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Italian-American Food, All-American Wine

By Eric Asimov January 25, 2012 8:44 am

Much has been written about Torrissi Italian Specialties, the terrific Italian-American restaurant on Mulberry Street, including Pete Wells's review this week of the Torrissi spin-off, Parm. But almost none of the attention has focused on Torrissi's unusual all-American wine list, which has grown from a half-dozen bottles when the restaurant opened two years ago to around 80 bottles now.

Why all-American? Given the restaurant's method of transforming, with exceptional ingredients and careful techniques, Italian-American clichés into Platonic ideals, it would be easier to imagine great southern Italian wines that might at least suggest the heritage of these dishes. But that's not how Torrissi operates.

"From the beginning, we decided that everything we would use in the restaurant would be a domestic product," said Nialls Fallon, the general manager, who oversees the wine list (which, sadly, is not posted on the restaurant's Web site). "It's a very Italian idea of using what's around us."

It's by no means a locavore list. Most of the wines are from California, and with so many good, graceful New York wines available, I'd say Torrissi could do a lot better than the handful of local bottles they offer. Still, the restaurant has performed a neat trick of finding a fair number of domestic wines that go well with many of the more delicate dishes it serves.

"To be honest, it would have been much easier starting with Old World wines," Mr. Fallon said. "But it's been a fun challenge, like finding a great domestic prosciutto or a substitute for Parmesan. Once you go out looking it's amazing what does pop up."

By-the-glass offerings include a 2010 Russian River Valley trousseau gris from **Wind Gap**, a flinty white wine made in tiny quantities from a rarely seen grape, and a fresh 2009 **Edmunds St. John Bone-Jolly** gamay noir.

With our recent meal, we drank a tangy 2010 Napa Valley white (\$75) from **Matthiasson**, a small family operation that is one of my favorite California producers, and a 2003 nebbiolo **Bricco Buon Natale** (\$72) made by Clendenen Family Vineyards in the Santa Maria Valley, a very credible wine given how difficult it is to succeed with nebbiolo anywhere outside the Piedmont region of Italy.

Those who prefer heavier-bodied cabernet sauvignons and chardonnays will find familiar labels like Silver Oak and Aubert, and trophy hunters can bag a 2006 Marcassin Estate pinot noir for \$325 or a 1996 Abreu Madrona Ranch cabernet for \$650.

Personally, I'd go for the 2010 spätlese-style riesling from Hermann J. Wiemer in the Finger Lakes for \$59, the 2010 Stone Crusher roussanne from Donkey and Goat in the Sierra Foothills for \$60 or Wind Gap's savory 2008 syrah from the Sonoma Coast for \$84.

While my initial thought on surveying the list was to yearn for something Italian, I concluded that the Torrissi approach was far more interesting. Looking forward to returning to see what else Mr. Fallon will turn up.