

# The Washington Post

## DrinkLocalWine.com 2010 Conference

By, Dave McIntyre

This week, the Park Hyatt Hotel chain announced that it would bring its annual Masters of Food and Wine event to Washington this June 17-20. Chef Brian McBride of [Blue Duck Tavern](#) in the Park Hyatt in the West End will welcome chefs, sommeliers and winemakers from around the country for a weekend of food and wine that will “focus on the commitment to local farmers and to supporting sustainable agriculture,” according to a company press release. They will visit the Dupont Circle [FreshFarm Market](#) and Virginia's “esteemed” Chapel Hill Farm in Berryville, which raises an heirloom variety of veal from the [Randall Lineback](#) breed.

Will they be visiting any local wineries? No.

Will any local wineries be participating in the event? No.

Who is the wine headliner? Dan Duckhorn, of Napa Valley's [Duckhorn Vineyards](#). An eminent name and hard to fault, especially given the obvious cute tie-in to Blue Duck Tavern. But hardly local.

This is a restaurant so committed to local farming that it wants you to know the name of the rancher who slaughtered the lamb you are about to eat. But its commitment to local wine consists of a few good but desultory selections buried in the list at markups (three times retail) guaranteed to render them mere window dressing.

The Park Hyatt is not alone in this hypocrisy. Alice Waters, the doyenne of the “eat local” movement, has organized a [series of dinners](#) in the District the past two years to preach the eat-local gospel. Each time, only California wines have been served.

The locavore movement in Washington-area restaurants ignores important advances in local viticulture that should make us locapours as well. This conundrum was a major topic at last weekend's [DrinkLocalWine.com](#) 2010 Conference at Lansdowne Resort in Leesburg. The conference, which I helped organize along with Jeff Siegel, a Dallas-based wine writer who blogs as The Wine Curmudgeon, focused on how local wineries can get their message out without relying on the “winestream media” of the major wine mags, as well as how to convince locavores to become locapours.

On that latter point, [Todd Kliman](#), wine and food editor of Washingtonian magazine (and a friend and former editor of mine), argued eloquently that local wineries should not focus on the Holy Grail of wine lists – those at the top-tier restaurants such as [Citronelle](#) or [CityZen](#). Such restaurants are designed to impress international and expense-account clients, and so will naturally focus on top-end wines with international fame and high point scores. Local wines will find little room to infiltrate their wine lists.

Kliman also derided area restaurants for touting their Randall Lineback veal while ignoring local wines. One restaurant he praised for featuring local wines was Baltimore's [Woodberry Kitchen](#), whose chef, Spike Gjerde, will be participating in the Park Hyatt event. Such restaurants in the middle tier are a better target for local wineries, Kliman argued, because they are innovative and often dedicated to the local farm movement to a greater degree than high-end restaurants.

(Kliman is also author of "The Wild Vine," a history of the Norton grape to be published Tuesday by Clarkson Potter. One of the more endearing parts of the conference was when Bruno and Jane Bauer, two Norton fans from South Carolina, revealed that they had trekked up here in their RV just to meet Kliman, having obtained an advance copy of the book on eBay. "Every wine lover should read this book," Bruno Bauer said.)

As for how to get around the winestream media and its focus on Bordeaux and Napa Valley, this was the answer:

Social media. Jen Breaux Blosser, of Loudoun County's [Breaux Vineyards](#), described how she uses Facebook and Twitter to forge relationships with customers and advertise special sales. During February's snowstorms, when no one could get to the winery, she offered blizzard discounts – order now, pickup after the melt – and managed to make money even without people coming to the winery. Jim Corcoran, of nearby [Corcoran Vineyards](#), told me that Internet coupons have significantly increased traffic to Corcoran's tasting rooms.

The highlight of the conference was the Twitter Taste-Off, in which 30 wineries from Virginia and Maryland poured two wines each for about 100 participants, including wine bloggers and writers from across the country. Tasters were able to Tweet live, and you can still follow them by searching for the tags #DLW10 and #DLW10VA. Statistics of how many Tweets were Tweeted by how many Twits to how many followers are not yet available; apparently the contractors enjoyed the wine too much. But a secret ballot revealed the crowd favorites to be the Breaux Vineyards 2002 Merlot Reserve for Best Red and Media Favorite; the [Chrysalis Vineyards](#) 2008 Albarino for Best White; and the [Michael Shaps](#) 2008 Viognier for Peoples' Choice.

Richard Leahy, East Coast editor of Vineyard & Winery Management magazine, said the victory for the Breaux 2002 Merlot Reserve demonstrated how well Virginia red wines can age, especially considering the strong competition from so many reds of the excellent 2007 vintage. I was thrilled at the consistently high quality of the wines from both Virginia and Maryland.

Local sommeliers should take note. Your customers have.

-- Dave McIntyre