

NYC Wine and Food Festival Grand Tasting

The Grand Tasting presented by ShopRite was one of the major events at the 2009 Food Network NYC Wine and Food Festival, which took the city by storm this past weekend. The tasting was held during three hour sessions on Saturday and Sunday and included hundreds of wines and dozens of decadent appetizers.

While it was easy to see the festive white tents stretching down Pier 54, it was difficult to traverse the West Side Highway to get there. Once attendees had picked up wrist bands (across the road), they were given gift bags that included tiny skillet or frying pans, and samples of olive oil, breadsticks and coffee.

Patrons may have been expecting a bit more glamour for their \$150: the bumpy asphalt of the pier was left bare and there was little décor. But ticket holders could feel good knowing that proceeds from the festival go towards two hunger-relief organizations: Food Bank For New York City and Share Our Strength. Furthermore, the simple backdrop was quickly forgotten once the eating and drinking began.

Top New York restaurants including Quality Meats, Delmonico's, Rosa Mexicana, and many more pulled out all the stops to wow diners with tiny bites of their finest food. Among the many treats were miniature lobster rolls, steak tartare on coin size bread slices, and a float made of squash ice cream and root beer, which could be described as the perfect Thanksgiving dessert. The most innovative presentation was by The River Café. Tender shredded beef in barbeque sauce topped with pickled onions and shaved parmesan was loaded into hollowed out beef bones. When asked about the uniformly sized bones, I was told they were cut with a band saw.

The wine selections ranged from everyday buys to splurges. On the value side, I discovered M^{énage à Trois}, a fruit-forward blend of Zinfandel, Cabernet Sauvignon, and Merlot priced under \$10. At the other end of the spectrum were two Francis Ford Coppola reds that were \$120 and \$130 a bottle. While many familiar producers were on hand such as Kendall Jackson, Ravenswood, and Ruffino, there were plenty of lesser known wines to discover. Wine lovers had their pick of wines from around the world, from South African Pinotage to a selection of Italian Proseccos from Mionetto. Colorful cocktails were also being mixed, including the most whimsical concoction of the show, Midori snow cones.

Along with all the eating and drinking, there was some play as well. Patrons could try out a soon-to-be-released Food Network game for Wii where the challenge is to create gourmet meals in a limited amount of time--just like a real dinner party!

This is only the second year of the New York City Wine and Food Festival. Judging from the crowds of happy attendees at the Grand Tasting and the fact that the majority of events were sold out in advance, it seems that this is an event that New York has been waiting for.