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Rosalie E. Leposky
Miami Food and Drink Examiner



Pairing wine and tequila at The Biltmore Hotel



Gary Shansby (left), owner of Partida Tequila; and winemaker Michael Mondavi.
Photo: © 2010 George Leposky

Michael Mondavi, grandson of the founder of Mondavi wines, travels often from his California home to the Miami area to promote his new wines. On a recent visit, he and his friend Gary Shansby, owner of Partida Tequila, co-hosted a dinner pairing wine and tequila at the Palme d'Or restaurant in the Biltmore Hotel in Coral Gables.



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Mondavi is working hard in south Florida and around the world to promote his newest wines. Three generations of Mondavi family members have built and rebuilt their wine empire, constantly reinventing their brands and the wines that carry the family name. Today's Mondavi wines are not those of the past, and even the winery has changed.

Michael expects to receive questions about his family. He is prepared for them and answers them honestly – but he really wants to focus on the present and future.

Books tell the Mondavi story

To understand the Mondavi story, read two books available from the Miami-Dade Public Library System:

- *Harvests of Joy: How the Good Life Became Great Business*, by Robert Mondavi with Paul Chutkow (1998, Harcourt Brace & Company).
- *The House of Mondavi: The Rise and Fall of an American Wine Dynasty*, by Julia Flynn Siler (2007, Gotham Books).

When I asked some background questions of Michael Mondavi's public-relations consultant, she suggested I read these books. I was a bit surprised, but this turns out to be the best thing she could recommend. The books are not perfect or all-inclusive, but they will help you keep track of the participants, and learn about the family's strengths and weaknesses.

A unique dinner

As guests arrived for the dinner, they were offered a glass of red Mondavi wine or a Partida Margarita with 100 percent agave nectar. (See related story.)



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During the dinner, Mondavi wines and Partida tequilas were paired with food prepared by the Palme d'Or's chef de cuisine, Philippe Ruiz.

The guests included wine distributors and other industry participants, food and wine writers, and local politicians including Coral Gables Mayor Don Slesnick, II.

During the dinner, Michael Mondavi spent time at each of the tables, talking about his wines and answering questions about winemaking in general. I asked him why I find wines with lots of tannin to be painful to drink. The tannins are bitter and they irritate the back of my mouth.

I'm not alone, Mondavi reported. Many wine drinkers share this complaint. "If you want a less tannic wine," he advised, "select the I'M Isabel Mondavi wines. They are named for my wife, who shares your discomfort."

This dinner included two of the I'M Isabel Mondavi wines, and I found both to be very pleasant.

The menu

In preparing the menu, Chef Ruiz faced a major challenge – to select recipes that highlighted the paired beverages and also complemented each other.

In my view, he succeeded. A restaurant owner with whom my husband and I shared a table had another view. "Tequila pairs nicely with Mexican food," he said, while drinking wine with the dishes intended for tequila pairing.

The first course consisted of spiced smoked tomato coulis with cod fish comesquis, served with Tequila Partida Blanco; and herbs and garlic cream with sautéed frog legs, served with I'M Isabel Mondavi Chardonnay, Sonoma-Carneros 2008.





The second course paired Maine lobster tail with aromates, served with Tequila Partida Reposado; and seared lobster tail with wild mushrooms cooked in a smoked Pinot Noir reduction, served with I'M Isabel Mondavi Pinot Noir, Willamette Valley, Oregon 2006.

For the third course, roasted duck breast with sweet potato flan was served with Tequila Partida Añejo, and braised short ribs with baby turnips and soft polenta was served with two very intense Mondavi 2006 Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon wines: Emblem "Oso Vineyard" and M by Michael Mondavi.

M by Michael Mondavi takes tannins to a new and higher level. I found it overwhelming. My husband, George Leposky, Miami Travel Examiner, has a greater tolerance for tannic wines but said that M exceeded his limit, too.

Before dessert, a palate cleanser of lime and cilantro sorbet with marinated dragon fruit was served.

Dessert was a chocolate cake with spiced chocolate mousse, nougatine and carmel crèmeux with Tequila Partida Elegante.



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