

Wine

Two for One

Sommelier duo raises the wine bar

By Alan McGinty

Okay, so they're both named Szabo, and both sommeliers... but that's where the similarity ends. And they're not related. "Szabo in Hungary is like Smith here," says John Szabo. The other one, Zoltan, is Transylvanian, which sounds scarier than it is.

Their surnames may be unassuming (if you're from Eastern Europe), but these two young sommeliers recently paired up to form a consulting service aimed at boosting the quality of wine lists and wine service in Toronto. And talk about bringing out the big guns: John is Canada's first Master Sommelier and Zoltan is going after his Diploma from the Wine & Spirit Education Trust, a path that will eventually lead to the Master designation.

Both are experts on food/wine pairings. Zoltan favours organic or "biodynamic" wine, including unfiltered wines. "I want the winemaker to add as little as possible to my wine. Some winemakers prefer filtered for its clearer, brighter colours, but you are losing flavour, some extract and some concentration."

If nothing else, these guys will knock the image of wine geeks sideways. Zoltan — who is effusively enthusiastic about, well, everything — also promotes the Slow Food movement. (Slow Food doesn't mean digging out mom's Crock-Pot and boiling up cheap cuts of meat for 12 hours: it means, says Zoltan, "slowing down your life, taking the time to use fresh foods... I promote market fresh cuisine and avoiding processed foods. I encourage everyone to move towards healthy eating and drinking habits.")

Jackson-Triggs reigns at Cuvée

By Alan McGinty

There are lots of Canadian wine awards, but only one calls itself the industry's "Oscars." That's because the 200 entries at the Cuvée Wine Awards are judged by a panel of peers — the winemakers themselves — in a series of tastings that narrow the field. Winners for 2005 were announced in March at a sold-out gala in Niagara. Tom Seaver of Jackson-Triggs walked away with the most hardware, snagging awards for best red and best sparkling.

Seaver's winning Meritage — a blend of cabernet sauvignon, merlot and cabernet franc — came from the stellar 2002 vintage. Remember how hot that summer was? Good for red grapes. Jackson-Triggs' sparkling wine win justifies the amount of care and money spent on their stunning ultramodern winery just outside of very traditional Niagara-on-the-Lake. "All the grapes for that sparkling wine came from right around the winery," said Seaver.

Perennial Cuvée winner Sue Ann Staff of Pillitteri picked up the top honours in



Zoltan (left) and John: sommeliers for hire.

For restaurants, the Szabo & Szabo alliance is a win-win situation. These sommeliers even come with a money-back guarantee. "If you don't sell more wine after working with us, we will give you your money back," says Zoltan. Sounds like an offer that can't be refused.

szaboandszabo.com

Food and Wine

Here are a few of Zoltan Szabo's favourite pairings, from the menu and wine list of Il Mulino restaurant (ilmulinorestaurant.com):

Fish and Bubbles

Dish: Smoked salmon on corn cakes with avocado salsa

Wine: Henry of Pelham Cuvée Catharine, Niagara

Oysters and Zip

Dish: Fresh oysters

Wine: Peninsula Ridge Sauvignon Blanc 2003, Niagara

Sea and Chablis

Dish: Fresh linguini with baby clams, Chablis, lemon zest and fresh thyme

Wine: William Fevre Champs Royaux 2003, Chablis, Burgundy

the crowded field of icewines. "I've been fortunate enough to win almost every year at Cuvée," she said, "but each one is more exciting because I never know in advance and each year the competition gets stiffer."

Niagara College Winery's chardonnay took best white; however their wines are currently available only in their small boutique and in a few select restaurants.

The wine delivery outfit winerytohome.com offers assortments of 2005 Cuvée winners, which can be delivered to your home.