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Art, Wine are Works of Beauty

By DAN MACDONALD, Special to the Times-Union

Art came to life the other night.

The painted bottles left the canvas and joined us on a sundown cruise in the mouth of the Intracoastal in St. Augustine.

The evening was a celebration of art and wine. And in such a gorgeous setting, celebrating was a very easy thing to do.

The wine was a collection of great labels that were used in a recent Thomas Arvid work to publicize the first Pebble Beach Food and Wine Festival. The painting, called *Ultimate Destination*, featured wines from Harlan Estates, Plumpjack, Kosta Brown, Peter Michael, Dom Perignon, Chateau Margaux, Shafer Hillside Select, Continuum and the much-coveted Screaming Eagle.

If you aren't familiar with Arvid's work, you should take a look. Arvid, who lives outside of Atlanta, has made a career of meticulously painting still-life portraits that feature wine bottles. His skill is such that the paintings look like photographs. The detail on the labels is unbelievable. The wine glasses shimmer. The wine looks as if it could be served right off the canvas.

Arvid's work is featured at Galeria del Mar in St. Augustine. Gallery owners Len and Sonya Cutter teamed with Opus 39 owners Michael and Christine McMillan to put on the event. Guests drank Dom Perignon champagne (one of the painting's featured bottles) in the gallery while awaiting the unveiling of Arvid's most recent work, *Show of Hands*.

Novices wouldn't know this as an Arvid original except for his distinctive signature. Painted in browns, tans and grays, this work looks like a painting. It pictures his hands opening a bottle of wine. The colors produce drama and action as the cork slides out of the bottleneck.

Both paintings, as well as other Arvid works, hang in Galeria del Mar on King Street.

Arvid, whose originals can sell in the six figures and whose numbered prints are collector items in themselves, told the story behind *Ultimate Destination*. He was approached by the festival producers, who wanted to commission him for the poster. Arvid's busy schedule didn't allow for the job at the time, but the folks at Pebble Beach are rather persuasive.

Even after saying no, Arvid said he was sent nine bottles from the Grand Tasting. That and further negotiations that included golf at the famed course and other considerations convinced him he could squeeze in the commission.

Usually an Arvid original on canvas takes two months to paint. However, he did this one on paper because paper takes less paint and less time and he was able to complete it in three weeks.

At the St. Augustine event, the group boarded the schooner Freedom and took a cruise to sample the wine and drink in the sunset. The brisk, near-autumn air was just chilly enough to demand a sweater or jacket. But the wines more than offset the weather.

I felt like a bit of an interloper sitting about the vessel sharing these wines with a group of both food and art connoisseurs. But there was no swishing, or hoity-toity description of tastes. And heaven forbid, there was no spitting of the wines. It was a gathering of people who appreciate the craft of art and wine.

Arvid is an exemplary talent who seems to live an unbelievable lifestyle of travel, art and fine wine. It paints a pretty picture.

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