



FOOD & DRINK ARTICLES

You are in: [Home](#) > [Recipes](#) > [Food & Drink articles](#)

Tags: [Beer](#), [Food & beverage](#), [Trends](#), [Wine](#), [International](#)

Wine & Dine – US Food Trends

(09 April 2009 10:39)



Wine dinners and other beverage-pairing events drive traffic by giving guests experiences in addition to great meals.

This article first appeared in the 1 March 2009 issue of *Restaurants & Institutions (R&I)*.

R&I is the USA's leading source of food and business-trend information and exclusive research on operators and restaurant patrons. Editorial coverage spans the entire foodservice industry, including chains, independent restaurants, hotels and institutions. [Visit the R&I website](#) to find out more about the magazine or to [search its recipe database](#).

By Allison Perlik, Senior Editor

Filling seats—especially on weeknights—is an ongoing challenge for many restaurants, but reservations for the recently launched monthly wine dinners at Laurent Gras' ritzy L20 in Chicago have been selling out in less than 48 hours.

Article continues below

At Rock Center Café in New York City, beer-pairing dinners—a longtime program at the Patina Restaurant Group concept—continue to attract up to 100 guests a pop. And a March 24 wine dinner at Devereaux's in Greenville, S.C., had sold two dozen spots by early February.

That diners are willing and eager to drop anywhere from \$50 to \$200 a head for beer and wine dinners even as they cut back on regular restaurant outings seems paradoxical. Yet Gras and other restaurateurs driving big business with this strategy can count a host of reasons for its success.

"Just going out to a steakhouse, you could easily spend \$150 per person," Gras says. "This is something different from the regular [dining] experience. It's a very good value given the quality of the wines, the information that comes directly from the winemaker and dishes specially designed to go with each wine."

At L20 and other restaurants, these types of events are typically slotted on traditionally slow nights such as Sundays, Mondays and Tuesdays. Depending on the per-person cost and the expense of the food, wine and beer served, such dinners can be real moneymakers. Alternatively, they can serve as break-even investments that draw new faces to the dining room and help concepts differentiate themselves. Either way, the dinners promise plenty of incentives for customers, as evident in these six key selling points.

- **Attending a wine and beer dinner is like getting into an exclusive, private party.** Gras' dinners cost \$195 per person, not including tax or tip, and attendance is limited to 10 guests, creating an intimate social experience. The evening begins with a reception in a semi-private area of L20's dining room, where guests meet each other and the night's featured winemaker, who joins them for the specially crafted meal. There may be seven to 10 courses, depending on the number of wines showcased.
- **Special dinners can cost diners less than regular meals at the restaurant.** Rock Center Café charges \$52 per person (which includes tax and tip) for its beer dinners, while a regular three-course meal with drinks at the restaurant likely would run closer to \$70, says Ken Gordon, vice president of operations for Patina's Rock Center Café, Sea Grill, The Ice Rink and Cucina & Co. concepts. "It's a really value-oriented market, and the beer dinners are a good deal—and they're fun," he says.
- **Customers get to sample and sometimes purchase pours that might otherwise be hard to find.** "That's the other part of where we can make a little more money," says Carl Sobocinski, owner-partner of the Table 301 restaurant group, which runs Devereaux's and three other concepts that also hold wine dinners. The dinners themselves serve more as marketing tools and differentiators than as profit centers, he says, but at the last two wine dinners the restaurants hosted, Sobocinski sold 11 and 16 cases of wine, respectively. The markup typically is lower than what customers might find at retail shops, and guests can get the winemaker's signature on the bottle, making it a personalized souvenir.

SPONSORED LINKS

3663 - Exciting selection of wines from the world's key countries and regions

Apetito - Enjoy our new range of mini meals, for light bite at lunchtime or supper

Industry Resources - The single resource for all your Foodservice industry needs

Industry Resources - Stay up-to-date with the latest Foodservice Industry information

MOST VIEWED NEWS

- Restaurant drops foie gras after attack
- Oldham orders licence reviews for 22 pubs
- Oldham's licence review attracts more flak
- London Olympic tourism action plan launched
- 75% of families less likely to eat out

BUY & SELL

BUZZ
Buy, sell anything from your mobile

- Kenwood XVP001 PROFESS/VEG PREP BRAND NEW SEALED COST £1030 WILL ...
- Wide selection of new and second hand stainless steel catering ...
- Used restaurant fine dining chairs, some OK, some need cleaning/upholstery.
- Complete professional outside catering kitchen, turnkey operation, near Peterborough. ...
- Starting up a

- **The events bring together customers who have common interests and help restaurants target a growing demographic of wine and beer enthusiasts.** A love of wine draws diners to the L20 events, at which guests can discuss a shared interest with like-minded people—even if they don't know their dining partners beforehand. "It's different from the experience of the dining room, where guests come with friends to share an evening," Gras says. "It's a little bit more of a social event." Table 301's dinners target not just oenophiles but also foodies by inviting well-known chefs and restaurateurs to create the pairing menus. Recent guest hosts have included Ralph Brennan of the New Orleans restaurant group that bears his name and Atlanta chef and cookbook author Virginia Willis.
- **By partnering with beverage vendors, restaurants are able to provide value.** For Table 301's wine events, Sobocinski partners with wine vendors to keep costs down. "The distributors will supply a certain portion of the bottles we will be pouring. So if we purchase a case of each kind, we'll split it—they'll buy six bottles and I'll buy six, but I'll also buy several [additional] cases to try to sell retail." In New York, regulations prevent beer-and-wine vendors from providing products at reduced costs for events such as wine dinners, says Patina's Gordon, but vendors can still help in other ways, as by buying tables, printing menus or bringing favors.
- **Wine and beer dinners offer guests an experience they can't get everyday.** For their money, diners expect not only a delicious meal but also a memorable one. The chance to hobnob with winemakers and chefs from around the country is especially attractive to guests in smaller markets like Greenville who might not otherwise have such opportunities, says Sobocinski. "For guests to come to the restaurant and have one-on-one time [with these chefs and winemakers] feels really special. It's like having a celebrity in the house."

restaurant? Crockery, utensils, display items all available ...

Source: Restaurants & Institutions (US)

Ads by Google

[ServSafe\(R\) Food Safety](#)

Training and exam brought to you by the NRAEF.

www.servsafe.com

[The Art Institute Online](#)

Live Your Passion - Pursue a Hotel & Restaurant Management Degree.

www.aionline.edu

