

# LIFE



## Perfect Pairings

Wine crates create a stunning display for appetizers, candles and flowers at a dinner party hosted by wine artist Thomas Arvid and his wife Vanessa.





IT'S AN  
ARTFUL LIFE



A sampling of the artfully arranged wines, opposite, to be served at the party. ■ Thomas Arvid loves to cook, so the kitchen was designed to pull people in and encourage them to be a part of the action. ■ Thomas and Vanessa enjoy a quiet moment before their guests arrive. ■ Adam Everett, short-stop for the Houston Astros and his wife Jennifer are neighbors of the Arvids.



WINE PAINTER THOMAS ARVID AND WIFE VANESSA CELEBRATE THE GOOD LIFE WITH A FINE BLEND OF SERIOUS VINTAGES AND SPECIAL FRIENDS

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**T**homas and Vanessa Arvid work hard, and while their house is a nod to all of their labors, they also feel strongly about play and fellowship. An artist, Thomas' name is recognized far and near as a master of the "modern" still life. The realism he gives to his paintings of wine and its culture has fueled not only his success but also a love of the study and collection of wine.

Within the belly of their new house, located near Acworth and the shores of Lake Allatoona, is a cavernous wine cellar. Here the Arvids take care of the wine, and the wine takes care of them—especially on porch-perfect nights like this one when their home sets the stage for the kind of dinner party that folks will talk about for a long time.

"I never intended to primarily make my paintings be all about wine," says Thomas, who grew up in Detroit. "I started painting seriously several years back, after moving to Atlanta. One of the projects I was working on was a study in red, where I was painting iconic red things like a Radio Flyer wagon or red Converse high tops. Because Café Tutu Tango was hanging my paintings, it made sense to paint a glass or bottle of red wine.

Also, American red wine was really becoming popular, and the general public started recognizing labels. Well, those wine paintings were being sold before the paint was dry, so I just kept exploring that theme."

The wine-inspired pieces caught the attention not only of Atlantans but also of vintners and collectors. Commissions came pouring in, and Thomas learned more and more about the personalities and culture behind the wine. "When you get to know the folks who make wine, you realize that they are farmers and laborers; they are real people," he says. "Some people are intimidated by wine as well as art, and I seek to break down the walls of intimidation for folks by painting something sophisticated like wine culture in a friendly, approachable way—just like those farmers who make such a delicious product."

Thomas' work also encourages others to enjoy the communion of sitting down with a friend and opening a bottle. The cork rolling on the table, the drips that happen when one casually shares a drink. It is that same warm feeling that comes over guests when they enter the Arvid household.

The party starts on the massive porch with a '98 Dom Perignon. ■ Playful colors and a warm feel in each room create a comfortable setting for friends and family. ■ A baby artichoke becomes a sweet place card holder on the spring table.

Vanessa Arvid, the president and CEO of Thomas Arvid Fine Art, explains that, with the help of interior designer Terry Duffy, the goal for their home was to create a space for living and entertaining that was easy and fun. "We love having friends over for food and wine. Sometimes we will be sitting on our front porch, enjoying the evening sunset, and we will see neighbors walking by and wave them up for a glass of wine. Well, three hours and two bottles later ... That's what we want—for friends to feel like they can be here and enjoy this home with our family."

This particular night, Vanessa and Thomas have planned a dinner party. It is early spring, and the weather is turning warmer. "It's difficult with our work to pull friends who also have busy schedules together, but this day just worked for everyone—it was in the stars," says Vanessa. Stars for sure; the Arvids' guest list is a fun mix of people. Adam Everett, Georgia boy and starting shortstop for the Houston Astros, and his wife Jennifer have a home across the street and have an odd opportunity to be in Atlanta at this time of year. Jennifer called a babysitter to watch their two young girls, and the couple walks over to spend the evening.

A car with Tennessee tags pulls up, and a songwriting power couple from Nashville joins the group. Monty Powell, who has written more than 500 hits for some of music's biggest stars, and his talented wife Anna Wilson, a songwriter and jazz singer, met Thomas and Vanessa at an event to raise awareness and money for the Alzheimer's Society of Atlanta. Also attending are Rob and Merry Preiditsch. Rob is the director of marketing for Thomas Arvid Fine Art, and Merry, a human resource manager, is steeped in charitable work for children. Though Thomas and Vanessa love to cook and do so every day with their two sons, Jimmy and Christopher, tonight they employ the help of Randolph Shirk, executive chef at the Governors Towne Club.

"When you have serious drinkers coming, it is important to really think through what order to pour and how much you are serving. Tasting pours are important because no matter how much planning I put into the wine list, we always end up thinking of something else to open," Thomas explains. "It is fun to host a wine dinner because we give our wine list to the chef and then he has fun matching the food to the wine instead of the other way around."

The guests make their way from the porch, where they toast each other with glasses of a '98 Dom Perignon, to tour the wine cellar. The cellar is all dark wood and stone, with a side bar perfect for opening another bottle and enjoying prosciutto and artisan cheese. When the feast moves to the kitchen, a tower of wooden wine cases rises before them, set with various appetizers to nibble while they watch the chef work on the main course.

"We love this open kitchen because of course people always gather in the kitchen, but it allows the cook to mingle with guests as well," says Vanessa. "Also, we want our family to be together in







With Thomas' paintings as a backdrop, Georgia native and songwriter Monty Powell treats fellow guests to a performance of his No. 1 hit, 'Days Go By,' recorded by Keith Urban. ■ The Arvids' cellar is designed to hold treasured bottles but also acts as another stop for guests in this moveable feast.



**DINNER MENU & WINE PAIRINGS:**

**Assorted Appetizers by Chef Randolph**

2006 Muldenbosch Cabernet Sauvignon Rosé

**Pears and prosciutto with goat cheese and spinach topped with roasted Vidalia onion vinaigrette**

2003 Fisher Vineyards Whitney's Chardonnay

**Macaroni and crab au gratin**

1999 Panther Creek Bednarik Vineyard Pinot Noir

**Intermezzo of homemade peanut brittle ice cream**

**Rack of lamb with organic muscadine jelly and spring vegetable medley**

2004 Hundred Acre Ancient Way Vineyard Shiraz

**Fresh organic raspberries, ricotta cheese and local honey with almond biscotti**

2001 Chateau Guiraud 1st Cru Sauternes

the kitchen so the boys can watch or help or sit right there and work on a project while we are preparing dinner. It is very important for us to share all aspects of a meal together."

When the actual seated dinner begins, the party gathers around the dining room table adorned with spring colors—a runner of grass, pink roses and fresh, mixed-colored dishes. Talk turns to work and everyone argues over who likes their job more. Thomas pipes up, "You know, both baseball and music are called 'play'—you play ball and you play music—you guys are just playing." Monty retorts with a chuckle, "Oh well, you just paint wine."

With full stomachs, everyone grabs a glass and heads to Thomas' studio. Easels and paintbrushes fill one side, and a shelf holds bottles he's been commissioned to paint. "These bottles are special," Thomas explains. "One might be the bottle that was opened when a marriage proposal occurred, another is a bottle from a 50th wedding anniversary. People want those moments preserved. The bottle might be empty, but if we can capture that moment on canvas, it is there forever."

Attention turns to a not-yet-completed painting. The detailed work is almost more evident when the bones of the painting are exposed. There happens to be a guitar in the room, something Thomas turns to for fun when his eyes need a rest or he just wants to take a break. Because Monty is there, the group begs him to play something. He begins singing one of his latest hits, "Days Go By," recorded by Keith Urban: *Days go by / It's all we've been given / So you better start livin' right now / Days go by / We think about tomorrow, then it slips away / We talk about about forever, but we've only got today/ Days go by.*

The song hits home, and another cork is popped.