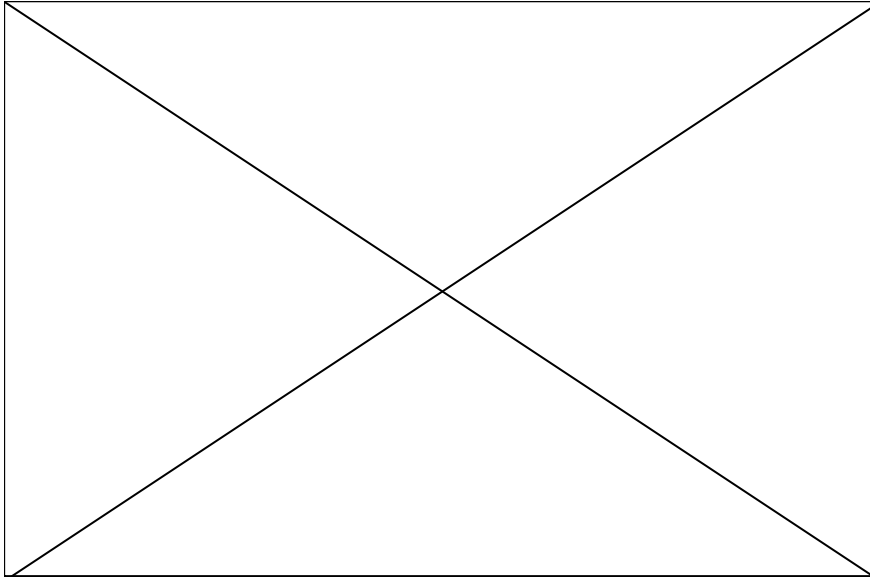




December 31, 2008

We Have Winners! Riding Dirty Atlanta Wine Pairing Challenge #dty



Eight weeks ago, [Rowdy](#), [Smylie](#), and I got together and decided to get some of Atlanta's top restaurants to compete in a [wine pairing challenge](#). We wanted to have a way for people to see wine and food working together, at its best, and also at a price that wasn't prohibitive (all pairings had to be under \$25). It sounded easy, we'd hit 3 restaurants a night, and knock it out in under 3 weeks. Did we ever get that wrong. The time commitment required to put these posts together was intense, and Rowdy and Smylie deserve huge props for the time they put in editing video, photos, and dealing with my insane schedule.



We were blown away by the restaurants who decided to participate in something as crazy sounding as "[Riding Dirty](#)". In fact, we had such a large response that we had to turn restaurants away. The effort, creativity, and time put in by the chefs, wine directors, and staff was incredible. Regardless of comfort, every restaurant jumped in front of the camera and told their story. Their stories are better than any wine or food. These are the people who pour their heart in soul into your restaurant experiences.

Taste is personal. Rowdy, Smylie, and I all have three very different palates, which made agreeing on a winner close to impossible. Add in that so many of the pairings were so amazing, the battle for the top spot was ultimately claimed by tiny margins. After four hours of debate, discussion, and a few bottles of wine, we finally agreed on our picks.

Huge thanks go out to all of the participating restaurants, [Melissa Libby and Associates](#), [Green Olive Media](#), [The Reynolds Group](#), posts from all of the bloggers, [Creative Loafing](#), [Twitter-folks](#), friends and family that helped promote, recruit, and ultimately endure this process. Without you, we would have never have made it!

So it is with great pleasure that Rowdy, Smylie, and Dirty
announce the winners of

"Riding Dirty- The 2008 Atlanta Wine Pairing Challenge"



Best Overall Pairing: [Holeman and Finch](#)

Lustau East India Sherry and Pork Belly

This pairing was phenomenal, creative, well thought out, broke the mold, and showed that Greg Best and the crew at Holeman and Finch do more than great cocktails. Holeman and Finch is the real deal.

Best Traditional Pairing: [Dogwood \(Dogwood Video\)](#)

Rutz Maison Grand Cru Chardonnay and Lobster Grits

Flavorful, intense, great synergy between the wine and the food. This pairing really popped. Traditional with the lobster and Chardonnay, but this was really really good. The grits practically became buttered popcorn when washed down with the wine.

Best Wine Program: [ENO](#)

85+ wines by the glass with an incredible (and awesomely geeky) selection. Doug and Chef Eli have a wonderful thing going on here.



Best Dish: [Woodfire Grill](#)

Pan Roasted Diver Scallops, braised leeks and fennel, Bouillabaisse sauce, Herb salad.

This dish was clean, perfect, and just naturally good. Nothing overdone, nothing in the way- just stop in your tracks good. We all agreed that Woodfire is better than ever with the new ownership and Chef Kevin in the Kitchen



The "Joe Truex Kicks Crazy Ass!" Award: [Repast](#)

Joe Truex- What can you say about him? If Atlanta has a champion for great wine and food, it has to be Joe. Joe consistently amazes us, and went through hoops, and incredible effort to get his pairing the way he wanted it without cutting corners. Rowdy, Smylie, and Dirty are huge fans!



Best Restaurant to Drink Wine: [ONE. midtown kitchen](#)

I love the concept of the wine program at ONE. 75 wines by the glass, priced in several categories with the option of buying by the taste, glass, or bottomless glass. I love the bottomless glass concept. Not for the sheer quantity, but for the ability to pick and try any wine in that category. There is nothing like this in town. Also, Chef Tom Harvey and John did a killer job putting together a killer pairing.



Best Belly Pairing: [La Tavola](#)

A rustic Primitivo and Orcchiette with housemade sausage... This is come in from a cold night goodness. Comforting, welcoming, and capturing the essence of La Tavola. Also one of our favorite videos!

Biggest Surprise: [VINE](#)

VINE is the biggest surprise for a lot of reasons. They closed days after our visit. They put together an incredible and unique pairing (Ginger Creme Brulee and Oregon Pinot Noir). They overcame negative reviews, broke out from old ownership, and really impressed us. I look forward to visiting Chris and Stephens next venture.

Best For Large Groups: [VITA](#)

A huge room that can fit more people than you can shake a stick at. When we went, they had a party for 90, and there was still plenty of space.

Best Value: [Toulouse \(Toulouse Video\)](#)

A comforting meal. A surprising pairing of Shiraz and Salmon. An incredible room. Great ownership. A great neighborhood bistro. George and team have a wonderful spot.



Favorite Wine Pick (Smylie): [ARIA](#)

2006 Bodega Colomé Malbec- Velvety, with soft tannins, pronounced fruit, and great balance. This was a killer pick with Aria's incredible short ribs. This wine helped change my mind about Malbec.

Favorite Wine Pick (Rowdy): [Canoe](#)

2006 Bergstrom Dr Bergstrom Riesling. Finally a West Coast Riesling that packs in the petroleum, and minerals of German Riesling. A touch of residual sugar, tropical fruits, beautiful palate, and great balance. A surprising wine, and a great pick.

Favorite Wine Pick (Dirty): [TOP FLR \(TOP FLR video 2\)](#)

2007 Cote de Gascogne Gros Manseng. Crisp, peppery, light, rocky, and acidic- Though simple, this is a delicious wine, perfect for pairing, and a great value. Beyond that- an obscure varietal that showed that Adam is a man on a mission for great wine, value, and overall experience.

Most Inspirational Pairing: [International Society of Africans in Wine and Vino Libro](#)

Who else has a story and a cause like ISAW's? Picking a wine with the purpose of improving the conditions for native South Africans in the SA wine trade (and having it be wonderful too). This was heart and soul, and the wine world is fortunate to have people like Stephen Satterfield.

Congratulations to all the winners!
We look forward to doing this again in 2009!

Cheers,
Rowdy, Smylie, and Dirty

(For a great slideshow of Riding Dirty Photos, Check out [Smylie's Flickr Page](#))



(photos courtesy of Riding Dirty MVP, [Broderick Smylie](#))

(All Videos Courtesy of the one, the only, and the world champion--- [RowdyFood!](#))

http://www.dirtysouthwine.com/my_weblog/2008/12/we-have-winners-riding-dirty-atlanta-wine-pairing-challenge-dty.html



MELISSA LIBBY & ASSOCIATES