



Owner Tabitha Eck with a glass of Abbelone '09 Pinot Noir

PHOTO BY TRASK BEDORTHA

Uncorked in Veneta

Our Daily Bread helps grow local wine tourism

When, last month, the Oregon Legislature passed two bills, HB 3280 and SB 829 — together dubbed the “King Estate bills,” to be reconciled into one bill — it became clear that King Estate would retain its full-service, fine-dining restaurant at the winery, and would continue to serve thousands of visitors at the Estate. This came as good news to many of the businesses and towns along Territorial Road, from Cottage Grove to Monroe.

Tabitha Eck, co-owner, along with her parents, Tim and Catharine Perkins, of Veneta’s only fine-dining restaurant, Our Daily Bread, was delighted at the news of King’s success: “Hey, wonderful! I think it would be sheer foolishness to shoot yourself in the foot when it comes to (wine) tourism. Everything they do there adds value to the valley as a whole. I profit from what they do there,” she said.

Eck and her parents have consciously positioned Our Daily Bread to take an active role in developing the growing wine-tourism businesses along the Territorial corridor. ODB is housed in a former church, remodeled and expanded but retaining some nice church-y touches, such as the Gothic-arched windows with stained glass, even what looks like the church’s old upright piano. (But atop the piano sits a small sign bearing the distinctly secular homily “Dancing Allowed — Shoes not required.”) The restaurant is open seven days, serving breakfast, lunch, dinner and Sunday brunch. They have gained some fame for baking — ahem — their daily bread, plus pastries, focaccia, and a full range of desserts: “It was very important for us to have an in-house product,” Eck said, noting that they also make their own sauces, dressings, gravies, while keeping close relationships with local growers and suppliers, especially wineries.

Tabitha Eck is young, only 28, but she has made some astute decisions about the family’s restaurant. Most notably, she has worked hard to make Our Daily Bread’s wine list the best in the south Willamette Valley for its inclusion of local wines. Nearly every winery in the southern part of the valley has a representative wine on ODB’s list: “Some are so new that we haven’t had a chance to interact with them yet,” Eck said, mentioning Sarver and J. Scott, “but we’re constantly reprinting our wine list,” broadening and updating to include such rarely found labels as Pfeiffer and HillCrest, which are only sold at the wineries.

Eck has seen what restaurateurs in California’s and Washington’s wine valleys have seen, that concentrating on local wines doesn’t imply any compromise on quality, and the mutual support that follows helps everyone. “We have an amazing amount of variety around us, and it’s all so good. And we really enjoy the relationship aspect. Many of the vineyards are small and family-owned, like us. It’s just good for everybody.”

Our Daily Bread’s kitchen might be small, but the menu is eclectic and ambitious, plating a range from sandwiches and burgers, soups and salads, to pastas and prime rib, and local wines (microbrews, too) to match any dish. The list offers 28 white wines, four rosés, 37 reds (16 local pinot noirs), five sparkling and five dessert wines (including Chateau Lorane’s honey mead). An additional six wines — three white, three red — are available by the glass (or bottle). Total choices add up to around 85. Prices are moderate, ranging from a nice Emerson Chardonnay (\$16) to King Estate’s blockbuster 2006 Domaine Pinot Noir (\$86). Eck also reaches into Oregon’s southern wine valleys to find some rather special bottlings, like Agate Ridge’s 2007 Primitivo (a Zinfandel relative) from the Rogue, Spangler’s 2007 Petite Sirah or Girardet’s 14 Vines from the Umpqua.

Eck stays busy with her family (as we spoke, her husband, Marshall, waited tables while her three children — the youngest, Joshua, just 10 months — waited at home), her restaurant, and her extensive wine list, but apparently that’s not quite enough. She also maintains a small retail space where she sells ODB’s wines directly, plus Riedel glassware and assorted hand-crafted items related to the kitchen or to wine. The family recently added an event area (and new parking lot), anticipating a summer of hosting wine garden parties featuring local wineries and live music.

How do the Veneta residents feel about all this activity? “We have huge local support,” Eck said. Mothers’ Day was booked with 400 reservations. The Wings and Wine Festival in May brings bird-loving visitors in flocks. Note to other family members: Our Daily Bread also makes something special for Fathers’ Day, Labor Day and other special occasions.

The quaint former church with modest blue trim adds to the bustle of Veneta’s downtown along Territorial Road. “Locals appreciate it. And we have a unique ability to attract Eugeneans out this way. There’s nothing in this immediate area, aside from a vineyard” — unnamed — “that can say they do that.”

One vineyard that can draw thousands — King Estate — is thriving, as is the business of viticulture in this part of the south Willamette Valley. Good food, superb wines and dazzling views; it’s really a simple formula with a country twist, very attractive.

In Tabitha Eck’s words, “It’s a unique experience out here.”

EW

On Modesty & Greed

What would Karl Rove not drink this holiday?

We’re feelin’ the buzz: Fourth of July, Art and the Vineyard, high summer (on the calendar, at least). I’m ready, my whole family is ready, so let’s celebrate some. It doesn’t have to be much, a smidge of smile-inducing hoopla.

Like most Americans, our slice of American Dream Pie is rather modest. Our work is satisfying, and we’re perfectly willing to slog long hours over many years to plate our thin wedge. We live in a warm, dry house with a thriving garden (though soggy and sun-hungry), have happy/healthy kids/grandkids. We have enough to eat and decent wines to slurp with dinner. OK, my Honda is ancient, but it hums, it’s economical and it’s paid for. And, sure, my Pulsar is no Rolex, but it marks time’s fly-by, meaning that although my wife is youthful and lovely, I could probably benefit from a few cosmetic surgeries, some “procedures” — but I won’t.

I just don’t suffer from that kind of ego, get no jolt from feeling better, bigger, stronger, richer than anyone else; in fact, I’m saddened to see others struggling, destitute or in pain. I’m a sucker, maybe, for people holding ragged signs on street corners. I consider it my duty — and my good luck — if I can help neighbors when they need a hand. And we don’t mind paying our taxes, contributing to our community.

All this is prologue to saying — confessing, I suppose — that I just don’t understand greed. Last night, Kat and I watched the HBO documentary *Hot Coffee* and were appalled by the Karl Rove-inspired corporate attacks on Americans’ rights in court. But it wasn’t only the unrelenting attacks that bothered me; rather, it was the smug self-satisfaction of the corporate-rich, their glee at crushing all opposition through strategies that are vile, bordering on criminal and certainly sinful (if they actually believed in God or divine justice, which clearly they don’t, though they piously beat their breasts to assert their faith when it serves their political purposes).

If the Rovians and allied Bush-leaguers have their way, we’ll see the establishment of nothing less than global fascism — or “corporatism” as Mussolini called it just prior to WWII — starting with the U.S. Even the illusion of democracy will be gone. The current Republican attack on voters’ rights is part of the battle. At stake are chances to sweep up trillions of dollars in tax breaks and public funds, including Social Security and Medicare.

The chilling question, of course, asks what we can do to stop them, if anything. On that note, and as our segue, we wonder what wine Karl Rove drinks. Probably not these modest lovelies:

Eve 2008 Chardonnay (\$11): Another fine, accessible wine from Washington’s Charles Smith Wines, producers of a broad range of superb wines, many at affordable prices for common people. This chard is fresh and clean, the flavors of apples and aromas of white flowers given a deft touch of oak — delish with chicken and picnic chow (screwcap opener an added virtue).

Alex Eli 2009 Gewurztraminer (\$15): Just say “ga-vertz” and be happy with this crisp, zippy and zesty white from a family production in Molalla. Juicy, jazzy grapefruit flavors invite matching with cheesy pastas, even traditional potato salad.

Domaine Saint-Nabor 2010 Gris de Gris (\$10): It’s one of the most charming and inviting rosés we’ve encountered this season, in one of the prettiest packages. It’s French (duh), from the Rhone Valley, pale pink but blessed with lingering flavors of early raspberries with hints of orange zest. Outstanding value, for many summer foods.

Crowley 2009 Willamette Valley Pinot Noir (\$23): Summer’s not usually time for red wine — except for pinot noir, ‘cause it’s *always* time for pinot noir, especially for an aromatic blast of roses and cherries, followed by a mouthful of lush, ripe raspberries and black cherries, carefully crafted to match with meats, cheese, warm breezes, whatever; gimmesum.

We close with simple wishes for your summer and beyond: Duck the greedheads, share your love.

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