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Troy Wastell
Executive Chef
Island America Line

Our Weekend

Food for thought

The best of Seattle

– Mandy Rowe

I have just returned from the 2011 International Food, Wine and Travel Writers Association (IFWTWA) conference, which was held on a Holland America ship called the *Ms Westerdam* (www.hollandamerica.com).

About 50 or so American and Australian delegates and their spouses enjoyed one glorious week sailing from Puget Sound in Seattle to Hubbard Glacier in Alaska under the guise of professional development.

One would be hard-pressed to find a more suitable venue in which to hold a conference. Essentially, cruising is about great food, excellent wine and plenty of travel, the perfect match for a bunch of serial food, wine and travel writers.

Apart from a busy schedule of lectures and daily wine and food pairing events, we got to enjoy the *Westerdam's* many and varied restaurants, buffets and cafes.

An invitation to 'Dine with the Chef' was the ultimate high sea gastronomic adventure. *Westerdam's* executive chef and head sommelier combined forces to create a sensational six-course meal, matched with wines and liqueurs from around the globe. It was a small and intimate occasion somewhat akin to attending a friend's dinner party; only the food and wine were far superior.

IFWTWA had also organised a three-day pre-cruise event called 'The Best of Seattle': a showcase of the city and surrounds luxury accommodation, fine-dining restaurants and wineries.

Our lodgings included a night overlooking Lake Washington at the magnificent Woodmark Hotel, Yacht Club and Spa (www.thewoodmark.com) in Kirkwood, one night at Hotel 1000 in downtown Seattle (www.hotel1000seattle.com) and a night immersed in rustic opulence at Willows Lodge in Woodinville (www.willowslodge.com).

Here is a glimpse of some of the stories that made it into my dog-eared travel journal, which I shall enjoy sharing with you over the next few weeks.

A 'behind the scenes' interview with *Westerdam's* executive chef Troy Wastell, an Aussie boy, was both enlightening and inspirational.

He oversees the production of 9000 to 11,000 meals a day for about 2500 people. After most dinners Troy could be seen sauntering around his restaurants engaging in cheerful banter with satisfied guests. He was squeaky clean, unflustered, genuinely gracious and — heavens forbid — a 'pies' supporter.

For me, cooking dinner for a few friends and any pre-production nerves, has taken on a whole new meaning.

The burgeoning food scene in downtown Seattle piqued my interest and certainly gives Melbourne a good run for its money. Celebrity chef Tom Douglas seems to dominate a section of the culinary landscape with a series of innovative restaurants such as Seatown, Etta's and Serious Pie.

Going to the same restaurant on two consecutive nights is usually taboo, but I was suffering with withdrawals from Tom's tasty tuna sashimi with a green onion pancake and wasabi tobiko and required another fix. Etta's extensive menu of Washington State wines, many available by the glass, meant we were able to traverse a gamut of local varietals. Of course this was considered more professional development.

Hotel 1000's signature restaurant BOKA Kitchen and Bar, on the corner of First and Madison, is a mecca for urban American food and handcrafted cocktails. Do yourself a favour and check into one of their sumptuous luxe guest rooms for a night or two. 'Out of the square' sophistication prevails. Even their trifle has culinary clout. The duck floating atop a tub of cream, custard and cake is nothing short of edible art. A rubber duck, a bathtub and iridescent blue bath water have never tasted so good.

'Signature Everything' should be Hotel



Westerdam's executive chef Troy Wastell and Mandy Rowe in the galley.

1000's by-line.

Of course, a visit to Seattle is not complete without a few hours spent in Pike Place Market. It's a food destination in itself. Seattle Food Tours (www.seattlefoodtours.com) runs regular guided walking tours, which are jammed-packed with useful local information and a bountiful supply of food tastings. Mini-breaks for cucumber gelato, warm crumpets, award winning chowder and a truffle infused potato and leek soup kept any hunger pangs at bay.

Last but not least are the diverse and exciting wines of Washington State. These can be found on many of Seattle's wine lists, in specialist wine stores and cellar door outlets.

The Tasting Room located in Post Alley at Pike Place Market is a co-operative wine tasting cellar (www.winesofwashington.com) and home to the Wilridge Winery 07 Nebbiolo, one of our favourite holiday wines.

URBAN enoteca (www.urbanenoteca.com) in the hip SODO — south of downtown — district of Seattle is a cellar door with plenty of 'attitude'. Terry Thompson's clever restoration of an industrial warehouse is now home to some of the state's finest boutique wines. His concept, to bring wine tasting rooms to the city, is so simple it defies belief.

I was so enthralled by URBAN enoteca's Library Lounge menu, which lends itself to shared dining, I contacted Terry and pleaded for one of their recipes.

Over the next few weeks 'Food for Thought' will publish this, along with other stories on Seattle, and highlights of our Holland America cruise to Alaska. Enjoy the musings.



Mandy Rowe hard at work during her Seattle food tour.



Hotel 1000's spectacular trifle.

Photos by Shane Rowe



Holland America's *Ms Westerdam*.