

# The Wine Guy's Wine Tasting Notes

September, 2009



## **Domaine de la Janasse, 2008 Viognier, Vin de Pays de la Principauté d'Orange, Rhone Valley \$23.**

This wine is 100% Viognier and is outstanding. That said I'm confused by the back label which states that the grapes came from the Condrieu A.O.C. Vin de pays are wine growing areas that have not been given the higher A.O.C. classification. Why they don't want to use Condrieu on the label is perplexing. But the bottom line is that they are fine producers and the wine is well worth the price.

## **St. Urban-Hof, 2007 Riesling Qualitätswein, Mosel \$16.**

This is St. Urbans entry level wine and the grapes come from a variety of vineyards. At this price this is an outstanding value. The wine is crisp with only 10% alcohol content. It has a light sweetness and rather tart finish. This is the balance we can expect in more expensive German wines.

## **Childress Vineyards, 2005 Cabernet Franc Reserve**

Tasted at The Bistro in the Childress winery. What can be nicer than sitting on the balcony of the winery for lunch overlooking the vineyards and having a really good bottle of wine. In my opinion this is the best of the Childress wines and with four years of age it is drinking at its best. Subtle tastes with the slightest hint of spice, this wine paired well with my generous club sandwich.

## **The Oregon Trip**

A word about Oregon - I spent four days in the Willamette Valley and another week visiting various parts of northwestern Oregon. I am very excited about what I found at the wineries and the restaurants I visited. I encountered mostly professionals who seemed glad that someone from North Carolina would visit their businesses. The wineries I visited had wines that ranged from very good to world class. Most had modest tasting fees and would gladly open something that was not on their list if I asked. I was most impressed that each winery used good quality glasses, mostly Riedel, and most offered whites in one glass and reds in another. The restaurants were all at a very high level of quality and creativeness and the service was always at a very high level. What a treat. I'm looking forward to a return visit.

Oregon has a total of 16 AVAs with the Willamette Valley receiving this designation in 1983. Considering the first Pinot Noir vines were planted in 1966, this was a very quick approval.

Six sub-designations have been approved within the valley in the past four years.



## **The Wineries**

Normally I detail each wine I taste at a winery, but on this trip I visited 13 different wineries and tasted 5 to 10 or more wines at each so I think a few comments on each establishment will be better. In general I thought the wines were very good and I don't think any were disappointing. This is quite a statement since the oldest winery I visited was opened in 1966.

**Domaine Serene, Dayton** - Celebrating their 20<sup>th</sup> year in business, this was the wrong winery to visit first. All of their wines are as good as it gets. The Rose, Chardonnay and

several different Pinot Noirs are at the highest level on the scale. I wish we could get more like these in our area. Their advertising discusses comparative scoring against DRC wines and always show very well. Following my tasting I can understand why.

**Sokol Blosser Winery, Dundee** - Consistently good wines and a wide variety. They have the only Muller-Thurgau I saw, and they use it in a blended wine. These wines are very approachable, and I do order them in North Carolina when I see them.

**The Four Graces, Dundee** - As any reader of my notes knows, this is one of my new favorite producers. Their whites are specially good but that doesn't mean their Pinot Noirs should be passed up.

**Argyle Winery, Dundee** - We stopped here because they make some very good sparkling wines. As it turned out they have 3 different versions and each is good. Of course, they also make quality whites and reds.

**Archery Summit Winery, Dayton** - In 1987 I visited Pine Ridge Winery in Napa which is owned by the same people, and I must say these wines are far superior to the Pine Ridge. Their Pinot Noirs are some of the best I've ever had.

**Ponzi Vineyards, Beaverton** - This is the closest winery to Portland and produces a large variety of wines of high quality. I even bought an Arneis for my son since I thought that variety was only grown in Sicily. Actually they planted this grape in the 1990s. The Ponzi family moved to this area in 1970 which makes them one of the pioneers in the valley. In addition to the winery they own the Dundee Bistro and also have a tasting room in Dundee. Their wines are classic Willamette Valley wines and are available in North Carolina if you look hard.

**Panther Creek Cellars, McMinnville** - We used to see a lot of Panther Creek but I haven't had any in a number of years. The good news is that they are still as good if not even better. They make a number of vineyard-designated Pinot Noirs which can be outstanding.

**Eyrie Vineyards, McMinnville** - In 1966 David Lett moved to Oregon and planted the first Pinot Noir vines in the state. This was the beginning of the state-wide push for quality wines. David left us last year, but the winery is being run by his son, Jason. They, of course, produce a Pinot Noir and a Reserve version, but I was most impressed with their Pinot Meunier which isn't produced very often.

**Anne Amie Vineyards, Carlton** - This is one of the older vineyards in the valley and the current owners have been there for 10 years. They produce good quality wines at reasonable prices. This is a winery that I had not heard of, and I like to try something new to get a real sense of the area. They were very gracious and offered interesting comments on their wines. As a bonus they have a terrific view of the valley.

**Penner-Ash Wine Cellars, Newberg** - Located high above the valley floor this relatively new winery has one of the best views (I keep saying that, but it is true). They offer two flights of wine called the Daily Flight and the Pinot Flight which is only the higher quality Pinots. I had both. The Daily Flight had several well-made white wines and a Pinot-Syrah blend. It also included a Rouge Valley Syrah. But you come here for the Pinot Flight which contains 5 high quality Pinots. Each is dense and rich. They were all from the 2007 vintages and would benefit from some bottle-ageing.

**WillaKenzie Estate, Yamhill** - This 400-acre estate is not easy to find, but worth the drive for the view alone. But we came here for the wines, and they were very fine indeed. This was the only winery I visited where the servers were not very engaged with the customers and even I didn't say a lot to them.

**Erath Vineyards Winery, Dundee** - Dick Erath arrived in the valley in the early 70s with the plan to plant Pinot Noir grapes. He and David Lett are the Godfathers of this area. They offer a wider variety of wine than most and have 3 different flights. I, of course, sampled from each. I was most interested in their Gewürztraminer which was the only one I found on this trip. It was lightly spiced and very pleasant. They also produce a Dolcetto which is soft and not at all acidic. Of course, with 4 different pinots I went from the light to very intense. One of the gentlemen pouring worked with me almost exclusively which I appreciated.

**Elk Cove Vineyards, Gaston** - Located in the northern part of the valley, Elk Cove has vines which were planted in the early 70s. This has long been a favorite since they are readily available on the East Coast. With several whites and several Pinot Noirs, this winery may be a bit out of way, but worth the visit.

## The Restaurants

**Elk Cove Vineyards, 2007 Pinot Gris**

**Anderson Family Vineyards, 2006 Chardonnay**

**Ayres Vineyard, 2007 Pinot Noir**

**Lange Estate Winery, 2005 Pinot Noir Rocky Knoll**

**Bodegas Toto Albala, 1982 Don Pedro Ximenez Gran Reserva Sherry, Spain**

All tasted at **The Painted Lady** in Newberg. This restaurant serves only four-course price-fixed dinners and for an additional \$40 will pair each dish with outstanding wines. I chose the pairing and was very satisfied. The first course was a Potato Gnocchi topped with Wild Mushroom Ragout, and the rich, not overly oaked, Anderson Chardonnay was a perfect match. The rich Ayres was served with a slow roasted Coho Salmon and was perhaps the best wine of the evening. With my choice of Rack of Lamb I had the Lange and it was over-the-top good. My dessert was a Grand Marnier Soufflé with Chocolate Sauce and here the pairing didn't work. I love Sherry and the Pedro Ximenez is one of the world's outstanding grapes, but the bittersweet chocolate was just too much for the wine. Better an Oregon sparkling wine. This is an outstanding restaurant and the service was superior without being intrusive.

**Eyrie Vineyards, 2005 Pinot Gris**

**Maysara Winery, 2007 Rose**

**Evesham Wood Winery, 2005 Chardonnay**

**Hidalgo Cream Sherry, Spain**

I tasted these wines at **La Rambla Restaurant** in McMinnville during a luncheon visit. What could be better than a Spanish tapas restaurant in the middle of wine country. We sampled a wide variety of dishes with these wines. The Eyrie was a tip of the hat to the pioneer of Oregon wines and the Pinot Gris was light and fruity. A rich rose from Maysara went very well with the Spanish Potato Omelet, and the Chardonnay was rich with light oak. Sherry is a must at any tapas meal, and this standard was a perfect finish to one delightful lunch.

**Bethal Heights Vineyards, 2005 Chardonnay**

Tasted at the **Pazzo Ristorante** in Portland, an outstanding Italian restaurant downtown, where I had brunch and two dinners and everything was excellent. I had been to Ponzi Vineyards that afternoon and bought their Arneis for my son. When I saw they had the Giocosa version from Italy I ordered it to compare, but that wine was out of stock so I got the Bethal wine which proved to be a good choice. They are in the very southern area of the valley so I wasn't going to visit. The wine had a strong taste which mostly came from oak, but that worked very well with my food.

**Trimbach, 2004 Pinot Gris Reserve, Alsace**

**Ken Wright Cellars, 2006 Pinot Noir Shea Vineyard**

**Bodegas Gutierrez, 2005 Alicante Moscat, Spain**

These wines were tasted at the **London Grill** in downtown Portland, a very formal restaurant with outstanding service and a great wine list. "All great meals should start with Alsatian wines," so says me. We had so much Pinot Gris on this trip that I wanted to have an original, and it was a great starter. However, the Ken Wright would make any other wine pale next to it. This was about as deep a Pinot as I've had. We asked our waiter, Giacomo, to recommend a dessert wine and he brought the Spanish Moscat: it was soft, elegant and had a pear finish, just what we needed.

**Bergstrom Winery, 2007 Chardonnay Old Stones**

Tasted at **Tina's Restaurant** in Dundee, a small restaurant with great character. The service is casual but efficient and the food is terrific. I had duck pate that was so large I could not finish it. The Bergstrom is a rich, full-flavored Chardonnay that made me wish I had more time to visit wineries.

**Ponzi Vineyards, 2008 Pinto Gris**

**Eyrie Vineyards, 2007 Pinot Noir**

**Andrew Rich, 2007 Late Harvest Gewürztraminer**

**Ponzi Vineyards, 2008 Pinot Blanc**

All tasted during two visits to **The Dundee Bistro**, which is a restaurant owned by the Ponzi family. This is one of the best lunch stops I've made in a long time. The menu is creative, the wine list is long, and at one of the lunches I was by myself and sat at the chef's counter overlooking the kitchen. The two Ponzi wines were each light, fruity and refreshing. The Eyrie had substance and matched well with my lunch, but it was the Rich dessert wine that was over the top with rich sweetness.