

## Pasta Dinner Jim Sikes for 082809

This past Monday night was pasta time at Jimmy's. A group of us gathered to explore some of the wonders of dishes containing various types of pasta. Needless to say, the unusual was in order.

After sharing some Chardonnay and meeting new friends we sat at table to begin our feast. Anticipation was in the air.

The first course was billed as "coins and corn." It was an interesting combination of slices of sea scallops and small pasta shells in fresh pesto. The pasta was made from corn not wheat. So it was gluten free. It had a pretty yellow hue. The rich green of the pesto looked great against it. It tasted mighty good too.

Our first wine was Kiona Vineyard's Vivacious Vicky White. This blend of primarily Chenin Blanc and Semillion from Washington State had the slight sweetness that brought out the scallops perfectly. This is an affordable wine that is well suited to outdoor eating. Think tailgating.

There is also a red version of Vivacious Vicky that works just as well. It uses the Washington grape Lemberger as its base.

The next offering was the actual "pasta course." For this one we had a large tube pasta – pacchiere. Pacchiere (pah-kee-eh-reh) is made from traditional semolina and is often stuffed.

Ours was simmered until tender, then stuffed with oven-dried tomato slices, cheese and herbs. They were topped with a tarragon cream and baked with Parmesan sprinkled over them.

The intensity of the tomato flavor was superb. The pasta was there just to hold it all together. That was an excellent dish that fit the definition of a pasta course perfectly.

Wine number two was Italian – a red blend of Aglianico and Sangiovese – Alovini Basilicata Rosso. This wine had lots of fruit flavors that was spot one with the rich tomato of the Pacchiere.

Our middle course was a pasta salad with grilled shrimp done in an Oriental style. The pasta was Shiratake noodles. This is a very interesting pasta that resembles spaghetti and is packed wet.

Shiratake are made from a root similar to a yam. So the result is a gluten-free pasta. Since the root produces a high fiber product, the net carbs are very low. If you are trying to follow a low-carb diet, here's a pasta you can add with little guilt attached.

The Shiratake were seasoned with hoisin sauce, soy, chili paste and sesame oil and then mixed with minced red pepper and green onion. It was placed on a lettuce leaf surrounded by the grilled shrimp and Mandarin orange slices. The shrimp had been marinated in garlic and Chinese five-spice powder before grilling.

The wine with this course was George Breuer Riesling "Charm" Trocken. The sweet – acid balance of this wine was great. It made for a good companion to the spicy Oriental flavors of the salad.

Rieslings are a perfect white wine to have with spicy fare. They work well with grilled foods and barbecue. They are also good for sipping. Once again think tailgating.

With our main course the pasta was spaetzle. This is a traditional German pasta made with flour and sometimes mixed with potato. The noodles are squeezed through a press directly into simmering water rather than cut. Ours were mixed with butter and parsley.

The meat for this course was Jaegerschnitzel. Our version used tender pork cutlets pounded thin and lightly breaded. They were fried crisp on the flat top grill and topped with sauteed mushrooms.

A sauce made from strawberries, raspberries, sugar and Sherry vinegar was served along side. A few asparagus spears rounded out the plates.

This was a very satisfying course. The flavors went well together and the quantity was just right. As the guys in the kitchen said, "These dishes will be easy to wash. They're clean already."

The wine was a Zinfandel from the Lodi area in California – OZV. This one is produced by the Oak Ridge Winery.

OZV is a great wine at an affordable price. For less than \$20 you get a soft supple wine that is full of fruit and has plenty of structure. It is a perfect full-bodied red for those grilled and barbecued delights.

Pasta for dessert? Why not. Ours was peach lasagne. We infused the lasagna noodles with pumpkin spices and simmered them. We layered them with sliced peaches we got at the farmer's market in downtown Opelika. We added ricotta in the layers and topped the whole with a sauce made from the peach juices. Squares were cut and topped with a soft peach-flavored whipped cream.

Peach lasagne was a nice dessert and not too dissimilar to a traditional peach cobbler – just a little fancier.

The wine we had was Santome Prosecco. Prosecco is the grape and fun is the wine. The sparkling was the the “extra dry” variety. That means it's going to be slightly sweet. That made it perfect for the peaches. Prosecco is a great party wine. Your guests will always enjoy it.

So where do you get all these strange pastas?

Chances are your local market is not going to have things like Pacchiere, corn-based pastas and Shiratake. But I got mine “on-line” and so can you.

The Pacchiere came from Capri Flavors. They are a great source for Italian goodies and is located in North Carolina. The fellow I talked with, Costanzo Vuotto, was the real thing and very helpful.

The corn pasta came from Gluten Free Mall. They are a wonderful and reasonably priced source for anyone needing foods for that dietary regimen.

The Shiratake noodles were ordered from Asian Grocer. This is an interesting website that contains a bountiful supply of Eastern fare.

All three of these sources performed perfectly for me. The delivery was prompt and the prices very fair. The shipping charges were quite reasonable.

With just a little effort and planning you can have a special dinner that centers around something just as interesting as pasta. Give a theme a try. It will be fun for you and your family or guests. And be a different experience for all.