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Rare & Fine Wine Auction Uncorks Another Vintage by J. Buckner Hightower, Foundation President

Within the past few years, wine has exploded in popularity. Wine bars, pairing stations and classes have popped up just about everywhere; from high-end, exclusive restaurants to local grocery retailers. Along with the new wave of enthusiasts who are becoming more educated about wine, it naturally follows that the popularity of storing and collecting wine is also on the rise.

Collecting wine used to be considered a luxury reserved for the truly wealthy or the serious connoisseur. Today, wine cellars and storage areas are being built...

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Locating Local by Shannon Finch

Before "eat local" got so trendy, the greenest and healthiest choice was clear: organic. Things are more complicated now. "Organic or local?" has joined "Paper or plastic?" as another ecological decision faced at the grocery store. But choosing a bag at the checkout line has far fewer environmental...

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Match Made in Texas

by Trish Bales & Robert Calvert

Food scholars say that wine and cheese have been around for at least 4000 years—and likely much longer. Both are produced through mysterious processes that must have seemed magical to early man. Somehow...

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Member Profile: Meet Jim Erben

by Sarah Murray



A true Texan and talented business man, Jim Erben

talks about ranch life, gastronomical memories, his work, being a Wine & Food Foundation member, and of course, first-rate wine...

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FEATURE ARTICLES

[Foundation Launches Community Partnership Program](#)
by Rebecca Robinson



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Plate & Vine Contributors

TRISH BALES



Trish Bales began her career in the food industry about 10 years ago with a catering business specializing in European Dinner Parties. Currently, she runs her own

J. BUCKNER HIGHTOWER



Mr. Hightower is a fifth-generation Texan and a graduate of the University of Texas. His professional career is a fascinating mosaic of manufacturing,

Currently, Community Partners include a wide range of businesses and interests, including design firm the i2i Group, the Driskill Grill, Paragon Printing, Winebat.com, Ambiente Distributing, Travel Becomes You, Castle Hill Café, Mirabelle and many others. The Foundation homepage rotates member logos in addition to the Community Partnership page. At the top \$1,000 level there are an exclusive number of spaces available, as with the \$500 level. The \$250 level has an unlimited number of partners.

Visit the new [Wine & Food Foundation calendar](#), which is revamped and chock full of exciting wine and food events produced by the Foundation, and exclusive listings from our Community Partners. Simply visit the '[Calendar](#)' section of the Wine & Food Foundation website from now on, and your next glass of wine is only a click away. Cheers!

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New & Notable: *Fun Things to Try in Austin and Away*

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New & Notable: *Fun Things to Try in Austin and Away* by Rona Distenfeld

Austin: TRIO at the Four Seasons is expanding its presence as a place for wine lovers with two new regular events. **TRIO Thursdays**, a new weekly wine appreciation event, lets you taste a different flight each week and see how each wine pairs with food. Led by sommelier Mark Sayre, TRIO Thursday is \$20 per person and includes both the flight and the tapas-style appetizers. TRIO has also started a series of **wine dinners**, bringing winemakers or their representatives in to talk about the wines you try as you enjoy a full meal designed to pair perfectly with each selection. For more information on both events, go to <http://www.fourseasons.com/austin/>.

Austin: The **Driskill Grill** has started a new season of **monthly winemaker dinners** to be held the last Thursday of every month. The six-course meals will be designed to enhance your experience of the featured wines, and the winemaker or a representative will be on hand to tell you about the wines and answer questions. The March program features Clyde Gilbet of Raymond Vineyards and April features Aldo Rafandelli of Antinori Vineyards. Call 512.391.7041 for reservations.

Dallas: In November, the **Rosewood Mansion on Turtle Creek** reopened its famous restaurant following a complete renovation of both the historic building and the menu. With two sommeliers on hand, the wine list is becoming consistently broader and more interesting, and the food is even better than before. The bar area is also worth a visit. Sit by the fireplace and enjoy wines by the glass and excellent nibbles from the bar menu. It makes for a great place to call your own while visiting Dallas. Call 214.443.4747 for reservations.

Hong Kong: When you're ready for a more creative approach to local fare, try **Lumiere** on Level 3 of the IFC building near the Star Ferry. There is a full-time sommelier on hand to help you choose from a wine list that carries an equal number of well-known names and wines from regions less common in America, including China's own "Chairman's Reserve." The food and the view won't disappoint, either. Visit www.lumiere.hk for more information.

--Rona Distenfeld

JE: My wife, Kathy, and my five-year-old Jess. He's a riot. He calls wine Daddy's grape juice.

How long have you been in Austin proper?

JE: I left Austin after UT for 7 years, then moved back in 1993 to start my own company.

Speaking of, what is Erben Associates? What's the most interesting part of your profession?

JE: In a nutshell, we do wealth management with a focus on exit planning for business owners. The most interesting aspect is helping people figure out how to exit their business. Whether it's the unfortunate horizontal method (in a pine box), or deciding to sell or give to their kids or their employees, it's rewarding to help people sort it out. We also run a referral service in three states – Texas, Georgia and New York – so we're able to help people in other areas of the country. The company functions on referral only and we have a nearly 100% retainage rate.

How did you become involved with The Wine & Food Foundation of Texas?

JE: Michael Russell introduced me to some people at the Foundation and then I became part of the Auction Committee. Then I went to the Auction and fell in love. Becoming a corporate sponsor seemed like the natural next step.

What are your expectations for the Auction?

JE: I think we'll raise a lot of money, have a lot of fun, and drink a lot of wine. It's a great event for the cause it supports.

(www.oneifbyland.com). It's Aaron Burr's old coachhouse. Small, intimate, romantic with an excellent *prix fixe* menu.

Favorite Texas food and wine? Favorite BBQ?

JE: Well, steak. And for BBQ, Cooper's in Llano (www.coopersbbq.com). And for wine, Becker's 2004 Malbec (www.beckervineyards.com). That's just a great wine and we've had fun evenings out at the ranch relaxing and drinking it.

Favorite type of grape?

JE: I go by the season, my wife likes the whites in summer, but I prefer red. Good Cabs, sometimes a good Pinot. I love Italian wines.

Best wine for a celebration? For an evening at home?

JE: Caymus for a celebration. For home, I drink something different every day because I like trying new wines. And there's some great wine under \$20 a bottle for every day drinking.

Overall best wine experience?

JE: Siena, Italy in Tuscany - hands down. The table wine is spectacular.

Food & Wine Pairing?

JE: Wine goes with anything. Popcorn and candy bars.

--Sarah Murray with Jim Erben

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A Wine Lover's Tour of Austin

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A Wine Lover's Tour of Austin by Rona Distenfeld

Austin has long been known for its music, for keeping things weird and for pretty coeds flashing the "hook 'em" sign. Once in a while, there's even something important enough to take notice of, coming from the tallest capitol building in the U.S. In recent years it's also been developing a reputation as a place with some pretty good restaurants, and a growing appreciation for good wines.

Cork & Co, a locally-owned wine bar and retail shop on Congress Avenue, has put together a large selection of flights that range from cabernets to champagnes. You get three wines in each flight and prices range from \$10 to \$24 per flight. There are also many wines available in a 2-ounce pour, by the glass and by the bottle. It's easy to taste a number of things without spending too much. The staff is

Larry Peel, co-founder of the Texas Hill Country Wine & Food Foundation, has watched this development with delight. In fact he's done more than just watch, he's done his own share of sampling. He's developed some definite favorites among these restaurants. Jeffrey's, Aquarelle, and the newest addition to the scene, TRIO at the Four Seasons, head his current list of favorites. They're closely followed by Zoot, Castle Hill, Mirabelle and Wink.

Beyond the restaurants, Austin has a growing selection of wine bars. This has become increasingly popular way for those finding their way in the world of wine to make new discoveries. They're also great for those who have been enjoying wines for years and wish to do their own personal tastings. They've also become a popular way to spend an evening, alone or with friends, enjoying delicious nibbles with a glass of something you're in the mood for.

So do you dine heartily or go for the light bite? Which of Austin's many choices will give you the experience you want?

Wining & Dining

Dining in Austin has always offered variety. These days, long-time local favorites like Jeffrey's and Zoot have been joined by high-end, limited location chains like Roy's and Eddie V's. There's something about our home grown places, however, that manage to combine Austin's unique feel with superb food and wine. The places you can find in New York or Scottsdale, while offering excellent food, wine and service, just don't have that special Austin touch.



Jeffrey's does, which is one of the reasons it has been a favorite haunt of Austin's foodies for thirty-two years. The wine list, and the by-the-glass offerings change seasonally along with the menu, but the service and the ambience are reliably constant. This is a place for romance; for candlelight and savoring their signature appetizer of crispy oyster on yucca root chip while gazing into the eyes of someone special. It's a place for celebrating something great or just celebrating another great

knowledgeable and accommodating.

Cru offers flights also, but not the opportunity to create your own or sample individual wines in less than a full glass.

Aside from their approach to flights, these venues also differ in other ways. Wink was first known for its food. The restaurant has long been considered one of Austin's best. The Wine Bar is completely separate and has its own personality.

Dining at Wink is an upscale experience, but the wine bar is a small place with low lighting and friendly staff dressed in casual clothes instead of starched shirts and aprons. This makes it feel like a cozy neighborhood bar. Come here twice and they'll probably remember you. That doesn't make it low rent however; the bar-height tables with their high chairs have heavy linen tablecloths and the bar menu is one of the best in town, borrowing some things from the restaurant and adding its own treats. Menu favorites include the mac n' cheese with black truffles and the Wink brie burgers. The brie burgers are three small (but not tiny) beef burgers with brie or foie gras. Even the Mansion on Turtle Creek in Dallas doesn't do mini burgers as good as these. The el rey chocolate cake made with zinfandel infused cherries is a winner for those wanting something sweet. Regulars here tend to be in their 30s and older, with some knowledge of wine and their own preferences. It can get very busy and crowded during happy hour, but at other time is a nice place to talk with a friend (or a date) or come on your own with a book.

TRIO is a wine bar as well as a restaurant, all in the same place with the same menu. If you don't want a full dinner, you can snack and sample at their bar, in the casual seating area at the front, or out on the patio. This is possibly the nicest place in town to enjoy a glass of wine when the weather is nice. The bar area is even Wi-Fi enabled if you want a glass of wine while you catch up on email or work.

The patio offers couches or tables where you can relax, explore flights or enjoy a glass or a bottle of something you like. Pair it with some of TRIO's fine food as you gaze out at Lady Bird Lake. Rather than a separate bar menu, they offer an ever-changing array of starters and sides to go with your wine. The trio of foie gras, crab fondue, truffle macaroni, and gnocchi are good choices when available. Be sure to try the sweet corn crème brulee, an instant favorite. TRIO is a little higher priced. A couple each enjoying a flight, a full glass or two, and several starters and sides can expect to spend about \$100, but the service will pamper you and it's a truly relaxing and delightful way to spend an evening.

Cork & Co takes a very different approach. This

meal. Any dinner feels special, even if all you're celebrating is that it's Friday.

TRIO, another of Peel's favorites, is Chef Elmar Pramb's latest enterprise at the Four Seasons Hotel. Pramb regularly prepares private dinners for Peel in his renowned private cellar (many of those dinners were auctioned off for charity). It's no surprise that TRIO would make Peel's top list. TRIO will make yours, too. With 799 bottles of wine on display, and Texas State Sommelier winner Mark Sayre on hand to help you choose, you're off to a great start.

TRIO offers flights, wines by the glass, and all those bottles. Pramb has designed the menu with wine drinkers in mind, keeping the food simple. He relies on excellent ingredients to give the food character and flavor that pairs well with any wine you select. Just as important, TRIO does not feel like a hotel restaurant. It's warm, comfortably elegant, and friendly. If you're dining on your own, it's light enough to read without being harsh. That's a good thing, because you'll want a good look at the beautifully presented food before you clean the plate.

Flights of Fancy

One of the great things about most wine bars is the opportunity to do flights. These "mini tastings" typically let you to sample three to four different wines with two-ounce pours, although some places tend to be a little more generous.

Each venue has its own approach; Wink lets you create your own flights with as many wines as you like and prices each pour individually (most between \$2.75 and \$3.50). You can also ask your server to create a flight for you after discussing what you like. At TRIO, sommelier Mark Sayre has created flight selections based on his deep knowledge and creative presentation of wines that compare well to each other. You can also create your own flight from the large selection of wines available by the glass.

Cork & Co takes a very different approach. This wine bar and retail store seems designed to make neophytes feel as comfortable as collectors. The downtown location makes it a natural happy hour place for local office workers of all ages, but overall the clientele here is younger and hipper, and interested in learning about wine. The knowledgeable staff is happy to oblige. Cork & Co does regular wine tasting events led by "Miss Jane", an instructor at the Texas Culinary Institute. They also provide an occasional wine and food pairing events with visiting winemakers.

Cork & Co limits its nibbles to a cheese plate and sweets, so this is a good place to come before or after you go to dinner. It could be a starting place for an evening out, especially if you plan to head to the clubs on Sixth Street or the Warehouse District. The friendly vibe, nice bar, and couch seating at the front by the windows make it an inviting place to just come and hang with your friends. You can always stop by to pick up a bottle of something you like for yourself or a gift.

Austin is getting its share of "chain" wine bars, too. Cru and Vino Vino have made their mark in other parts of Texas and have also found a home here. Cru offers a full menu, including "pizzas", mussels, calamari, and entrees like pan seared diver sea scallops or seared Kobe beef. Vino Vino offers lighter fare to go with your wine by the glass, such as sandwiches, pate, and tuna tartar. Both are also retailers and sell wines by the bottle or the case.

Experienced and new wine lovers will also discover new wines and tastes of Austin's best restaurants at the Texas Hill Country Wine and Food Foundation's many tasting events. Visit the web site at <http://www.wineandfoodfoundation.org> for more information.

--Rona Distenfeld

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Elegant Hawaii

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Elegant Hawaii by Rona Distenfeld



Long before Rick Springfield sang about walking the beaches of Waikiki or Gidget inspired America to surf, Hawaiian royalty and wealthy locals were building homes on the islands' best beaches. Waikiki, Kaaanapali, and Hanalei Bay still draw those who expect the best.

Timeless Traditions and New Tastes on Oahu

On Oahu, Honolulu draws visitors from around the world for its shopping, nightlife, beaches, and great restaurants. The long white curve of Waikiki beach, with its view of Diamond Head, is what first made Hawaii famous. Here, in 1901, the first beachfront hotel began welcoming the rich and famous. Additions and renovations have retained the classic Beaux Arts architecture and old-world charm of the Sheraton Moana Surfrider. As you walk through the elegant lobby you can almost feel the presence of guests from a bygone age, like Edward, Prince of Wales and Amelia Earhart.



The resort's Black Rock Steak and Seafood restaurant offers an intimate atmosphere in keeping with its romantic appeal. It provides contemporary Hawaiian entertainment, and a menu that combines prime cuts of beef and fresh seafood with the Pacific Rim cuisine that defines Hawaii's culinary arts. Executive Chef Byan Ashlock is the recipient of many awards, including James Beard House Chef, 2001.

The resort also offers a more Asian experience at Teppan-yaki Dan. In traditional

High Tea, on the verandah overlooking the Moana's famed Banyan tree, has been a tradition here for generations. Locals fondly reminisce about being taken here for tea as children, and it's still a favorite way to mark a special occasion.

The Surfrider prepares its own special blends, which you choose from jars of loose tea. Just sampling the aromas of the leaves is a treat! Your tea is steeped in its own individual pot, and served with a tiered tray of sweet and savory morsels. Munch on little sandwiches, petit fours, and tiny pastries as you gaze over the Banyan Court out toward the sea.

The verandah is also the entrance to the new Beachhouse Restaurant. Chef Rodney Uyehara creates vibrant island-inspired cuisine that take full advantage of Hawaii's fresh produce and seafood, and the finest quality steaks. The wine list offers some of the best known names from around the world to make your meal complete.

After dinner, walk over to RumFire, the new bar at the Sheraton Waikiki. Its signature tower of rum sports 101 different rums, including some exclusive, rare rums not found anywhere else in the U.S. The fire pits and views of Waikiki Beach make this a special place to relax, and if you get hungry the tasty tapas will keep you happy.

Want a casual dining experience with incredible fare? Grab your favorite libation and bring it to Hank's Haute Dogs on a Friday or Saturday before 9:00 pm. On Friday nights, the lobster sausage is a hands-down favorite. Try one of the signature dishes from owner Henry "Hank" Adaniya's five-star Chicago restaurant, Trio, such as truffled macaroni and cheese or the Chicago Italian beef sandwiches. Adaniya chooses a different signature dish to feature each month.

Explore the Local Cuisine with an Expert

Those looking for an insiders take on the best places to eat on Oahu can take a guided tour led by Grant Sato, chef at the Kapi'olani Community College (KCC), which is well known for its culinary arts program. Chef Sato offers several culinary tours. One of the most popular takes you on foot through Chinatown, followed by a dim sum brunch.

The tour then continues to one of Oahu's local farms where Sato teaches participants how to cook with produce found on the farm.

Japanese style, food is prepared tableside with showmanship and culinary skill. Treat your palate to sautéed prawns with sweet island pineapple chunks; seared macadamia nut crusted jumbo scallops served with watercress pesto; chunks of lobster with essence of lemon grass; peppercorn-crusted prime cut of strip loin, aged to perfection and served teriyaki style; or seared filet mignon accented with a fine sake dipping sauce.

For a true Pacific Island dining experience, try Pineapple Grill at Kapalua Resort. Executive Chef Ryan Luckey was born and raised on Maui, and delights in sharing the flavors and culinary traditions of his home. Maybe that's why Frommer's picked it as the one place to eat if you had only one night on Maui.

Maui's most upscale dining experience may be the Son'z Maui at the Hyatt Regency Maui Resort & Spa. Their "Surfing Goat Cheese Ravioli" and the "Hawaiian Opakapaka Picatta" are just two examples of how Executive Chef Gino Sarmiento uses the best of locally grown and produced ingredients. This restaurant is part of the same group that owns Nicholas Nickolas and Sarento's, two of Hawaii's most esteemed dining establishments.

Other Local Flavors

In Maui's uplands, visitors will find the Nanea Ao Kula Maui Lavender Farm. It can be quite cool up here, a surprising and pleasant change from the warm beaches. Lunch on the lavender chicken salad as your eyes feast on the colorful gardens and sweeping views. Browse the gift shop for soaps, bath oils, and chocolates made with the locally grown lavender.

Over on the beautiful slopes of Maui's Haleakala Crater in lower Kula, Surfing Goat Dairy has been producing award-winning "Maui Gourmet Goat Cheeses" for over 4 years. "Shark Bites", the exotic super premium line named after the "bite out of the wallet they take" (possibly the most expensive line of goat cheese in the world), uses some of the world's most expensive and rare ingredients such as Perigord truffles and 23K gold flakes.

The "Aloha" line contains fresh Maui Gourmet Goat Cheese Chevre, plain or blended with many different herbs, fruits and gourmet ingredients grown on the farm, and their "Quarks" (a goat yogurt).

Kapi'olani Community College is also home to a weekend Farmers Market. Local producers come from all the islands to offer fruits, vegetables, coffee, and prepared local foods, as well as arts and crafts. Stroll, sample, and savor the tastes of all the islands here.

If cooking classes are your idea of fun, Gourmet Cooking Hawaii presents four in-kitchen cooking classes with notable chef George Mavrothalassitis. The always-entertaining Chef Mavro invites 15 guests behind the scenes into his famous kitchen for two hours of hands-on cooking filled with practical tips and memorable stories. After the class, Chef Mavro joins the students for a three-course gourmet lunch served at a convivial chef's table. Wine pairings and commentary by Chef Mavro's sommelier further enhance the experience.



Different Flavors and Feels in Maui

Where Oahu is hip and happening, Maui offers a quieter feel. Black Rock on Kaanapali Beach has its own royal tradition. Hawaiian legend says that the last chief of Maui proved his spiritual strength by leaping from the sacred Pu'u Keka'a into the Pacific. The legend is remembered with a nightly torch lighting procession and cliff dive ceremony, best viewed from the Lagoon Bar at the Sheraton Maui. This is where the original Mai Tai was created, later adapted to the less potent version served today.

The hotel, repeatedly named one of the best by Travel & Leisure Magazine, is built around Black Rock, and is a favorite destination for couples looking for a romantic get-away. Special touches, like private dinners on the beach, are easily arranged, and just down the beach, you can indulge your body and spirit at the Westin's Heavenly Spa®, the second spa in the world to receive SpaExcellence certification. Luxurious treatments like the Island Lavender Body

The "Paradise" line features more exotic combinations of Maui Gourmet Goat Cheeses in various oils, wrappers and spices as well as aged biscuits wrapped in wax. Surfing Goat Dairy produces over 25 different cheeses, and the Maui Gourmet Goat Cheeses have received 16 National Awards in the past three years.

Daily tours, cheese tastings, and special events offer a fun way to spend an afternoon. Or come for tea and enjoy their own fresh-brewed blends and treats like Liliko'i Cheesecake. An annual "Best of Upcountry" event in June features cooking demonstrations by some of Maui's best chefs, food, crafts.

Whether you cruise along the coasts on a catamaran or savor the sushi at Momoyama in Honolulu, every island will give you its own unique taste of Hawaii to treasure.

--Rona Distenfeld

WHEN YOU GO

ON OAHU:

Sheraton Moana Surfrider
(808) 922-3111

<http://www.moana-surfrider.com/>

[Kapi'olani Community College Farmers Market](#)

[Momoyama](#)

ON MAUI:

Sheraton Maui Resort

(808) 661-0031

<http://www.Sheraton-maui.com/>

Westin Heavenly Spa

(808) 661-2588

<http://www.westinmaui.com/>

Nanea Ao Kula Maui Lavender Farm

(808) 878-3004

<http://www.mauikulalavender.com>

Surfing Goat Dairy

(808) 878-2879

<http://www.surfinggoatdairy.com>

Butter and "Kope" Coffee Contour Wrap make use of locally grown ingredients.

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