



# Drinking in

April 24, 2015

by Nick Green | @\_NicholasGee



In case you're in the dark about it, **O.Noir** is a restaurant franchise with locations all around the world that features meals in a room that is completely without light. Led to their tables and served by waiters who identify as vision-impaired, guests can enjoy an array of dishes that range from filet mignon to penne. According to the restaurant's founder Moe Alameddine; "When you eat food in the dark, your remaining senses are heightened to savour the smell and taste of food."

Well, **O.Noir** is taking it to another level, premiering North America's first truly bling wine tasting experience. On Sundays at 5:00pm, guests can now head into the dark dining room for a tutored tasting of five wines; one sparkling, two whites, and two reds. The event is hosted by Carolyn Hammond, a respected and very personable London-trained sommelier, wine critic, and best-selling author.

in the interest of offering an informed opinion (also because I needed a drink), I checked out a preview of the event last week. Having never eaten there I really didn't know what to expect. My plus-one and I waited in a dimly-lit foyer for the server to take us to our table. Once our names were called, we lined up, left hand to the left shoulder in front of us, at which time we were lead into a small room. Once the door to the foyer was closed, another opened and we entered into pitch darkness. The server took us slowly on a twisty trek to our table, seating us one at a time while giving us a description of our surroundings; *There's a wall to your right. In front of you is a plate with some soda crackers, a napkin, and a glass of water.* We took our seats and took it in.

Okay. So. Here's what to expect. The first five minutes are a little freaky. Your perception of space and distance takes some time to adjust to, exemplified by the fact that my plus-one thought I was sitting next to him for several minutes when I was actually across from him (he's a little dim. Pun intended). You'll also notice that you can hear *everything* that everyone around you is saying. Which means they can hear you. So watch your mouth. As

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you pad your hands around the table and take some deep breaths, you begin to get used to it all. I promise.

Once we were all seated the tasting began. I have no idea where she was, but Carolyn's voice cut across the crowd, introducing the event and explaining the proceedings while our amazing server navigated the crowd, offering pre-poured wines to the guests. Wine after wine, Carolyn instructed us to first give the wine a swirl, then a sniff, and to call out what we smell. Being an introverted extrovert, I usually shrink at the mention of audience participation. But something happens in the dark (and in the presence of a bunch of wine). There was a level of anonymity that allowed the crowd to yell out their thoughts in a much more uninhibited way. As we took our sips and called out the flavours, the same thing occurred. It was great to hear all of the different things people smelled and tasted. While some observations (particularly coming from my plus one) were a little head-scratching, it was fun when someone would call out something like *cedar!*, prompting a room full of *oh yeahs* and *totallys*. The cedar-yelling chick may have been too meek to do it in the bleak light of a dining room. But in the dark, who cares?

So you're thinking: Clearly the ambience and experience were pretty fabulous, but how the heck was the wine? Obviously the choice of wine is integral to the success of a wine tasting, and Carolyn did not disappoint. We enjoyed; a 2014 Prosecco; a 2013 Ontario Chardonnay (one Ontario wine will always be featured); a 2013 California Chardonnay (with a deliciously different flavour profile); a 2013 Argentinian Malbec; and 2011 Napa Cabernet Sauvignon. While some were better than others, there was something for everyone, and all wines are offered at the LCBO. After tasting, Carolyn would challenge us to guess the grape, where it's from, and the price. I did pretty well. My plus one was pretty terrible, but it was dark so it wasn't all that embarrassing.

At the risk of overstating it, this event was pretty much completely wicked. As I was led to the door through the darkness, a little tipsy from the tasting, a funny feeling came over me. While on the way in I wanted to run back towards the light, on the way out I kind of wanted to be left in the dark.

To participate, sign up at [onoirtoronto.com](http://onoirtoronto.com) or by emailing [managerto@onoir.com](mailto:managerto@onoir.com). The event is every Sunday at 5pm at \$40 per person.

O.Noir Toronto, 620 Church St., [onoirtoronto.com](http://onoirtoronto.com), [@ONoirRestaurant](https://twitter.com/ONoirRestaurant)

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