

Life on Tour

THE TASTING PANEL'S ANNUAL CROSS-COUNTRY WINE AND SPIRITS TREK TAKES US OUT AND ABOUT

by Rachel Burkons

When rock stars go on the road, they hit it hard, stopping in major cities across the country and belting out hits in front of throngs of adoring fans before packing up, hitting the road and doing it all over again the next night, in front of another full house.

THE TASTING PANEL knows that the Double Gold Medal winners at the **San Francisco International Wine Competition** and **San Francisco World Spirits Competition** are the rock stars of the booze biz, so we took a page out of the rock 'n roll guidebook and took these superstars on the road, stopping in 13 of the hottest beverage markets along the way.

From the quaint streets of Ann Arbor, Michigan, to the Las Vegas Strip, THE TASTING PANEL took the Double Gold Medal winners on tour, rocking across the U.S. and meeting with some of the influential brands, faces and places along the way. Here's a look at life on the Tour!

CHICAGO: My Kind of Town



PHOTO: ERICA GANNETT

The All-Star Arena: Beautiful Lincoln Park neighborhood restaurant Rustic House was a gracious host to our Chicago superstars, where co-proprietors Chef Jason Paskewitz and Ryan O'Donnell were thrilled to invite top industry influencers to their elegant eatery. "To get this caliber of people in to see our restaurant and see what we do is an obvious perk," admits Paskewitz, whose classic, rustic comfort-food menu has made this charming spot a must-eat on the Chicago dining map.



PHOTO: ERICA GANNETT

Daniel Freedman, Beverage Manager at aria restaurant and Eno Wine Room at the Fairmont Hotel in Chicago, was on hand with several of the hotel's staff to taste some of the best wines in the world. Coincidentally, Freedman had spent the previous day with renowned Napa Vintner Randy Dunn, tasting his truly stellar 2007 Feather Cabernet Sauvignon from Long Shadows Vintners. Says Freedman, "This is a truly awesome wine, and people won't be expecting it to be as light and fruity and balanced as it is. It's not typical of those big tannic styles, and it really blew me away."



PHOTO: ERICA GANNETT

Chandler Moore, Managing Director of the San Francisco International Wine Competition, joins THE TASTING PANEL's Marketing and Events Director Nicolette Teo and Associate Editor Rachel Burkons for a celebratory toast on a well-done Tour stop. "Our success in the Tour has been the quality of trade that comes to each city's tasting," says Moore. "Word is out that these tastings have nothing but the top products from all over the world that have been chosen by the best in the business."



PHOTO: ERICA GANNETT

John C. Shelby, founder and President, LUXE Spirits, met up with us in Chicago to show off the Double Gold Medal-winning Cabresto Silver Tequila, a feminine super-premium offering that's big on floral notes and easy on the palate. "I thought we had a good shot to do well at a competition as prestigious as the San Francisco World Spirits Competition, but I was floored when we won Double Gold!"



PHOTO: ERICA GANNETT

Ruth Saringer, a mixologist at Nacional 27, one of Chicago's hottest dining/drinking destinations for those seeking a new twist on Latin classics, was excited to use the Tour's stop as an educational experience. "I just wanted to taste and learn from all of these wines and spirits," she says. "It's not often that you have this many amazing products in one room, and it's also great to be surrounded by all of these members of the trade."

ORANGE COUNTY: Welcome to the OC



PHOTO: RACHEL BURKONS

The All-Star Arena: In the heart of Downtown Santa Ana, CA, Chapter One: the modern local has become the go-to spot for Orange County's hip young cocktail-seeking crowd. Owners Tim O'Connor and Jeff Hall were thrilled to play host to this stellar group of wines and spirits. "We were so excited to have you guys here! This is such a great opportunity to show the trade what we can do—and to taste some of the best wines and spirits out there," says O'Connor.

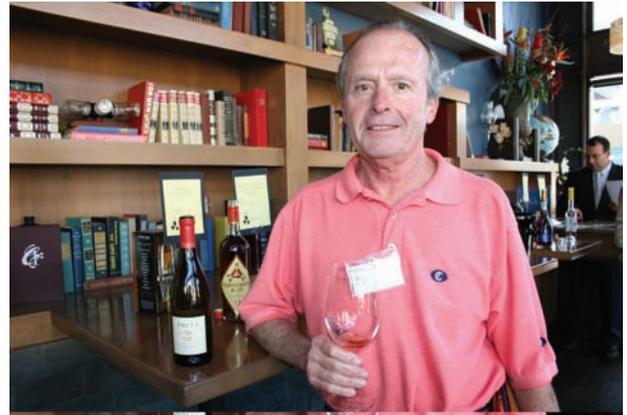


PHOTO: RACHEL BURKONS

Vance Frontino, Sales Manager for Fritz Cellars, stopped by to support the Double Gold Medal-winning Fritz Winery 2009 Chardonnay, which was also awarded Best Chardonnay. "We were blown away," says Frontino, "and the reaction has been terrific. Winning awards from such a prestigious event as the San Francisco International Wine Competition is such an honor, and it gives us great exposure."



PHOTO: RACHEL BURKONS

At the Orange County, New York, Los Angeles and Las Vegas stops on the Tour's cross-country voyage, in addition to the buzz surrounding these spectacular wines and spirits, there was another product generating excitement. Vinturi, a company that produces a groundbreaking lineup of wine and spirit aerators, was on hand to demonstrate their incredible products. The personable President and creator of Vinturi, Rio Sabadicci, says, "Being here gives us the chance to show Vinturi's true capabilities."

VINTURI in Action

You've read our UpFront (if you haven't, turn to page 5), but don't just take our word for it. We put Vinturi to the test in Orange County, and here's how it went down!



PHOTO: RACHEL BURKONS

THE TASTING PANEL's Editor-in-Chief Anthony Dias Blue and Vinturi President Rio Sabadicci experiment with the brand's portable aerator. "This thing is seriously incredible," says Blue. "The things it can do to a glass of wine are amazing!"

Eleventh-generation family member Carl Nolet was proud to represent his award-winning Nolet's Dry Gin, saying, "We're super-thrilled to get to take our gin on the Tour. It's a wonderful way to display the product, and we're proud of the results." Nolet joined Anthony Dias Blue and Sabadicci for a side-by-side tasting of the gin, pre- and post-Vinturi. The results? "The Vinturi really does do wonderful things to this gin. It just smooths it out even more—it's awesome!"



PHOTO: RACHEL BURKONS