

Stowe 2007 Annual Vertical Regatta recap.....

Every year the Stowe Annual Vertical Regatta develops a theme that sets it apart from the previous events. It is usually not the skiing, but rather the conversation and après-ski action that creates the ambience. In a rapid-fire post event exchange of e-mails, I came across Tom's description: *"Our discussions can vary from the broadly general to the technically punctilious and, as you might have noticed, the number of off-limit topics is relatively small. I guess we've developed somewhat of an exuberant style of discussion, especially when fuelled by some good Italian wines, and a quiet bystander stands out as an anomaly when volleys are flying in all directions. Sort of like UN peacekeepers in a war zone."*

Some of this year's topics included the unfortunate demise of Anna Nicole Smith, catheters, memory loss, global warming, the importance of physical conditioning (or the consequences of the lack of same), onion soup recipes, suitable yoga music, U.S. politics, and the joys of opera. There were definitely many more, but wine erases all kinds of memories. At a bare bones minimum, we all can agree that it was interesting. The group has a wide range of interests that extend well beyond deciding the appropriate amount of mast rake.

Ten of us arrived in Stowe to discover that the reluctant winter of 2006-07 had decided to show up big time. The snow fell on Wednesday night, continued through the day on Thursday, and we witnessed an accumulation of 16", or 40 cm. by Friday morning. The skiing was pretty spectacular, providing us with rare Easter powder. It can happen. We had to contend with some windy and cold conditions, but we Fireball sailors are a pretty tough crowd. We ventured out into the elements dressed like we were going to the bank to make a sizable unauthorized withdrawal. (See the pretty pictures.)



While we are on the subject of tough crowds, we learned to our shock and consternation that Rob (Twinkle-toes) Levy is preparing for the sailing season by taking dancing lessons. Be prepared to watch as he waltzes to the start, pirouettes around the marks, and boogies over the finish line. But I digress.

The heavy snow, questionable training regimes, and not enough skiing took their toll on the mountain. Friday was enjoyed by fewer skiers than Thursday. The only serious damage was to Andrew's ski binding, which failed like a cheap overstressed mast. The good news was that he discovered that newer equipment rented on Friday allowed him to ski like a pro.

The annual highlight is our remarkable dinner, prepared at Phil's house by our two extraordinary chefs. Tom and Andrew share the planning, do all the skilled work, direct the volunteers, and seem to have a good time in the process (more pretty pictures).



For the uninitiated and the curious, I have attached this year's menu.

Hors d'oeuvres:

Bruschetta. Oil-brushed, oven-toasted baguette slices with a chopped tomato and basil topping.

Entrée:

Traditional French Onion Soup. A winter favourite, with caramelized red onions, crispy croûtes and a golden topping of melted gruyère.

Main course:

Braised Lamb Shanks. Fall-off-the-bone meat resulting from a three-hour braise in red wine, chicken stock and mirepoix. The shanks will be plated on a base of skin-on crushed potatoes (roughly mashed with olive oil, roasted garlic and caramelized onion), surrounded by a crown of glazed baby carrots, and sauced with a reduction of the braising liquid. Depending on the availability of lamb shanks, English-style beef short ribs might be substituted.

Salad:

Mixed greens, with a light olive oil and balsamic vinegar dressing. Some crushed walnuts might be added to the mix.

Dessert:

A large scoop of Ben & Jerry's vanilla ice cream, surrounded by fresh raspberries and drizzled with a balsamic vinegar and maple syrup reduction.

Following wines were suggested:

- Argentina: - Malbec
- Australia: - Cabernet Sauvignon
 - Shiraz
- California: - Zinfandel
- France: - From southern Rhône: Côtes du Rhône AOC, Côtes du Rhône Villages, Chateauneuf du Pape, Gigondas.
Avoid the 2002 vintage, it was terrible.
 - From northern Rhône. E.g. Hermitage, Crozes Hermitage.
 - From Burgundy. E.g. Côte de Nuits, Nuits St-George, Mercurey.
 - From Bordeaux. E.g. St-Emilion AOC,
- Italy: - Barbera d'Asti (DOC)
 - Barolo (DOCG)
 - Brunello di Montalcino (DOCG)
 - Chianti Classico Riserva (DOCG)
 - Valtellina Superiore (DOCG)



We made a valiant attempt to respect Tom's wine list suggestions, but I must report that there was wine standing long after we no longer could.

So there you have it. The 2007 Stowe Vertical Regatta is now history. Thanks to all who came. I am looking forward to next year.

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