

malibu times

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CLASSIC**

FRANCESCO
QUINN



Tra di Noi Ristorante, Malibu

Malibu Vineyards



It's two days before the fall harvest. Winemaker Jim Palmer is pointing to a cluster of Syrah grapes and explaining to chef Francesco Velasco and owner Tarcisio Mosconi of Tra di Noi Ristorante how he can tell when the grapes are ready to be picked. "I don't need instruments. I can see that the bees are all over this fruit, enjoying the sugars in it." Palmer instructs the two restaurant men to pick a few grapes and taste them. "You have to look at the seeds. You want seeds that are dark in color. This is when you pick the grapes," he instructs. Velasco and Mosconi are amazed at the sweetness of the tiny, dark grapes. "After 12 years I finally understand what I'm doing," says the man behind Malibu Vineyards (malibu-vineyards.com) and its award-winning wines.

This hillside planted with Syrah and the adjoining flatlands and canyon—growing Merlot, Cabernet Franc, and Sangiovese—are only a few minutes' drive from Tra di Noi Ristorante in Malibu. Says Palmer, "Every time I get a craving, I go down there. I eat there three times a week." Chef Velasco nods and adds, "He loves the spaghetti with botarga. We always talk and taste new wines." Today Velasco and Mosconi have come to see the vineyard that supplies so many great wines to Tra di Noi's customers. The wine they're discussing now is the Sangiovese Vortex. The Sangiovese varietal, the dominant grape in Chianti wine, has been a tough one for California winemakers to master. But Palmer has won over even Italian winemakers like the esteemed nobleman Marchese Piero Antinori with a new world blend of 80% Sangiovese, 10% Merlot, and 10% Cabernet Franc that tastes of the old world. Gayot, the restaurant and wine review-

ing empire describes Palmer's 2006 Vortex as a "clean, elegant and velvety Sangiovese showing an acidic character with cherry flavors." The Best of Wine website calls the 2007 vintage "well-made wine that tastes Italian." Chef Velasco, who grew up in Italy, finds the 2008 Vortex to be a "lovely, easy-drinking wine—very smooth."

As he walks the rows of current grapes, Palmer explains that he'll harvest them in the early morning because that's when "you get sharper flavors and better quality grapes." Then the fruit will be de-stemmed and put in cold storage for three days which concentrates the flavors even more. After crushing, the juice pretty much gets left alone. "I don't have to do a lot," Palmer notes. He relies on the quality of the fruit to make a wonderful wine.

Once the new vintage of Sangiovese Vortex is ready, Palmer will bring it down the hill to Tra di Noi for chef Velasco to taste. But these grapes will take two years to mature in French oak casks before their juice can be bottled. In the meantime, Velasco concentrates on the 2008 Vortex. He whips up a special pasta dish designed to pair perfectly with the wine. It starts with a tagliatelle pasta in a Barolo-wine and vegetable sauce. Then he add parsnips, pancetta, and Pecorino cheese. Finally, he shaves black truffles over the top. "Francesco Velasco is an artist," exclaims Palmer after tasting this pasta. High praise from a winemaker who has devoted the last 12 years of his life to mastering his craft. "This is all about passion, about loving what you do," insists Palmer. That's true for both the winemaker and the chef.



Introducing: Malibu Vineyard Wines

"Jim Palmer is pioneering super Malibu wines worthy of national attention." - Antonio Alessi



"If you don't know your wine grapes, know your winemaker."

- Tarcisio Mosconi

Tra di Noi Ristorante brings local, Malibu Vineyard wines to the dining table.



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"One of Malibu's Best!"

- Zagat Restaurant Guide

