



2005 Flights!

By Edie DeAvila

Flights! finds new home at the City College Culinary Arts and Hospitality Studies Program

Flights! was held at City College of San Francisco's Ocean Avenue campus, in conjunction with its Culinary Arts and Hospitality Studies program. After the *Flights!* tastings and discussions, a reception was held.

Talented culinary students prepared and served the participants a delicious array of appetizers.

Part of the fun was sharing Zinfandel knowledge with the students. Volunteer Bob DeAvila says, "For some students, it was a first experience with a wine-focused event. Yet, they caught on fast to the need for correct set-up and careful, accurate wine pouring. Later, during dinner, they asked to learn about food and Zinfandel wine pairing. From their comments, working at *Flights!* was an exciting addition to their education."

ZAP wishes to acknowledge Tannis Reinhertz, Wine Instructor at City College for her many contributions to making our *Flights!* event such a success.

ZAP is pleased to award the department with a grant to help fund its wine program.

Zinfandel lovers got a jump on the 2004 vintage at *Flights!*, the ask-the-winemakers event held at the ZAP Zinfandel Festival in San Francisco this past January.

As in previous years, *Flights!* gave attendees the chance to meet renowned Zinfandel winemakers, taste their wines, and hear firsthand the winemakers' descriptions, opinions, methods, and predictions.

Part of this year's *Flights!* presentation included the tasting of barrel samples from the new vintage. Some of the samples had only recently gone to barrel, so they weren't influenced by prolonged barrel age or oak. As the audience tasted, the vintners described aspects of how the wines were made. For example, Robert Biale (Robert Biale Vineyards), Doug Beckett (Peachy Canyon Winery), Paul Draper (Ridge Vineyards), and Julie Johnson (Tres Sabores) discussed their goals of using vineyard practices to establish character, ripeness, and alcohol and acid profiles, instead of relying on what Draper called "industrial approaches," or adjustments during winemaking.

Dave Pramuk, of Robert Biale Vineyards, describes the *Flights!* barrel samples: "The wines were already showing a lot of young Zinfandel appeal with deep color, gobs of ripe fruit, and spice aromas. With so many wines still developing, it's a little too early to proclaim 2004 a great Zin vintage, but the year is showing great promise."

Regarding the 2004 harvest in general, Pramuk says, "Even old-time growers like Aldo Biale just scratch their heads and admit that they've never seen wine grapes harvested so early. But that doesn't mean that 2004 produced a shortened growing season. For the majority of growing regions, that was not the case. In fact, according to longtime grower George Hendry, 2004 was about the longest growing season since the tremendous 1994." According to Bob Biale, "The unseasonably warm March weather in Northern California fooled the vines into pushing early. This led to early bud break and flowering. The cool summer allowed the fruit to mature slowly and fully and, when warm weather began in late August, suddenly the Zinfandel was all ready to come off and we were off to the races."

In this year's *Flights!*, a total of 16 winemakers presented their wines and answered other up-to-the-minute questions from the audience and from moderator/Master Sommelier Peter Granoff of Ferry Plaza Wine Merchants. These included: What are your favorite Zinfandels made by other winemakers? What are some differences between the way you made Zinfandel in the past and the way you make it today? Where does Zinfandel grow best? How are your wines affected by nearby crops

or plants, such as anise or pine trees? Should the term "Old Vines" be officially regulated?

At the conclusion of *Flights!*, more Zinfandel wines accompanied a beef sirloin dinner, prepared and served by the staff and students of the City College of San Francisco's Culinary Arts and Hospitality Studies program.

Flights! once again proved to be exactly what Dave Pramuk had in mind when he suggested the *Flights!* format, more than four years ago. "The Festival was a great place for Zinfandel fans to celebrate great wines," says Pramuk, "but we wanted to give the Festival a focused educational edge. We suggested a session with focused tasting and interaction with winemakers." Veteran ZAP members Frank and Joyce Ortega, Susan Ridley, and Tom and Carla Fawcett agreed; and they organized the first *Flights!* at the 2002 Festival. Since then, the *Flights!* event, limited to about 100 attendees, has been filled every year. As Pramuk says, "Judging from participants' feedback, *Flights!* answers a real need."

Winemakers on the *Flights!* panels were: Doug Beckett (Peachy Canyon Winery), Robert Biale (Robert Biale Vineyards), Justin Boeger (Boeger Winery), Vic Bourassa (Bourassa Vineyards), Eric Cinnamon (Rancho Zabaco Winery), Duane Dappen (D-Cubed Cellars), Paul Draper (Ridge Vineyards), Jeff Gaffner (Saxon Brown), Tim Holdener (Macchia), Julie Johnson (Tres Sabores), Charles Mara (Mara Winery), Bob Marr (Marr Cellars), Joel Peterson (Ravenswood), Kent Rosenblum (Rosenblum Cellars), Jerry Seps (Storybook Mountain Vineyards), and Van Williamson (Edmeades Winery).

Doug Beckett of Peachy Canyon Winery says, "Every year, one of the things I like most about *Flights!* is it gives me the opportunity to try wines from different regions and different winemakers. It helps me to fine-tune my wines. Not that I want them to be like anyone else's, but rather to make sure they're always exceptional."

Moderator Peter Granoff adds, "My most lasting impression from this event is the extent to which Zinfandel in California is still a work in progress; the best winemakers are pushing the envelope of expertise and knowledge further with each vintage. Zinfandel as a wine is clearly one of the most region specific or site expressive wines we make in this Golden State, and the diversity of styles makes for wonderfully hedonistic exploration. What are you waiting for?"

Edie DeAvila is a wine educator and author of The Great Wine Adventure and editor for numerous publications, including AAA Northern New England Journey. She and her husband, Bob, serve as volunteer leads for ZAP's Festival Marketplace.