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« Best of 2013: Food & Drink: Readers Poll Results

Best of 2013: Food & Drink

Writers Picks

BY RACHEL DOVEY, ELISE GUILLOT, NICOLAS GRIZZLE, JAMES KNIGHT, JONAH RASKIN AND BRUCE ROBINSON



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Sara Sanger

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On the grounds of the Buena Vista Winery, the historic stone structures and Tokaj-style cellars founded by the tirelessly entrepreneurial Hungarian immigrant and so-called Count Agoston Haraszthy in 1857, thus laying claim to the title "first commercial winery in California" (generally exclusive of the weak spirit squeezed from pig skins by brothers of the Franciscan order, merely as a sacramental sup, firstly, and surely a thirst-slaker for the "savages" whose sunny paradise they were busily engaged in remaking to their preference), there exists a curious installation that one might at first glance call a fountain, constructed at the behest of the property's current owner and dedicated restorer, Jean-Charles Boisset, a Frenchman of no less international renown and entrepreneurial vigor (though perhaps a mite more sensitivity to the unseen flow of energies) than his unfortunate predecessor, the count, who disappeared into swirling waters teaming with crocodiles in Nicaragua in 1869 after having his stake in the winery he founded wrested from him after only a short run, in the grand scheme of things; to wit, upon standing in this particular spot, at the end of a promenade now handsomely paved in Belgian stone, the Boisset—a proponent of that agricultural system informed by cosmic forces, biodynamics—reported feeling a "knot" in the flow of energy there, a restoration problem that no extra joist, no stonework, nothing would help to fix but a custom-built vortex, a "two-way rhythmical movement of water," having quite the opposite action of a sabered Champagne bottle's exuberant outward flow, rather more like that of wine poured down the bunghole of a barrel that is never—can never be—filled, and which, although we know the suggestion of one of the several

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character actors hired to impersonate the count that these swiftly devoured dark waters exit somewhere in Arizona to be merely off-the-cuff, just might, for some, have a deeper resonance than what may seem, to most, like a funny little fountain at a boozy little tourist attraction, because if it isn't bad feng shui—beware the money corner—then it's a reminder of the unseen gyre that surrounds and pulls all of our lives into destination unknown, a punctuating chasm at the tail end of a history that ends where it begins, like the insatiable demand of a hungry ghost. *18000 Old Winery Road, Sonoma.*—J.K.

Best Vanishing Act

See the Pinot? Make sure you all get a good look at it. Touch it. Swirl it. Smell it. It's genuine, bona fide Russian River Valley Pinot Noir—the very best French clones—no expense spared, made with the time-honored methods of tradition itself and, need I even say it, a passion for wine! Ladies and gentlemen! This Pinot has an alcohol concentration by volume of 16 percent! Young lady, would you not prefer drinking a wine of more delicate composition, as in the civilized nations of Europe? Young man, do you blame the high alcohol levels of our modern age on climate change? No matter! Watch as the offending margin of alcohol in this finished wine vanishes before your eyes when it's put inside this hat (Winesecrets in Sebastopol, a widely used wine services firm that forces wine through a membrane at high pressure, then treats its alcoholic permeate with evaporative perstraction and distillation, recombining the water and wine concentrate at the final stage). Drum roll, please. Abracadabra! A moderate-alcohol Pinot Noir with gobs and gobs of late-harvest flavor! (Applause, oohs and aahs.) *1446 Industrial Ave., Sebastopol.*—J.K.

Best Way to Give Him the Ooh-La-La

At Chloe's French Cafe, the pâtisseries are out of this world, and not unhealthy, either, provided you don't inhale two or three all at once. "*C'est si bon*," co-owner Marc Pisan boasts—though he also says, "Yes, it's good" for English speakers. (At no extra charge, he'll even throw in an "Ooh-la-la.") Saving the time and the money it takes to fly to Paris, the butter croissants (\$1.25), éclairs (\$3.50) and Napoleons (\$3.50) speak eloquently for themselves, though Chloe's also professes a philosophy of food. Hey, it's a French cafe—and you expect Monsieur Pisan to say, "I eat patisseries, therefore I am." What he does say in plain English is that he never "masks the extraordinary quality of Sonoma County ingredients." What more could one expect from a transplanted Frenchman? *3883 Airway Drive, Ste. 145, Santa Rosa.*—J.R.



Elise Guillot

@ Windsor Town Green
Sun., April 21, 11 a.m.
Change Challenge for Cancer Awareness
@ Sonoma State University
Through April 4
1st Friday Art Walk Guerneville, CA
@ Downtown Guerneville Plaza
First Saturday of every month
Spiritual Exploration Movie Nights
@ Unity of Santa Rosa
Thursdays, 6:30 p.m. Continues through April 25

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March 20-26, 2013



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