

Mountaintop dinner complements scenery



Wining and dining at Homewood. Photos/Kathryn Reed

By Kathryn Reed

HOMWOOD – Lakeview dining at Tahoe just got elevated – to about 7,000 feet. And the food will have you rethinking your opinion about ski resort fare.

This is no ordinary mountaintop dinner. It's five courses with a different wine with each dish. And it's an opportunity to mingle with the people responsible for creating the edibles and liquid refreshments.

Homewood Mountain Resort for the second summer is hosting the Farm to Peak Dinner Series. Chefs and vintners create food and pour wine at the top of the Quail chairlift. Seated at long tables with crisp white linens, guests have a sprawling view of Lake Tahoe for their eyes to feast upon.

Skiers know this resort as being the one place in the Lake Tahoe Basin where it feels like you are about to land in the water as you schuss down the mountain. Dining atop the mountain was not adrenaline pumping, but the setting for this meal far outshines anyplace I've eaten in Tahoe.

"We are taking baby steps to make it a year-round resort," Paul Raymore, spokesman for Homewood, told *Lake Tahoe News*. "The mountaintop is one of our prime assets. Unless you ski or ride, you don't have a chance to ride the chairlift."

Homewood hopes to bring the West Shore resort into the 21st century by modernizing lodges, adding lodging and creating a year-round destination. Legal issues are delaying that, but Raymore said owners hope construction could begin in 2016.

For now, though, the resort is hosting a few Farm to Peak Dinners each summer.



Axel Schug tells guests about his wines.

Guests on Aug. 9 arrived at the South Lodge where Axel Schug was pouring a 2013 Sauvignon Blanc. Schug and his wife, Kristine, own Schug Carneros Estate in Sonoma. They have a home in Tahoma, and he used to live in Incline Village when he worked in food and beverage at the Hyatt in the late 1980s.

They worked with guest chef Grog Verbeck of Hey Chef! in Truckee to ensure the wines would pair well with his concoctions. Kristine Schug handles the food at the winery. She contributed herbs from her garden to the meal.

Verbeck provides private chef services in Truckee, Tahoe and east to the Reno area.



Burgundy Braised Brisket

The Schug winery has deep roots in the business. Walter Schug established it in 1980 after having been the founding winemaker for Joseph Phelps Vineyards in the 1970s. Schug grew up among the vineyards of Germany.

When he left Phelps he did so with the winery's permission to use his label for what was then their Pinot Noir. It is that delicate red varietal that is Schug's signature wine.

The 2012 Pinot was paired with the main course – Burgundy Braised Brisket with Chimichurri and Summer's Best Vegetable Succotash.

Sue said the meat was cooked perfectly, a little peppery, but

not overbearing. Shawn simply said it was “delicious.”

I had portabella mushrooms substituted for the brisket.

“My god, that’s like a steak,” Sue said of the mushroom. I had to agree. It was one of the best portabellas I have ever had. It was cooked perfectly; and the marinade – well – it was as good as the view.

Both entrees were braised in the Pinot we were drinking.



Wild Mushrooms and Smoked Fontina

Overall, though, Steve and I thought our entrees were a bit on the salty side. The onion ring on top in particular needed a chaser of water to be able to swallow.

But considering one of the challenges to cooking this meal is that part of it is done in the lodge below and part on the mountain, quality control can be hard to manage. Even Chef Robert Irvine of “Dinner Impossible” fame might find this dual cooking arrangement for more than 100 people a challenge.

Still, as the plates went back to the tent, there was nothing left on them.

We started our food venture at the lodge with a Wild Mushroom and Smoked Fontina Phyllo Purse. For someone who loves mushrooms, I could have filled up on these. The pastry was

flaky, a perfect complement to the warm, smooth mushroom-cheese filling.



Four spreads

The appetizer made the fruitiness of the Sauvignon Blanc stand out even more. This combo was perfect on a late summer afternoon.

With wine glasses in hand, we then boarded the chairlift.

The second course came served totally Tahoe-style – on a round that in other locales would be used as a stepping stone. It was a creative presentation for the four spreads that were served with bread.

The farm cheese was the favorite of those seated around us. I also particularly liked the pickled onions. So often anything pickled can taste too vinegary – not so with these. The fig and tomato jam tasted just like a sweet jam, which was disappointing to Shawn and me. We were expecting something spicy, with more tomato flavor.



Salad of Heirloom Cucumbers

The Rouge de Noirs Brut was the least favorite of the wines for those seated by us. As much as winemakers keep professing how wonderful roses are, I'm not buying it.

The Salad of Heirloom Cucumbers, Toasted Almonds, Goat Cheese and Cress Oil was the favorite of the night for Debbie. "The cucumbers exploded," she said.

They tasted so fresh I would have been surprised if they had not been picked that day. "The salad tastes wild and fresh," I wrote that night.

On top of many of the plates was a sprig of lavender – which some found a bit foreboding to taste. But no chef who is going to stay in business puts food on a plate that is not edible.



Chef Grog Verbeck

“The lavender flower counteracts the garlic. And there is a little bit of lavender in the dressing,” Chef Verbeck told his guests.

The 2012 Chardonnay was liked, but not everyone thought it went well with the salad. Debbie said no to the pairing, while Shawn thought they were a nice combo.



The Schug Pinot Noir was the star of the night.

“It’s oaky, but it’s still crisp,” Shawn said of the wine. Fifteen percent of the barrels the Chardonnay is processed in are new oak.

“We go easy on the oak,” Axel Schug said.

Wrapping up the dinner was a Hazelnut Dacquoise and Vanilla Bean Ice Cream Cake with Chocolate Ganache and Peach Compote that was paired with a 2012 Late Harvest Riesling.

Sue and Shawn said this was a perfect pairing. Just the peaches and ice cream would have been fine with me – and the wine.

Notes:

- Chef Jessica Stutz of Coastal Culinary personal chef service will be doing the cooking Aug. 30.
- For reservations, call 530.584.6849 or go online.
- Cost is \$150 per person.