyards or its state-of-the-art winery, but because it was started from scratch less than 20 years ago. Most of the land was covered with forest and brush when the Mariani family found it. Nevertheless, they recognized the site was exactly what they had been searching for.

The first course was a delicate Black Mussel Soup. The mussels were nestled in a creamy Crème Fraiche and Chardonnay broth seasoned with saffron. This velvety soup was paired with Banfi's Le Rime. The aromatic blend of Pinot Grigio and Chardonnay, with its refreshing acidity, allowed the soup to take center stage.





The second course was a Seared Duck Breast Salad. The Maple Leaf Farms duck, seasoned with cumin, coriander and allspice was layered over baby spring greens, drizzled with a sweet balsamic and rosemary glaze, and accompanied by dried apricot and cherry couscous. This creative salad was paired with a youthful red wine, Col-di-Sasso (translation: "Stony Hill"), a Super Tuscan Cabernet Sauvignon, Sangiovese blend, perfectly complementing the glazed duck.

The pasta course, Penne Regate, was prepared al dente, smothered with wood-oven roasted organic yellow tomatoes, garlic and sweet Vidalia onions. This typical Italian dish needed a typical Italian wine. So here our host chose a Chianti Classico Riserva. Chianti may be the single best-known wine in the world. Banfi's blend of Sangiovese, Canaiolo Nero and Cabernet Sauvignon with flavors of vanilla, cocoa and spice, was the perfect choice for this dish.

The main course, creatively crafted by Chef Helena, was American Rack of Lamb with cherry chipotle chutney, Gorgonzola cream sauce, nestled on a bed of Parmigiano polenta. It was heavenly. What better to serve with this exciting dish than Castello Banfi's "Cum Laude"? This Super Tuscan cuvee is a combination of Sangiovese, Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Syrah; a full-bodied red wine with aromas of berries, clove, anise and black pepper.

A rich dessert of triple chocolate timbales served with a fudge sauce and fresh blueberries was enhanced by Brachetto D' Acqui-Rosa Regale, a sparkling red wine that was sweet and appealing.

The guests enthusiastically acknowledged a perfect evening by giving Chef Helena, her staff, and hosts Robert and Malena Ardovino a standing ovation!

INFO

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