

The Wine Guy's *Wine Tasting Notes*

March, 2009



A.Rafanelli, 1999 Zinfandel, Dry Creek Valley

Ten years seems just about right for these wines (see notes from 12/08 for their Cab). I served this with a Veal Piccata, which is difficult to match a wine with because of the lemon sauce. The calmed down, yet rich Zin held up very well. This producer is hard to find but offers full-flavored, long-lasting wines.

Louis Latour, 2002 Auxey-Duresses Blanc, Burgundy

This little known section of the Côte de Beaune produces almost equal amounts of red and white wine. In years past these wines were fraudulently labeled as Pommard or Meursault, two of its neighboring regions. The pricing of Auxey-Duresses is always a value compared to the nearby area, and they are rich and flavorful wines. At 8-years-old this was still fresh and vibrant.

Hanover Park, 2004 Michael's Blend, Yadkin Valley \$16.

Hanover Park is that small vineyard and 100-year-old farm house in Yadkinville that is owned by "The Teachers." Michael and Amy are good friends of mine, and I always enjoy their company. That said, Michael's Blend is one of their better wines. Even though they claim to be Rhône advocates, this Cabernet Franc-Merlot blend shows that Michael can work well with a variety of wines. Soft and gentle, it has been aged in older oak barrels for 42 months. I think the key here is the use of older barrels, which doesn't put the wine over the top like some similar-styled wines.

Ferrari-Carano, 2007 Fumé Blanc, Sonoma County \$15.

This is a very fruity Sauvignon Blanc from one of the better producers in Sonoma. At this price it represents a very approachable wine that should be consumed within a year or two.

Van Ruiten Vineyards, 2006 Old Vine Zinfandel, Lodi \$16.

Lodi is one of the most misunderstood wine regions in California. It is also one of the biggest producers, and it has a significant number of older vines. Old Vine is not a defined term in America and can mean anything the producer wants, but having been to Van Ruiten I can assure you that they have some of the oldest vines I have ever seen. The back label states that the grapes came from vines more than 50-years-old. Because of the large production in Lodi, they can produce quality wine at affordable prices. Even though this wine has 15.5% alcohol it is still relatively soft and has great Zin flavors.

Domaine de la Fruitiere, 2007 Muscadet "Petit M", Loire \$14.

Made with 100% Melon de Bourgogne grape this wine comes from the section of the Loire Valley closest to the Atlantic Ocean. In fact, some say that these wines can be a bit salty from the ocean breezes. With 12% alcohol this wine shows a light sweetness but retains its balance. It is said that this is the perfect match for oysters; unfortunately I don't care for oysters so I can't comment on that.

The Four Graces, 2006 Pinot Gris, Willamette Valley

Tasted at Milner's Restaurant in Winston-Salem. It has been some time since I have tasted Four Graces wines, and I don't know why. This is one terrific wine similar in style to some of the best Alsatian Pinot Gris. Slightly sweet at the front, yet the acidic finish proves very satisfying.

Open That Bottle Night

Ten years ago Dottie and John, the *Wall Street Journal* wine writers, got the idea to have an annual evening for friends to gather and open bottles that are special and may not have otherwise been opened until it was past their prime. I have friends who for the past seven years have hosted such a party. Here are the wines which six couples opened for the evening.

Veuve Cliquot, Brut Champagne NV

This bottle has rested in the cellar for about 10 years and was brought out at a good time. The Widow Cliquot's wine is worthy of celebrating on an occasion like this since she did more for the development of Champagne than any other, even the notable Dom Perignon. The wine was crisp and a terrific starter.

Vincent Dureuil-Janthial, 2006 Aligoté, Burgundy

This is a new producer to me but it was one of the most full-flavored Aligotes I've had. This second-permitted white grape of Burgundy isn't available very often. Cream de Cassis was also available to blend and make a Kir.

Dr. Richter, 2004 Veldenzer Eisenberg, Riesling Spätlese, Mosel

This was my contribution and it was a very well-balanced, intense wine, which with four plus years in the bottle, is just entering its prime.

Vinarstvi Ridiny Spalkovy, 2006 Svatovavrinecke, Moravia

What a treat to have a wine from the Czech Republic that actually tastes good. One of our guests sought out this wine while on vacation just for this event. The principal grape is the St. Laurent, which is a red grape that is grown in Austria. The wine had a bit of a rustic taste and since I've had only one other bottle of St. Laurent I can't do a great evaluation. However, I was impressed with this wine, which it the best Czech wine to-date.

Chateau Lussac Bel Air, 2000 Bordeaux

Certainly not a wine we see very often. From one of the great vintages of recent years, this Merlot-Cabernet Franc blend is typical of this small region within St. Emilion. There are many different Bel Air Chateaus in Bordeaux and they all seem to offer quality wines.

Langmeil, 2006 Three Gardens S-G-M, Barossa Valley

Our host has a son-in-law in the wine business, and this little gem is one he has distributed. Syrah-Grenache-Mourvedre is a common blend in Australia and this young wine has many more years left to continue to smooth out. It offers rich flavors and would be a good match with beef or lamb dishes.

Domaine de Pauilles, 2006 Banylus Rimage, France

For our finale our host opened the Banylus, which has its own appellation in southern France. A fortified wine with 16% alcohol, it is made primarily from the Grenache grape and is not as over-powering as a port or Madeira. This is a wine not often seen in the United States and was a good end to a very diverse evening.