

Tasty Tidbits and More than a Bit of Wine: An Evening Stroll Through Pleasanton

By Laura Ness

Pleasanton is a beautiful town, by day or by night. It's one of a few towns in the Bay Area that really lends itself to night gallivanting. And even though it turned out to be a February evening after all, with a chill wind and drizzle. It didn't dampen any spirits at the "Truffles, Tidbits and Wine Tasting," aka Wine Stroll, held on Thursday, February 4, 2010 in Pleasanton.

Organized by the Pleasanton Downtown Association, and supported by nearly three-dozen local establishments and nearly as many Livermore wineries, the event drew a few hundred happy-looking guests. There were lots of smiles as they trooped, glasses in hand, like a bunch of adult trick-or-treaters sans costume, from door to balloon-festooned door, in search of the next intriguing sip and tasty tidbit. Although the main draw seemed primarily gastronomical, the underpinnings were clearly economical. Each merchant seemed eager to make a splash. The Valentine's theme was in high gear everywhere. The atmosphere was clearly conducive to impulse buying, combined with spontaneous, if not premeditated, bargain hunting. And there were plenty of tempting bargains to be found.

Generally, I only like shopping when I'm not planning on doing any. What's more fun than being pleasantly seduced into something you didn't plan on doing? Beginning at Pans on Fire, where owner Linda Wyner plied her yummy pork roast with mustard sauce and strawberries with cream on philo, I learned about "Olive U," coming up on Feb 12, where you'll make things like shrimp poached in olive oil, and an olive oil cake from Apulia. The shop is brimming over with culinary tools and toys to delight any cook or wanna be chef. How about a gift certificate for Valentine's Day to help someone whip up more magic in the kitchen?

On to Berry Patch, where Larry Dino was all smiles, pouring his excellent lineup of Cuda Ridge wines accompanied by a lovely harpist and delectably enhanced by Cupid's Too Too Tasty turkey cranberry-raspberry kale meat-



Cuda Ridge wines were poured at Berry Patch.

balls, by caterer Claudia Imatt of "Shall We Dine?" She didn't even have to say how good they were for you. They were the best meatballs of the night, and let's just say there were plenty of 'em. Charlotte's Fudge tempted, as did the fun assortment of gifts, including fluffy socks wrapped up to look like cupcakes.

Studio 7 was bursting with colorfully decorated walls of art, and some adorable glass candy truffles that would make great low calorie gifts, I delighted in the 2007 Crooked Vine Viognier made by winemaker (and shop owner) Jaime Dowell, accompanied by Pasta's excellent chicken-cashew salad. This was a high-class, high style, high energy atmosphere.

On to Murphy's Paw, barking with doggie delicacies, like Holistic Breath Beaters and Cheese Hearts, plus canine couture including stylish leather collars that would make my belt collection

envious. Plus a hat for humans that read, "I sleep with dogs." Here, Little Valley's White Rabbit Cabernet Franc hopped nicely to the flavors of Baci's chicken skewers with spicy peanut sauce.

Gourmet Works wonks you over the head with aromas of chocolate: this has to be a chocoholics equivalent of a pitcher of martinis. Casa Madrid tempted strollers to pause for a snack. American Harvest boasts cool bags and interesting boxes. Loved the note pad depicting a gal on the phone saying, "Some people call it gossip: I prefer the term networking."

It didn't get any more like a nightclub than Thriving Ink, where live music by Lucas Ohio Pattie had the throng dancing and toe-tapping with glasses of Wente in hand, as they drooled over a sweet collection of way too cool tops and hip-hop skirts.

Towne Center Books has calendars on sale if you've just now



gotten over your denial of the new decade. Intriguing was a Penny Warner party planning mystery called, "How to Host a Killer Party," clearly something the Pleasanton Downtown Association knows how to do quite well.

It didn't feel much like a staid lending institution at Comerica Bank: more like a festive fund-

raiser, with lots of excitement, raffles, Fenestra port and Syrah, and Ahi tuna tartare by Pampered Palate.

Alexander's Fine Art, where the old southwest store used to be, has visually delightful art on every wall. Stony Ridge was pouring a 2006 Syrah with a cool new label. If your heart flutters at the sight of anything Tinkerbelle, you must check out the "Tinkertini" collection by Trevor Carlson. *Ding!* I can just hear her little magic wand hitting the martini glass.

Clover Creek, which featured a hefty selection of Marie Osmond's non-Nutrisystem approved jewelry line, will be part of Ladies Night Out on March 4th. Ruby Hill's port called to many, as they browsed the huge sale on pillows and Lolita glassware, while nibbling bon bons. I spied a set of coasters that read, "Was he worth shaving her legs for?" a question I hadn't pondered in a while.

Up the street, I spied people



Artist Erika Richert demonstrated her portrait painting.

making merry at Blue Agave, and contentedly lounging cocktail sippers in the cozy Rose Hotel Bar. Outside, the fine mist gained momentum, along with the wind. So I ducked into The Farmer, where I had a brief chat with owner Sue Martinovich who told me the restaurant, which features affordable, “normal” American homestyle fare, has been packed since its opening. She says the #1 favorite dish is fried chicken, followed by the cobbler, which she makes from her grandmother’s recipe. “Save room for dessert!” is her mantra. She invites all the ladies to come on Thursdays for “Girls Just Wanna Have Fun” nights, with 50% off bar appetizers and special cocktail potions for \$5, from 8pm til midnight. Gesturing down the bar at the patrons, many of whom are regulars, Sue proclaims, “I feel like we’re Pleasanton’s very own ‘Cheers!’”

At the well-appointed, bursting with bubbly as well as retail Little Valley tasting room, lots of people were saying “cheers!” with Sandi Bohner’s almond and raspberry bubbly, as they devoured Tulula’s “Baked Bliss” red velvet mini-cupcakes frosted with cream cheese. Tulula cakestress Aileen Avila, who provides mini and full-sized cupcakes for all manner of private parties, weddings and corporate celebrations, is working on a Guinness cupcake with Bailey’s frosting for St. Patrick’s Day. I gave in to a lovely dichroic glass pendant by Kelley Heath of Kona Girl Jewelry for my beachbum sister, then waltzed out the door to musician Steven Gary’s soothing strains of “Gotta Have Faith.”

White Crane was pouring Char-

donnay at Rick’s Picks, which is a godsend for anyone with a brain cramp for gift-buying: here, you’ll find something for absolutely everyone, especially yourself. Cool sunglasses and readers for only \$7.99 suckered me in, and the collection of quirky and clever peppermills will definitely prompt a return.

At Sincerely Yours Cards & Gifts, where Connie and Gloria from Retzlaff were pouring their estate treasures, the crowd was joyous. Elbow to elbow, they perused the hysterical greeting cards, fun gifts and an upbeat town spirit collection of all things Pleasanton. A porcelain wall hanging begged the question. “When Blondes Have More Fun, Do They Know It?” I would have to say, yes, absolutely.

But blondes weren’t the only ones having fun at Savvy Seconds, where Tamas Estates was pouring a red blend called “Double Decker” that captivated at least a few over the top raven-haired party princes and princesses: they were trying to remember the name of the wine for future reference, declaring it their fave of the night. Hope this helps. Several well-dressed, wineloving glam gals were succumbing to the temptation of shoes. A dangerous combination: wine, chocolate and footwear. Heeding my inner “you don’t need more shoes” Mother, I left a pair of brown mules behind, hoping they may still be there on my next visit. There’s always something worth returning to Pleasanton for, even if it’s a well-brewed cup of normal American Joe at Café Main. And maybe a pair of boots, jeans, and a sassy scarf for the next Stroll.