



Jan 18, 2007 Sandra Silfven

New column every Thursday. Sandra Silfven has written about wine for more than 20 years. She's a longtime copy editor at The Detroit News, as well as a former restaurant critic. Her advice to newbies: "If I can figure out this stuff, so can you!" E-mail her at ssilfven@detnews.com

Fleming's Steakhouse's unique wine program comes to Metro Detroit

With accolades from Wine Spectator and Food & Wine magazine, the California-based Fleming's Steakhouse and Wine Bar hangs up the "Open" sign in Livonia, Mich., on Friday, Jan. 19, to showcase this latest steak and fine wine concept to Metro Detroiters.

Fleming's is not just another high-end steakhouse, especially when it comes to wine and decor. As its national wine director Marian Jansen op de Haar says, "There is no such thing as a house wine at Fleming's."

There are 100 wine choices by the glass available every day, plus a reserve list of 80 wines, in a mix that ranges from coveted and rare (Stag's Leap Wine Cellars Artemis), to tried-and-true (Clos du Bois Merlot), to exciting but obscure (Hoopes Cabernet Sauvignon), to the best easy-drinking quaffers (Veramonte Sauvignon Blanc).



Fleming's is known for its emphasis on wine, serves dinner only seven nights a week, and is 100 percent nonsmoking.

On the upscale steakhouse circuit, Fleming's niche is unique -- it's dinner-only, female friendly and 100 percent nonsmoking. The portions may be more male friendly, but light eaters can choose from a number of interesting salads and sides, plus appetizers -- tenderloin carpaccio with caper-creole mustard sauce, seared Ahi tuna on a fresh vegetable salad with spicy mustard sauce, and lobster tempura with jalapeno and soy-ginger sauces, served with tempura vegetables. The real Fleming's customer who walks-

the-walk orders a bone-in filet when it's available, or the bone-in ribeye, along with the Fleming's Potatoes (with cream, jalapena peppers and cheddar) and the Fleming's Salad. The menu is a la carte, and the average meal per person is \$55.

Wine is clearly emphasized. Glasses are handcrafted by a West Virginia glass maker whose only other customer is the White House. The regular-size pour is 6 ounces, but special flights of three 2-ounce servings are suggested. Individual 2-ounce pours are available for a third of the price of a glass. And beyond the 100 wines by the glass, which are properly stored and topped off with nitrogen at closing time every night to keep them fresh, Fleming's has a special list of Reserve wines only sold by the bottle.

The restaurant, located in the heavily foodie corridor on Haggerty between 6 and 7 Mile roads, is part of a chain, but the management is all local, with strong experience. The operating partner is Peter Travis, a Livonia resident, who has racked up 30 years in the Metro Detroit restaurant biz, including 13 years managing Chuck Muer restaurants.



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Before that, he served as director for Ilitch Holdings Specialty Restaurants.

His chef-partner is Mark Strausberg, a 17-year veteran of food industry jobs, including chef at Charley's Crab in Troy. The wine manager is Nicole Kosta, formerly of Matt Prentice Restaurant Group.

The restaurants regionalize their wine lists, so the Livonia site offers several Michigan wines including L. Mawby Blanc de Blanc and Peninsula Cellars Manigold Vineyard Gewurztraminer.

All the restaurants are accented with limited-edition, giclee-on-canvas prints by renowned artist **Thomas Arvid**, who happens to be a Livonia native, based in Atlanta. Purchase of one of his original oils, sold in select galleries across the country, push the six-figure mark. If you haven't seen his works before, you'll discover they are so crisp, they're like high-definition TV meets the canvas. His tightly focused images define wine and all its aspects, from corks to crates to torn neck capsules, the way people really view it.

Arvid, who paints in large format, is finishing a piece destined to take up a wall in the restaurant entryway, featuring bottles from Fisher Vineyards, an extra perk for Detroit since Napa Valley's Fred Fisher is a descendant of the famous Detroit Body by Fisher automotive family. Arvid has 11 giclee prints (considered the highest-quality form of reproduction) scattered throughout the restaurant.

Read a column written in 2004 on Thomas Arvid.

Fleming's was launched in Newport Beach, Calif., in 1998 by restaurant industry veterans Paul Fleming, who developed P.F. Chang's China Bisto and had development rights for a number of Ruth's Chris Steakhouses, and Bill Allen, who was instrumental in developing the Dallas-based la Madeleine French Bakery and Cafe chain. Today, there are 47 Fleming's Steakhouses nationwide, including the Livonia site. Another is opening this month in Dayton, Ohio.

The Livonia Fleming's is located in College Park at 17400 Haggerty Road between 6 and 7 Mile. Call (734) 542-9463. Dinner is served seven days a week with the exception of Christmas Day and Thanksgiving. Hours are 4-9 p.m. Sun., 5-10 p.m. Mon.-Thurs.; 5-11 p.m. Fri.; 4:30-11 p.m. Sat.