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wine-tasting party





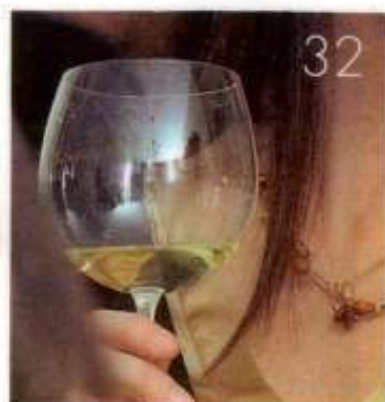
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Toast of the town



A wine-tasting party is an opportunity to gather with friends, sniffing out vintages and testing your knowledge.

FOOD, FRIENDS, A FEW GOOD BOTTLES — IT'S A HOMEGROWN WINE TASTING

BY LAUREN BECKHAM FALCONE • PHOTOGRAPHS BY RENEE DEKONA

Marlo Fogelman knows wine. Especially how to promote it. As founder of marlo marketing/communications, based on Newbury Street, her client roster reads like a oenophile's dream: Les Zygomates Wine Bar & Bistro, the Nantucket Wine Festival, Tanglewood Wine & Food Classic and — a recent addition — Red Bicycleette, for whom she planned a series of tastings in Boston.

So when she hosted a blind tasting at her Back Bay digs recently, she was

cool as a chilled bottle of sauvignon blanc.

"It's pretty simple," said the 34-year-old marketing maven, as she stood in a robe drying her hair, just 15 minutes before more than a dozen guests were scheduled to walk in the door.

"I asked the women to bring a bottle of white, the men to bring a bottle of red. The price limit is \$15 a bottle. You number each, everyone gets score cards and there you go, a party."

The scene of the soiree: Fogelman's one-bedroom condo at the corner of Dartmouth and Newbury streets, in what once was the lobby of the former Hotel Victoria.

Fogelman, an attorney, bought the place while she was attending law school at Boston University. Since then, she's renovated her kitchen, adding glass tiles, granite counters and stainless steel appliances, and restored the unit's original woodwork, stained-glass windows and exquisite 19th century ceramic glass floors.

"It was a process, but worth it," Fogelman recalled, pausing to answer the buzzer. "They're here already?"

"They" included Longwood Events' Jim Apteker and his wife, Alina; marlo marketing account executive Nicole Morales and her boyfriend, Mintz Levin lawyer Dennis Baden; Avanti salon owner Alex Iacobacci and his friend, Dawn Beckman; Body Evolver Fitness and Training founder Mike D'Angelo; and illustrator Wanda Sandstrom and her husband, EMC exec Hal.

The guests tried all 20 bottles (really), and munched on cheeses and breads, including prosciutto-wrapped goat cheese with fig jam.

"Oh, these are decadent," said Sandstrom as he popped another nibble into his mouth and chased it with wine No. 6.

Marlo's tips for a terrific tasting:

THE WINES

■ You'll want one bottle of wine per guest. Assign some guests to bring red and others to bring white, so that you'll have variety. If you're hosting a very large party, add in categories of sparkling wines, champagnes, dessert wines or ports. Ask guests to bring information on price and where they bought the wine.

■ Set a price limit, a price range, or even set a theme — blind tastings can be based on price, region (California, Chile) or grape (Cabernets, Chardonnays).

MORE TIPS, PAGE 34





Once the tasting scores were tallied, Fogelman awarded prizes to those who brought the winners (Red: Reserva Argentina Altos Malbec 2004, \$24; White: McIlroy Sonoma Country Chardonnay Aquarius Ranch 2003, \$23; Best in show: Friends 2001 Cabernet Sauvignon, \$10.50).

In the end, there were no winners or losers, just revelers.

"Someone," said Iacobacci, "has to do a story on the day after a wine tasting."

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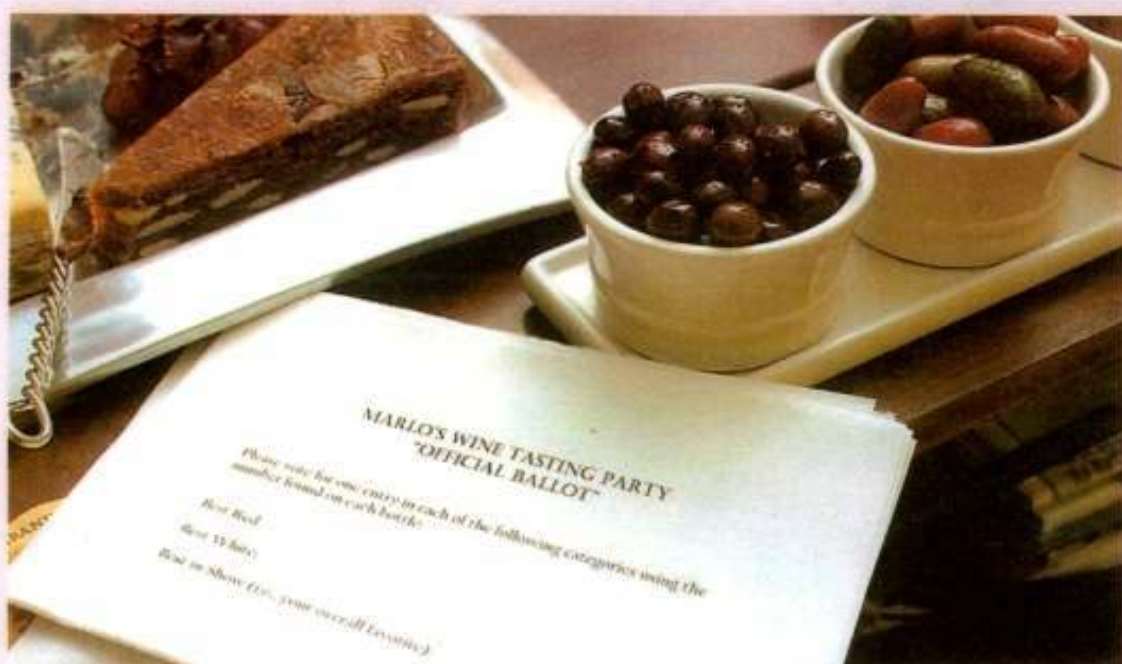
THE SETUP

■ Prepare covers and number labels for the wines in advance of the party. Cover the bottles and number them as the guests arrive and place on a table with the wineglasses.

■ Create a ballot for voting. Be as creative as you like with categories: Best red, best white, most fruity, most oaky, best of show, etc.

■ Have prizes for the guests who brought the winners. (Fogelman gave out Cocoa Vino chocolates from Tempura in Boston, wineglasses and a book on wine tastings.)

■ Encourage guests to take home notes on the wines they liked best.



A blind tasting creates drama and makes the competition aspect of the party more interesting. Pass out fun ballots for everyone to fill out, and encourage guests to keep track of their personal favorites.

■ Be sure to use wineglasses that allow the wines to breathe — most experts agree a simple white-wine glass will do, but if you're really feeling ambitious, you can serve wines in glasses specific for the grape (see sidebar). Off-price retailers often sell them inexpensively, or you can rent them from a party supplier.

■ Be sure to have bottled water on hand, both still and sparkling, to give your guests a break from the wine.

■ A wine tasting party should be like any other — create a mood with music, lighting and flowers.

THE FOOD

Tasters do not live by wine alone — a wine-tasting menu should include a variety of cheeses, breads, even sweets. Here are Fogelman's suggestions:

■ Artisanal cheese platter accented with fruits, such as apples

or grapes. Assemble your own or order one already prepared.

■ A couple of prepared appetizers. Fogelman served goat cheese and fig jam wrapped in prosciutto with aged balsamic for dipping, and brie baked in cranberry chutney.

■ An assortment of fresh breads and savory crackers.

■ Raw vegetables to cut the intensity of the cheeses — a big bowl of sugar snap peas provides crunch and a plate of sliced red, yellow and orange bell peppers adds color.

■ For crunch, a bowl of marcona almonds and a selection of baked veggie chips.

■ Gourmet olives in a variety of colors, flavors and sizes.

■ A tray of gourmet cookies and some intense dark chocolates.

— LAUREN BECKHAM FALCONE

Where to wine and dine around Boston

TASTINGS, DINNERS:

■ **Beacon Hill Bistro**, Boston. Four-course meal by Chef Ben Knack, paired with wines from around the world. Discussions led by wine experts Cecelia Rait and Marilyn Snee. Second and fourth Monday of each month, 7 p.m.; \$55. 25 Charles St.; 617-723-1133.

■ **L'Espalier**, Boston. Wine manager Erik Johnson chooses vintages to complement a four-course French-inspired New England meal prepared by Chef Frank McClelland. Every Monday, 7 p.m.; \$50. 30 Gloucester St.; 617-262-3023.

■ **Aujourd'hui at Four Seasons**, Boston. Sommelier Ted Davidson and chef Jerome Legras present three light courses built around a theme, region or grape. Every Tuesday at 6 p.m.; \$45. 200 Boylston St.; 617-351-2037.

■ **Les Zygomates**, Boston. Sommelier Geoffrey Fallon discusses various wines and chef Ian Just pairs them with hors d'oeuvres and offers brief cooking demonstrations. Every Tuesday at 6 and 8 p.m.; \$30. 129 South St.; 617-542-5108; www.winebar.com

■ **Tomasso**, Southboro. Wine tasting. Every Tuesday, 7 p.m.; \$25. The Crossings, 154 Turnpike Road (Route 9); 508-481-8484 (reservations required).

■ **33 Restaurant**, Boston. Wine director Jacob Knight pairs four wines with food by Chef Anthony Dawodu. Every Wednesday, 5-7 p.m.; \$20-\$25. 33 Stanhope St.; 617-572-3311.

■ **Sel de la Terre**, Boston. Sample a selection of wines paired with a four-course tasting menu by Chef Geoff Gardner. Every Wednesday at 7 p.m.; \$45. 255 State St., Boston 617-720-1300.

■ **Vinalia**, Boston. Four wines paired with seasonal appetizers. Every Wednesday, 6:30 p.m.; \$15. 101 Arch St.; 617-737-1777.

■ **Four Maple Specialty Wine and Cheese Shoppe**, Mendon. Wine tasting. Every Friday, 5-8 p.m.; free. 4 Maple St.; 508-478-2266.

■ **Leary's Fine Wines**, Natick. Wine tasting. Every Saturday, 3:30-6:30 p.m.; Free. 6 Worcester Road; 508-653-6221.

CLASSES

■ The **Elizabeth Bishop Wine Resource Center** at Boston University offers four levels of course work and expertise taught by Masters of Wine Sandy Block and Bill Nesto.

Courses run nine to 14 weeks; prices start at \$850 per course. www.bu.edu

FESTIVAL

■ **17th Annual Boston Wine Festival**, now through April 2006. **DESCRIBE**. Boston Harbor Hotel at Rowes Wharf, Boston; 617-330-9355; www.bostonwinefestival.com

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