



## TODAY'S STORIES

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### Oya's road to the wine house

By **Betsy Rothstein**

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Wine can be light, fresh and fruity.

It can also taste as old as dust. Such is the presidential wine contest at Oya Restaurant & Lounge in downtown Washington, where patrons can choose from Illinois and Arizona wines and subtly cast their vote for the next president of the United States.

"I like the novelty of having wines from different places, but they have to be up to par," says Oya's sommelier, Andrew Stover, who created the contest and in the process toured wineries and tried nearly 50 wines. "There were a lot of crappy wines I tasted to do this."

There are three Illinois wines and five Arizona wines to choose from.

So far, the old, refined and dusty Arizona red wine representing Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.) leads with 120 glasses sold since June 11. It's called Dos Cabezas D.C. Red (that's "two heads" in Spanish) and assumes a smoky raspberry-dark cherry flavor with notes of spice and truffle. The 2004 medium-bodied wine hails from Cochise County in southeastern Arizona.

The best-selling Obama wine, a Seyval Blanc white wine from the Lynfred Winery in southern Illinois, is not far behind with 91 glasses sold since early June. It's much, ahem, younger than its McCain counterpart and was made in 2007. It's description: "A rockin' Sauv Blanc meets Riesling styled white made from a French-American hybrid grape in America's heartland; loads of gooseberry, lychee and exotic tropical fruit notes with a slightly sweet finish."

In a show of political correctness, the restaurant does not support one candidate or party over another, although there was an Obama fundraiser held there last year. Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton (D-N.Y.) has dined at Oya, ordering a lunch salad and iced tea, and former Virginia Democratic Gov. Mark Warner, currently running for Senate, is a frequent customer.

Stover insists that the wine contest is "all about taste," and not political party. Yet he says when customers order the wines, they get excited upon learning their wine will favor one candidate over another.

"Some people get all giddy and say, 'Oh, you have an Obama wine?'" Stover says. One woman came in and drank an entire bottle of Obama wine herself. "She does like Obama," he said.

On a technical note, Illinois is home to more wineries than Arizona. "They are so different," Stover explains. "If you like California wine you'll like Arizona wine because the climate is dry. In Illinois it isn't hot, so you can't grow the same grapes."

The restaurant has also included one Clinton wine despite the fact she is no longer in the race. It's a 2005 Brooklyn Oenology Chardonnay created by a 34-year-old female winemaker in a Brooklyn warehouse. It's "rich and opulent with beautiful fruit."

Stover justifies keeping the Clinton wine around, saying, as many have, that the senator just doesn't seem to go away.

He says sometimes the last thing people want is a heavy red wine. For example, there's an Obama red that is

“charismatic and not too heavy,” he says. “The wine is very charismatic.” (Obama, charismatic?)

In contrast, the McCain red is “very old in style,” Stover says. “McCain gets accused of being old and dusty, and it’s a dusty wine.”

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