

The Wine Guy's *Wine Tasting Notes*

September, 2010



Valhalla, 2001 Götterdämmerung, Virginia

Several years ago I visited this winery in Roanoke and was most impressed by the wine and the view. I didn't realize that the elevation around this city was so high. As a plus, they are only about 10 minutes from Route 220 south of the city. The wines are wonderful with many of them named for operas written by Wagner. When I walked into the tasting room my first comment was "what no opera music?" The Götterdämmerung, named for the last of his Ring Cycle operas, is a blend of 60% Cabernet Franc and 40% Merlot. It is one of their softer red wines, but that does not mean really soft. The rich flavors would have been a treat for Wagner if he were still alive.

Ponzi Vineyards, 2008 Pinot Gris, Willamette Valley \$17.

Dick Ponzi was one of the first winemakers to make his home in Oregon's Willamette Valley where he has been making fine wines since the 70s. The Pinot Gris grape grows very well in this climate and produced this very flavorful and wonderfully food-friendly wine.

Avignonesi, 2007 Rosso di Montepulciano, Tuscany DOC \$17.

A review of the Italian section of my cellar book tells me this is one of my favorite Italian wines. I have had so many over the past few years and from a variety of vintages. A bargain at the price, this is a typical Italian wine with the acidity right out front. The producer is one of the best, which makes this a great bottle of wine for sipping or for dining with the best of Italian meals.

Montes Alpha, 2007 Carmenère D.O. Colchagua Valley, Marchigüe Vineyard, Chile \$22.

I am always asked what is Carmenere when I am pouring one at a tasting and, generally, I just reply "the name of the grape." But there is more to the story: this grape was once one of the grapes permitted in a Bordeaux blend. This means that the wine will taste like a Cabernet-Merlot blend. When the French stopped using this grape, the Chileans adopted it and produce terrific wines. Making Bordeaux-like wines, this producer is well-known for its quality, and this balanced wine is light and fruity with a good level of backbone.

Mt. Difficulty Roaring Meg, 2008 Pinot Noir, Central Otago \$24.

I first had this wine at a tasting, and I wasn't sure about how it tasted so I bought a bottle to develop a more informed opinion. This wine is the real thing: softer than most Pinots, but not quite the delicate Burgundy model. That

richness is what makes it a good food wine since it can pair with a wide variety of dishes. I believe I'll get some more to see how it ages.

Hughes Wellman, 2006 Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley

My friend from D.C. left this wine with me after his July visit. What a truly great bottle of wine. I recalled an article about these wines in *The Wall Street Journal* (as an aside, if anyone knows what John and Dottie are doing please let me know). I called my friend and got "the rest of the story." First, I never ask what a gift costs, but this time I did and he said about \$20. Secondly, the wine is produced and bottled by a company owned by Cameron Hughes, the Fred Franzia (Two Buck Chuck) of quality wines. He has been using the wine glut in California to his advantage and buying high quality wines, with the pledge not to reveal his sources. He then sells the wine at greatly reduced prices. The wine was very special indeed with rich overtones and nice balance. The age-ability for the '06 is at least 7 more years. As always, it is the label that guarantees quality, but since his sources are not known, we will have to see more of these wines before we can have that assurance due to his secrecy.

Banfi, 2006 Chianti Classico Riserva DOCG, Tuscany \$20.

This wine's designation of Riserva means it has been aged at least 3 years in barrel and/or bottle before release. The wine is not your ordinary Chianti because the Classico means it comes from the best regions in Tuscany. Soft, gentle with a good mouth feel, this wine should be shared now or within the next 2-4 years.

Bleasdale, 2006 Shiraz Bremerview, Langhorne Creek, South Australia \$20.

The Potts family started Bleasdale in 1850 and are producing some of the best Australian wines today at reasonable prices. The vineyard is located in South Australia where Adelaide is the major city. Bold and rich, this wine with 14.5% alcohol, is best saved for the heartiest meals, like with the roast lamb we had.