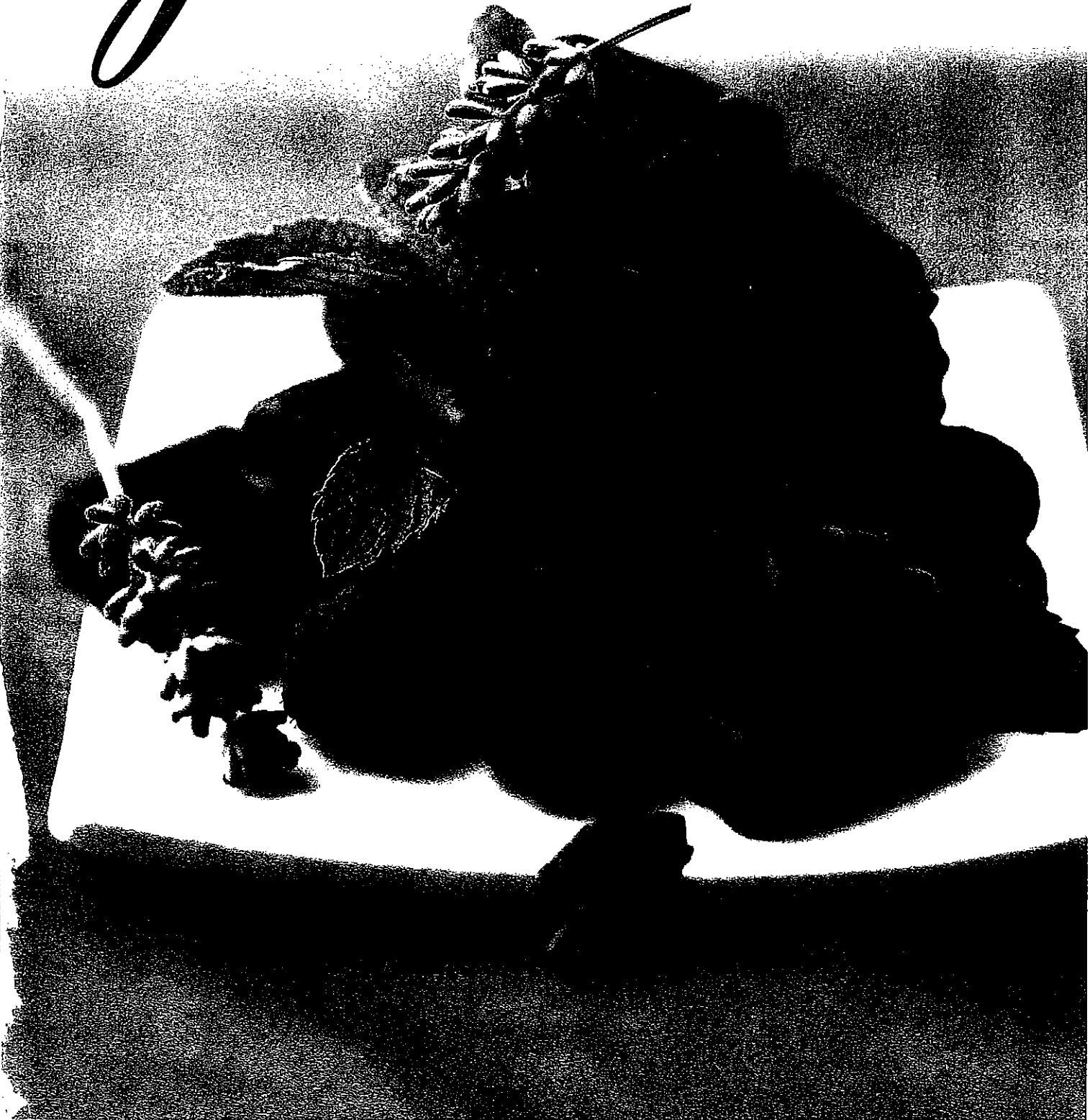


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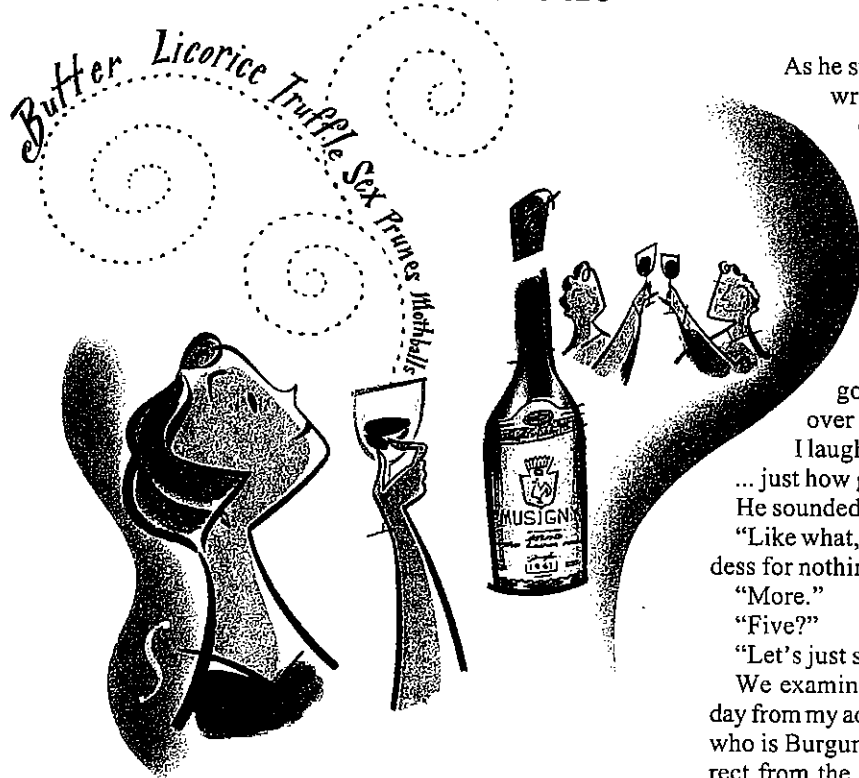
Gourmet

THE MAGAZINE OF GOOD LIVING

ST. PETERSBURG CHICAGO ASIANGPPE



DRINKS: MEMORABLE MEALS



Cinderella's Bottle

When a friend gives you a \$1,000 bottle of wine by mistake, what do you do?

By KATE COLEMAN

WHEN THE BELL RANG, I was up to my elbows in mashed parsnips. It was New Year's Eve, and I'd promised to bring a dish to my sister's house. Opening the door, I was happy—and somewhat relieved—to see my friend David Tanis, then the chef of Chez Panisse. He thrust a bottle wrapped in flashy silver and black paper into my hands. "Happy New Year," he said, with a big smile.

"Oh, you're a dear. C'mon in. You can help me figure out what to do with all these parsnips." David was on his way home across the Bay to San Francisco after menu consultations at César, the tony tapas restaurant next door to Chez P. He set the gift bottle on the end of my butcher block and looked around the kitchen for inspiration, seizing immediately on a wreath of southwestern dried chiles hanging from a wire basket and a knob of fresh young ginger.

"Toast these chiles and crumble them over the top," he commanded, like the cooking guru he is. I busied myself toasting the chiles, and soon the kitchen was filled with their sweet pungency. (I love these spontaneous moments when David turns his culinary genius to my pathetic cooking attempts.)

As he started to chop the ginger, I stripped the holiday wrapping from the bottle. The label looked like old parchment. Its typography was aristocratic. I saw a number and a lot of French words.

"David, what is this?" I asked. "It looks too good!"

He spun around. "Wait a minute, lemme see that."

What? He didn't know what wine he'd just given me?

"Oh jeez!" he said, rolling his eyes. "You've got to promise me something. That you invite me over to share this with you when you open it."

I laughed. "Hey, take it back. I don't mind. So, David ... just how good is it?"

He sounded almost funereal: "Very, very, very good."

"Like what, couple of hundred?" I wasn't a poor slum goddess for nothing.

"More."

"Five?"

"Let's just say it's very good wine indeed."

We examined the label closely. (I learned the following day from my adorable French wine importer, Sylvie Sullivan—who is Burgundian and comes by her knowledge of wine direct from the soil up to the top of her curly head—that the wine, a Burgundy, was a Musigny from Domaine Comte Georges de Vogüé, 1961, with its own reserve number: 002840.) David, who also knows his Burgundies, thought it could easily go for \$1,000 at wine auction. Or more.

How had he come by such a treasure? He had been at the tapas joint, he told me, when one of the silent partners had arrived to deliver holiday gifts and bonuses. This man was something of a freak of good fortune. Not only had he won millions in the state lottery, but he'd been blessed with a dot-com entrepreneurial bonanza. He had given David the wine rather casually, and David had passed it along to me without actually looking at the label. ("Better you than the parking attendant," he said.)

We made a pact: We would organize a dinner around the consumption of the wine. David; his partner, Randal; and me. Just the three of us.

It is almost a year later, and tomorrow, Sunday, is the day of our ritual bottle opening. I am to cook a lamb shank dinner, for which I plan to shop this afternoon.

David calls. "Listen, we just went to the farmers market and we've got a ton of gorgeous food: a Hoffman chicken, beautiful vegetables. What if we cooked the dinner over here at my place tonight?"

I'm all for it. Good God, I'd be relieved of cooking for one of the great Bay Area chefs. But I worry about transporting the wine, possibly shaking up the sediment.

"Don't worry," says David. "Just carry it with great care."

I dress with great care, too, because this evening is a rare luxury for a freelance writer who, these days, with the continuing deregulation of California's energy industry, is loath even to turn on the heat. Luckily, I have my dead aunt Valerie's plush fox-fur collar and I wear it—both to accessorize the wine and for warmth.

"What a fabulous fur!" Randal exclaims, ushering me into their cozy kitchen. We are all excited as we unwrap the carefully swathed bottle.

"Shouldn't we decant it?" I ask, betraying my ignorance.

Randal, a wine snob of the best sort, demurs. "With Burgundies this old, this good, you never decant."

"Should we let it breathe?"

"No way. You open it at the precise moment you're ready to drink it. Wines like this can turn quickly once they're opened."

"Oh my goodness. Who knew you're supposed to guzzle down a thousand-dollar bottle of wine!" I exclaim.

Burgundies, Randal explains, are pure Pinot Noir and thus very unstable. It's like getting a blast of something rare ... and then it's gone. Plain old Bordeaux from Cabernet grapes or Merlot can last almost forever, but Burgundies are the stuff of dreams. So we open something else to start. A rosé.

Randal tastes it. "Funky," he declares disdainfully.

David takes a sniff. "Ugh." And pours it down the sink. A new bottle is opened. Randal smells, grimaces, tastes. "I dunno. What do you think?" He pours a taste for David.

David inhales, sips, and pronounces this one acceptable. I am relieved, as I'm afraid this might start a pattern of tossing wines down the sink.

Both Randal and David have warned me not to get my hopes up about the ultimate bottle. "It could very well be vinegar by now. It happens," cautions Randal. "Musigny's Comte Georges de Vogüé is known for great, perfect wines, but you never know how it has been transported or stored."

The homey, organic, free-range chicken in David's pot-au-feu begins to offer up its own tantalizing scent. First we eat bright radishes, their decorative stems attached, along with olives and salami from David's favorite charcuterie in Paris (where he and Randal had vacationed just the week before). Randal shows me pictures from their trip, mainly of their dog, an Asta look-alike that must have wowed the Parisian pooches. David chops parsley and watercress for a sauce for the leeks, carrots, celery root, and greens.

Finally the big moment arrives. We are seated at the table. David has served each of us portions of chicken and vegetables, ladling golden broth over the top. And now, at last, it's time.

Randal gently peels off the bottle's leaded top. Gingerly he inserts the corkscrew and begins to twist. The cork plops down into the bottle. "Uh-oh. Not good," he says. David and I, watching, are nervous. Randal quickly pours a small taste into David's wineglass and hands it to him. I detect the

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CHICKEN POT-AU-FEU

Adapted from David Tanis

Serves 4 to 6

Active time: 1 hr Start to finish: 5 hr

We recommend using the freshest watercress possible—if not at its best, it can give the sauce a slightly bitter taste. (Try hydroponic watercress; it's generally better than conventionally grown supermarket cress.)

Tanis suggests skimming all the fat from the cooking liquid and serving the broth as a first-course soup, garnished with toasted slices of French bread.

For chicken and vegetables

- 1 (4-lb) chicken (preferably organic)
- 1 teaspoon salt
- ½ teaspoon black pepper
- 1 bunch fresh thyme
- 2 qt chicken stock or canned broth
- 1 qt water
- 1 large onion stuck with 1 whole clove
- 1 head garlic, left unpeeled and halved horizontally
- 1 celery rib
- 1 Turkish or ½ California bay leaf
- 8 small leeks (1½ lb; white and pale green parts only), root ends trimmed but leeks left intact
- 12 small (1½- to 2-inch) boiling potatoes (1¼ lb)
- 12 small carrots (1¼ lb), peeled
- 8 small parsnips (1¼ lb), peeled
- 1 large celery root (1¼ lb), peeled with a paring knife and cut into ½-inch wedges

For green sauce

- 1 garlic clove
- 2 teaspoons capers, rinsed
- ½ teaspoon salt
- 2 cups chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley
- 2 cups coarsely chopped tender watercress sprigs
- ¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil

Garnish: watercress sprigs

Special equipment: an instant-read thermometer

Poach chicken:

► Pat chicken dry and sprinkle inside and out with salt and pepper. Stuff cavity with thyme and chill chicken, loosely covered, at least 3 hours (to allow seasoning to permeate meat).
► Transfer chicken to a 7- to 8-quart heavy pot, then add stock, water, onion, garlic, celery rib, and bay leaf and bring to a boil. Reduce heat and gently simmer chicken, covered, until juices run clear when a thigh is pierced with a skewer and thermometer inserted into thickest part of a thigh (do not touch bone) registers 170°F, about 45 minutes. Transfer chicken to a large platter and let stand, loosely covered with foil, 20 minutes. Reserve cooking liquid in pot, uncovered, and discard onion, celery, garlic, and bay leaf.
Prepare leeks and potatoes while chicken cooks:

► Starting about ½ inch from root end, make a lengthwise cut through middle of each leek (keep leek intact). Wash leeks well under cold running water and drain. Halve potatoes.

Cook vegetables while chicken stands:

► Bring chicken cooking liquid to a boil, then add leeks, potatoes, carrots, parsnips, and celery root and simmer, partially covered, until tender, about 20 minutes. Carefully transfer vegetables with a slotted spoon to platter with chicken and keep warm, loosely covered with foil. (Reserve cooking liquid for another use if desired; cool, uncovered, then chill, covered.)

Make sauce while vegetables cook:

► Mash garlic and capers to a paste with salt using a mortar and pestle (or mince and mash with a large heavy knife). Transfer to a food processor and pulse with parsley and watercress until herbs are finely chopped. With motor running, add oil in a slow stream and process until smooth. Season sauce with salt and pepper. ► Serve chicken and vegetables with sauce.

Cooks' notes:

- Stuffed and seasoned uncooked chicken can be chilled, loosely covered, up to 1 day.
- Watercress sauce can be made 2 hours ahead and chilled, covered.

August). Enjoy entrées like roasted rack of lamb with garlic rosemary bread pudding. *W* \$32

THE WINE BAR, 417 Broadway, (518) 584-8777. Owner/Sommelier, Melissa Evans; Chef, Mark Graham. Local produce and seasonal ingredients contribute to the international fusion cuisine at this modern eatery. The award-winning wine list complements dishes like savory pork loin or ahi tuna. *W* \$18

Pennsylvania

EPRHATA—THE RESTAURANT AT DONECKERS, 333 N. State St., (717) 738-9501. Owner, Bill Donecker; Chef, Greg Gable. Indulge in nouveau French American cuisine with signature dishes such as Crab *Galette* and Sole à la Doneckers. The quaint dining room of this antique-filled restaurant suits locals, and the sophisticated menu and vast wine cellar accommodate well-traveled visitors. *W* \$24

SOUTH STERLING—FRENCH MANOR, Huckleberry Rd., off Rte. 191, 800-523-8200. Owners, Ron and Mary Kay Logan; Chef, W. Scott Killiany. Gourmet French cuisine is served in a regal dining room with a foot vaulted ceiling and massive stone fireplaces at its country chateau. The nouvelle menu includes pateaubriand carved tableside. *W* \$29

ST CHESTER—DILWORTH TOWN INN, 1390 Old mington Pike, (610) 399-1390. This colonial-style restaurant offers tranquil candlelight dining and an elegant American menu. Feast on roasted shallot and tomato sauce with truffles followed by the ginger crisp lob-

Texas

DALLAS—ARCODORO & POMODORO, 2708 Routh St., (214) 871-1924. Chef/Owner, Efsio Farris; Co-owner, Francisco Farris. This breathtaking villa pays homage to the Farris brothers' Sardinian roots. Generations of Sardinian tradition result in this authentic Italian cuisine featuring homemade pastas, hearty meat specialties, and fruits of the sea. Dine in the casual elegance of the grill, the secluded quiet of the Pomodoro Room, or al fresco in the heart of Dallas.

CAFE PACIFIC, 24 Highland Pk. Village, (215) 526-1170. Starched white linens, rich dark paneling, etched glass, and gleaming brass provide a sophisticated dining environment catering to many of Dallas' business and social leaders. The cuisine is classic Continental with a contemporary twist.

JAVIER'S, 4912 Cole Ave., (214) 521-4211. Owner, Javier Gutierrez; Chef, Juan Reyes. Colonial Mexican decor is the setting for true Mexican cuisine like snapper *mojo de ajo* and *filete Cantinflas*. The owner continues a 25 year tradition of introducing his own elegant favorite meals to the Dallas audience. *W* \$24

PARIGI, 3311 Oak Lawn Ave., Ste 102, (214) 521-0295. Chef/Owners, Janice Provost and Abraham Salum. *Parigi* is the Italian word for Paris, and this charming *bistro* serves a menu influenced by both French and Italian cuisine. The owners provide a warm welcome and a complimentary glass of Prosecco upon your arrival. *W* \$25

PARIS VENDOME, 3699 McKinney Ave., (469) 533-5663. Chef, Chris Ward. The award-winning chef offers a full menu of traditional *bistro* fare at this popular French *brasserie*. The attractive dining room and bar area combine Art Deco elements with sleek modern design.

PERRY'S RESTAURANT, 2911 Routh St., (214) 871-9991. Owners, Amie Bergus and Travis Henderson. The prime handcut steaks and generous cocktails attract a loyal following to this exceptionally good steak and seafood house. Linger over the homemade dessert.

FORT WORTH—RANDALL'S GOURMET CHEESECAKE CO., 907 Houston St., (817) 336-2253. Owner, Jerrett Joslin; Chef, Erick Boyle. Share a bottle of fine red wine with someone you love at this romantic restaurant where the sumptuous entrées vie with the famous cheesecake for most satisfying. A signature is the Paris *enchilada* filled with escargot.

HOUSTON—ARCODORO, 5000 Westheimer, Centre at Post Oak, (713) 621-6888. Chef/Owner, Efsio Farris; Co-Owner, Lori Farris. Located in the heart of the Galleria area, this authentic Italian restaurant attracts an international clientele as well as local enthusiasts. Experience the Sardinian dishes including homemade pastas, hearty meat specialties, and fruits of the sea that have been passed down from generation to generation and pay homage to Efsio Farris' homeland.

ZULA, Capitol bet. Main & Fannin, (713) 227-7052. Exec. Chef, Lance Fegen. The high-energy atmosphere

combines elegant dining with fun. Enjoy innovative New American cuisine and people watching from a private banquet room in the spacious drama of the main dining room.

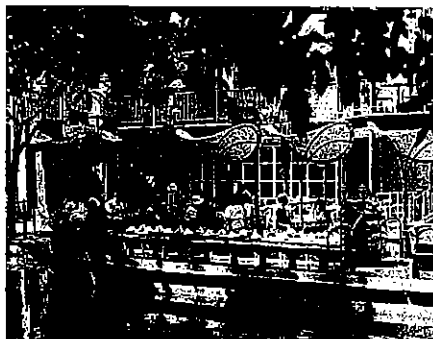
LAS COLINAS—TENAYA, Hwy 114 & Walnut Hill, Chef/Owner, Charles Miller. Known for its singular treatment of wild game, this homestyle restaurant features a wide variety of meat dishes as well as seafood novelties. A specialty is the fire ribeye with chef Miller's signature spices.

PLANO—CHOW THAI PACIFIC RIM, 3309 Dallas Pkwy., (972) 608-1883. Owner, Vinnie Virasin. Sushi and dim sum dishes mix with entrees like teasmoked pork chops or whole crispy red snapper at this four-star Thai restaurant. Awarded one of the top new restaurants of 2000 by the Dallas Morning News. *W* \$17

THE MERCURY, 6121 West Park Blvd., (469) 366-0107. Chef/Partner, Chris Ward. The French-inspired menu at this lovely restaurant includes braised lamb shank, jumbo lump crabmeat, and pepper-crusting ahi tuna. The ultramodern design complements the chef's innovative twists on old favorites.

SAN ANTONIO—BIGA ON THE BANKS, 203 S. St. Mary's St., (210) 225-0772. Chef/Owner, Bruce Auden. Enjoy chef Bruce Auden's creative cuisine featuring striped bass, lamb, wild game, and beef while reveling in the views of the Riverwalk. One of Gourmet's top five restaurants in Texas.

BOUDRO'S, 421 E. Commerce on the River Walk, (210) 224-8484. Chef, Alex Baratin. This Texas bistro features dishes such as pecan-grilled chops with herbs and peach chutney. Especially praiseworthy are the wild mushrooms with *polenta* and herb-smoked salmon tacos. *W* \$15



OUTDOOR DINING AVAILABLE AT BOUDRO'S, SAN ANTONIO, TX

Canada

MONTREAL—THE BEAVER CLUB AT THE FAIRMONT QUEEN ELIZABETH HOTEL, 900 René-Lévesque Blvd. W., (514) 861-3511. Director F&B, Michel Busch; Chef, Alain Pignard. Early Montreal is the backdrop for this unique 5-Star Mobil Travel Guide-rated dining room, highlighting innovative *haute cuisine* and promoting the best of local ingredients. *W* \$35



CHEF ALAIN PIGNARD OF THE BEAVER CLUB, MONTREAL, CANADA

Compiled by Lissa Wood, Kristin Norris & Marjorie Wampole

W average price of dinner entrée (prix fixe noted at those restaurants that only serve full-course meals at one price)

MEMORABLE MEALS

(Continued from page 61)

aroma of the wine filtering into the room. His nose over the glass's edge, David inhales deeply. "Aaaahhhh."

He sips.

"Oh God," he wails, as if stricken.

Oh heck, I think, sensing disaster.

"Aaaahhhh. It's delicious. It's fabulous. Incredible!"

We laugh with joy and relief.

Randal pours again, with infinite care, for each of us.

We toast the generosity of David's Chez Panisse partner, the wine itself, and each other. As I raise my glass, my nose is filled with attar and the scent of all things darkly and deliciously mysterious. The bouquet is transporting. The taste is complicated, earthy, a texture of velvet—or butter. Like licorice one minute, like truffle the next. It is the smoothest, most wonderful wine I have ever drunk. And it is different with each sip, teasing the senses with ephemeral, heavenly tastes ... and a hint of sex.

WE CAN HARDLY bear to put our glasses down. But we do. As we eat our peasant fare, we sip a king's ransom in wine, and I know with each gulp that I shall never imbibe its like again.

But I don't want to gulp. I want this moment and this wine to last. Randal pours us each another glass of our beautiful Burgundy. This one tastes even better, if that's possible. (Sylvie confirms that I have been the Cinderella drinker of the night, for the wine served mid-bottle of this vintage treasure is, indeed, the best of all.)

But all too soon the wine is breaking down. David, reaching the sediment first, reports the change. I quickly quaff my glass for fear the magic will disappear.

Droplets are left in David's glass.

"It's going ... going ... gone," he says sadly.

"What does it taste like now?" I ask.

He dips in his tongue, a hummingbird's taste.

"Now it's down to prunes and mothballs ..."

I quote the Bard: "O, what a falling-off was there." But I know, sitting comfortably in the parlor after dinner, that I have safely sealed and corked the memory of this extraordinary bottle—to be decanted pleasurably at leisure for the rest of my life. @