

2E WINE: RIOJA MAKERS RETURN TO ROOTS

3E RESTAURANT REVIEW: VILLA AZUR ★★★

# TROPICAL LIFE

The Miami Herald 

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## PAGES & POURS

A wine appreciation class at Books & Books immerses students in two of life's great pleasures.



BY ANA VICIANA-GUAREZ  
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A bottle of red, a bottle of white, perhaps a bottle of rosé instead.

Billy Joel got it right when he sang *Scenes from an Italian Restaurant*, but the students in Patrick Alexander's wine appreciation class might add one more element to amp up the ambience: floor-to-ceiling shelves of books.

Alexander, a retired University of Miami executive who has served as a judge for the Florida International Wine Challenge, teaches his 12-hour course at Books & Books, the venerable independent bookstore in Coral Gables. His stu-

• TURN TO CLASS, 4E

MARCO BONANDEAU/Herald Staff

ANNOTATED MENU: Chef Allen Susser, standing at left, talks about the meal he has prepared for the wine appreciation class.

## CLASS

# Pours among the pages at bookstore wine class

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dents are both veteran and beginning wine enthusiasts who bond over one of life's great culinary and social pleasures.

Most are women, and Alexander has a theory about that.

"They want to know what to order and not have to depend on a man," he says. "They're also doing a lot of entertaining alone these days."

He pauses, smiling slyly. "I also think it has something to do with men not wanting to ask for directions."

Ann-Lynn Denker is the perfect example. A nurse who lives in downtown Miami, she eats out a lot and entertains plenty, but knows little about wine except what she likes to drink. So... "now I can look at a wine menu and know what I'm ordering. I don't have to depend on anyone."

Julissa Senices, a psychologist in private practice in South Miami, was similarly motivated. She took the course because she wanted a bit more confidence when ordering. In the end she got something extra: "I loved the history. It was fascinating. I look at wine in a different way now."

During the six-week course, students learn how to use their senses to sample wine, how to distinguish



**INSTRUCTOR:** Patrick Alexander serves wine to student Lourdes Marct.

among some 30 grapes, how vines are grown and the types of terrain they require. They also get a condensed version of 8,000 years worth of wine history. In the end, though, Alexander believes it all comes down to this: "Do you like the wine?"

David Galler, an archi-

tect, knows what he likes — "stronger, full-bodied wines" — but he was pleased to discover that he enjoyed some of the lighter white wines served in class. As a result, "I think I'm going to experiment more now."

Students sample four wines during each Monday

night class — a total of 24 wines from various parts of the world — and score them on sight, smell, taste and overall quality. Not everyone has the same tastes, however.

During the final class, the students sampled a sauvignon blanc from New Zea-

land, a shiraz from South Australia, a carmenere from Chile and a malbec from Argentina. Reactions tended to be quite descriptive. The shiraz was "ruby red with a touch of purple." And the carmenere, one student blurted, "smells like stinky socks."

## Next Class

Books & Books in Coral Gables begins another six-week, 12-hour wine appreciation course for 16 students on Monday evening. The \$299 fee covers lectures, tastings, a workbook and a four-course dinner. Reserve by emailing [cristina@booksandbooks.com](mailto:cristina@booksandbooks.com). Learn more at [gableswine.com](http://gableswine.com).

"Comes on strong, then fades," said a second. "Like a relationship," chimed a third.

If enjoying new wines in good company isn't attraction enough, the final class is a wine-paired dinner prepared by renowned chef Allen Susser, the man behind the store's Books & Books Café by Chef Allen.

The four-course dinner is served on a long, white-clothed table, with Alexander presiding at the head. Susser introduces each dish, explaining the thinking that went into the food selections designed to match the two reds and two whites the students had voted for at an earlier class. Alexander then serves wine to each student with more commentary.

The mahi mahi ceviche, for example, is paired with a 2011 torrontes from Argentina, the white truffle mac and cheese with a 2008 A-Mano Primitivo from Italy, the grilled skirt steak chimichurri with a cabernet sauvignon from California and the fruit and berry tart with a French sauternes.

The room is awash in good cheer by the end of the evening. And it's not just all that drinking.

"What I liked most," said Stephanie Wasserman, who took the class with her fiancé, Hodari Burns, "is that there's a back story for every grape, every wine, every region. It's fascinating."

(The following is the text of the article by Ana Veciana-Suarez published in The Miami Herald on July 5, 2012 with photographs by Marice Cohen Band of the Miami Herald Staff.)

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Photographs by MARICE COHN BAND/MIAMI HERALD STAFF

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<http://www.miamiherald.com/2012/07/05/2880518/wine-appreciation-class-at-a-bookstore.html#storylink=misearch>