

The Beachcomber's Roving Rogue

By Bill Campbell

Well, you've done it. You're at least through the "Holy" part of the Holidays—the days are getting longer, and hopefully you will survive New Year's Eve. Perhaps you already have.

But if not, I have a gem of a place to commend to you. I had some friends visit from South Carolina and, it being a Monday night, we were rather limited in our dining opportunities. Until, that is, they espied an invitation I'd received from the **Black Pearl** to spend New Year's Eve with them.

You have to know where this place is, so I'll tell you. It's between **Howl at the Moon** and **The Swamp** on the Boardwalk on Okaloosa Island. It's waterfront, and yet still manages to be cozy in a **Harbor Docks** sorta way. The food is excellent, the wine list more than adequate, and they have a full, if not small, bar. And any place that serves **Veuve Clicquot Champagne** on New Year's Eve is fine with me.

That's part of the dessert course which follows Buffalo Wellington served with a BV Cabernet Sauvignon. Pretty inventive. The menu is refreshingly honest: "Dinner about 9:15 p.m." I loved that.

So if you want a change of pace, give 'em a call at 833-3016.

We now pause for our fortnightly visit to a courtroom, this one in Pennsylvania:

Q: Could you see him from where you were standing?

A: I could see his head.

Q: And where was his head?

A: Right above his shoulders.

A Gourmet Find Department: You're not going to believe this, but I have found the World's Greatest Hotdog. Or at least the World's Greatest Bun, for as their logo says, "It's all in the bun."

At present you can find this treat in only two places, **Destin Commons** and **Silver Sands Factory Stores**. And you'll have to eat it outside. I speak of **Dave's Dogs**. They're served from a little trailer and I predict soon you'll be able to get one 'most anyplace in America. They're that good.

And, yes, the secret is in the bun. Dave gets them from a bakery in West Virginia and they're ambrosia. The bun is grilled

and comes out looking sorta like a piece of French toast. And it rocks.

So next time you're at either of those wonderful locations, save room for a dog. You'll thank me.

And All that Jazz Department: I've written about a clever little shop in **Uptown Station** called **Jazz**. It's tucked away in the far right corner, and it's worth finding. Not only is there an incredible selection of jazz CDs and albums (some quite old and collectible), but also owner **Ed Smith** (surely a great "motel" name) has added some vintage posters from both jazz and rock. It's a great place to shop for that hard-to-shop-for music lover.

Wine Not Department: One usually buys a bottle of wine for what's in it, not what's on the outside. Sure, every decent cellar should have a bottle of "**Marilyn Merlot**" in it, if for no other reason than to amuse friends. They're very collectible, as the label changes every year. I don't know anyone who's actually drank any of the stuff, but the bottles are terrific.

As is my latest find, "**Writer's Block**." I discovered this varietal at a Toys for Tots wine tasting at my local hangout, **Da Ba** above the **Black Angus** in Fort Walton Beach. The wine's pretty good, it being a California Syrah. (No "z" please, we're American.)

But here's part of what's on the back label, it in itself worthy of the \$15 or so you'll shell out for a bottle:

"Before me a bottle, a corkscrew, an empty glass. Do I dare? This is a magic vintage, and my spirit weakens from the remembering. The bottle-temptress is green, smoky-green, green of lichens and cool thickets where lovers escape from parched Augusts and prying eyes. Green of layered petticoats hiding soft and voluptuous shapes, a liquid-like rustling that hints at meadows full of birdsong and fountains sweet to please. Green beaker of hope, you are the throb of cult mysteries. You are raw emeralds and the drum of approaching thunder. I tremble before your dark green depths, your swollen blood reds and delicious override blacks.

"O beautiful red-breathed fairy in your green glass gown, nymph of golden-spurred drunkenness, handmaiden of couplets and

charms, when I lift your mouth to make you mine you need no coaxing: inch by inch you reveal your naked scarlet self, a cloudburst of pinks and blushes, a torrent of flesh-soft rubies crushed together in a midnight lake of shimmers and crimson licks. I put my lips to your yearning pools and drink. Drink! Your peppered velvets soften my tongue, my grateful throat. When I taste you I taste springtime and rain, violets and eternity, your liquid soul a deep dim of colliding nights and secret harbors. When I taste you, you make my mouth electric, and shock my words with lightening. I steady my pen, desperate to describe the heavenly lift of your burgundy wings.

"But first, another sip ..."

Beat's the hell out of "It was a dark and stormy night," doesn't it?

We close with a sip tip. **Destin Winery** is a small yet fascinating little shop in the **City Market Shopping Plaza**, which you'll find nestled between **Cuvee Beach** and **Cava Blue**.

It rates a mention here because they have the strangest wines you've ever tasted. Not that they're bad, mind you, but because none of them are made with grapes! Nay, they're made with things like oranges, strawberries, watermelon, pink grapefruit and blackberries. And before you go "Yuck," let me tell you the inventory has won 162 medals in national and international wine competitions, not one of them being for "Weirdest Stuff I've Ever Tasted."

Free tastings are offered during business hours, which are 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. daily except Sunday. They also stock plenty of wine gadgets for the oenophile on your list. You can check 'em out at www.destinwinery.com, but do check 'em out.

Here's to a hurricane-free 2006 for one and all, but first, another sip... 🍷

Bill

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