

**08/03/09 - Restaurant Review: Tierra Sur**

**Restaurant Review:**

Herzog Wine Cellar's Tierra Sur

Chef Todd Aaron Showcases Local Produce at Winery

This last Thursday the 23rd of July was another in a long string of perfect blue skied, mild summer days in Los Angeles. I picked up my husband in front of his office and allowed ourselves just under 2 hours for the brief, but what we thought would be bumper to bumper rush hour traffic drive to the Herzog Wine Cellar's restaurant Tierra Sur. Much to our surprise the traffic soon thinned out and our drive to Camarillo was only an hour and ten minutes.

After entertaining ourselves for a bit at the nearby outlet mall, we drove to our ultimate destination down several side streets, or should I call them farm back roads through beautiful cultivated land part of . Soon we could see the Herzog winery building down about half a mile away in the midst of abundant fields. We smelled wood fueled fire for grilling meat in the parking lot, as we walked to the winery entrance.

The diners were an intimate group including the McGraths some of their employees and spouses. The Tierra Sur restaurant boasts a well known chef, an alumnus of Chez Panisse in Berkley and The Savoy in New York. Todd Aarons joined us in our private room to explain the concept of his menu; to use as much of the current McGrath farm produce as possible, and support Community Supported Agriculture (CSA). Then he excused himself to the kitchen.

We sat next to Peter and Joanne McGrath, 5th generation family farmers who own 300 acres, between the outlet mall and the wine cellars. Originally, farmers planted the super fertile plain, located between the Pacific Ocean and the foothills of the coastal range, with lima beans and other crops suited to the foggy, cooler, coastal, micro climate. Now as commercially adapted strawberries, housing tracks and business parks take over; the McGraths maintain their organic, sustainable farm in the midst, with a commitment to CSA.

Table arrangements made with fresh lavender picked on the farm tickled our noses, as the wait staff presented a quenelle shaped croquette of pureed fresh lima beans lightly crusted in breadcrumbs as the amuse bouche. Chef Aaron's creatively composed salad came with yellow and green *haricot vert* perfectly steamed, a

creamy miniature potato, a quail egg with its yolk not quite hard and organic cherry tomatoes as the base. The Ahi tuna was a thick, seared, chunk crusted in dehydrated and then crushed Nicoise olives. The olives lent their salty goodness to this salad, all dressed in lemon vinaigrette. These first two menu items were served with a beautiful bright tasting **Pinot Gris, Goose Bay, New Zealand 2007**.

Duck consommé with strong flavored dandelion greens, a perfectly poached duck egg, and smoky bits came next, accompanied by a red by W. Weinstock Cellars, 2008. After a bit, the chef emerged from the kitchen to introduce the main course. Braised veal breast sat on a bed of stewed and pureed heirloom tomatoes surrounded by baby carrots, baby beets, pearl onions, and swiss chard, was presented in a large soup dish. The succulent veal with its slightly roasted crust and melding of the season's best but humble vegetables slid down my throat with such satisfaction as to be truly memorable. I vowed to recreate this veal at home. **Herzog Wine Cellars Special Reserve Zinfandel Lodi 2006** paired perfectly.

Coffee served aside a desert of a frozen honey and lavender cream sitting in a dish of macerated strawberries and flanked by baby corn beignets was a perfect finish.

The Herzog Wine Cellars is located in Oxnard, California.. Their phone number is 805-983-1560. The winery has wine tasting, a wine bar, tours of the winery operation (not the vineyard), and an award winning restaurant with many special events. As a bonus, it is strictly kosher.

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