

Napa and Yountville Revisited

David Landis

We're lucky to live so close to the wine country. If wine tasting weren't enough, there are many more reasons to visit: the proximity (a little over an hour away to Napa and Yountville), the views, and, of course, the fine dining. During a recent rainstorm, The Gay Gourmet returned to bring a few new places to the fore.

Gentleman Farmer Wines

Merriam-Webster defines a “gentleman farmer” as: “a man who farms mainly for pleasure rather than profit.” That mantra permeates everything that the husband-and-husband team of Joey Wolosz and Jeff Durham espouse at Gentleman Farmer Wines, a unique Napa winery where food is also paramount.

This gay-owned establishment believes that “a life well led is a life well fed.” The Gay Gourmet couldn't agree more. We had the pleasure of a lunchtime repast with the dynamic owners at their lovely Yountville home. But they're also re-habbing a historic bungalow (and perhaps a guesthouse next door) to open in downtown Napa, hopefully this fall. Members of the winery's club can partake in private “experiences” like the one I enjoyed. As we toured the new space, Joey and Jeff gave us a taste of their deliciously dry, Provence-style 2021 still rosé, which scored an impressive 90 points from Wine Enthusiast. At the soon-to-open bungalow, there will be space for up to 50 indoors, as well as al fresco tastings to boot. With the new digs, stay tuned for singular wine samplings, special luncheons, soirées, music, and more.



A little backstory: Joey is from the Central Coast; Jeff is a native of Napa. Both attended the University of Southern California to study hotel and restaurant management. But it took meeting years later at The Bar on Castro to get this duo together. Both are vintners (and Joey is a talented recipe developer), but their real life's work is storytelling. Spending an afternoon with them is like visiting life-of-the-party Aunt Marge—only with way better food and wine. The guys believe we should be “fed by thoughtful food, good wine, and engaged conversation.” Conviviality is key.

This boutique winery produces only approximately 1,000 cases each year; as a result, the wines are of superior quality and are clean and tasty. Showcasing the wines with the excellent recipes that Joey has developed brings out the best in both.



So, what's a luncheon with the guys like? When you arrive at their creekside Yountville home, you immediately are enveloped in a world of artistry: impressive design, a piano and an accordion in the corner, chickens in the backyard, and that kitchen—oh my! It dominates the entire back half of the house, but is open to the dining area to, of course, encourage conversation.

First off, everything is homemade. Everything. We began our afternoon with Joey's chopped liver (sorry, Mom, even better than yours!) and homemade brioche that was so buttery it melted in your mouth. Two kinds of housemade pierogis followed: a potato cheese and a mushroom sauerkraut. It was definitely a toss-up as to which was our favorite; both were light as a feather but savory with complex overtones.



Joey also pickles his own veggies and makes his own mustard (who does that?!!) with chardonnay and sherry vinegar. Paired with our first course was the Gentleman Farmer 2020 Chardonnay. I will start off by saying that I rarely like California chardonnays—they're just plain too oak-y. This one made me change my tune. It has a hint of oak, but the oak doesn't dominate, so you can really taste the fruit.

For our next course, Joey and Jeff picked the Gentleman Farmer 2019 “Red Wine” (yup, that’s what it’s called—and it’s a merlot-dominant blend) to complement a delectable Italian spinach ricotta dumpling created in the Napa Valley called “malfatti” (which means “badly formed” in Italian). It tastes just like Italy.

Our next course was a Fatted Calf hangar steak with homemade spaetzle. The secret to cooking the steak? Joey marinates it with sherry, ginger, and mustard, cooks it sous vide, and finishes it in the saucepan with clarified butter. The steak paired expertly with the Gentleman Farmer 2018 Cabernet (with Merlot), a structured but elegant red wine with a hint of tannins.

Following the main course, we sampled Joey’s homemade blueberry and raspberry clafoutis with Grand Marnier and lavender buds—paired wisely with the winery’s 2021 Pinot Noir (earthy and not too fruity). And for the finale? Homemade marshmallows, dubbed “crème brûlée on a stick,” cooked tableside over an open flame. All in all, join the Gentleman Farmer club, enjoy their wines, snag an invite to one of their wine club luncheons, and wait with baited breath for the new bungalow to open in downtown Napa this fall.



Jeff Durham and Joey Wolosz