

Cognoscenti magazine

Because life is short

The Wine Spectator Greystone Restaurant
St Helena, California

Any way you cut it, arriving at **The Wine Spectator Greystone Restaurant** is an impressive experience. The grand old building and the gardens are spread out as if real estate in this chic neck of the woods costs mere pennies—but then, real estate *did* cost mere pennies in 1889, when the historic structure was built.

Challenged with creating a dining experience in such an imposing, even monumental structure—the walls are 22 inches thick—the designer must work overtime to instill a sense of intimacy and warmth. Without strictly partitioning or having the budget to add opulent furnishings, intimacy can seem difficult to attain in such spaces.

At Greystone Restaurant, designer Adam Tihany opted for openness—a tempting enough alternative. But if intimacy matters in the restaurant experience—and it does—then Tihany only partially succeeds. On a busy night like the one **Cognoscenti Magazine** editors chose for their visit, the individual diner ends feeling a bit... *dwarfed*. The routing of miscellaneous pipes and conduits, presumably required to run the large open kitchen in the middle of a restaurant, combines with the aesthetic impact of the baronial structural characteristics to foster a slightly uncomfortable sense of massiveness. And from tables buzzing with conversation to the sounds of frying and

sizzling, ambient noise levels run high. Stone and wood can be delightful, but they need to be contrasted with something gentler; the judicious addition of heavier fabrics into the decorative mix—as much to baffle the noise as to improve the décor—would improve things.

The house's Mandarin Orange Blossom cocktail wet our whistles nicely. This Cointreau, vodka and orange juice concoction was served up with a splash of cranberry juice—yum!

With the notable exception of the excellent

pickled shrimp, the “Temptations”—five tasting plates served on a revolving tray—were dullish. Herb-infused *dashi* broth added considerable intrigue to glazed grilled wahoo, while dayboat scallops in *Kataifi* pastry with applesauce stayed on the bland side.

A filet of beef was pan-roasted exactly to order and presented with a very fine *bordelaise* sauce, the potato-leek *purée* working well in accompaniment. Black mission fig Linzer tart came with a crisp cardamon *tuile* cookie and mascarpone ice cream: a lovely treat.



Set in a historic structure



Focus on food and wine

A single night isn't enough to scratch the surface of this restaurant's impressive wine list. Naturally, it's largely focused on California. A glass of 2003 *Selene* Sauvignon Blanc Hyde Vineyards Carneros revealed pleasant flavor bursts along with healthy acidity levels, just a hint of effervescence and good palate persistence. *Capiaux* Gary's Vineyard 2000 Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir opened to show decent fruit but lacked noticeable backbone—when, oh when will California begin to produce an abundance of fine Pinot?

This article was written by contributing editors to *Cognoscenti Magazine*.

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