

The Wine Guy's Wine Tasting Notes

March, 2010



La Delizia, Il Nostro, Brut Spumante, Friulani

Two very good wine friends invited me to a brunch at their home and told me this wine was a Prosecco. I immediately declared it the finest Prosecco I've ever had. Well, when I set down to write these notes I actually read the label to find out this was a Spumante from the northeastern part of Italy and not Asti Spumante which generally comes from the northwestern part of Italy. The blend of grapes included the Pinot Nero (Pinot Noir), Chardonnay and Ribolla Gialla. There is always something new in the wonderful world of wine! My friends told me this was on the shelf of a large retail store in the Prosecco section; perhaps this retailer should hire more knowledgeable staff.

Le Vieux Donjon, 2005 Chateauneuf-du-Pape, France

This is a new Chateauneuf for me, but it was a big, rich, bold wine. This wine was 80% Grenache with small amounts of Syrah, Mourvedre and Cinsault. The vines are about 80-years-old, which accounts for the richness, and the high amount of Grenache accounts for the peppery flavors. The vineyard is located adjacent to the Mont Redon vineyard (see June 2009 notes for my comments on Mont Redon).

Arrowood, 2007 Chardonnay, Sonoma \$26.

I encountered this wine at a recent tasting, and it was the first wine of the evening. I was talking with the friend who was pouring when I stopped and said "Wow, what a finish!" Arrowood wines have not been in our area in a while and it is good to see quality wines at any time. This Chard had a light oak taste and was a bit creamy, but it is the finish that got me to buy several bottles. I'll try to hold on to the other one for about 2 years when it should be even more special.

Bruno Giacosa, 2001 Extra Brut, Italy

Joseph Drouhin, 2002 Chassagne-Montrachet Marquis de Laguiche, Burgundy

Bodegas y Vinedos Shaya, Verdejo Old Vines, Rueda

Chateau La Tour du Pin Figeau, 1977 St. Emilion. France

Shelton Vineyards, 2004 Port, Yadkin Valley

With my son home for an evening and a wine shop owner as a guest, we had a wine-filled time.

Giacosa is one of the Italian Piedmont's finest producers, and I never knew that he produced sparkling wines until my son gave this to me as a gift several years ago. It was very Champagne-like and a very good starter. The **Drouhin** is a classically elegant Chardonnay that at 8-years-old was perfect. The **Rueda** wine was opened blind, and if I had guessed for a week I could not have come up with the Verdejo grape. This is a minor grape varietal that is grown almost exclusively in northern Spain. However, this one was full-flavored, rich and powerful. This is an old vine bottling that is very special. The **St. Emilion** was decanted about 10 minutes before serving to remove years of sediment. This is a small estate, and we were concerned about whether it would have survived for 3 decades. It was elegant with hardly a sign of tannins. Not many wines could do this well for so long. Our final wine of the evening was local. **Shelton**, in Dobson, N.C., produced this Cabernet Franc-based wine as their first effort at Port and the results have been excellent. I've had several bottles of this vintage, and while after 5 years it isn't quite as potent as before, it was still a fine example of what North Carolina can do with dessert wines.

Open That Wine Night 2010

1. VINO Nitra, 2008 Rulandske Biele, Slovakia
2. Chateau du Jaunay, 2008 Muscadet Sevre et Maine, Loire Valley
3. Hickory Hill Vineyard, NV Smith Mountain Lake Sunset, Virginia
4. Weingut Geil, 2008 Gewurztraminer Kabinett Mettenheimer Michelsberg, Rheinhessen
5. Rose de Chevalier, 2007 Bordeaux
6. Don Guizard, 2006 Coteaux de Languedoc, Cuvee Prestige
7. Terreventoux, 2007 Terres de Triffes, Southern Rhone Valley
8. Valhalla, 2002 Valkyrie, Virginia
9. Twomey, 2000 Merlot, Napa Valley
10. Garden Gate, 2003 Sweet Muscadine, North Carolina

Friends of ours have been doing an ***Open That Bottle Night*** for ten years, but this one was very special because no one knows what has happened to Dottie and John, the *Wall Street Journal* wine writers who started this annual event. For this year's gathering, we had six couples who brought one or two bottles of their special wine.

We started the evening with a wine from Slovakia that had been purchased last year on a river cruise through that country. Although I don't speak any foreign languages, I do speak the language of wine, but this bottle's label couldn't be read. We were told it was a Pinot Blanc, but it was very rich unlike most Pinot Blancs I've had. However, it was the finest Slovakian wine I've ever had.

The next wine was a very representative Muscadet from the westernmost area of the Loire Valley. This wine sings out for seafood, but it also worked very well with the variety of cheeses we sampled.

Following was a semi-sweet Muscadine from Virginia. It had mild Muscadine flavors and led very well into the next wine from Germany. The Geil was a very good example of the German version of Gewürztraminer. It was lightly spiced but had the typical German balance between sweetness and acidity.

This is the first year we had a blush wine in our tasting. Coming from one of the great French Bordeaux estates, Domaine de Chevalier, we were assured of quality. The pale color was followed by rich Bordeaux flavors.

Our first red wine was from the Languedoc region in southern France. This wine, imported by our hosts' son-in-law, demonstrates that his young business has sourced some good European wines.

The Ventoux region of the Rhone Valley offers a wide variety of grapes for blending, but this wine contains only Syrah and Mourvedre. The flavors were rich and illustrated why this region's wines should be more available locally. With a rustic taste characteristic of the area, this wine satisfied all of us.

We then moved into the Bordeaux-styled wines with a blend from one of Virginia's best producers. Located near Roanoke, the owners of Valhalla are opera lovers and name about half of their wines after operas by Richard Wagner. Die Valkyrie is the third of Wagner's Ring Cycle. With 34% Merlot, 27% Cabernet Sauvignon, 26% Cabernet Franc, 10% Malbec and 3% Petit Verdot, the wine was well balanced and, for a seven-year-old wine, showed a lot of fruit.

The wine of the evening was the Twomey, which was outstanding! This is about the fifth time I've

had their Merlot and it has everything you should have from this grape--balance, subtle flavors, smooth yet with a richness that was terrific. At 10-years-old this bottle could easily last another 10 years without losing a step in flavor. What a joy to have such a fine wine!

With a light dessert we had a North Carolina sweet Muscadine from Garden Gate in Mocksville. This was a good choice because any red wine after the Twomey would have disappointed. The light Muscadine flavors enhanced our sweet dessert and the good company for the evening only enhanced the wine experience. Too bad we can't get Dottie and John to write about our event.