

The Twenty Spot

Celebrating two decades in Chicago, the vivid Vivere hasn't lost its magic | *By Michael Nigrant | Photography by Dave Slivinski*

Whatever the medium, there are always a few masterpieces that capture everyone's imagination. In cinema, it's *Citizen Kane*. In music there's *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*. And as far as Chicago wine lists go, it's the one at Vivere, the upscale Italian Village restaurant family.

The famous list may only be printed in black type on white paper wrapped in a leather folio, but it's as engaging as Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises*. Though I already decided on a pineapple-perfumed Gruner Veltliner and a cherry- and wild yeast-kissed half bottle of 2003 M. Chapoutier La Bernardine Chateauneuf du-Pape, I've yet to give the expectant waiter my order. I want to keep my grubby fingers on this list forever.

My wife, however, has already pillaged our hot, crusty Italian bread and is ready to order black truffle gnocchi and wild boar pappardelle. The waiter, acknowledging my grape-induced saucer-eyed gaze, tells me I can hold on to the wine list as long as I like.

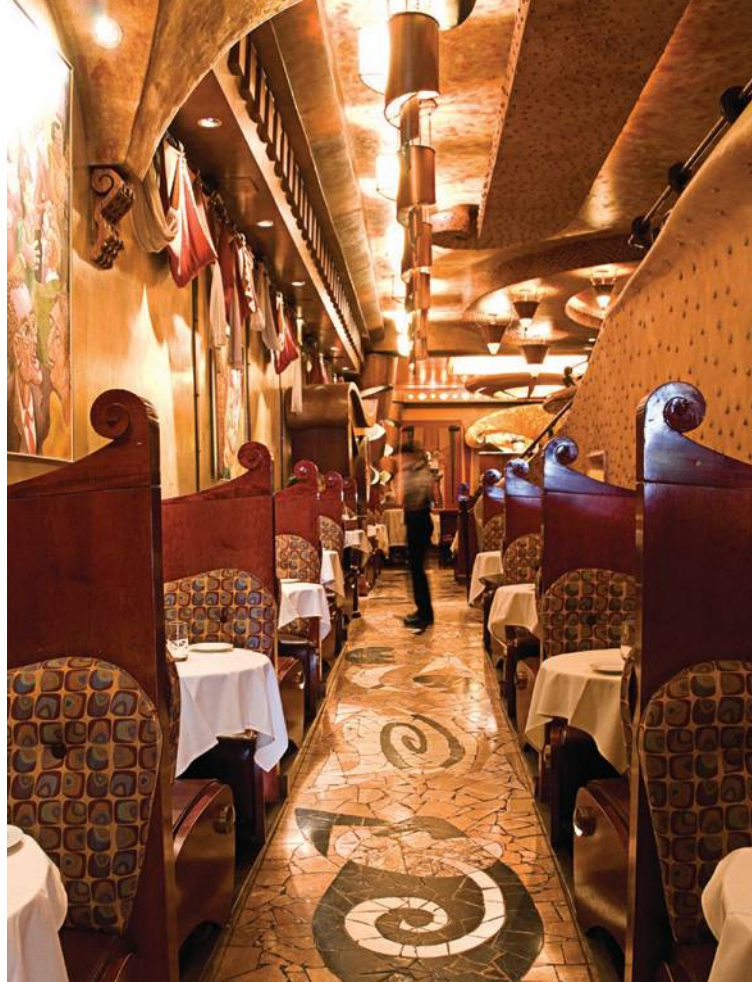
From 70-year-old Bordeaux to modern vintages of Zinfandel, the only limit on drinking at Vivere is the size of your wallet. The cellar

has 50,000 bottles with more than 2,000 different selections.

Like the wine list, Jordan Mozer's modern baroque interior—which features a polished metal and glass-swirl chandelier made from an airplane nosecone—is singular. Twenty years old or not, in this era of slapdash restaurant designs punctuated with tired chalkboards and exposed brick, Vivere is an imaginative treasure that honors dining out as an event.

For the most part, the hand-made pastas and entrées of executive chef Robert Reynaud honor both the architecture and the wine. My wife's tender shards of wild boar perfumed with cinnamon and nutmeg and tossed with pasta and maitake mushrooms taste like Christmas morning. It's as good as any pasta dish in town.

The only real exception in our meal is a Texas quail that, while cooked to a perfect medium rare, needs salt and is stuffed with cakey dry venison and foie gras. This likely won't be a problem for long. For, over a round of lush white chocolate cheesecake with Grand Marnier glaze, our waiter explains that the chef takes criticism very seriously. He says that a few years ago, when a critic derided the dessert list, the



chef stowed himself away with a bottle of pricey Grand Marnier Centenaire, his favored tippie, until he invented the cheesecake we were eating. With such discipline, Vivere will likely last another 20 years. I'll raise a glass to that. ■

VA-VA-VIVERE!

Clockwise from top: The Vivere dining room; *Pappardelle con Cinghiale* (hand-crafted pasta strips, wild boar, mushrooms and tomatoes); *Torta di Formaggio e Cioccolata Bianca* (white chocolate-Grand Marnier cheesecake with orange slices).

Vivere

71 W. Monroe St.
312.332.4040.

HOURS:

Mon.-Fri. lunch 11:30AM-2:30PM; Mon.-Thurs. dinner 5PM-10PM; Fri. and Sat. dinner 5PM-11PM.

Bottle Basics Wine director Michael Taylor suggests a few rare selections from the Vivere/Italian Village wine cellar.

From Bordeaux

1945 CHATEAU HAUT-BRION, PREMIER CRU, \$8,500.
1959 CHATEAU LAFITE-ROTHSCHILD, PREMIER CRU, \$7,850.

"I chose these wines because they represent two of the oldest and most expensive wines on our list. Holding them is like holding a piece of history, worth far more than their price."

From Barolo

1970 GIACOMO CONTERNO, "MONFORTINO," BAROLO, RISERVA SPECIALE, DOC, \$1,950.
1974 GIACOMO CONTERNO, "MONFORTINO," BAROLO, RISERVA SPECIALE, DOC, \$1,550.

"These two represent what I truly love about Piedmont wines. Not only are they old and rare, but they come from a producer that epitomizes the region."

USA - California

A VERTICAL OF RIDGE VINEYARDS, "MONTE BELLO," FROM SANTA CRUZ MOUNTAINS, RANGING FROM 1980 TO 2004 (1980 IS CURRENTLY TAYLOR'S FAVORITE VINTAGE).

"Winemaker Paul Draper seems to achieve what most producers only talk about: long aging, low alcohol, true terroir, these wines are as close to the 'old world' as you will get from California."