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Roadtrip: The over-the-top Paulée Dinner in the Russian River wine country

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The **Paulée Dinner** invitation included the word "Bacchanalia." As in Bacchus, the Roman god of [wine](#). As in a really, really wild party. And, while no bulls or virgins were sacrificed, it was quite a night up in the [Russian River Valley](#). I took a little detour from the San Francisco restaurant scene to check it out.

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The "Paulée Dinner" concept comes from Burgundy, France, where vintners gather at the end of the harvest to celebrate by sharing a meal and some very special bottles of wine that they've dug up from their cellars. The Russian River version was part of last weekend's **Pinot Classic** events, which also included barrel tastings, a seminar and other activities that connected [pinot](#) noir-lovers with producers.

For the first time, "civilians" were invited to join the winemakers at their Paulée Dinner, and I was lucky to snag an invitation. The affair was held this past Saturday, at DeLoach Vineyards, where 150 guests gathered and schmoozed on the tented lawn. Kind of like a wine wedding. All the area's pinot royalty were

there: **Merry Edwards**, Michael Browne of **Kosta Browne**, Rod Berglund of **Joseph Swan**, Jean-Charles Boisset of **DeLoach**, Jeff Mangahas of **Williams Selyem**, Scot Covington of **Trione**, Guy Davis of **Davis Family Vineyards** and many more (see them all in the slideshow).

Large-format bottles ruled the night, as winemakers table-hopped, offering pours from magnums and jeroboams. Some well-aged vintages were liberated from their cellars. Mangahas made the rounds with a 1988, and **sommelier Chris Sawyer** saw to it that I got a taste from the last known bottle of 1979 **Bacigalupi** chardonnay. At my table, Covington was pouring a four-year Trione vertical. But nobody took themselves too seriously, especially Browne, who hoisted a huge bottle of his own excellent pinot and pretended to chug it (see the slideshow).

The ringleader of it all was **Boisset**, dressed in a red jacket, who led the group in the "**Ban Bourguignon**," a song that made the entire bunch of attendees appear to be happily surrendering, as we twirled our hands in the air and clapped to the "la-la-la" lyrics (clearly, this song was meant to be taught to tipsy people).

The food, of course, was French, with **Chef Michel Cornu** turning out four courses that paired perfectly with pinot. We started with fish, ombre laid over grilled white asparagus and topped with a rich sauce. That was followed by *oeufs meurette*, poached eggs in a wine sauce with mushrooms and a touch of contraband foie gras. Then rabbit, braised with onions and falling off the bone ("Really, it's chicken!" the husband of a newlywed couple sitting next to me promised his wife, snatching away her menu). And finally, the cheese course arrived, with *compte*, *brillat savarin* and--pardon me, I've forgotten the third *fromage*. Could I have had just a tad too much wine?

We all retired to the JCB (Boisset's initials and another of his wine brands) *lair* for *macarons*, *petits fours* and flutes of sparkling wine. I say "*lair*," because it's a barrel room decked out like a dance club, with a huge chandelier and bright-colored wigs for guests to try on.

I've no doubt that Bacchus would have approved.

The Paulée Dinner is an annual event, so save up for next year. The \$250 per person price tag is worth it for a one-of-a-kind wine and food experience.



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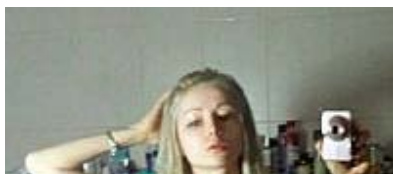
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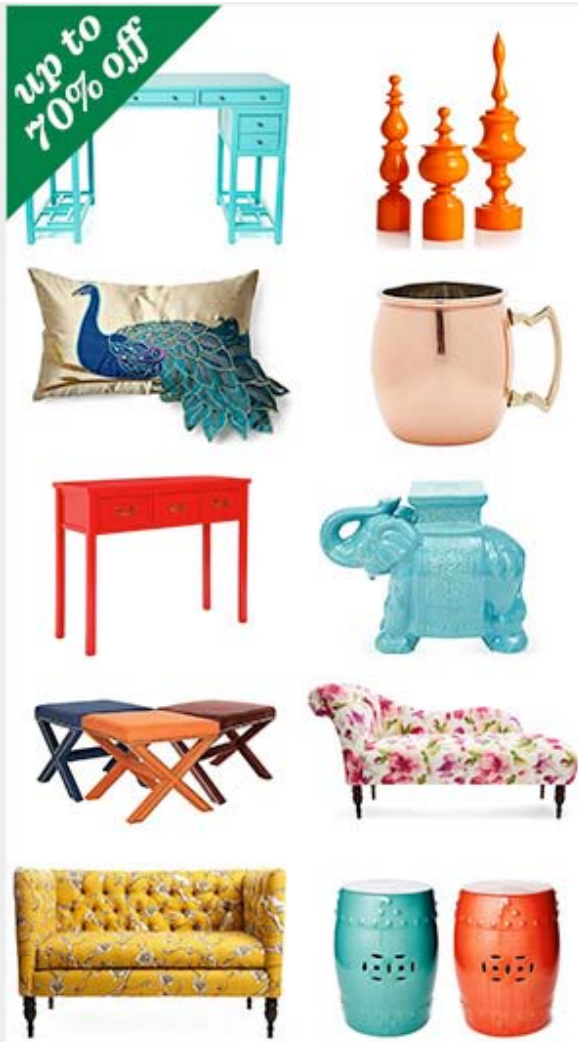


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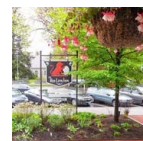
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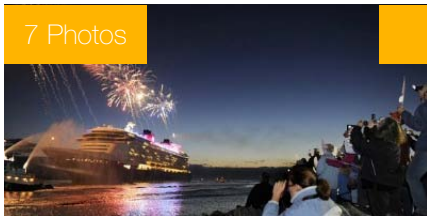
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