

## Best Hidden Gem Sommelier Series:

### *The Spruce wine team: Andrew Green, Andrew Fidelman and Sarah Almand*

By Jeannine Sano

A talented chef supported by a skillful kitchen crew is only one component of an inspiring and memorable meal. I am, of course, referring to wine, and the erudite sommeliers that select and serve that divine liquid. Can you picture a couture outfit without the perfect shoes to set it off? In the same way, I cannot conceive of a great meal without great wine. Yet the kitchen limelight often overshadows sommeliers. Here, and in the coming months, we study the people who highlight our dining experience.

Spruce in Presidio Heights has been an instant hit since its much-anticipated opening last summer. Andrew Green, wine director of the Bacchus Group and head of the wine team at Spruce, described the Spruce wine list as the one that he has been dreaming about. With over 1,000 selections, including 25 Madeiras by the glass and over 100 German Rieslings, it is undeniably a dreamy wine list. Green, who was profiled in the previous "Best of" issue of *Northside San Francisco*, wanted to increase the interaction between sommeliers and diners, and to increase the overall level of wine service. Spruce is the culmination of his wine ambitions.

To that end, Andrew Fidelman and Sarah Almand (who recently departed due to a family emergency) were hired to be the sommeliers on the floor. As a former high school teacher with a master's degree in bilingual education, teaching cus-

tomers about wine comes naturally to Andrew Fidelman. Sarah Almand's thoughtful and analytical approach is apparent in every bottle she touches.

With her command of French and her experience working at the Ritz Carlton Half Moon Bay resort, it is hardly surprising that she passed the Certified Sommelier examination by the Court of Master Sommeliers last spring. Young, energetic and knowledgeable, the wine team at Spruce reflects the sophisticated vibe of Chef Mark Sullivan's menu and the polished service overseen by William Redberg (also featured in the last "Best of" issue for his intriguing Asian food-wine pairings at Bong Su).



Above: Spruce's "wine tower" was custom-designed by Andrew Green and features temperature control within each space. Below: Spruce's stunning interior. photos: Frankie Frankeny

**How was the experience opening Spruce?**

**Green:** Stressful, but really good. We went to all of our suppliers to look at everything fresh. It was a growing experience for the sommelier team. We had one stretch where we tasted 3,000 wines in about 10 days. We still do blind tastings.

**Fidelman:** I live in San Francisco, so the transition from the Village Pub to Spruce was great. The pace

is much more constant, and people tend to dine later, with a lot of requests for wine pairing. **Almand:** In San Francisco, you get wine on every single table every night, even with a burger at the bar, so wine service is incredibly busy, but it's very exciting.

**What is your favorite wine on the Spruce wine list?**

**Green:** So many things to choose from that it's like being a kid in a candy store. If I were to sit down and drink one thing, maybe [it would be] the 2003 Thierry Almand Cornas or the 1989 Dönhoff Riesling.

**Fidelman:** Depends on what I'm

eating, but I like the 1993 Jacoby-Mathy Riesling, or the 2005 Domaine de la Chanteleuserie Cab[ernet] Franc.

**Almand:** I love our big, huge, crazy Riesling collection and turning people on to how food friendly German Rieslings are.

**What is your best-selling wine?**

**Green:** Still Pinot Noir — New Zealand, California, Oregon, and Burgundy.

**Fidelman:** Pinot Noir from the Willamette Valley in Oregon is very popular.

**Almand:** Gigondas flies out of

this restaurant. I don't know if Robert Parker has been writing about it, but it's the most popular Old World wine.

**What is your beverage of choice when you're not working?**

**Green:** I am a huge fan of Oregon Pinot Gris. It shows great varietal character, with nice acidity and everyday accessibility. I also drink lots of Rosés. I take a lot of pleasure in finding great \$10 wines.

**Fidelman:** I tend to pick things I do not generally taste at work, like Italian whites, or older Spanish wines.

**Almand:** I like Champagne, but my spirit of choice is Campari.

**What are some of your favorite food and wine pairings?**

**Green:** A burger with Barbera, or Riesling with charcuterie.

**Fidelman:** A classic pepperoni pizza with Dolcetta d'Alba, or boudin blanc with Alsatian Riesling.

**Almand:** A margherita pizza with Nero d'Avola or Aglianico from Basilica, or Viognier paired with olive oil-poached halibut with mushrooms.

**Are there any wines that you feel have to be appreciated in order for you to serve?**

**Green:** I used to be very pro-

tektive and proprietary over certain wines, but over the years, I have relaxed. With hard-to-get wines, I try to school the team to figure out what people really want.

**Fidelman:** I can be pretty protective, and they make fun of me. Like the older Riojas, the old Bordeaux, and Domaine [Ghislaine] Barthod [Red Burgundy].

**Almand:** Well, with certain wines, once they're gone, you never know if you're going to get them again. For example, Raveneau [White Burgundy] is highly allocated. It's not one that I would push unless someone knew it and wanted it.

**How do you deal with a customer whose wine tastes are completely different from yours?**

**Green:** As long as people are drinking wine, I'm happy. It's actually nice to have people who drink all different price ranges and variety. It allows for flexibility and it's

more interesting.

**Fidelman:** I try to listen to what people are saying. Wine language is muddled, and I know my personal tastes are often different from what other people like.

**Almand:** Something Andrew Green taught me is that you don't have to like every wine to appreciate it and know how to describe it. We have tasted every single wine on our list, and I'm confident that every one of them is a good wine. So even if it's not necessarily something I would personally buy, I think I can find a wine for every customer.

**Editor's Note:** Sarah Almand has recently departed from Spruce due to a family emergency.

**Spruce:** 3640 Sacramento St., (at Locust); lunch weekdays 11:30 a.m.-2:30 p.m., dinner nightly from 5:00 p.m.; 415-931-5100, [www.sprucesf.com](http://www.sprucesf.com)

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