

Feature Cover Story ★

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Lunch with the wines of

Mollydooker

and

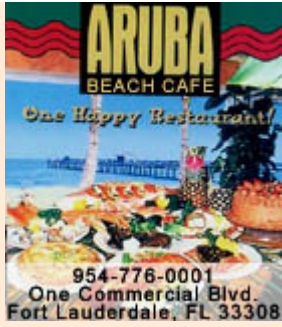
Winemaker Sparky Marquis

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As a food critic, I've finally given in to the fact that there are simply too many restaurants, vs. the amount of time I have on this earth dedicated to reviewing them. I've admitted that it would be impossible for me to dine at and review every restaurant in Dade County Florida for example, but I am trying! On the other hand, there are little more than a handful of restaurants considered by myself and thousands of others as dining destinations in this very same locale. So when Thomas Tremel of Trans Atlantic Wine & Spirits called inviting me to dine with Sparky Marquis (owner of Mollydooker Winery) at [Michael's Genuine](#) in the Miami Design District, it was a match made in Heaven for me. *That was even before I had a sip or a bite!* I was psyched! Mollydooker's wines have always fascinated me in the taste department. Combine Sparky and Sarah Marquis' fabulously tasty wines with their charismatically clever naming and innovative labeling, and I became a [Sparky Marquis](#) fan a long time ago.



Soon I was shaking hands, *left-handedly I might add*, with Sparky, his mother and General Manager of the winery, Janet Gawith, along with Bryan Janssen who is in charge of business development. Chef and Owner Michael Schwartz came over next, and as we all chatted for a few minutes, I took some great pictures of Chef Schwartz and Sparky. Unfortunately I didn't pan down low enough to get Michael's bright green Chuck Taylor Converse Sneakers to go with his "GUMBO" t-shirt, but I thought his attire was perfect for this colorful, Celebrity Chef!



Celebrity Chef Michael Schwartz & Celebrity Winemaker Sparky Marquis

[Chef Schwartz](#) is an accomplished and talented chef who has been hard at work in kitchens since he was 14; eventually evolving into the nationally renowned chef he is today. With this latest venture, he has created a showcase for the type of cuisine that he loves and does best - homemade, unpretentious and delectable, with an emphasis on local and organic ingredients. With a mere 90 seats indoors and out, and another 14 seats at a welcoming, bar adorned with fresh radishes and ramekins of sea salt, diners can enjoy happy hour cocktails with snacks like deviled eggs and crispy hominy. How about an alfresco dining experience in the courtyard featuring specialties from the wood roasted oven? If you prefer, take a table in the warm, jazzy ambiance of one of the main dining rooms. A laid-back bistro with seriously good food and an impressive wine list with realistic prices, Michael's Genuine quickly won the hearts of Miami diners since its opening, and is destined to stay atop the list of the city's best restaurants for years to come. Not an easy feat if you think of the amount of competition "out there"!



Yes...the bar snack at Michael's Genuine! Fresh crispy red radishes and Sea Salt

Our server Michael approached, confidently recited the specials of the day, and then proceeded to lead us down a path of least resistance. What is that path you ask? We agreed to just “let the game come to us”, and except for placing our entrée order, we let Chef Michael and our server send out some specialties for appetizers. As the starters began to appear before us, Sparky was already unscrewing and pouring a cold bottle of [The Violinist 2009 Verdelho](#). Sparky informed us of interesting facts like the climate that factored into this wine, and amount of distribution based on the fruit weight (the velvet glove or silky sensation) present in this wine. As we were enjoying the Verdelho, I guessed the alcohol content to be around 12% based on the light flavor profile and fragrant bouquet. Sparky smiles and says, “What we do with the Verdelho, which is actually 15% alcohol, is during the barrel ferment of this wine we go to 10% over oak of only 1/3 of the wine *before* the blending process.” Based on that and the over-all skill of these two winemakers, the final product has much more complexity and the ability to mask its higher alcohol content. It really fooled me!



Crispy Shitake Mushroom Pizza with cave-aged Gruyere cheese, caramelized onions and fresh thyme @ Michael's Genuine

As we sipped this refreshing juice, we dined on a perfect food pairing; [Crispy Sweet & Spicy Pork Belly](#), accented with Kimchi Slaw, crushed peanuts and finished with fresh pea shoots. We also enjoyed a Shitake Mushroom Pizza with cave-aged Gruyere cheese, caramelized onions and fresh thyme. The combination of this flavorful food and The Violinist Verdelho wine made each one of us announce the delightful culinary combinations out loud. *Translation:* Lots of oohs and ahhs from the table. *Note:* I kept my glass of Verdelho throughout the meal and even used it to cleanse my palate between wines.



Sparky Marquis demonstrating The Mollydooker Shake while Bryan Janssen looks on

As our plates were deftly cleared and table re-marked for the next course, much to my surprise our entertaining host Sparky began shaking the next bottle we would taste, *which was a red wine*. Sparky calls this "[The Mollydooker Shake](#)"! He explains, "The reason we do this is because we use nitrogen in our winemaking. Many people are allergic to sulphites ." Sparky continues, "What nitrogen does is flatten the back end of the flavor profile, and that foamy layer on top is the nitrogen. Once the creamy café-like foam layer settles back into the wine, it is ready to drink." Of course I burst out laughing as I said, "After 41 years in the hospitality business, I have never seen this before." Imagine a waiter coming to your table and shaking your bottle of Mollydooker red wine before serving it to you? You would be surprised as well! Apparently many Mollydooker drinkers do know about this procedure, and it will probably become more prevalent as this information spreads. *Note: It is important to pour a little bit off the bottle first in order to make some room inside for the shaking process to be most effective.*



Pork Chop at Michael's Genuine with Mollydooker's Two Left Feet Shiraz / Cab / Merlot Blend in background

As the main courses were served, we tasted a merlot named The Scooter. This silky wine exhibited delicate sweet berry fruit, fine integrated tannins and a long, beautiful finish. This was named after Sparky's scooter-racing years, and as far as I am concerned belongs in the winner's circle! My perfectly grilled Fudge Farms Pork Chop, with braised collard greens and apple chutney was a super pairing with this merlot. I couldn't be happier at this point, as I was drinking one of my favorite wines and eating in one of the best restaurants in Miami! The service here is impeccably relaxed, and seamless in every way.



Grilled Harris Ranch Skirt Steak Salad, with onions, fregola, radish, arugula, fennel, citrus and olive tapenade

Sparky's wife [Sarah](#) could not be here for this lunch, but he refers to her often, as they have become an award winning team! They were named *Australian Winemakers of the Year*, crowned *McLaren Vale's Blushing King & Queen* a record three times, and chosen by *Robert Parker* as one of the top wine personalities of the world! What's next for the dynamic Marquis family? Only time will tell...



Tom House and Mollydooker Owner / Winemaker Sparky Marquis

Mollydooker wines are categorized in the following way; **Lefty Wines**, including The Violinist Verdelho, The Scooter Merlot, The Maitre D' Cabernet Sauvignon, Two Left Feet, a blend of Shiraz, Cab and Merlot named after Sarah and Sparky's dancing ability, and The Boxer Shiraz. With fruit weights of 65-70% and a price range of about \$25.00, they are designed for everyday drinking. Next are the **Party Wines**, including Gigglepote Cabernet named after Sparky and Sarah's daughter Holly shown laughing on the label, Blue Eyed Boy Shiraz with son Luke depicted on the label smashing grapes with his feet and Goosebumps Sparkling Shiraz, with fruit weight of 75-80% and sold in the \$55.00 range. Next category are the **Love Wines**, including Enchanted Path Shiraz / Cab blend and Carnival of Love Shiraz with fruit weights of 85-90% and priced from \$90.00, and lastly the **Velvet Glove Shiraz** is in a category of its own, featuring Marquis Fruit Weight of 95+% and priced from \$185.00. The Velvet Glove is the ultimate expression of Sparky and Sarah's passion in winemaking. What an amazing and fun wine portfolio, and once you meet Sparky and his fun-loving team, you begin to understand the personality exhibited in the labeling and most importantly the incredible flavor profiles of each and every wine! Sparky, Sarah, Janet and Bryan, along with their staff comprised of family and friends have really taken winemaking and promotion to a level I have never seen before...the whole

Mollydooker concept and portfolio will give you goose bumps too!



Mollydooker's attractive bottle packaging...The Violinist Vedelho on left, The Boxer Shiraz far right

As we continued wining and dining, we moved on to [Mollydooker's Maitre D](#)", a 100% cabernet sauvignon that fills your nose and mouth with delicious ripe fruit, followed by Two Left Feet, a powerful blend of Shiraz, Cabernet and Merlot. These two wines are shining examples of just how food friendly Sparky's wines are. For example, Janet was enjoying a thick piece of Grouper served with wood oven roasted asparagus, grilled lemon and Provencal vinaigrette, along with an unreal dish of hard-Roasted Brussels sprouts with hefty pancetta lardons and lemon aioli. Thomas was enjoying a beautiful presentation of [Grilled Harris Ranch Skirt Steak Salad](#), with onions, fregola, radish, arugula, fennel, citrus and olive tapenade. Sparky decided on the sandwich special, Deer Creek Farms Roast Beef Sandwich served on a French Brioche bun with Sirachi aioli...a French Dip if you will. This wide variety of food choices would be a tough test for any wine, but each and every Mollydooker wine we were sampling seemed to pair effortlessly with them all.

Finally we would taste [The Boxer Shiraz](#), a well known and complex Shiraz made by combining Australian regional grapes from McLaren Vale, Langhorne Creek and Padthaway. This wine exhibits power and purity in every sip. This turned out to be my favorite pairing with my meal, and I was glad I saved a few bites of Michael Schwartz's moist pork chop and flavorful recipe to eat with this wine.

We decided to share one dessert, and soon were gazing upon a luscious Chocolate Cremoso, served with a pinch of sea salt, an olive oil sourdough crostini and accompanied by a delightful espresso parfait. Combining the remaining sips of red wine and the intense chocolate was fun and of course delicious! During dessert, I asked Sparky what the name [Mollydooker](#) meant, and the answer is quite simple; it is what Australian's call left-handed people in much the same way we use the term Southpaw.



Michael Schwartz's Chocolate Cremoso, served with a pinch of sea salt, an olive oil sourdough crostini and accompanied by a delightful espresso parfait

On the way out of [Michael's Genuine](#), I once again clumsily fell victim to Sparky and company's left-handed handshake, as I had to switch everything I was carrying to grasp Sparky's left hand with my own left hand. Did I catch a good natured twinkle in his laughing eyes? Probably, but he deserves to be very confident with the amazing wine accomplishments he, his wife Sarah and his mates have achieved. Cheers Sparky! Next time I will be ready with my left hand out first! As for you my loyal readers, get yourselves down to The Miami Design District real soon for lunch or dinner at Michael's Genuine, and tell them that Tom House from Dinnerreviews.com© sent you!