

Victoria: capital of Italian food and wine

scritto da Roberto Nicolli | 4 Febbraio 2015



Roberto Nicolli interview Frances Sidhe

Could you tell more about your Restaurant? How would you describe your average customer?

Zambris serves classic Italian cuisine in an upbeat restaurant with a somewhat casual approach but fine dining level food and wine. We have been in business nearly fourteen years and three years ago we went through a very large expansion from 30 seats to 120. So, we had to make some changes but the heart of our restaurant, an adherence to true Italian food and wine stays the same. One of the main things I love about Zambris is that we really have no average customer. On one table you might have a very young alternative rocker just grabbing a quick bite. At another table you might have some of the elite of the foodie movement as Peter Zambris reputation as a Chef extends far beyond the parameters of Vancouver Island. We have received excellent reviews in many magazines like Saveur and we regularly win Gold or Silver in the Vancouver Magazine Awards. However, if I had to average it out I would say our customer is in their mid to late fifties and upper middle class. They do appreciate good food and wine but are somewhat price sensitive. They often have been to Italy or are planning to go there.

How do you structure your wine list?

I structure my wine list in two ways. The first page is quick and easy, three whites, three reds, briefly described in three price ranges from \$7.50 to \$9.00 per glass. This makes it easy for the customer that just wants a quick bite or someone who is maybe a bit intimidated by Italian wines. Then, I have several pages of selections for customers who want to learn a bit more about Italian wines and chose from a more extensive list. In both the whites and the reds I have divided the categories into three sections, Northern Italy, Center Italy, Southern Italy and the Islands. I give a brief description of the wines and the region and then have a range of wines in all different prices and styles for them to chose from those regions. My staff also go through an intensive training on Italian Wines and have regular updates and tastings so that they are able to assist customers in making wine choices.

What type of wine is preferred in your Restaurant?

Red wine is definitely preferred in my restaurant but I find more and more people are trying white wine, especially in the summer. Now that is possible to get a greater range of the beautiful white wines made in Italy, my customers are really open to trying them. I also am proud to say that I am trying to wean my customers off the really big, full bodied reds preferred in the "New World" to some of the great and distinctive red wines that are so unique, much lighter, and generally much much better with Italian food.

Could you tell me a story about wine that happened in your Restaurant?

I always love success stories. Like the customers who wanted only Shiraz and now are familiar with grapes like Aglianico and come in and proudly order this. I absolutely love my customers that are willing to try something new and I think Zambris can take great credit for turning Victoria on to true

Italian Food and Wine. When I first started at Zambris thirteen years ago we did a Chefs choice food and wine pairing event every Saturday night and we always started with a glass of Prosecco. At that time Prosecco was not well known but it became so successful that the next time I went to the Government Signature Liquor Store they asked me what I was doing because they just couldn't keep enough Prosecco stocked on the shelves for customers that had been to our wine dinners. That part of my job is so satisfying.

Do you prefer a certain Italian region and if yes, which one?
What is your favorite Italian wine?

It is so hard to say if I prefer a certain region of Italy. I kind of lean to white wines so I am a huge fan of the stunning wines from Collio. But I also love the interesting a complex white wines like Greco di Tufo and Fiano di Avellino from Campania. And nothing interests me more than a red wine that is unlike the typical North American Cabernet Sauvignon. My current red wine favourite is made from the Ruche grape in Piemonte. But I also love the Colutta Gianpaolo Tazzelenghe that I recently featured at a wine dinner.

Zambris ([link](#))

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