

Photo by Michelle Le/The Almanac

Striving for pairing perfection at the Village Pub's winemaker dinners

By Renee Batti
Almanac News Editor

Early on during a recent event at the Village Pub in Woodside, winemaker Michael Martella of Thomas Fogarty Winery and Vineyards told the wine-swirling, sipping guests: "This is what wine — here, in the Santa Cruz Mountains in Woodside — tastes like."

Those familiar with cleanly made, unmanipulated wines made from northern Santa Cruz Mountain grapes would have been likely to agree after tasting the intense, finely structured pinot noirs, chardonnays, and cabernet sauvignon served that night.

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Skylines Serendipity

Cool climate, 'lean' soil presented grape-growing challenges, but Fogarty Winery celebrates 30 years of making elegant wines that express Skyline's terroir

By Renee Batti
Almanac News Editor

When Dr. Thomas Fogarty was looking for land to grow grapes more than three decades ago, there was little property to choose from in and near his hometown, Portola Valley. The acreage he ultimately bought on Skyline, above Portola Valley and near the Skylonda community of Woodside, "was the last of the (available) agricultural lands in town," he explains.

The renowned cardiovascular surgeon and inventor planted the hilly terrain in the late 1970s, intending to grow grapes to make his own wine. But after the vines were in, it became clear that Skyline's climate, soil and terrain were not the most hospitable if what you're looking for are

ease of growing and abundance of fruit.

What might then have looked like an unwelcome challenge, however, revealed itself to be fortune's kiss, because the aspiring wine-grower also discovered that the Skyline terroir — with its cool, marine-influenced climate and undernourished soil — was exceptionally well-suited for growing the grapes he was most determined to turn into great wine: pinot noir and chardonnay.

Serendipity? "A lot of things were serendipity," Dr. Fogarty said in a recent phone interview. "You can't take credit for everything."

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Photo by Michelle Le/The Almanac

Top of page, winemaker Michael Martella, center, manages the production process as "cellar rat" Kaylan Sellingsloh fills a wine barrel. Above, Mr. Martella walks through the Albutom Vineyard on the Winery Estate property.

On the cover

Winemaker Michael Martella cleans out a barrel at the winery. Photo by Michelle Le/The Almanac

Village Pub

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But as the assembled wine-lovers savored the wines of the nearby mountain, they indulged in the tastes of another Woodside institution as well: Each wine tasted during the March 22 winemaker's dinner was paired with food chosen by Village Pub chef Dmitry Elperin and sommelier Michael Acheson to complement the wine's specific characteristics.

The Pub has been hosting winemaker dinners for years, and this was the second to feature Fogarty wines — the creations of winemaker Martella, associate winemaker Nathan Kandler, and the environmental elements of the Skyline area just south of Woodside's Skylonda community.

Mr. Acheson worked with the winemakers and winery manager Tommy Fogarty — the son of winery founder Dr. Thomas Fogarty — to choose the wines for the dinner: a sparkling "blanc de blancs," two vintages of chardonnay, two vintages of pinot noir, a cabernet sauvignon, and a port.

He then collaborated with Mr. Elperin, the Pub's Michelin-star chef, to come up with a menu. "Generally, we'll sit down and go over my tasting notes, (consider) each wine's acidity, fruit profile, body, and tannins, and use that as the basis to then craft a menu," he explained.

Wine and food pairing is not very complicated when the "wines are solid, are well-produced," as are Fogarty wines,

said Mr. Elperin. In choosing the food, he added, "there's a responsibility to live up to the expectations created by well-made wines."

Mr. Acheson explained that good pairing often has to do with contrast: The acidity that lends backbone to the 2007 Damiana Vineyard chardonnay, for example, was well-complemented by "the creamy, rich boldness" of the lobster bisque served with it.

Mr. Elperin said one of his favorite pairings of the night was seared duck breast with farro and dried cherries, which was served with 1997 reserve pinot noir and 2008 pinot noir, both from Block B of the Rapley Trail Vineyard. "Duck breast with pinot noir is a natural pairing, and the fruit of the cherries complemented the wine's nuances," he said.

The dinner also included roasted sirloin of lamb with root vegetables grown in the nearby hills, served with a 2005 Gist Ranch cabernet sauvignon, which Mr. Elperin said had "just the right amount of tannins and fullness to go along with the meat."

Both men say the winemaker dinners give them the opportunity to be creative and adventurous, coming up with dishes that aren't typically on the menu. Mr. Acheson said he's hoping to include more local winemakers in the monthly events.

Go to thevillagepub.net for more information about the Village Pub's monthly winemaker dinners. ■

FOGARTY

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Thirty-year partners

One of the things Dr. Fogarty can take credit for, though, is his choice of his first winemaker,

Michael Martella, whose work at three wineries after earning a degree in food sciences/viticulture at Fresno State University provided broad,

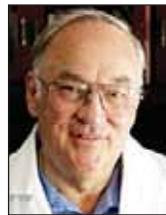
real-world experience in winemaking. He was hired in 1981, and as Thomas Fogarty Winery and Vineyards celebrates its 30th season, Mr. Martella is able to declare to a group of tasters at a recent Woodside event: "I've been lucky enough to be there for every one of them."

Mr. Martella met his boss through a friend who had heard that Dr. Fogarty was looking for a winemaker for his new enterprise. "We hit it off ... and in my own mind, I was perfect for the job," Mr. Martella recalls.

He obviously was able to con-

vince his potential employer of that, and three decades later, Dr. Fogarty says, "Based on the quality of the wine and his work ethic, he was."

Nathan Kandler was hired seven seasons ago as assistant winemaker,



'A lot of things were serendipity. You can't take credit for everything.'

DR. THOMAS FOGARTY, FOUNDER

and has since been promoted to associate winemaker.

The wines

Most Fogarty wines are made with grapes grown on the Winery Estate property or the winery's second property, Gist Ranch, which is about 17 miles south of the estate. In addition to pinot noir and char-



'My hope is we'll take a great vineyard (Windy Hill) and make it even better.'

THOMAS FOGARTY JR., MANAGER

donnay, Fogarty bottles cabernet sauvignon and cabernet franc, merlot, gewurztraminer, and a few dessert wines.

The winery sits at about 2,000 feet above sea level, although there's a broad range of elevation on the properties. Mr. Martella says there are a multitude of microclimates, even within specific vineyards, and the grapes ripen through a "cool, long growing season."

Although many of the wines have won praise — and many fans — pinot noir is Fogarty's flagship wine, according to Mr. Martella, who notes that the winery was the first to grow pinot noir vines on Skyline.

The soil of both properties "features a layer of low-vigor loam on top of sandstone, shale and marine deposits," according to the winery's website. Mr. Martella describes the soil as "thinner and less fertile — it's mountainous, lean soil."

All of these factors — the many microclimates, the "lean" soil and steep terrain, the cool climate — add up to the land's terroir, which is essential to express in the glass, Mr. Martella says.

Because of the cool climate, grapes mature slowly. "We have to work at attaining ripeness," Mr. Martella says. The range of microclimates has led to "micro-harvesting" practices, because grapes in any single vineyard ripen at different times.

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CALENDAR

■ Go to AlmanacNews.com/calendar to see more calendar listings

Special Events

'America's Pastime' Car Show Benefiting Menlo-Atherton High's baseball program. Classic and special cars, trucks and motorcycles. Music, raffles, awards and BBQ. April 16, 8 a.m.-2 p.m. \$25 registration per car. Menlo-Atherton High School, 555 Middlefield Road, Atherton. Call 650-716-8129.

Woodside Village Band will give its 23rd annual Spring Concert, featuring music from Civil War, Broadway, Hollywood and Buffalo Bill's Wild West. Sun., April 10, 3-4:30 p.m. Woodside Village Church, 3154 Woodside Road, Woodside. Call 650-851-1642.

Talks/Authors

'Bali: Art, Ritual, Performance' A docent from the Asian Art Museum will present a slide/lecture about this current exhibit. April 12, 7-8:15 p.m. Free. Portola Valley Library, 765 Portola Road, Portola Valley. Call 650-851-0560. www.smcl.org

"The Bond: Our Kinship with Animals" Our Call to Defend Them" is Humane Society President Wayne Pacelle's first book. April 15, 7-9 p.m. Free. Kepler's Books, 1010 El Camino Real, Menlo Park. Call 301-258-1483.

Concerts

The Ivory & Gold Trio — Jeff and Anne Barnhart on piano and flute and percussionist Danny Coots — perform ragtime, jazz and Tin Pan Alley hits in a benefit concert for Haitian Relief Fund. Doors open at 6:30 p.m. April 6, 7-9:30 p.m. Donations accepted. First Baptist Church of Menlo Park, 1100 Middle Ave., Menlo Park. Call 650-323-8544.

Et Alia

'Spring in Bloom' Atherton artist Gloriamari Prado presents a collection of her floral oil paintings and watercolors plus limited-edition prints. Artist reception April 9. Exhibit runs through

May 11, 10 a.m.-6 p.m. Peabody Fine Art Gallery, 603 Santa Cruz Ave., Menlo Park. Call 650-322-2200.

The Cleo Eulau Center will hold its fourth annual Forget-Me-Not Breakfast to honor three people for their outstanding work in developing and supporting resilience in children. Pat Brown will receive the first Neil Call Memorial Award. Educator Awards will go to Tania Magana and Trisha van Erp. April 13, 7-9 a.m. \$65. Sharon Heights Country Club, 2900 Sand Hill Road, Menlo Park. Call 650-314-0180.

Menlo Art League April's featured artist is Kay Duffy, who will give a watercolor demo. April 13, 7:30-9 p.m. Free. The Menlo Park Recreation Center, 700 Alma St., Menlo Park. Call 650-906-2045.

Foundations for Marriage This class for dating, engaged, or newly married couples will address significant marriage topics from a Christian perspective. Thursdays, April 7 through May 5, 7:15-8:45 p.m. Free. Menlo Park Presbyterian Church, 950 Santa Cruz Ave., Menlo Park. mppc.org

International Folk Dance Class Marcel Vinokur, teacher. Mondays, beginning April 11. Beginning teaching at 7:30 p.m., intermediate teaching at 8 p.m., request dancing at 8:45 p.m. No partners necessary. Featuring dances from the Balkans and Israel. \$43 residents, \$56 nonresidents for 11 week quarter. \$7 drop-ins. Arrillaga Family Recreation Center, 700 Alma St., Menlo Park. Call 650-327-0759.

Community Preparedness Day A fair with information on disaster preparedness. Representatives from Menlo Park fire district, CERT, REACT, USGS. Hosted by FBC Menlo Park. April 9, 10 a.m.-2 p.m. Free. First Baptist Church, 1100 Middle Ave., Menlo Park. www.firstbaptist.com

Robot demonstration In celebration of National Robotics Week the robotics team of Sequoia High School will demonstrate the robot, "The Royal Twit." April 13, 4-4:45 p.m. Free. Atherton Library, 2 Dinkelspiel Station Lane, Atherton.

Reggae Sundays Reggae-themed evenings every Sunday, 8 p.m. to midnight. \$10. British Bankers Club, 1090 El Camino Real, Menlo Park. www.bbcmenlopark.com

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Mr. Martella and vineyard manager Julio Deras walk the vineyards tasting the grapes during harvest season, picking them only when they taste ready. "We may pick only 12 rows of a vineyard at one time," coming back to taste and determine when to pick the remainder, depending on ripeness.

Although they pay attention to the Brix scale reading, which measures the sugar content of the grape and is used religiously by many viticulturists to determine when to harvest, Brix measurement is secondary. "There's not a magic number," Mr. Martella says. "We have a Brix ballpark we like to be in, but after that, we like to pick by flavor."

Over the years, California winemakers have increasingly harvested grapes when they're very ripe and have a high sugar content. This can make for some flavor-intense wines — some would call them "fruit bombs" — but, according to Mr. Martella, "it doesn't suit expressing the terroir." When the grape is too ripe, he adds, "the fruit expresses itself instead of the terroir."

The Fogarty winemaker also makes wine under his own label — Martella — buying grapes from growers he knows, including his brother. Those grapes come from sunnier climes, and the wine they become can be more fruit-forward as a result.

Fogarty wines, Mr. Martella says, "have a stronger expression of soil versus sun" — with more minerality, structure and complexity. They are characterized, he adds, "by finesse and elegance."

Over the 30 years of Fogarty's existence, knowledge of growing vines and making wine has expanded significantly, and Mr. Martella and Mr. Kandler, the associate winemaker, are ever on the alert for new information on winegrowing practices.

Next year, the Windy Hill Vineyard at the Winery Estate will be replanted, with a reorientation of the vines for better exposure. That vineyard has produced premium pinot noirs over the years, but it seemed the right time to make a change, Mr. Martella said.

Helping with the Windy Hill Vineyard replanting is Tommy Fogarty, Dr. Fogarty's son, who is a major player at the winery these days as overall manager, helping oversee the day-to-day operations.

Tommy Fogarty says he was only about 11 when the first vineyard was planted on the estate. "We learned a lot from our first planting," he says.

Regarding Windy Hill Vineyard, "My hope is that we'll take a great vineyard and make it even better."

Over the years, Fogarty Winery has also become a popular venue for tastings and private events, including weddings. Go to fogartywinery.com for information. ■