

A Wine for All Seasons



GRAND CRU CLASSES

3985 Sound Avenue, Mattituck, NY 11952
646-279-8494 *cellular* • 631-298-1231 *voice mail* • www.GrandCruClasses.com



GRAND CRU CLASSES
we know vino

A Wine for All Seasons

Tracy Ellen Kamens, Ed.D., DWS, CWE
Chief Education Officer

Grand Cru Classes

3985 Sound Avenue, Mattituck, NY 11952
646-279-8494 *cellular* • 631-298-1231 *voice mail* • www.GrandCruClasses.com



November 12, 2008

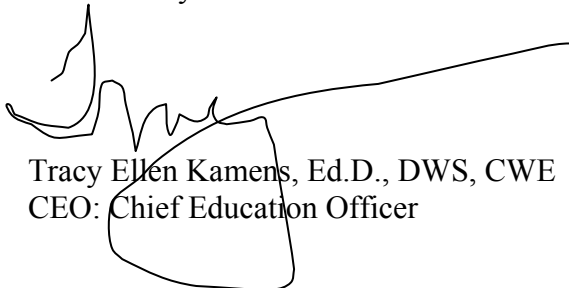
Dear Friends,

Each month, it is both a privilege and a pleasure to share my wine knowledge and tasting notes with our newsletter list. In putting together the articles, I try to identify a topic of interest to our readers that will not only add to their knowledge of wine, but also deepen their enjoyment of this luscious elixir. For me, wine is truly a labor of love and I endeavor to impart this love to fellow wine drinkers.

Finding connections between wine and the seasons is relatively easy, but of course, wine is timeless and seasonless. In fact, wine is perfect any time of year and with any occasion. Yet, there are times when certain wines seem more apropos than others. In this vein, the themes and wines presented each month reflect these rhythms and synergies.

I hope that these newsletters will inspire you to try new wines and expand your wine horizons. And, may you always find a wine for all seasons...

Drink wisely and well!



Tracy Ellen Kamens, Ed.D., DWS, CWE
CEO: Chief Education Officer

NB: Previous newsletters always included a link to a retailer where one could purchase the wines we highlighted in the tasting notes section. As we do not receive advertising revenue for publicizing these vendors, nor did it appear that readers were clicking through these links, we abandoned this practice. Instead, we would like to advise you of www.Wine-Searcher.com, a free website where one can type in a particular wine and find out where it is currently sold. Alternately, many wineries are now selling direct from their websites, so it is a good place to start as well.

JANUARY

Last January, Jared quit his job and Tracy asked, "What next?" The answer to that question took us on a journey through the wide world of wine careers. Along the way, we read lots of books, made the acquaintance of many vineyard and winery owners and traveled to Napa and Vancouver. Arriving at our destination (destiny?) as wine educators and staunch supporters of the Long Island wine region, Grand Cru Classes was born. Not fully knowing where this dream would take us, we vowed to make the commitment to see it through. Now, a year later, we can point to several key accomplishments as measures of our early success, including the incorporation of our company, development of our business plan, completion of initial wine education certifications and the introduction of this newsletter. Despite this impressive list, there is still much to do in the months ahead as we move closer toward our launch. While we may not always know where our efforts will ultimately lead, we'll always stop to ask, "What next?"

Grand Cru Grapevine

January 2006

Riesling in the New Year

With the dawn of 2006 upon us, many people choose to use the newness of the year as a way to adopt new habits and behaviors. Among your resolutions this year, we suggest you resolve to drink more Rieslings. Riesling wines are particularly aromatic with perfume (i.e. rose or violet) and petrol as their classic notes, along with aromas and flavors of stone fruit (peach, pear and apricot) and minerals. The grape does well in cool climates and is found in several northern wine regions. Abroad, the Riesling grape is at home in Germany (primarily Reingau, Rheinhessen, Mosel and Pfalz) and the Alsace region in France. Alsatian Rieslings tend to be drier than German Rieslings. Closer to home, the grape does quite well in New York State, in both the Finger Lakes and Long Island regions. The grape is also starting to find some acclaim in Washington State and, to a lesser extent, in Oregon. These white wines have very nice sugar/acid balance to them and a slight oily character, making them an excellent match for food, especially more robust cuisine such as Asian-inspired dishes. However you decide to pair them, we hope you will find lots of reasons for drinking Rieslings in the New Year.

Drink wisely and well,
Tracy Ellen Kamens, Ed.D., CSW
CEO: Chief Education Officer

and
Jared Michael Skolnick
COO: Cork Opening Officer

Tasting Notes

Peconic Bay Winery, Riesling, 2004, North Fork, USA, \$14.99

With its floral (rose), peach and lychee aromas, this dry, white wine offers typical Riesling characteristics. The acidity is medium-high, with the lushness of lychee and apricot rounding out the tartness of the acid. There is also a slight spice flavor in the finish.

Poet's Leap, Riesling, 2003, Columbia Valley (Washington), USA, \$21.99

As a classic example of Riesling, the Poet's Leap offers distinctive aromas of petrol, lychee, apricot and the sweet spice notes of cinnamon. These aromas are carried through to the palate with the addition of gooseberries and stone. The wine is medium-dry, which is balanced by the medium-high acidity level.

Selbach Piesporter Michelsberg, Riesling Spätlese QmP, 2000, Mosel-Saar-Ruwer, Germany, \$12.95

With Germany's northerly latitude, grape ripeness levels take on more importance and the better wines are classified by sugar levels. These wines are labeled as QmP (Qualitätswein mit Prädikat) – quality wine with attributes and range from Kabinett (dry) and Spätlese (may be semi-dry to sweet) to Auslese, Beerenauslese and Trockenbeerenauslese (all of which are sweet). Drier wines often include the words *trocken* (dry) and *halbtrocken* (half-dry). On the nose, this wine has a real freshness to it, with lychee, pear and a green or herbaceousness to it and an undercurrent of petrol. As a Spätlese wine, it is sweet on the palate with ripe lychee and pear, along with hints of stone and white pepper.

Waters Crest Winery, Riesling, 2004, North Fork, USA, \$17.99

This New World Riesling is very reminiscent of Old World wines with its complex nose and limited emphasis on fruit. It provides a wide range of notes including orange blossom, cotton candy, apple cider and a hint of minerality. On the palate, it is dry with medium acidity and flavors of pear, spice and the herbaceous quality of green pepper. Toward the back of the palate, there is a faint note of white pepper. The full spectrum of flavors is especially balanced and results in a very elegant wine.

Happy New Year! We hope you had a lovely holiday season, filled with family, friends and fun, along with wonderful wines and great memories. With the hustle and bustle of December behind us, it is time to focus on the new year at hand. This is a time for making (and breaking) resolutions and perhaps, a time to put your house in order. As you set your agenda for 2007, this might be the perfect opportunity to live by the motto: a place for everything and everything in its place. To that end, this month we explore your options for storing your wine collection, whether it be just a few special bottles or a dozen cases.

For us, this motto means that we will finally be able to present our public wine classes in their place – our brand new tasting classroom. We have made tremendous strides in getting the renovation complete and plan to kick-off the 2007 season with an open-house in the new space sometime this March. We continue to be grateful to those wineries that graciously provided us with space, but, as Dorothy said, "There's no place like home." Of course, for our private events, we recognize that sometimes there is no place like *your* home (or business).

Grand Cru Grapevine

January 2007

Cellar-Stocking Stuffers II

Last December (2005), we provided you with a list of wines to stock up a friend's or your own wine cellar. But, perhaps you still have all of your wine stored in various places around your home. Whether you have enjoyed the pursuits of wine for ages or have only recently come to appreciate its virtues, you may find that your purchasing habits are beginning to change, as you buy wine by the case rather than in single bottle purchases. Or, maybe you are buying more wine to hold rather than drink now. While there is no one right solution, there are a few things you should keep in mind in order to ensure that your wine will provide you with pleasure upon opening.

Most of us do not have the wherewithal to build a grand cellar in our basement, especially if that basement serves as the condo's laundry room, but such extreme measures are not necessary to preserve your wine collection. Wines which will be consumed within the next few weeks to several months aren't too much of a problem. However, wines you intend to hold onto for six months or longer should be kept under more ideal conditions, especially as the average bottle price increases.

Such ideal conditions include a constant temperature (50-70° F), along with 60% humidity. The moisture will help keep the cork from drying out and thus prevents the wine from coming into contact with oxygen, which would result in oxidation. To better understand the nature of oxidation, you might think about the browning that occurs when cutting up an apple. In addition, most bottles should be kept on their side to keep the cork moist from the inside. If you are unable to lay them down, you can keep them in the box, upside down. Of course, none of this poses a problem with screw caps or crown caps. Further elements to avoid are light, especially with lighter bottles, and vibrations, which will break up the chemical compounds in the wine that provide much of its aromas and flavors. Thus, storing your wine next to the washing machine may not be the best approach.

If you live in a house with a basement, storing your wine there will most likely produce the best conditions in terms of temperature and humidity. For those living in apartments or homes without basements, you could consider finding some space in a closet, which isn't used as frequently. However, if your apartment experiences extreme temperature fluctuations, the closet will mitigate, but not correct, the situation. If your collection begins to outgrow a case or two, it may be time to consider a wine refrigeration unit. Such units will provide cellar-perfect conditions and can be fitted under the counter in your kitchen or placed elsewhere in your home.

Counter style units are also available and can be purchased for just over \$100. A larger, free-standing unit generally starts at \$250 and holds approximately 30 bottles. From there, the size and cost begin to escalate depending upon the quality, capacity and aesthetics of the unit. For example, furniture grade units are available, but will, of course, add significantly to the price. Some of the less expensive manufacturers include Haier, Avanti and Magic Chef, while more premium units are produced by Transtherm, Vinoteque and Sub Zero.

An alternate option is to consider off-site storage at a private wine facility. Some of these are maintained by the better wine stores, while others exist as stand-alone businesses. In choosing a merchant, it is important to research the facility's policies and practices to ensure that your wine is clearly earmarked as yours and won't be mistakenly sold.

Regardless of your storage choice, your decision to safe-guard your wine from its enemies of heat, light, vibrations and arid conditions, will help protect your wine in the near future and for generations to come. Vinegar is great for salads and marinades, but I certainly wouldn't want to drink it.

Drink wisely and well,
Tracy Ellen Kamens, Ed.D., CSW
CEO: Chief Education Officer

and

Jared Michael Skolnick
COO: Cork Opening Officer

Tasting Notes

Domaine de Beurenard, 1996, Chateauneuf-du-Pape, Southern Rhone, France, \$55.00

We visited the winery in 2001 and purchased this wine in honor of our anniversary year, holding it for an additional five years. Its nose has aromas of leather, baked red fruits, anise, chocolate and baking spice. After ten years, the wine has developed beautifully, with ripe chewy tannins and gamey notes, leather, stewed fruit (plum and fig), nutmeg, clove and coffee.

Domaine Rollin Pere & Fils, Pernand Vergelesses, 1998, Burgundy, France, \$38.99 (1999 vintage)

As a white Burgundy, this wine is made from 100% Chardonnay grapes, which has wonderful aging potential. Showing some development on the pronounced nose, the aromas include honey, yeast, candied citrus, apricot, almond and a hint of stone. The wine has flavors of almond, lime, mineral, citrus, apricot and some oakiness.

Osprey's Dominion, Flight, 2000, North Fork of Long Island, USA, \$35.00

This blend of Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Cabernet Franc has been aged in oak for two years. Its aromas include oak, cedar, wet leaves, mint, smoke and black currant. On the palate, it is full bodied with flavors of blackberry, oak, smoke, green pepper and olive and a long finish. It could withstand some additional aging.

Chateau Musar, White, 1998, Bekaa Valley, Lebanon, \$39.99

This wine is produced from a Semillon-style grape native to Lebanon. The aromas include honey and fig, which continue on the palate, joined by earth and a slight oxidative quality. The length is long on this dry, medium-bodied wine.

Carruades de Lafite, Bordeaux, 2001, Pauillac, France, \$74.95

The second wine of Chateau Lafite Rothschild, it has an earthy expression, barnyard notes and light mint. On the palate, the wine has deep, yet restrained berry fruits, along with subtle oak and coffee.

Happy New Year! Welcome to 2008. This time of year many of us are filled with thoughts of resolutions. Among our list, we resolve to take time to stop and smell the roses (or perhaps the rosés?). With this in mind, we head off on a Caribbean cruise this month, while the newsletter transports you to Paso Robles, California. Wherever your life is headed, make sure you don't simply let it pass you by; resolve to sit back, relax and enjoy your favorite wines.

Grand Cru Grapevine

January 2008

Passing through Paso Robles

Last June, while in California for the Society of Wine Educators' annual conference, we took the opportunity to visit the Paso Robles wine region. Upon the conclusion of the conference, we spent a few days in Big Sur, which was beautiful, but cold and wet. We had three back-to-back days of overcast skies, 50°F temperatures and on again, off again rain. So much for sunny California! Thus, it was under these conditions that we set off south on US1 at 8:00 AM Tuesday morning.

We drove past the elephant seals and San Simeon (home of Hearst Castle) until we hit Route 46, where we turned left and headed east. The road began to rise through elevations as we proceeded into the mountains. The car was enveloped by fog, which I soon realized were actually clouds as we made our way further up the mountain. Then, we began to descend into the valley, still shrouded by drizzle and dreary weather. Suddenly, the mountains were behind us and the brilliant sky opened up before us. It was incredible, as we looked back and saw the fog trapped in the west, unable to escape the mountainous peaks. We had arrived in Paso Robles.

Paso Robles, which is Spanish for "Pass of Oaks", was established by a land grant in 1844. The original 26,000-acre site was purchased for \$8,000 by the Blackburn brothers and partner, Drury James, the uncle of outlaw Jesse James. Paso Robles soon became a resort town, with the hot sulfur springs drawing visitors to the area. Agriculture also flourished.

The wine grape growing boom began in the late 1960s, with significant vineyard development taking place in the 1990s. Land previously planted to walnut orchards was replaced by grape vines. The growth of this area as a wine region has been meteoric, with a 72% growth, the most dramatic increase of any American Viticultural Area (AVA), according to the San Francisco marketing firm Gomberg, Fredrikson and Associates. Today, Paso Robles boasts over 26,000 acres of vineyards, 170 wineries, and more than 100 tasting rooms.

With a Central Coast location bordered by the Santa Lucia Mountains, Paso Robles enjoys optimum growing conditions. It is home to the state's largest diurnal temperature swing, which helps to preserve acidity in the grapes. Consequently, grapes fully ripen with balanced sugar and acid. Various microclimates within the region permit a wide range of grape varieties to be grown; in fact, more than 40 different varieties can be found. Among the more popular grapes are those from France's Rhône Valley: Syrah, Viognier and Roussanne as well as the more Californian Zinfandel. The old standbys of Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Chardonnay also abound. Current AVAs include Paso Robles and York Mountain, both granted recognition in 1983. A third, Paso Robles West, is pending review.

With our early morning arrival, we hit the ground running, first visiting tasting rooms on the west side of the region—Tablas Creek, Hunt Cellars, Lone Madrone, Four Vines and Turley—after which we stopped for a lovely lunch. Refueled, we set off once again, this time focusing on the east side with visits to Eberle, Tobin James, Robert Hall and Silverstone. Everywhere we went, we were greeted by friendly and knowledgeable staff. At 4:30 PM, we called it a day and headed north on the freeway to San Jose with

just enough time to return our rental car and catch our 9:00 PM flight home. It had been a busy day, but we had very much enjoyed our pass through Paso Robles.

Drink wisely and well,
Tracy Ellen Kamens, Ed.D., CSW
CEO: Chief Education Officer

and

Jared Michael Skolnick
COO: Cork Opening Officer

Tasting Notes

Eberle Winery, Roussanne, 2005, Paso Robles, CA, USA, \$22.00

Upon arrival at the winery, visitors are greeted by a bronze boar (in German “Eberle” translates to “small boar”), which is a replica of the original statue by Tacca cast in 1620. Hailing from the northern Rhône, Roussanne is frequently paired with Marsanne as it is in white Hermitage. This wine has floral, marzipan, tropical fruit and lemon aromas on the nose with lemon, peach and almond flavors on the palate.

Robert Hall Winery, Viognier, 2006, Paso Robles, CA, USA, \$18.00

This winery and tasting room are set in an architecturally exquisite building, resplendent with arches and fountains. Also from the northern Rhône, Viognier is found in Condrieu and is sometimes blended in small quantities (~5-10%) with Syrah in Côte Rôtie, where it is also vinified on its own as a white wine. This wine was produced through a combination of barrel (55%) and stainless steel (45%) fermentation. The tropical character of this wine is evident in its aromas of peach, apricot, vanilla and floral notes, of which the peach and apricot persist on the palate, with long length.

Tobin James Cellars, Syrah Rosé, 2005, Paso Robles, CA, USA, \$14.00

In a town founded by the uncle of Jesse James, Tobin James (no relation) Cellars fits right in with its old west décor and saloon bar in its tasting room. In fact, when Jared called the tasting room a few weeks later, Tobin greeted him with a hearty, “Howdy partner!” Notes of strawberry, herbal and floral aromas give way to the slightly off-dry palate, with ripe fruit flavors of raspberry and strawberry.

Lone Madrone, Zins of Steel, 2006, Paso Robles, CA, USA, \$27.00 (*may no longer be available*)

From Neil Collins, who also manages vineyard operations for Tablas Creek, grapes are procured from small, locally owned, and sustainable farmed vineyards on the west side of Paso Robles, many of which are dry farmed and head pruned. Their tasting room is on the site of an herb farm, which they have restored. Referring to its stainless steel fermentation, Zins of Steel was the product of unexpected results. Fruity aromas of raspberry and blackberry were joined by floral notes on the nose while the off-dry palate has a slight effervescence and flavors of grape and berry.

J. Lohr, South Ridge, Syrah, 2003, Paso Robles, CA, USA, \$15.00

Jerry Lohr has been a pioneer in the Central Coast for decades, first in Monterey and later in Paso Robles. This wine is a blend of 80% Syrah, both French and Australian clones, along with 10% Petit Verdot, 5% Petit Syrah and 5% other varieties. Fermented in stainless steel, the wine was then barrel aged for 15 months, with 15% in new French oak and 10% in American oak barrels. The palate follows the nose of earthy, black currant and herbal notes, joined by oak.

FEBRUARY

Love is in the air this month. For those of you looking for a way to dress up your Valentine's Day, consider the object of your affection —the one with the sparkling personality— as your inspiration. Accordingly, pop open the sparkling wines and celebrate. If Valentine's Day is not your thing, there are plenty of other reasons to celebrate with bubbly this month, from Presidents' Day to any other day of the week, which ends in "y." Why? Because sparkling wines add a touch of festivity to any occasion and they taste too good to wait for a special event. And, even though you may not have a fondness for this Hallmark holiday, you always have your love of wines to keep you warm. Of course, if your first love is football and you are gearing up for Sunday's big game, you might want to check out our [Wine Enthusiast article](#) on super wine picks for the Super Bowl.

Grand Cru Grapevine

February 2006

All that Glitters

Sparkling wines, of which Champagne is most well-known, capitalize on harnessing the CO₂ created during the fermentation process to provide the fizz we all know and love. This capture takes place during a secondary fermentation, which is coupled with allowing the spent yeasts to remain in the bottle throughout the ageing period. The yeasts impart the breadly/toasty aromas and flavors that are characteristic of sparkling wines.

There are several ways to make a wine sparkle, the simplest, cheapest and short-lived being the injection method (aka *pompe bicyclette*), which injects CO₂ into the wine. These man-made bubbles tend to be large and coarse on the palate. Conversely, the traditional method, based upon Méthode Champenoise, provides a longer-lasting, smaller bead, which has more finesse in its mouthfeel. These traits stem from the labor-intensive process which includes an initial blending of still wines (*assemblage*) that is then bottled and capped, along with a yeast and sugar mixture (*tirage*), to facilitate a secondary fermentation. The wines are then left to age on the spent yeasts for a period of time as set by the appellation (in Champagne, this is a minimum of 15 months for non-vintage wines, while Cavas are generally aged for 9 months). The sediment left behind must then be carefully shifted from the base of the bottle to the neck in a process known as riddling. The bottles are gently tilted and turned throughout a period of several weeks, forcing the sediment down into the mouth of the bottle. The necks are then immersed into a cold, briny solution, thereby freezing the sediment. The caps are removed and the frozen sediment is thrust out of the bottle and discarded (*disgorgement*). The remaining wine is topped off with a blend of wine and sugar/must (*liqueur d'expédition*), which impacts the resulting dryness or sweetness of the finished sparkling wine. The final step is the insertion of the cork, which is much denser than those used for still wines given that sparkling wines can be under up to 6 atmospheres of pressure (be careful where you point that thing).

A similar process is used in the transfer method whereby the steps above remain the same with the exception that the sediment is removed in bulk and the wine is then filtered and bottled. Such wines will note that they have been fermented in the bottle, whereas the wines in the previous method are labeled as having been fermented in this bottle. An additional method involves the use of a tank in which the entire secondary fermentation, ageing and disgorgement takes place. While this is of course a much less expensive process than the other two, it is frequently used to produce wines that have a distinct freshness to them such as Astis from the Piedmont region in Italy.

The Champagne region in France has done a good job in marketing itself as a luxury product and this joined with increasing demand, limited supply and expensive processes has pushed up the price on these

wines. Vintage sparklers (those produced entirely from grapes grown in a particularly great year) and prestige marquees (i.e. Crystal, Dom Perignon) command even higher prices. However, many sparkling wines from other regions in France (such as Burgundy and the Loire Valley) as well as well-made American, Italian (Asti and Prosecco), Germany (Sekt) and Spain (Cava) can offer the consumer a wonderful experience without the hefty price tag.

Drink wisely and well,
Tracy Ellen Kamens, Ed.D., CSW
CEO: Chief Education Officer
and
Jared Michael Skolnick
COO: Cork Opening Officer

Tasting Notes

Lenz Winery, Sparkling Wine, 1991 *recently disgorged*, North Fork, USA, \$50.00

Having sampled this wine at Lenz's annual Oyster Fest this summer, we made sure to purchase a bottle for our New Year's Eve celebration and we were glad we did. This wine, made from grapes grown in 1991, was aged for over six years, and only recently had the sediment removed. This extended time on the spent yeast gives the wine a fuller body and strong notes of toast and yeastiness, than wines which are typically aged for a much shorter period. On the palate, the wine is a complex mix of grapefruit, yeast and licorice, with bread notes lingering in the finish. It was the perfect foil for our lobster dinner.

Moet et Chandon, Brut Imperial, NV, Champagne, France, \$35.99

From the well-known Champagne house, the Brut Imperial is a quintessential example of true, non-vintage Champagne. Its pale gold wine offers continuous, tiny beads (bubbles) that are quite delicate in the mouth. The understated bouquet provides hints of toast and citrus, which follow through on the palate with a faint French toast/cinnamon quality to it. The flavors of this off-dry wine are subtle, but long lasting. Enjoy with oysters, caviar or on its own.

Domaine Chandon, Blanc de Noirs, 2003, Napa, USA, \$12.50

The Domaine Chandon property, located in the Napa Valley, is an American venture of the Moet et Chandon Champagne house. Should your travels bring you to the region, it is worth a visit, especially if you have the opportunity to dine at their on-premise restaurant. Their California bubbly is quite good and reasonably priced. The *Blanc de Noirs*, which means white from black, is made entirely from red grapes (Pinot Noir and Pinot Meunier) and has a slight salmon tint from its contact with these grape skins. The red grapes also give it some fullness and a hint of red berry aromas.

Paseo, Brut Cava, NV, Penedes, Spain, \$9.99

This is a great example of a Spanish sparkler, which provides good value for its price. On the nose, the wine provides yeasty and citrus/grapefruit aromas, along with hints of stone, apricot and violet. On the palate, the grapefruit continues, punctuated with lime, minerality, bread and toasted oak flavors. As with most sparklers, this would make a wonderful aperitif or enjoy it with your meal as a terrific match with shellfish.

Castello Banfi, Rosa Regale, Brachetto d'Acqui, 2004, Piedmont, Italy, \$16.99

This is an unusual Italian sparkler made from the red Brachetto grape, which provides a lovely hue of deep rose in your glass, a color quite evocative of Valentine's Day. With wonderful berry and floral aromas on the nose, this medium sweet wine bursts with raspberries on the palate and its sweetness is tempered by its elegant bubbles. At a low alcohol of 7.0%, it won't add to your lethargy after a long meal, making it the perfect accompaniment with dessert.

Each February, we can't help, but get inspired by St. Valentine's Day. We feel the love all around us and continue to be enamored by many a wine. However, this year we are particularly passionate about Pinots. Of course, this includes the much vaunted Pinot Noir. However, we also feel that the entire Pinot family deserves to get in on the act. Thus, Pinot Blanc/Bianco and Pinot Gris/Grigio will also join us in this love fest.

Speaking of love, we are delighted to be presenting a private wine class for a bridal shower later this month. In fact, we have been privileged to conduct private events lately, including birthday parties and fundraising events, and look forward to doing more. A private class certainly can make a nice gift for someone you love.

Grand Cru Grapevine

February 2007

Passion for Pinot

Over the last several years, Pinot Noir, which has always been highly-regarded by wine lovers, has become a more familiar grape to those less familiar with wine. Suddenly, it became quite fashionable to order Pinot Noir and people are discovering the pleasure that this grape can provide. Accordingly, Pinot Noir's reputation is well deserved, with its wines presenting a wonderful array of fruit, flower and farmyard aromas and flavors, along with a lovely sensuality. Toward the less tannic reds, Pinot Noir can serve as a fabulous foil to many fare, without competing with the food's own flavors, especially due to its generally high acidity. More versatile in this arena than Cabernet Sauvignon, Pinot Noir is a perfect match with richer fishes, as demonstrated in the classic pairing of Oregon Pinot Noirs and Pacific-Coast salmon.

The grape itself can be quite difficult to cultivate, requiring a more moderate climate than some other red varieties. It is particularly well suited to France's Burgundy region where it has been planted for centuries. It is truly the grape of Kings, with vines on the hillside above Aloxe having been owned by Emperor Charlemagne in 775 CE. Elsewhere within Europe, Pinot Noir is found in Germany, Austria, Romania, Switzerland and Italy. Moving to the New World, Pinot Noir has begun to receive recognition in Oregon, particularly the Dundee Hills area of the Willamette Valley and in California, both in Carneros and the Russian River Valley. On the other side of the equator, New Zealand's Central Otago, Marlborough and Martinborough regions are gaining ground as heartlands for this wonderful wine.

However, Pinot Noir is just one side of the Pinot story. Pinot Noir is quite prone to mutation, among which include Pinot Gris, which itself mutated into Pinot Blanc. These two grapes also have their place in the wine world. Pinot Blanc is a French, white varietal, known as Pinot Bianco when grown in Italy and Weissburgunder in Germany and Austria. Similarly, Pinot Gris, is Pinot Grigio when it crosses into Italy and is also a white varietal. These whites are both quite food friendly. In France, Gris and Blanc do well in Alsace, while in Italy, they are frequently found in the north, especially Alto Adige. Pinot Blanc tends toward full-bodied, highly perfumed wines. Conversely, Pinot Gris has a deep richness with limited aromatics.

Whichever wine finds its way to your table this month, you can now say with pride, "I know, Pinot!"

Drink wisely and well,
Tracy Ellen Kamens, Ed.D., CSW
CEO: Chief Education Officer
and
Jared Michael Skolnick
COO: Cork Opening Officer

Tasting Notes

Archery Summit, Pinot Noir, Premier Cuvée, 2004, Dundee Hills, Oregon, USA, \$37.00

This is a youthful wine with aromas of violets, red berry fruit and herbal notes. On the palate, it is medium bodied with medium acidity and medium tannins, along with medium-intense flavors of sour cherry, raspberry, oak, vanilla and cinnamon and a long finish.

Jamesport Vineyards, Sarah's Hill Vineyard Pinot Noir, 2004, North Fork of Long Island, NY, USA, \$34.95

As a difficult grape to grow, Pinot Noirs are few and far between on the North Fork. This one from Jamesport comes from its Sarah's Hill vineyard and has nice mulberry, raspberry, moss and evergreen aromas. The medium-high acidity provides a good framework for the raspberry, blueberry, spice and coffee flavors that linger on the palate.

Lieb Cellars, Pinot Blanc, 2005, North Fork of Long Island, USA, \$19.00

This wine's aromas include floral, almond and marzipan notes, joined by honey dew and a hint of banana, which waft in the background. On the palate, the juicy, citrus flavors of grapefruit and pineapple take center stage, along with a hint of spice.

Williams Selyem, Russian River Pinot Noir, 2004, Russian River Valley, CA, USA, \$56.00

We had the opportunity to taste several of the Williams Selyem wines while visiting John Dyson's Hudson Valley winery, Millbrook, this past fall. Dyson is truly a master in the industry and his wines show it. With notes of fruit and earth on the nose, the palate explodes with raspberry, vanilla and spice, along with a slight minerality. It has a long finish.

Castello Banfi, Pinot Grigio, 2004, San Angelo, Italy, \$13.99

Unlike many other Pinot Grigios, this wine is produced from the fruit of a single vineyard. Hailing from Southern Italy, this Pinot Grigio is slightly less acidic than those from up North. Its citrus and smoky aromas persist on the palate with the addition of spice.

Returning to California once again, we focus on that truly Californian grape, Zinfandel. Join us in California dreaming as the winter weather continues to bring us frigid temperatures. With cooler climates keeping us indoors, now is the perfect time to host a private wine class for your next business or personal event. As a ray of hope, we know that Spring lurks around the corner, which will find Tracy teaching our Great Grape Series as part of the NYU-James Beard Foundation food and wine education program.

And, we are delighted to announce that [the first podcast in a series](#), featuring Tracy with the Guru of Luxury, Lorre White, has been "published" for your viewing pleasure. This first installment presents a general overview on wine service and tasting.

Grand Cru Grapevine

February 2008

Zinful and Seductive

Forgive me, but I have Zinned. Among my first experiences with wine (and perhaps yours?) was with a glass of White Zinfandel. This ubiquitous wine has both helped and hindered this noble grape from its early origins in the 1970s. During this decade, Americans began to think about eating healthier and, likely due to its similar color to white meat, equated white wines as being healthier. Of course, this is the opposite of what today's research tells us with regard to red wine's anti-oxidants, but that's a subject for another day.

This relatively sudden shift in consumer preference was an anathema to Zinfandel growers since Zinfandel is actually a red grape variety. And, unlike other industries, which can quickly shift products to meet changing consumer demand, newly planted grapevines require four to six years before they yield quality fruit. So, what does a red wine producer do under these circumstances? Make a white wine from red grapes, which is precisely what Trinchero Estates did when they "invented" White Zinfandel. Surprisingly, it was initially bottled in green glass before they ultimately switched to a clear bottle to show off its pink hue.

Whether you are a White Zinfandel fan or not, the popularity of this wine is responsible for saving the Zinfandel vines from extinction. While the Zinfandel grape is not native to California (no *vitis vinifera* grapes are), it is uniquely Californian in the wines it creates. Related to a Croatian grape, Plavac Mali (yeah, I can't pronounce it either), the grape was transported to the U.S. as well as to Sicily, Italy where it is known as Primativo.

Arriving first in the Ravenswood section of Queens, New York, the Zinfandel grape was imported to America when horticulturist George Gibbs of Long Island brought cuttings of the vine from Vienna, Austria in the 1820s. By the 1840s, another horticulturist is attributed to having introduced the grape to California, where it became all the rage among the Gold Rush crowd, due in part, no doubt, to its low price. In a funny coincidence, today, Ravenswood Vintners (no relation to Queens) is among the largest producers of Zinfandel in Sonoma, California.

The grape itself is capable of achieving ripe fruit flavors and high alcohol. In particular, some wines are finding their way to your glass at 15% and higher (alcohol by volume is generally 12-13.5%). Enjoying a Mediterranean climate, the grape flourishes in warm sunshine with a long growing season and lots of hang time, which accounts for the high alcohol. Prime California regions include Dry Creek Valley, Lodi and Paso Robles (see last month's newsletter). This is a vine that has a long life; many of California's Zinfandel vines are 50 years old and some are as old as 80 years. Typical aromas and flavors include blackberry, blueberry (bramble fruit), spices and black pepper, with a hint of sweetness due to the ripe character of the fruit. This is the perfect wine to pair with barbeque, burgers and other hearty fare. And, of course, you may just find it to be that zinful and seductive wine to serve with your Valentine's Day meal.

Drink wisely and well,
Tracy Ellen Kamens, Ed.D., CSW
CEO: Chief Education Officer

and

Jared Michael Skolnick
COO: Cork Opening Officer

Tasting Notes

Ridge, Zinfandel, Lytton Springs, 2005, Dry Creek Valley, CA, USA, \$27.00

Among the Rolls Royce's of Zinfandels in terms of quality, this wine is produced by Paul Draper of Monte Bello fame. The youthful aromas include menthol, floral, black cherry and blueberry. This full-bodied wine has medium+, ripe tannins with flavors of blueberry, blackberry, spice, dried fruits, oak and vanilla. It has a long length.

Gnarly Head Cellars, Old Vine Zinfandel, 2004, Lodi, CA, USA, \$12.99

This is not the product of a bunch of surfer dudes; rather, the gnarly refers to the look of the old vines, which are 80+ years old. On the nose, aromas include blueberry, soil, cut grass, chocolate and leather. The palate shows blueberry, chocolate and mineral notes of granite and steel.

Jesse's Grove Winery, Earth, Zin & Fire, 2004, Lodi, CA, USA, \$12.99

This winery is host to its "Groovin' in the Grove" concert series featuring Blues and R&B music each summer; thus, its aptly named wine is quite fitting. Blueberry, port and faint vanilla notes linger on the nose while blueberry jam, blackberry and vanilla are found on the palate.

Tobin James Cellars, "James Gang Reserve" Zinfandel, 2005, Paso Robles, CA, USA, \$28.00

With pronounced aromas of blackberry, black cherry, oak and vanilla, this wine is full-bodied, with a hint of sweetness. Flavors include ripe black cherry fruit, vanilla and a slight bit of oak, which all linger in the wine's long length. The alcohol is 15.4% so please be careful if you are drinking this wine before driving home.

Macchia Wines, "Mischievous" Zinfandel, 2003, Lodi, CA, USA, \$18.00 (2006 vintage)

A small, family-run winery, Macchia means "the spot" and this is among the spots to find quality Zinfandel wine. This one is a blend of five different, old vine vineyards. Ripe cherry and blueberry aromas persist on the palate with jammy blueberry and a juiciness. The tannins are soft and lush.

MARCH

March's entrance is usually heralded with lion-like qualities, but with spring-like weather abounding this weekend, there was a certain buzz in the air. And, with March's arrival, the countdown to March Madness has begun. The excitement and frenzy this sporting event instills in fans is quite madness itself. Whether you are following the outcome of these games or think that a court refers to a place where legal proceedings or kings, queens and jesters reside, we can all channel our energy and get excited for Merlot. This month's newsletter is a preview of one of our wine classes, drawn from the Great Grape series. While Miles was mad *at* Merlot in the movie *Sideways*, we hope that by exploring this single grape in several of its varying iterations, you will find the flavor profile that has you mad (passionate) about Merlot. Speaking of our classes, we had hoped to be up and running at our own facility this year. While those plans look less likely, we are scouting out other possible venues (such as partnering with wineries and restaurants) and still plan to launch sometime in late spring. We'll keep you posted as our location(s) becomes crystallized.

Grand Cru Grapevine

March 2006

Mad About Merlot

The Merlot grape is quite versatile, taking on a starring role in single varietal wines or serving as an important supporting cast member in blends, most notably Bordeaux or Bordeaux-style wines. On its own, Merlot is generally medium-bodied, with ripe fruit (plum, blackberry, black cherry), spice and wood aromas. The grape thrives in maritime climates and also does well in more temperate zones, ripening earlier than Cabernet Sauvignon. This variety of climates greatly impacts the style and flavor of the resulting wines. More specifically, California Merlots have generally seen significant sunshine and warm weather throughout its long growing season. Accordingly, the grapes achieve high levels of sugar before harvest and ripen quite fully. These wines are then often bolder, with fruit-driven characteristics taking precedence over anything else.

In cooler climes, including the Bordeaux region in France and Long Island's North Fork and The Hamptons, the grapes see more rain and cooler temperatures. As such, these grapes are less "baked" at harvest and result in wines that are more restrained. In fact, Bordeaux and Long Island share similar geographic characteristics including climate and the influence of several bodies of water (Atlantic Ocean, Gironde and Garonne Rivers vs. Atlantic Ocean, Long Island Sound and Peconic Bay). These wines have finesse and an elegance frequently lacking in their warm-climate cousins. Bordeaux wines are most commonly a blend of several grapes, with Cabernet Sauvignon as the lead player in wines from the Left Bank. Across the river on the Right Bank, the communes of Pomerol and St. Emilion tend to favor Merlot as the dominant grape, with some of the chateaux using Merlot almost exclusively. Merlot wines are also well-regarded from other wine regions both in the Old World and New World, especially Italy, Switzerland, Chile and Argentina.

Drink wisely and well,
Tracy Ellen Kamens, Ed.D., CSW
CEO: Chief Education Officer

and

Jared Michael Skolnick
COO: Cork Opening Officer

Tasting Notes

Blackstone, Merlot 2003, California, USA, \$8.99

This youthful wine has a deep ruby core and a paler pink rim. On the nose, it provides cherry and strawberry aromas with hints of oak, vanilla and a slight herbal note. On the palate, the wine is slightly off-dry, but this touch of sweetness is balanced well with medium-plus acidity. This medium-bodied wine has fruit-forward flavors of cherry and strawberry, along with some chalkiness underneath and an oaky aftertaste in the finish.

Bedell Cellars, Merlot 2001, North Fork, USA, \$18.00

The 2001 vintage is a blend of 95% Merlot, with 3% Cabernet Sauvignon and 2% Cabernet Franc. The wine's ruby hue is of medium intensity and its aromas are less red fruit (black cherry) than they are spice and herbal characteristics. On the palate, the wine is dry with ripe tannins and a fuller body. The palate's complexity and richness include spice, herbal notes, plum, licorice and chocolate. This is a wine that could stand some ageing.

Broadfield's, Merlot 2001, North Fork, USA, \$21.00

Although still relatively young, this wine seemed to be showing a little development on the nose. There were aromas of fruit and earth as well as spice and oak. The dry wine was of medium-low acidity, but medium-high tannins, providing a nice structure. The fruit was more intense on the palate with jammy/cooked cherry flavors, coupled with vanilla, oak and a trace of spice. While the wine was drinking well now, it seemed to have enough balance, structure and flavor to age for a few more years.

Lieb Family, Reserve Merlot 2002, North Fork, USA, \$24.00

This is Lieb's mid-range Merlot and, in 2002, was made from 95% Merlot, with Cabernet Sauvignon and Cabernet Franc rounding out the final 5%. Its aromas include sour cherry, violets, green pepper and a mild earthiness. The dry, full-bodied wine is of medium acidity and has good structure from its ripe tannins. On the palate are flavors of cherry and vanilla, with oak lingering in its long finish. Lieb suggests that this wine can cellar for 3-5 years.

Arnozan Lussac St. Emilion 2000, Bordeaux, France, \$17.99

As with many Right Bank Bordeaux, this wine is 100% Merlot. Its youthful bouquet includes notes of strawberry, oak, vanilla, slate, violets and the faint smell of cut grass. This dry wine possesses medium-high acidity as well as medium-high tannins, which are somewhat rough at this stage. It is medium-bodied with an intense palate of strawberry/tart cherry fruit, along with vanilla and cedar. The fruit on this wine is quite elegant with good length and a long finish. However, the alcohol was somewhat out of balance, as detected by a slight burn at the back of the mouth. With its tight tannic structure and complexity of flavors, this wine should age nicely and perhaps the alcohol will mellow with time as well.

With March's page displayed on the calendar, we begin to get a little hopeful about the arrival of Spring. In preparation, we have begun to think about the time-old tradition of spring cleaning, getting our lives ready for renewal and rebirth. For the caterpillar, this means shedding the confines of his/her cocoon and emerging into a beautiful butterfly. As we give thought to our own renewal, we seek to clean house and catch up on all those loose ends from the previous year. Chief among them is the recounting of our trip to South Africa in April 2006. This New World country has a long history in wine, beginning as early as 1652, and which today provides a lot of great value for today's consumers.

It is also time for our new classroom to awaken to the sound of wine class participants, eager to learn about and taste wine in an educational and entertaining manner. We will be launching the 2007 season with an Open House on Monday, April 23, and a sneak-peek for friends of Grand Cru Classes on Sunday, April 22, 2007 from 12:00-4:00 PM. We invite you to join us for this special occasion as we inaugurate our facility and welcome you to the home that is Grand Cru Classes. We hope you will stop by for a glass of wine, a bite of cheese and the grand [cru] tour!

Grand Cru Grapevine

March 2007

Travelogue: South Africa

As wine aficionados and trade professionals, we strive to combine our love of travel with our love of wine. As wine becomes more and more global, this is easier to do, but our first priority is to the historic wine regions of the world. South Africa has only recently entered the global market after decades of decline during apartheid. Now, it has taken the market by storm, straddling the wine world with Old World sentimentality and a New World sensibility. However, its roots, literally those of its vines, go back to the Dutch East India Company, which, as you may recall from History class, sought to establish a water route to India in search of spices and other exotic merchandise.

For the Dutch, South Africa proved to be a good way station for ships en route to India, but for us it was our final destination. Thus, our flight from New Amsterdam (aka New York) found us in Cape Town, after a brief stop in (Old) Amsterdam to change planes. Crossing the equator as we traveled south from Amsterdam, we were transported from Spring to Fall. Arriving both excited and exhausted, we settled into our "crash pad" and drifted off to sleep. Our first night in Cape Town saw us at restaurant Aubergine enjoying their three-course menu paired with local wines. Within the small neighborhood of deWaterkant Village where our accommodations were located, Nose Wine Bar provided a wide range of by-the-glass options from which we chose selections from Tulbagh and Paarl.

Just outside Cape Town proper, we visited the region of Constantia, birthplace of the famed Vin de Constance, which was coveted by Napoleon during his exile. With Cape Town behind us, we set off in search of [Vergelegen](#), which had been named Wine Enthusiast's New World Winery of the Year for 2006, tasting several of its wines. Wasting no time, we continued east toward the Garden Route and our destination of Knysna, where our activities centered less on wine and more on water, particularly Knysna's lagoon. This stop was followed by visits to Tsitsikamma National Forest and Park, situated on the Indian Ocean (more water) and an incredible stay at Gorah Elephant Camp set within the Addo Elephant National Park (no water, but lots of wild life).

Departing Gorah, our hard day's journey into night (quite literally) found us driving seven hours straight between Port Elizabeth in the Eastern Cape to Robertson in the Western Cape, traversing through the beautiful, albeit somewhat barren, Klein Karoo. As the sun sank below the mountains, we passed several brandy distilleries (and ostrich farms), but didn't have time to stop. In final darkness, we at last came upon [Weltvrede](#), the winery where we had booked a small cottage for the night. For the equivalent of \$60.00/night, we got much more than we bargained for. Not only did the rate include overnight

accommodations and bottles of both their wine and their sparkling grape juice, but also a surprise guest. Just as we were preparing dinner that night, we discovered a large, fuzzy spider hanging out in the kitchen. My dear husband insisted that it wasn't the tarantula I knew it to be, citing that they only were found in deserts. However, he forgot that we had just driven through the semi-arid Klein Karoo.

At daybreak, we set off for the Winelands, stopping at our host's tasting room to enjoy a few more of their wines. The remainder of the day found us at [De Wetshof](#), [Van Loveren](#), [Rooiberg Winery](#), [KVV](#) and [Nederburg](#). We settled into our hotel in Paarl, situated on a small vineyard, and prepared for dinner at Bosman's, a Relais & Chateaux property. Tinkering with their tasting menu, we managed to order eight courses, each paired with a South African wine. But, not to worry, we returned to the hotel safely ensconced in a taxi. Our final journey in South Africa took us through Stellenbosch and Paarl where we continued to taste before heading home, laden down with 13 bottles of wine. While we would highly recommend our trip to anyone, you can enjoy South African wines from the comfort of your own country. A selection of some of our favorites is included below.

Drink wisely and well,
Tracy Ellen Kamens, Ed.D., CSW
CEO: Chief Education Officer

and

Jared Michael Skolnick
COO: Cork Opening Officer

Tasting Notes

Warwick Estate, Three Cape Ladies, 2003, Stellenbosch, South Africa, \$24.95

As noted in a previous newsletter, we had occasion to meet Mike Ratcliffe from Warwick on his visit to the United States last April and continue to be an admirer of his wines. This blend of Cabernet Sauvignon (49%), Pinotage (26%) and Merlot (25%) is a South African twist on the Bordeaux blend, with its inclusion of Pinotage, a grape created in South Africa in 1925. Having spent 24 months in oak, the nose included notes of blackberry, vanilla and oak. Its full body and dry palate presents flavors of black currant and cherry, which finishes with a long length.

Vergelegen, Mill Race, 2003, Stellenbosch, South Africa, \$25.99

As noted above, we had the good fortune to visit this highly regarded winery, where we were advised that the name becomes easier to pronounce as you drink more of their wine. A blend of Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Cabernet Franc, the nose gave off aromas of plum, cedar, strawberry and flint/slate. The palate provides notes of plum, chocolate, smoke and cedar, some of which stem from the wine's 14 months of ageing in wood.

Buitenverwachting, Sauvignon Blanc, 2005, Constantia, South Africa, \$14.99

Like many wineries in South Africa, Buitenverwachting has a wonderful on-site restaurant. Arriving on Easter Sunday, the tasting room itself was closed, but we were able to enjoy a lovely lunch, paired with two of their wines (including this one) looking out onto the breathtaking vineyards. The wine is a classic Sauvignon Blanc with aromas of grapefruit, citrus and some grassy notes. These continue on the palate, with very ripe, juicy fruit flavors.

Kanu, Chenin Blanc (Barrel Fermented) 2004, Stellenbosch, South Africa, \$13.99

The Chenin Blanc grape is well-established in South Africa, frequently known under the pseudonym of "Steen." As with most Chenin Blancs, this wine has lactic/cheese notes, along with apple, melon and faint oak. The medium-intense flavors include apple, melon, damp earth and a creamy/lactic quality, which permeates the texture of the wine.

Fairview Winery, Goats do Roam in Villages, Red, 2004, Coastal Region, South Africa, \$9.99

As the owners of the Catapano's former goat farm property, we felt that it was only fitting to visit Fairview, which has its own herd of goats, along with a tower on which they play, and which is also known for its selection of goat cheese. Among its several labels, Fairview has been poking fun at French wines, with a variety of puns, in this case, Goats do Roam in Villages used in place of Cotes-du-Rhone Villages (an appellation in Southern France). The wine has youthful aromas of raspberry, floral, spice and oak. On the palate, the tart cherry flavor is nicely concentrated, overlaid with a fair amount of oak and toasted notes.

As the vines on the North Fork, elsewhere in the U.S. and Europe slumber, awaiting bud break, the vines in the Southern Hemisphere are in the midst of harvest. South of the equator, it is autumn and the vines are pregnant with swollen fruit. Chief among these Southern wine regions is Australia, which has burst forth onto the wine scene in a matter of a few decades. This month, we turn our attention to this exciting upstart.

We are getting ready for our own exciting upstart as we re-launch our public classes beginning in April and the schedule is now available. You may wish to note that after holding our class fees steady for the past two years, our public class rates will be increasing slightly for 2008 to \$75.00 due to rising wine prices (damn Euro!). However, for early birds who register prior to April 30, 2008, we will honor our previous rate.

Grand Cru Grapevine

March 2008

The Wonder Down Under

Twenty years ago, you would be hard pressed to find an Australian wine on the shelf at your local wine shop. Fast forward two decades and now it's nearly impossible to ignore these wines. According to the Australian Government's website, Australia is presently the fourth largest wine exporter, with sales to over 100 countries, representing \$5.5 billion. This explosion onto the wine scene took the industry by storm and placed Australia firmly on the wine world map. Moreover, Australian exports to the U.S. have exceeded those of France and trail only slightly behind Italy, placing it as the second largest exporter by volume. In 1995, Australian imports to the US totaled 1.75 million cases, while today that figure is over 20 million cases. As the number one imported wine in the USA and the fastest growing imported wine in US market history, [yellow tail] alone accounts for a large percentage of that volume.

A vast country, straddling an entire continent, Australia is divided into six main wine regions – Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia, Western Australia, and Tasmania. In compliance with EU regulations, Australia implemented its Geographic Indicator (GI) designation in 1993. GIs can refer to a wine zone, region or sub-region. A super GI, Southeast Australia, includes all areas with the exception of Western Australia. These GI labels permit the production of large volumes of consistent, commercial quality wine (ala Yellow Tail) since producers can source grapes from an expansive area. While such practices don't lend themselves to the production of complex, nuanced wines, they do provide dependent quality year after year. Conversely, smaller wine regions within GIs are responsible for the production of hand-crafted wines of higher quality (and higher prices). Some well known producers include Penfolds Grange and Henschke's Hill of Grace at the high end of the price spectrum and Yalumba, Hardy's, Cape Mentelle and Jacobs Creek at lower prices.

Historically, Australia was known for its fortified wines, but today's wine production focuses on still wines. The two main Australian grapes are Chardonnay and Shiraz, which account for 50% of all wine produced. This figure reaches 70% with the addition of Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon. However, despite the dominance of these four grapes, Australia is also establishing a reputation for its Riesling and Semillon. Additionally, certain wine regions have established world-class reputations with particular grapes. Thus, Australia has made a name for itself in regionality – Clare Valley Riesling, Hunter Valley Semillon, Barossa Shiraz and Adelaide Hills Chardonnay, among others. These areas have unique climatic, terroir or both features that distinguish these wines among their counterparts from other regions.

With Australia's generally warm climate, moderated by maritime influences on its various coasts, grapes come to full maturity with rich, ripe fruit and often high alcohol. While some wines have ageing potential, most are ready to be drunk young and all are quite approachable at this stage. Australia is credited with being the first to label its wines with varietal names (i.e. Chardonnay or Merlot), so these wines should be easily recognizable to consumers. Overall, Australia has become known as a great value-for-money wine, which it delivers, with many of these wines retailing for under \$15.00. Clearly, Australian wines are a force to be reckoned with – they are truly the wonder down under.

Drink wisely and well,
Tracy Ellen Kamens, Ed.D., CSW
CEO: Chief Education Officer

and

Jared Michael Skolnick
COO: Cork Opening Officer

Tasting Notes

Yalumba, Shiraz, 2002, Barossa, Australia, \$15.00 (2005 vintage)

Yalumba has a long history of winemaking, coupled with innovation – they were among the first to pioneer the use of the screwcap back in 1976. This dense purple-colored wine has pronounced aromas of wet leaves and red fruits. Fruity and medium-bodied on the palate, elegant tannins co-mingle with berries, licorice and a spicy finish.

Kaesler, Old Vine Semillon, 2005, Barossa Valley, Australia, \$12.00

With youthful scents of apples, mixed with wax/lanolin, this wine displays typical Semillon characteristics. It has flavors of apple, lime and almond, along with a waxy mouthfeel (again, typical for this varietal). You may wish to note that Australian Semillon will develop honey and toasted notes with age, if you choose to cellar it.

Penfolds, Bin 407 Cabernet Sauvignon, 2002, Southeast Australia, Australia, \$27.00 (2007 vintage)

Deep ruby in color, this wine provides aromas of blackberry/bramble fruit, vanilla and cedar. On the palate, there are notes of black cherry, black pepper and nutmeg with vegetal flavors in the finish. This is a much more affordable option than their coveted cult classic Penfold's Grange.

Marquee, "Classic" Riesling, 2006, Victoria, Australia, \$15.00

This is truly a classic Riesling, with peach, citrus and floral aromas. The lively acidity is joined by flavors of peach, floral, lime and stone/minerality.

Petaluma, Chardonnay, 2004, Adelaide Hills-Picadilly Valley, Australia, \$26.00

Many Australian Chardonnays tend toward the oaked, full-bodied variety and this is no exception. Aromas of apple, melon and lemon present as do oak/toast and buttery notes. The strong, new oak flavors of wood and toast dominate the palate, with undercurrents of apple and butter (likely due to malolactic fermentation).

APRIL

Known for its showers, April tends to be a damp, dark month. Seldom does April put me in high spirits as I trudge through rainstorm after rainstorm, hoping for glimpse of sunlight every now and then. Matching a murky mood to wine, Cabernet Franc immediately springs to my mind. While the mood may be less than positive, I assure you that my love for this wine is certainly upbeat. In fact, we are especially upbeat as we move ahead with plans to launch this June and are currently in negotiations with several vineyards to hold our classes at their venues. We expect to announce our class schedule in early May.

As you will read below, Cabernet Franc is used more frequently as a blending grape, rather than as a single varietal wine. Accordingly, many people are unfamiliar with its charms. If you haven't tried Cabernet Franc yourself, now is as good a time as any to open a bottle. Don't let April be a complete wash-out, come to the Cabernet, old chum!

Grand Cru Grapevine

April 2006

Life is a Cabernet

When one hears Cabernet, most people will think of Cabernet Sauvignon, which is often regarded as the King of grapes. Less well-known, Cabernet Franc is a completely different grape, which can create some lovely wines in its own right. In contrast to Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc ripens earlier and is less full-bodied and more herbaceous than Cab Sav. Similarly to Merlot, Cabernet Franc is a structural component of the Bordeaux blend, although grown in smaller proportions. Thus, again it is found in the Bordeaux region and on Long Island's Forks. North of Bordeaux, in France's Loire Valley, Cabernet Franc is more highly regarded. Here, the grape is used for both red and rosé wines, the latter of which will be covered next month. Within the Loire Valley, Cabernet Franc wines are made in several appellations (demarcated wine regions, subject to specific wine growing and making rules). These include Chinon, Bourgueil and Saumur, all located toward the center of the valley. As a rosé, the wines might be known as Cabernet d'Anjou and Rose d'Anjou. Additionally, Cabernet Francs are made in Bergerac and Madiran, which are in the southwest of the country, just outside the Bordeaux region. On Long Island, many wineries are growing Cab Franc for their Meritage/ Bordeaux blends, but a number of them also produce their own single varietal wines.

If Cabernet Franc had a personality, I think it would be best described as brooding. The key elements of this grape are its herbal and tea-like qualities. These wines have a deep earthiness or murkiness to them – think mushrooms, wet leaves and forests. Despite this depth of character, they are generally light to medium bodied wines with moderate color and tannins. Underneath their earthy, organic aromas, fruit flavors such as mulberry, blackberry and cranberry linger below.

Drink wisely and well,
Tracy Ellen Kamens, Ed.D., CSW
CEO: Chief Education Officer
and
Jared Michael Skolnick
COO: Cork Opening Officer

Tasting Notes

Castello di Borghese Cabernet Franc, 2001, North Fork, Long Island, \$20.00

Castello di Borghese holds the distinction of being Long Island's first vineyard, planted with vitis vinifera (European grape species) in 1973, by Louisa Hargrave and Alex Hargrave. The vineyard and winery are now owned by Ann Marie and Marco Borghese, who have continued to build and shepherd this historic property. Their Cabernet Franc is of medium intensity on its ruby color, starting to show a hint of garnet as it begins to age. The youthful aromas included cranberry, mint, eucalyptus and humus (potting soil). On the palate, similar flavors were apparent, with the addition of plum, blackberry and cedar. The wine is dry with medium-high acidity and is on the fuller side of medium-bodied, with a moderate level of tannins present. The wine is ready to drink, but with its tannin level, it will continue to age nicely.

Domaine Bernard Baudry Les Granges Chinon, 2004, Loire Valley (Chinon), France, \$15.99

With medium intensity and ruby color, this Cabernet Franc was also youthful in its nose. Aromas of strawberry, violet, nutmeg and green pepper wafted from the glass. This wine was also dry, with medium acidity and medium-full body. The flavor characteristics included strawberry, oak and herbal notes with a slight bitterness in the finish. The tannins were firm and even a little rough, indicating that the wine could use some additional age to mellow out the structure before being drunk.

Schneider Vineyards Cabernet Franc, Roanoke Point, 2003, North Fork, Long Island, \$28.00

This medium-toned, ruby wine has a diversity of characteristics in its aromas. These included fruit (cherry/strawberry); spice (cinnamon and vanilla); herbal (cut grass) and mineral (slate). This dry wine had the lowest acidity and lightest body of the wines tasted for this newsletter. The tannin level was medium, with some tightness remaining in the tannins. The palate provided continued complexity with herbal, mineral, spice, straw and blackberry notes. The alcohol level was slightly noticeable, but not overly distracting. This is another wine that could stand some ageing.

Sheldrake Point, Cabernet Franc, 2001, Finger Lakes, New York, \$15.99

Sheldrake Point is located in upstate New York, on the western shore of Cayuga Lake, just north of Ithaca, and is especially known for its ice wines. Medium ruby in color, this Cabernet Franc provided notes of wet leaves, plum, herbs and leather. On tasting, the wine was dry, with a bit of a sweet attack in the front of the mouth. This wine was medium-bodied, with medium acidity and medium tannin. It showed cherry/raspberry, herbal, black olive and granite flavors on the palate.

Diliberto Winery, Cabernet Franc, 2003, North Fork, New York, \$20.00

Sal and MaryAnn Diliberto have been making wine on the North Fork for several years, but more recently have begun to expand their operations with a tasting room set to open this fall. This wine has youthful aromas of medium intensity, which included notes of strawberry, blueberry, wet leaves, cocoa and mushrooms. On the palate, the tannin level, body and flavor intensity were medium and flavor characteristics were tart cherry, herbal tea and smoke. While the wine's acidity was medium-high at first, the acid seemed more in balance when tasted the next day. We were fortunate to receive a pre-release bottle of this wine and, given its youth, recognize that it needs more time to age.

Spring has sprung (at least according to the calendar)! For some, Spring Break conjures up memories of rowdy trips to beach-lined destinations during our care-free college days. With our own college days behind us, such interpretations of Spring Break are a part of our past, but we are still in search of romance and adventure, which we now seek in our wines. Of course, we'd like to do so without breaking the bank. This month we provide you with tips on finding that perfect wine without having to take out a second mortgage on your home.

We won't be heading off on any travel adventures just yet as we get ready to open the doors on our new state-of-the-art tasting classroom in Mattituck, NY, in time for the season.

Grand Cru Grapevine

April 2007

Where the Buys Are

In 1960, George Hamilton made his first (at least on screen) visit to the beach, embarking on what one might surmise is his lifelong obsession in pursuit of a tan. Joining him in Fort Lauderdale were four Midwestern college co-eds who traveled to Florida in search of, "Where the Boys Are." No longer in pursuit of hedonistic vacations, we now pursue hedonistic wines. But, the well-known wines found in the pages of *Wine Spectator* and other publications frequently have high scores, with atmospheric price tags to match. Some of these wines might be worth a splurge now and then, depending upon your palate and pocketbook, but there is certainly no need to go broke in pursuit of the pleasure of wine. Thus, we embark on our own journey in search of, "Where the Buys Are."

Bargain Bordeaux

Bordeaux wines are blended wines, with the reds crafted primarily from Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon and Cabernet Franc. Wines from the top classified chateaux (those labeled Grand Cru Classé) can set you back a pretty penny, but wines from the Cru Bourgeois classification can be quite good for a lot less money. On the Right Bank, Pomerol wines are notoriously high-priced, but those from the communes of Lalande de Pomerol, Fronsac and Canon-Fronsac, just adjacent, can provide similar concentration of fruit at a lower price point. For the most basic appellations, AC Bordeaux, AC Cotes de Bordeaux and AC Premieres Cotes de Bordeaux, the trick is to buy wines from a great vintage. As they say, a rising tide lifts all boats. Accordingly, a stellar vintage like 2000 or 2005 should affect all of the properties within the region, not just the top ones.

Cost-Effective Cotes du Rhone

Moving South within France, the Côtes-du-Rhône region provides world-class wines ranging from Hermitage and Côte-Rôtie in the Northern Rhône to Chateauneuf-du-Pape in Southern Rhône. In addition to having a stellar reputation, with only 326 acres of vineyards in Hermitage, price will be affected by the law of supply and demand. Meanwhile, Crozes-Hermitage, just next door, has 2,500 acres of planted land and a similar style of wine, though softer and fruitier, at much lower prices. Another option, this one from the Southern Rhône, is Gigondas. Within the generic AC appellations, there are 16 villages within Côtes-du-Rhône that have been awarded higher status, which will be labeled Côtes-du-Rhône Villages and carry very reasonable price tags. Guigal and Chapoutier are the producers to look for here.

Price-Conscious Portugal

Portuguese wines achieved fame in the 1970s with Ruinate and Lancers rosé wines, which were cheap and cheerful, but not of particularly high quality. On the other end, many people are familiar with Port (a fortified wine), but not with Portugal's light wines. Today, a wonderful world of wine is being cultivated within Portugal, especially in the Douro, Daõ and Barraida regions. These areas produce red wines with deep color and intensity. As wines with less recognition on the world market, these tend to provide a good price to value ratio.

Winning Whites

White wines tend to be less expensive than reds, but the best examples of white wines from Burgundy will be priced upwards from \$50.00. For similarly styled Chardonnays with mineral notes, look beyond the Grand Cru and Premier Cru vineyards to the commune-level wines from Côtes-du-Beaune, especially Meursault, Puligny-Montrachet and Chassagne-Montrachet. Wines from Chablis tend to be priced lower than those from the Côte d'Or, so you may find affordable Premier Crus in this range of wines.

Another option for lovely white wines is Alsace. With its emphasis on 100% varietal wines, Alsace is the only region within France that is permitted to include the name of the grape on its labels. The primary grapes are Riesling, Gewurztraminer, Pinot Gris, Muscat and Pinot Blanc. While there is some inconsistency with Alsatian wines, consumers should be safe if they stick with wines from well-regarded producers such as Trimbach, Humbrecht and Hugel.

And, with all of the money saved on wine, you can head off on your own Spring Break vacation!

Drink wisely and well,
Tracy Ellen Kamens, Ed.D., CSW
CEO: Chief Education Officer

and

Jared Michael Skolnick
COO: Cork Opening Officer

Tasting Notes

Les Hautes Blaches, Crozes-Hermitages, 2004, Rhône Valley, France, \$14.99

As noted, wines from the Northern Rhône generally command high prices due to quality and limited quantity, but Crozes-Hermitage, whose vineyards actually surround the area encompassed by Hermitage, provides an affordable alternative. This wine has intense aromas of oak, leather, black cherry and a hint of gaminess and is beginning to show some development. The palate is similar, with the addition of herbal notes, black pepper and vanilla and provides long length. While it doesn't have the ageworthiness of its fellow Northern Rhône wines, it could withstand 2-3 years of bottle age to further develop.

Quintessence du Peybonhomme, Premiere Cotes de Blaye, 2002, Bordeaux, France, \$15.00

This appellation is located on the Right Bank, north of St. Emillion and is similarly Merlot dominant. The developing aromas include black cherry, oak, tobacco and some leather. The palate presents notes of plum, cherry, coffee and oak. The wine shows balanced structure and good concentration of fruit, indicating its ability to age for several more years.

Louis Latour, Bourgogne Blanc, 2002, Burgundy, France, \$11.99

This generic Burgundy hails from the 2002 vintage, which was a good year and has many characteristics of a classic white Burgundy, but without the nuances of its higher appellation siblings. Its medium intense aromas include stone, citrus and apple and show some development. On the palate, it offers more intense flavor with notes of apple, citrus and an oak and stone undercurrent. The length is relatively long.

Albert Mann, Pinot Blanc, 2004, Alsace, France, \$12.97

As discussed last month, Pinot Blanc is related to Pinot Noir and is quite food friendly. With youthful aromas of citrus/lime, green apple, faint floral and some minerality on the nose, the palate presents with medium acidity, which balances the off-dry hint of sweetness. The medium intense flavors include ripe white fruits, melon and pear with a hint of spice and/or oakiness in the medium-length finish.

Luis Pato, Touriga Nacional + Baga, 2001, Vinhos Regional Beiras, Portugal, \$14.99

This regional wine (equivalent to the French vin de pays designation) hails from Beiras, which encompasses the appellations of Barrada and Dao. It is made from two indigenous grapes – Touriga Nacional (which is generally used in Port) and Baga. The combination provides lovely aromas of blackberry and cedar, along with hints of leather and spice. The palate includes flavors of cherry, cedar and spice, with sufficient acidity and tannic structure to age for 3-5 years.

I am writing this month's newsletter in mid-March, just a day after a near deluge. April hasn't even arrived and the spring showers appear to already be upon us. The wet weather has reminded me of an equally dreary weekend this past fall, when the rain seemed like it would never let up. The bright spot to the day was a visit to a wine auction in Manhattan, where we found ourselves caught up in the heat of the moment. With the proliferation of wine auctions, both live and online, we thought it would be helpful to provide you with a brief introduction to these events.

Among other events this month, we are thrilled to welcome a corporate client to our state-of-the-art tasting classroom for a private wine class, coupled with visits to several wineries and complete with a barbecue lunch. I can't think of too many other ways to spend as nice of a day out on the North Fork. If your company is looking for a more unique company outing or team building program, *Grand Cru Classes* can customize a special day for you.

Grand Cru Grapevine

April 2008

Blame it on the Rain

As Milli Vanilli (remember them?) lip-synced back in the day, "Blame it on the rain." Such was our mantra when we departed Le Bernardin with a heavy credit card bill in hand. The wine industry is going gangbusters with auctions lately, with Acker Merrall & Condit leading much of the way. For collectors with vast numbers of bottles in their cellars and too little time to ever drink them all, selling all or part of their collections through wine merchants is a great way for them to convert wine into winnings. Some of these single cellars have netted more than \$1million and placed an amazing array of wines on the market from vintage Ports and Bordeaux to cult classics such as Screaming Eagle and Dunn Vineyards Howell Mountain.

For the wealthy wine enthusiast, wine auctions provide access to older wines, which may not otherwise be readily available in the market. But, wine auctions aren't necessarily the sole bastion of the rich and famous. Less endowed wine drinkers may be able to pick up some unusual finds to add to their own drinking pleasure/collections. Online auctions are another, less intimidating way to catch this craze.

Many of the live auctions are held at upscale Manhattan restaurants, which set the scene for a lovely event, regardless of your bids. Acker Merrall primarily hosts their monthly auctions on Saturday afternoons at Cru, while Zacky's has selected Daniel at the setting for its events. Either way, you are sure to indulge in a delicious meal, but be warned, there is no such thing as a free lunch – these meals must be paid for before departing the event. On occasion, the merchant may provide wines gratis, such as the glass of Dom Perignon with which we were presented on that rainy day in October. Additional wine selections from the restaurant's menu were promptly added to our tab. You can also choose to attend the auction without partaking in the meal and row seating is provided for these participants.

Patrons must register for the event and are generally asked to provide a credit card, which is filed in the event that you do make a winning bid. Upon arrival, you will be provided with a numbered paddle to indicate your bids, although bidding is certainly not required. An auction catalog, which is mailed out to regular customers in advance, can frequently be downloaded, permitting you to research potential lots of interest. They are often presented in categories such a series of lots from Bordeaux or another series of lots from California.

On the day in question, Acker's weekend extravaganza spanned auctions on Friday night and Saturday and Sunday afternoons, with the latter focused on Burgundy. A temporary change in venue from their usual affiliation with Cru found us arriving at the famed, three Michelin starred Le Bernardin a bit wet, but no worse for wear. We had chosen to dress up for the occasion, but not everyone had. We were seated

at a table for two in a back corner, but as we weren't intending to get particularly involved in the bidding, we were pleased to scan the prix fixe menu and sip the aforementioned Dom.

As the lots were presented, we followed along in our auction catalog the size of a small metropolitan sized city's phonebook (not quite as thick as Manhattan's, but still, at least an inch thick). The bidding was a bit slow, with some counterbids made, but nothing as exciting as a bidding war, escalating prices well beyond the estimated values. One lot caught our eye, so we tentatively threw out hat in the ring, but as a counterbid was made, we withdrew our interest, letting the spoils go to the other bidder. The initial thrill began to take hold and we set about identifying some of the smaller lots, which wouldn't require a second mortgage on the house, which we dog-eared in the catalog. We didn't have a particular strategy, but waited for these lots to come up on the block.

Suddenly, the first of our marked lots was up and we hoisted our paddle high in the air above our heads. The auctioneer acknowledged our bid and tried to drum up a second, larger bid from another participant. There were no takers and as quickly as it began, it was over, the hammer came down as he shouted, "Sold!" We were elated and then, we were panicked. What had we done? Was this really the lot we had wanted? Did we get a good deal and who was this producer anyway? Buyer's remorse set in immediately, but we tried to calm ourselves, putting down our paddle and returning our attention to enjoying lunch.

After lunch, we decided it was time to leave, before we got ourselves into any more trouble. We paid the lunch bill and then had to settle our tab with Acker Merrall, which included the winning bid, a buyer's premium of 21% and a delivery charge. Our wine was delivered within a week, at which time it was whisked off to our cellar. We recently opened the first bottle from this lot while visiting friends in the D.C. area and, must admit, that it was fabulous. We had certainly gotten swept up in the excitement of the auction, but in the end, we did quite well, scoring 5 bottles of a wonderful wine, below the estimated value. Usually more level-headed, we simply blame it on the rain.

Drink wisely and well,
Tracy Ellen Kamens, Ed.D., CSW
CEO: Chief Education Officer
and
Jared Michael Skolnick
COO: Cork Opening Officer

Tasting Notes

Alain Graillot, Crozes-Hermitage, 2005, Rhône Valley, France, \$40.00

From the Northern Rhône, this Syrah wine has aromas of cherry and leather. On the palate, raspberry, cherry and leather notes mingle with ripe tannins.

Chateau Bellevue, Médoc, 2005, Bordeaux France, \$15.00

With youthful aromas of black currant, tobacco leaf and eucalyptus, this wine hails from the famed 2005 vintage. Its rich flavors of black berry, currant, oak and graphite are joined with sufficient acidity and tannin to age 3-5 years, if not longer.

Tommasi, "Ripasso" Valpolicella, 2003, Veneto, Italy, \$18.00

This wine is produced by refermenting new wine with the lees from Amarone to provide body and richness and includes a blend of Corvino, Molinara and Rondinella grapes. Aromas of cherry, bark, vanilla, spice and truffles give way to blackberry, mushrooms and oak on the palate.

Casa Fosca, Verdicchio di Matelica, 2004, Marche, Italy, \$12.00

Youthful aromas of apple, light floral and a vegetal note are found on the nose. The palate provides medium intense flavors of green apple, lime and a hint of stone.

Kenwood Vineyards, Reserve Chardonnay, 2005, Russian River Valley, CA, USA, \$20.00

This wine was primarily fermented in new oak, with 10% done in stainless steel to preserve some of the freshness of the fruit. Aromas include ripe, tropical fruit, while flavors of pear, green apple and vanilla appear on the palate.

MAY

With April showers, come May flowers. The rains have receded and the sun shines once again, awakening our senses to springtime and new growth. In this light-hearted spirit, your wine choices may follow suit. Specifically, we'd like to turn your attention to rosés. If pink wines bring Beringer and Sutter Home to mind, put down that White Zinfandel at once and be prepared for something different. The wines we have in mind are dry and fruity and are perfect to enjoy with food, particularly lighter fare and seafood. Coming in a wide range of hues from the palest pink to deep salmon, rosé wines offer a refreshing alternative to white wines for the impending days of summer. The timing of our newsletter topic was especially propitious as the [Rosé Avengers and Producers](#) (RAP) hosted its *Pink Out!* in New York City this week, permitting us to taste quite a number of rosé wines. It also provided us with the opportunity to meet Larry Perrine, President and Executive Winemaker at Channing Daughters Winery of Bridgehampton, NY. Although we haven't tasted his wines for this newsletter, we would be remiss if we spoke about rosés, but didn't mention Channing Daughters; the winery has just released a trio of rosés, each vinified from a different grape variety. Whatever you decide to drink, we hope all of your days will be rosy!

We at Grand Cru Classes are especially light-hearted and rosy as we get ready to officially launch our wine classes on Saturday, June 10th. As June will be preview month, we are offering all classes at 50% off for the entire month. Please check our website for up-to-date information including our course curriculum and class schedule. Currently, class sites will be rotated among several of the wineries (Bedell Cellars, Castello di Borghese, Martha Clara Vineyards and Vineyard 48) to which we are deeply appreciative for the use of their facilities.

Grand Cru Grapevine

May 2006

Everything's Coming Up Rosés

When pressed for their juice, wine grapes yield a relatively clear liquid, regardless of whether the actual grape was red or white when it hung on the vine (with the exception of a few select varieties known as *teintures*). It is the juice's contact with grape skins that provides the color found in wine, along with higher levels of tannin and anti-oxidants, which are also pulled from the skins. White wines are made without any skin contact, while skins are typically macerated in red wines for several days or more. Intuitively, longer contact results in greater extraction of color.

Rosé wines lie somewhere between red and white wines and are commonly produced by the use of a short maceration process, followed by the usual white wine making techniques in terms of their fermentation and maturation. The paler red shades of rosé wines generally stem from this much shorter period of contact, which can range from as little as 4 hours to as much as 36 hours. Additionally, rosé wines can be made as a by-product of red wine production. Once the winemaking process for a red wine begins, the winemaker may choose to increase the color and structure of the finished wine by bleeding off some of the juice from the vat. This reduces the ratio of juice to skins for the remainder of the maceration process. The bled off juice will have only extracted a small amount of color and phenolics, thus producing a rosé wine. These latter-style wines tend to be less concentrated and lighter in color. You may wish to note that, with the exception of Rosé Champagnes, rosé wines are never made by blending a red wine into a white one. Consequently, the depth of color in rosés is strictly the product of skin contact.

Some of the best, most well-known rosés hail from the Provence region of France, including the larger areas of Côtes de Provence and Coteaux-d'Aix'en-Provence, along with smaller communes such as Bandol and Cassis (not to be confused with the liqueur), which border the Mediterranean Sea. These wines are generally made from Grenache, Cinsault, Mourvèdre and/or Syrah grapes. Other areas known for their rosés are France's Loire Valley and its Languedoc-Roussillon, especially Tavel. However, as pink

wines are the result of vinification techniques, they are not limited by grape variety and will be found in many different wine regions. Irrespective of their origin, rosés are most often dry wines, not sweet ones, and frequently provide aromas of strawberries, raspberries and other ripe berry fruit, which carry through to the palate with fruity freshness. You may see some of these other terms when looking at a wine label or menu: rosado (Spain and Portugal); clarete (Spain); rosato or charetto (Italy); cerasuolo (Abruzzo, Italy); and weissherbst (Germany). But, not to worry, a rosé by any other name will still taste wonderful. Generally, rosé wines should be served, similarly to white wines, at 50-60°F. We recommend that you pack one with your next picnic or enjoy it with another pink friend – grilled shrimp.

Drink wisely and well,
Tracy Ellen Kamens, Ed.D., CSW
CEO: Chief Education Officer
and
Jared Michael Skolnick
COO: Cork Opening Officer

Tasting Notes

Comtesse Therese, Rosé, 2004, North Fork, Long Island, \$14.00

This wine has a bright, medium salmon hue. Made from a blend of Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon, its youthful aromas include raspberry, herbal tea and a slight minerality. Upon tasting, the wine is dry and medium-bodied, with lively flavors of raspberry, white pepper/spice and a hint of stone.

Raphael, Saignee, 2004, North Fork, Long Island, \$16.00

Raphael's rosé wine is named for the eponymous French process used to make rosé (*saignée* means to bleed). This wine, made from 100% Merlot grapes, is fermented with its skins for only 10 hours, yielding a light pink color. On the nose, you are greeted with the sweet scents of strawberries and cotton candy. However, on the palate, the medium-bodied wine is dry with fresh strawberry and raspberry flavors.

Bieler Pere Et Fils, Provence Rosé, Sabine, 2005, Vin de Pays, Provence, France, \$11.99

We had the pleasure of meeting Charles Bieler, the *fils* (French for son) in Bieler Pere (father) Et Fils at the RAP event. Donned in a pink top hat, his passion for rosé was difficult to ignore. His rosé, made from a 60% Syrah, 30% Grenache and 10% Cinsault blend, exudes raspberry and watermelon on the nose. These are reiterated on the palate, along with a slight hint of spice.

Rutherford Hill, Rosé of Merlot, 2004, Napa Valley, California, \$15.00

Rutherford Hill prefers to hold their rosés for an extra year. Thus, while other wineries are releasing their recent 2005 vintage, Rutherford Hill is only just now releasing its 2004 rosé. Their wine spends five months ageing in oak barrels and while it has a very sweet nose of raspberry and strawberry, it is much more complex on the palate. This dry and full-bodied wine has less emphasis on fruit and is rather reminiscent of salmon tartare, accented with some granite and a hint of spice.

Domaine Le Grand Cros, La Maitresse Rosé Brut, NV, Côtes de Provence, France, \$N/A

This sparkling rose is of medium intensity on the nose with notes of fresh raspberries and a glimmer of yeast. Made in the traditional method, the wine comprises Grenache, Syrah, Chardonnay and Sémillon, which are blended and then aged *sur lie* for nine months, during which time it undergoes a secondary fermentation. On the palate, the fine mousse bursts forth with raspberries and almonds.

Happy May Day! Yes, May is the month in which the birth of Communism is celebrated, marking the occasion with dances 'round the May Pole. While we are not exactly Communists, we do appreciate the teamwork involved with running a venture and feel the *Yin* and *Yang* of our collaboration with each other as we shepherd Grand Cru Classes toward success. Within the world of wine, there are several such partnerships that encompass the work of an individual winery. Even more impressive are the ventures discussed in this month's newsletter as they bring several wineries together to create some very special wines.

Beyond our own team, we recognize that we are beholden to many people and acknowledge their contributions to our current achievements. We want to publicly thank May Matta-Aliah of Red Dot Solutions for her keen sense of design as we partnered with her to create a new logo for our venture. We will be rolling out the new look to our business cards, letterhead and website in the months to come. In addition, we would especially like to thank George Eldi of Wildman & Sons and William McPharlin of Rodney Strong, for their respective and gracious donations of wine for our Open House party held in April. If you missed the festivities, we invite you to stop by one weekend to check out the new tasting classroom, which opened to rave reviews. Or, better yet, sign up for a class and experience the new space firsthand. Classes began May 5; check out our schedule online.

Grand Cru Grapevine

May 2007

Strange Bedfellows

Creating wine is a unique endeavor that involves the cooperation of many partners. In the vineyard, the manager must tend to the grapes, nurturing them from bud break to harvest, with many hands helping with pruning, spraying, netting and, eventually, picking. The winemaker, too, must coordinate the activities of several people, which may include the winery owners. Of course, as an agricultural product, Mother Nature plays an extremely important role, without whose support would make the entire operation fruitless, both literally and figuratively.

Throughout the United States, small groups of wineries are gathering together to collaborate on a single wine or to develop a new wine within the context of a coalition. Here, on Long Island, several winemakers have launched a special cuvee, Merliance. This wine is intended to showcase Merlot's starring role on the North Fork. Formed in 2005, the alliance crafted a wine blended from the members' best grapes from their 2004 crops. Participants include the owners and winemakers from Sherwood House Vineyards, Shinn Estate Vineyards, Pellegrini Vineyards, Wölffer Estate Vineyards, and Raphael. Visit: www.longislandmerlot.com for additional details.

Farther north, in the Finger Lakes region, a similarly close-knit group of winemakers, Anthony Road Wine Co., Fox Run Vineyards and Red Newt Wine Cellars, developed a joint venture wine they call Tierce, playing off the concept of the trio involved. The wine features the Finger Lakes' signature grape, Riesling, and was a team effort throughout the project. The first vintage was made in 2004, followed up by a 2005. The 2005 vintage will be released at a special dinner on May 12, 2007 at Red Newt Wine Cellars.

And, across the country in Mendocino, California, an exciting union has taken place, with each participating winery creating an ultra-premium wine expressly for the Coro Mendocino collection. The individually crafted wines must adhere to the rules as set by the group, which require the use of Zinfandel as the reining varietal and establish blending and ageing parameters for each wine. In its second vintage, 2001, there were eight wineries involved. The following year saw the inclusion of eleven wineries. Coro,

Italian and Spanish for chorus, is an apt metaphor for this venture, with each wine providing its own distinct voice to the group. For more information, see: www.coromendocino.com

Also in California, the Lodi appellation enclave within the Central Valley is home to the Michael~David Vineyards, which has purchased grapes from a group of the seven best growers. These grapes are then blended for the production of its zinfuful (100% Zinfandel) "Seven Deadly Zins" wine. Michael~David Vineyards is a family-owned winery with fifth generation Michael and David Phillips presently at the helm of the operations.

Of course, such ventures are not limited to the United States. Within Argentina, the renowned consulting winemaker, Michel Rolland, has developed a special project called Clos de los Siete. This walled vineyard was supposed to encompass a group of seven (*siete*) –there seems to be something about that number – French owners each producing their own wine as well as contributing a percentage of their grapes to a joint production. While the group is a bit smaller than initially expected, the project has proceeded and the first wines have met with critical acclaim. The wines are predominantly made from Malbec, which is fast becoming Argentina's signature red grape.

Drink wisely and well,
Tracy Ellen Kamens, Ed.D., CSW
CEO: Chief Education Officer

and

Jared Michael Skolnick
COO: Cork Opening Officer

Tasting Notes

Merliance, 2004, North Fork of Long Island, USA, \$35.00

The wine's faint red fruit aromas give way to notes of spice and tobacco, which became more intense after the wine has been opened for awhile. This dry red's flavor characteristics include cherry, plum and cedar. The tannins are ripe and smooth.

Tierce, Riesling, 2005, Finger Lakes, USA, \$30.00

You are greeted with youthful aromas of citrus, peach, floral and a hint of grassiness. On the palate, the flavors include lime, apple and a mineral/stone character, which remains in the finish. The high acidity and good fruit concentration indicate that this could develop over several years of bottle age.

Fetzer Vineyards, Coro Mendocino, 2002, Mendocino, USA, \$35.00

For their 2002 vintage, Fetzer created a blend of 41% Zinfandel, 33% Syrah, 21% Petite Sirah and 5% Grenache Noir, from fruit sourced from Mendocino County. Youthful aromas of berries, floral and sweet woody notes are carried through to the palate, where the ripe and juicy blackberry and blueberry flavors dominate. Hints of sweet spice, anise and moss linger in the background. The relatively high alcohol (14.8%) is somewhat out of balance and cuts the finish a bit prematurely.

Michael~David Vineyards, Zinfandel "7 Deadly Zins," 2006, Lodi, USA, \$17.00

This wine has a heady, port-like nose with aromas of boysenberry, bramble fruit and spice. Its silken texture includes flavors of rich, jammy blackberry fruit and cinnamon spice. At 15% abv, the alcohol is a little out of balance, providing a bit of heat at the back of the throat.

Clos de los Siete, by Michel Rolland, 2005, Mendoza, Argentina, \$15.95

In addition to the Malbec (50%), the wine is blended with Merlot (30%), Cabernet Sauvignon (10%) and Syrah (10%), all sourced from the individual sites within Clos de los Siete. Youthful aromas include plum, blackberry and vanilla. With its balanced structure, bright acidity and concentrated fruit flavors of black cherry, spice, vanilla and a gamey/leather note, this wine will continue to integrate its tannins and develop more complexity over the next 3-5 years.

April showers bring May flowers and with this swing into spring, Mother's Day will soon be upon us. This is also a time to celebrate the mother of all mothers – Mother Nature – as the grape vines wake from their winter slumber and bud break begins. Mothers, at least as generally depicted by Hallmark, are sweet-tempered, loving and kind. With this image in mind, thoughts of sweet wines fill our head. Thus, in this newsletter we turn our attention to exploring the merit of some of these delectable liquid desserts. Their lingering sweetness leaves us with pleasant thoughts.

This month finds Grand Cru Classes presenting a special private wine and food pairing class for a law firm at the Kitano Hotel in midtown Manhattan. We are also available to create wine-themed, team building programs, client appreciation receptions and a host of other events for your next corporate or social function.

Grand Cru Grapevine

May 2008

How Sweet It Is

As grapes ripen on the vine, sugars are developed within them. These sugars are the product of sunlight and its action on the chlorophyll in the leaves, which serve to feed and nourish the vine as it produces its fruit. Throughout the growing season, the level of sugar is built up in the grapes until at last they are determined ready for harvest. Such sugar is measured by a special device called a refractometer. These devices can be calibrated on a number of scales; in the U.S., we use Brix, while Baumé is used in France, Oeschle in Germany and KMW in Austria. Regardless of the scale, the sugar levels are important because it serves as the food for the yeast during the fermentation process.

Pausing for a brief moment to review some simple chemistry: sugar + yeast = alcohol + carbon dioxide is the basic equation for the fermentation of grapes into wine. In this chemical equation, which can be written as $\{C_6H_{12}O_6 + \text{yeast} = 2C_2H_5OH + 2CO_2\}$, the elements of Carbon, Hydrogen and Oxygen in the sugar are thus converted into ethyl alcohol – C_2H_5OH . The CO_2 (carbon dioxide) byproduct is the subject for another newsletter (one focused on sparkling wines). As the sugar is converted into alcohol, the alcohol level of the wine rises and, as high alcohol levels are toxic to yeast, they eventually die off, bringing the fermentation to an end.

If all of the $C_6H_{12}O_6$ is converted to C_2H_5OH , the resulting wine is bone dry. Conversely, if some of the original $C_6H_{12}O_6$ is retained, rather than being fermented into alcohol, the wine has varying degrees of sweetness, depending on how much sweetness, known as residual sugar, remains. The retention of residual sugar may be deliberate as in cases where the fermentation is stopped early by either inoculating the yeast so that they can no longer function or by adding a neutral spirit, as in the case of fortified wines, a topic to which we will return later in the year.

Additionally, if we start with excessively high levels of sugar, a wine can be produced which achieves sufficient levels of alcohol, but retains a higher level of residual sugar. On average, most wines reach Brix levels of 23-25 resulting in dry wines with alcohol levels of 12-13% abv. High levels of sugar at the time of harvest may be the result of a long, sustained growing season, permitting the grapes to hang on the vine for a much lengthier period of time than usual. These wines are generally referred to as late harvest wines due to the later harvest date of the grapes.

Even higher levels of sugar may be the consequence of not only a long hang time, but also the result of the grapes being concentrated through freezing as is the case with ice wines. The freezing of the grapes permits the water content to be easily removed, leaving high sugar levels and very concentrated fruit.

Similarly, wines produced from botrytized grapes have been concentrated through the action of a fungus that attacks the grapes. When climatic conditions are favorable, this otherwise detrimental disease can produce celebrated wines capable of great ageing. Notable wines of this type hail from France (Bordeaux and Loire), Austria (Burgundland), Hungary and Germany (Rheingau and Mosel).

Overall, the key to a good dessert wine is in its balance with acidity. The sweeter the wine, the more critical the role of acidity plays. To illustrate, the carbonation in soda serves to balance the sweetness of the beverage in the same way that acidity does in the wines. And, while many sweet wines are desserts unto themselves, they may also be paired with the final course of your meal. However, the trick is to select a wine that is sweeter than your food item.

Drink wisely and well,
Tracy Ellen Kamens, Ed.D., CSW
CEO: Chief Education Officer
and
Jared Michael Skolnick
COO: Cork Opening Officer

Tasting Notes

Hunt Cellars, Zinfandel Port “Zinful Delight”, 2001, Paso Robles (California), USA, \$50.00 (375 ml)

While not technically a Port, despite it being labeled as such, this Port-style dessert wine has youthful, pronounced aromas of strawberry, spice, oak and chocolate. On the palate, it is medium-sweet with cherry, strawberry jam, chocolate and sweet spice flavors.

Doisy-Vedrines, Sauternes, 2003, Bordeaux, France, \$18.00 (375 ml)

This botrytized wine has medium+ intensity and displays aromas of pineapple, honey, orange peel and slight spice. The medium-sweet palate follows the nose with apricot replacing the pineapple as the dominant fruit flavor. This wine is a blend of 80% Semillon, 15% Sauvignon Blanc and 5% Muscadelle.

Domaine des Baumard, Coteaux du Layon, 2004, Loire Valley, France, \$25.00

Produced entirely from the Chenin Blanc grape, this wine has notes of floral, lemon and pineapple. With medium sweet flavors of pear, floral, stone and chalk, the lively acidity balances this youthful wine nicely.

Trimbach, Vendage Tardives Gewurztraminer, 2000, Alsace, France, \$69.00

Deep gold in color, this late-harvest dessert wine has pronounced aromas of honey, spice, floral and dried fruit. Its full body and high acidity complement its flavors of floral, honey, spice and musk.

Bonterra, Muscat, 2005, Mendocino (California), USA, \$12.00 (357 ml)

A wine with youthful aromas, the nose displays spice, apricot and citrus. It is off-dry on the palate with medium+ acidity and flavors of honey, apricot, and slight spice.

JUNE

Summer is upon us, bringing backyard barbecues, camp cookouts and the festivities associated with Flag Day and Father's Day. It's time to step out of your home and into the great outdoors. As you shift into grill or picnic mode, you might consider pairing your fresh food with a refreshing, fruity wine. This month we explore several wines that will match well with summer fare – from burgers and grilled chicken to slaws and salads. This is the perfect time to sample simple, straightforward wines, which won't break the bank.

June is also a great time to consider adding to your wine knowledge. Grand Cru Classes will launch its first class, featuring *From Vine to Wine*, on June 10th. Seats are selling, but we still have space left if you'd like to join us. Our July and August schedules will soon be posted to our website as well and will expand our course offerings. To learn more about our progress with both the educational and vineyard (did we mention that we were planting 1/8 of an acre of vines?) ventures, check out our blogs, [Grape Matters](#) and [Vine Views](#), respectively.

Grand Cru Grapevine

June 2006

Red, White & BBQ

Summertime and the living is easy. Well, maybe not quite easy, but perhaps our hearts are a bit more carefree as the days grow longer and warmer. Memorial Day Weekend generally heralds the start of the summer season and the return to backyard entertaining. For those in the city or without backyards, there is the tendency to seek out rooftop lounges, restaurants with outdoor seating and picnic spots in the parks. Wherever it is that you spend your outdoor dining, now is a good time to indulge in the simple life and simpler wines.

In that same mindset, we used last week's holiday weekend as a terrific opportunity to inaugurate our new barbecue grill. Moreover, while studying for the very intense exam (held on June 5) for Unit 2 of the Diploma of Wine & Spirits, the last thing I wanted to do for Memorial Day Weekend was to drink complicated wines, which needed a lot of thought or consideration. Accordingly, my thoughts turned to undemanding quaffing wines, perfect to pair with our barbecue fare. These are wines that are heavy on fruit, moderate on secondary characteristics and light on the wallet.

From the East End, we selected three easy drinking wines, two of which were off-dry (still retaining some of their residual sugar, making them a little sweet on the palate). While I don't generally prefer semi-sweet wines, other than those intended for dessert, in the heat of summer, I find them to be particularly refreshing. I also find that they work well with salads and sauces with some sweetness. For our barbecued meals, we paired them with fruit-forward reds, two of which hailed from warm climates. These warm climates provided lots of sunshine for the vines, enabling the grapes to achieve maximum ripeness and high sugar levels. The higher the initial sugar level at harvest, the higher the potential alcohol in the wine, as it is the sugar, which the yeasts ferment into the resulting alcoholic beverage. If the fermentation runs to completion, the final product will be a dry wine, but if the fermentation is stopped prematurely then the remaining (unfermented) sugar provides some sweetness to the wine. The aroma and flavor impact of these climatic conditions and winemaking techniques are explored in our usual tasting notes. With our emphasis on food-friendly wines, this month we also share our food pairing notes with you as well.

Drink wisely and well,
Tracy Ellen Kamens, Ed.D., CSW
CEO: Chief Education Officer
and
Jared Michael Skolnick
COO: Cork Opening Officer

Tasting Notes

Pellegrini Vineyards, East End Select Merlot, 2002, North Fork, Long Island, \$14.99

Arriving to the North Fork late one night, we ordered take-out from Farmer Bar and opened this wine to enjoy with a 1/2 rack of barbecued ribs, coleslaw and cornbread. This is Pellegrini's second label wine, which is less complex than its first label, but also less expensive. The ruby-colored wine holds a faint note of red fruit and a slight herbaceous quality of cut grass. It is dry, with medium acidity and soft tannins and possesses flavor characteristics of red fruit, spice and coffee and an oaky aftertaste.

Rosemount Estate, Diamond Label Shiraz, 2004, South East Australia, \$11.99

We used the holiday weekend as an excuse to try out the rotisserie attachment of our new grill and made a quick trip to Miloski's in Calverton to buy a whole, local Long Island duck (and several of his buffalo burgers – see below). The duck, with a simple dry rub of rosemary, fresh ground pepper and sea salt, was absolutely wonderful and enhanced by its pairing with this Shiraz. The deep ruby wine displays notes of plum and black cherry with some tar and smokiness underneath. On the palate, jammy flavors of cherry/black cherry abound, accompanied by some spicy and woody character. Its high alcohol (14.0%) results in some sweetness on the attack and slight burn at the back of the throat.

Gnarly Head Cellars, Old Vine Zin, 2004, Lodi, California, \$10.99

For the buffalo burgers, we wanted a more intense wine, which would balance the concentrated meaty flavors of the beef. Made from the Zinfandel grape, this youthful wine expresses blueberry, chocolate, leather and soil, which are reiterated in the mouth, along with granite and steel. The significance of the "Old Vine" designation is the fact that these grapes hail from 80 year-old vines. As vines age beyond 20 years old, they become less productive, yielding fewer grapes, but of a higher quality.

NB: Despite the fame of "White Zinfandel", Zinfandel is a red grape variety, not a white one.

Duckwalk, Windmill White, NV, South Fork, New York, \$9.99

A warm afternoon meant that we could partake of our lunch on the patio. The vegetable quiche and garden salad, along with the heat of the day, begged for a refreshing, but soft, white wine. This wine has a medium intense nose of tropical fruit, notably pineapple and grapefruit. It is medium-dry, with the sweetness well-balanced with medium-high acidity. The tropical fruit flavors remain on the palate, coupled with a hint of spice.

Palmer Vineyards, Sunrise-Sunset blush, NV, North Fork, New York, \$9.99

A light meal of salad and grilled corn was a nice way to end after a weekend of indulgences. With its beautiful medium salmon color, the wine has a light aroma of raspberry, melon and a hint of cotton candy. Unlike the dry rosé wines we discussed last month, this pinker has an off-dry palate with medium acidity and flavors of strawberry and raspberry. A spicy character on the finish offsets the sweetness nicely.

In movies, the spy is always trying to make him/herself inconspicuous. My mother used to jokingly reference an old movie in which the spy was discovered by his American, rather than European use of a knife and fork (Europeans don't switch hands after cutting their food). Hence, he was found out and his cover was blown. Feeling that some wines similarly travel incognito, this month, we discuss the issue of varietal vs. appellation labeling. If you only buy wines with the name of the grape prominently listed on the label, we hope this will inspire you to consider wines with less evident identities.

Grand Cru Classes will also be traveling this month, though deliberately more conspicuously, as we head to Monterey, California to showcase the wonderful wines of Long Island at the [Society of Wine Educators'](#) Annual Conference. We are greatly appreciative of the following wineries for donating wine for our conference presentation, "From Potatoes to Parker Points: The Long Island Wine Region Comes of Age": Bedell Cellars, Castello di Borghese, Channing Daughters, Corey Creek, Lenz Winery, Macari Vineyards, Martha Clara Vineyards, Raphael and Vineyard 48. We are excited to be visiting this area and expect to visit a number of wineries both in the Monterey vicinity as well as in Paso Robles.

Closer to home, we can now boast of our own vines, which were planted Memorial Day Weekend. The full saga can be read on Jared's blog, [Vine Views](#). Suffice it say, it was a lot of hard work, but we are excited to watch them grow.

Grand Cru Grapevine

June 2007

Traveling Incognito

In the wine world, it often seems like European wines are trying to hide themselves from the public. Donning a "disguise" much like a celebrity might wear a baseball hat and dark sunglasses to avoid being recognized, these wines sit on the shelf, but give no clue as to who they are. Conversely, wines from the U.S., Australia and South America practically scream, "Notice me!"

The main reason for this dichotomy stems from the rules and regulations pertaining to wine production in Europe. Adapted from the system developed by the French, all EU countries have demarcated their better wine areas, which must adhere to "appellation laws" for their individual area, in order to maintain the right to be labeled as such. More specifically, a region such as Bordeaux in France, Rioja in Spain or Dao in Portugal has a governing body, which specifies where the grapes may be grown, which varieties, in what density and on what trellis systems. Yields are controlled and vinification techniques are proscribed as to what is permitted. Anything not expressly permitted is forbidden.

With this system, the Europeans have placed greater emphasis on the demarcated area and its corresponding *terroir* than those in the New World. Hence, the wines are labeled with the name of the region, commune or even the individual vineyard name in the case of the best vineyards from which they come, rather than by the grape varieties from which they are made. The general exceptions to this are Alsace, which is unique in France in its ability to include grape names on its labels, Germany (particularly higher quality wines) and Austria. Accordingly, that Shiraz from Australia is a lot easier to spot at the wine store, while one from France will require a little more knowledge or sleuthing to track down, especially as the variety is also known as Syrah, which is the more typical parlance of Europe. But, once you learn more about a wine region, you'll find that its wines are much more recognizable than you thought. Plus, it seems that European producers have begun to create wine labels expressly for the U.S. market, which do indeed include grape names to assist the uninitiated.

Drink wisely and well,
Tracy Ellen Kamens, Ed.D., CSW
CEO: Chief Education Officer

and

Jared Michael Skolnick
COO: Cork Opening Officer

Tasting Notes

Domaine Francois Chidaine 'Clos Bandoin' Vouvray, 2005, Loire Valley, France, \$23.00

This white wine is from the Touraine area of the Loire Valley, situated on the Loire River. As a Vouvray, it is made from the Chenin Blanc grape, which truly thrives and shines in the Loire Valley. With developing aromas of honey, apricot and peach, along with nutty and mineral notes, the flavors continue on the palate, with long length. This is a well-structured wine with sufficient fruit concentration to develop for 5-7 years, possibly longer, in bottle.

Longwood, Shiraz, 2003, McLaren Vale, Australia, \$22.00

The nose includes blueberry and bramble fruits, sweet spice and some oak, with a port-like characteristic. The ripe, fruit flavors of blueberry, coexist with notes of chocolate, cedar vanilla and sweet spice in this full-bodied wine. It is ready to drink now, but could age 2-3 years given the level of fruit, tannin and acidity.

Brancott, Sauvignon Blanc, 2005, Marlborough, New Zealand, \$16.95

The highly aromatic grape Sauvignon Blanc has found its spiritual home in Marlborough where its pronounced aromas of tropical fruit, peach, herbal notes/cut grass and stone. These flavors persist on the palate with long length.

Ruffino, Chianti Classico, 2005, Tuscany, Italy, \$12.99

Chianti Classico is a red wine made from a minimum of 80% Sangiovese grapes, which can be blended with the indigenous Canniolo, Cabernet Sauvignon and/or Merlot in varying proportions, depending upon the winemaker's wishes. Indicative of Sangiovese, on the nose, youthful aromas of cherry, oak, and a slight herbal note dominate. Similarly, on the palate, the wine has medium intense flavors of sour cherry and plum, with an herbal undercurrent and slight oak.

Valckenberg, Gewurztraminer, 2005, Pfalz, Germany, \$12.00

This wine has a pronounced, youthful nose displaying typical Gewurztraminer aromas of floral/rose petals, peach and slight minerality. Its ripe, concentrated fruit flavors include floral, melon, peach and stone with a hint of spice in the long finish. While the wine is off-dry, the slight sweetness is well balanced by the bright acidity.

As the days grow warmer and the arrival of summer seems more certain, it's time to head outdoors for fun and sun. For many people, summer heralds their return to the links, teeing up for a round of golf. An ancient game, with historical origins thought to be 12th century Scotland, golf is now played internationally, with champion golfers achieving worldwide recognition. While Grand Cru Classes' golf clubs are quite dusty, our wine glasses certainly are not, and, in fact, have been filled recently with wines from some of the more illustrious names in golf.

Additionally, June finds us with a freshly painted classroom exterior, new landscaping and a fresh new schedule of classes. In other words, we are ready for you to come take classes with us. What are you waiting for?

Grand Cru Grapevine

June 2008

Fore! Score at the Top of their (Wine) Game

As an old query asks, "How do you make \$1 million in wine?"...., which humorously provides the answer, "Start with \$2 million." While the wine industry can be profitable for some, it can also be a heartbreaking love affair as Mother Nature takes, just as easily as she gives. Not surprisingly, winemaking (and vineyard and winery ownership even more so) is a sport generally reserved for those who find this labor of love to be too great to ignore or for the wealthy. With the wealth they have accrued from their time on the touring circuit, many professional golfers have the ability to start with a whole lot of money. Consequently, several of these players have parlayed their financial success in golf into winery ventures.

With a non-alcoholic beverage already bearing his name (half lemonade, half iced tea), Arnold Palmer entered the wine business in 2003, in partnership with his long-time friend, Mike Moone, owner of Luna Vineyards. His California-based operation had its initial release in 2005, with the launch of a Cabernet Sauvignon and a Chardonnay. As premium wines, they are produced from grapes sourced from California's acclaimed Santa Barbara and Napa Valley wine regions. Originally from Latrobe, Pennsylvania, Palmer proceeded to distinguish himself on the golf course. With a golf career spanning nearly 50 years, he has won 92 national and international championships, including the Masters (1958-60-62-64), British Open (1961, 1962) and the U.S. Open Championship.

Golfer Mike Weir hails from Ontario, Canada. At 38 years old, he has already proven himself time and again on the golf course, frequently finishing among the top-ten at various tournaments. The estate winery's first release was in April 2005 and has garnered critical acclaim and positive reviews among the trade and press. In addition to red and white wines, Mike Weir estate winery also produces an ice wine, in the true Canadian style. All net proceeds from the sale of his wines benefit the Mike Weir Foundation, which is dedicated to helping children in need.

Produced by the Katnook Estate winery in Coonawarra, Australia, the Nick Faldo Selection wines were launched in 2000. Named in honor of legendary golfer Nick Faldo, the wines are made entirely from estate grown fruit with an aim to capture the essential characteristics of Coonawarra in a harmonious, early drinking, forward fruit style. The range includes: Sauvignon Blanc, Cabernet Sauvignon and Shiraz. A professional golfer since 1976, Nick Faldo was born in Welwyn Garden City, England. With an illustrious golf career, Faldo has finished in the number one spot on the PGA tour nine times. In 1987, he received the recognition as MBE (Member of British Empire).

Greg Norman Estate Wines are also produced in Australia as was the man himself. In 1976, Norman won his first golf tournament, for which a case of Penfold's Grange was part of the prize. However, it was not until he started touring in California and Europe that his passion for wine really began to grow. While Norman nor his company, Great White Shark Enterprises, owns the vineyards, the wines are made to his taste and require his approval. The wines debuted in 1998, with the Shiraz Reserve continually earning high marks. The wine brand includes a 200,000 case production in Australia, along with an 85,000 case production in California.

In South Africa, Ernie Els and David Frost both share a passion for golf and wine. The son of a vineyard owner, Frost hit his first golf balls among his father's vines and financed his first set of golf clubs with money earned from picking grapes. From there, he went on to win over 22 tournaments worldwide and recorded the PGA Tour's lowest putting total ever. He set a modern day record at the 2005 British Open at the Old Course, St. Andrews, Scotland with a score of 65. In 1994, Frost purchased 300 vineyard acres in the Paarl wine region and produced his first wine in 1997, in collaboration with Napa Valley winemaker Jason Fisher. Today, David Frost wines produces 7,000 cases annually.

Ernie Els winery opened in 2004 as a joint collaboration between golfer Ernie and his dear friend, Jean Engelbrecht of Rust en Vrede estate in Stellenbosch. Taking a cue from Ernie's classic golf swing, they launched their signature wine, a classic Bordeaux-style red, in 2000. The most recently available vintage, 2004, is a blend of Cabernet Sauvignon 62%; Merlot 24%; Cabernet Franc 4%; Malbec 4%; Petit Verdot 6%. With the success of this first venture, the two have gone on to produce several other wine brands. The Engelbrecht Els Vineyards produces a blend of Shiraz with the Bordeaux grapes. Their Cirrus venture is produced jointly with the Duncan family in Napa, California, while Guardian Peak wines are made for early, everyday drinking. Regardless of the brand, they all share one common characteristic – all of the wines are red. Outside the winery, Ernie is a highly respected golfer, with a trophy record second only to Tiger Woods. Starting at age 13, he went professional at 18 and remains one of the most consistent, quality players having earned the No.5 spot in the Official World Golf Ranking in 2007.

While ours was not an exhaustive search, we were only able to identify male golfers with these ventures, but with Annika Sörenstam's retirement announcement and Michelle Wie's continued rise on the LPGA, perhaps that will change and someday we may see a wine labeled under Annika's or Michelle's name. Of course, if golf isn't your thing, you might want to check out wines from Wayne Gretzky Estates.

Drink wisely and well,
Tracy Ellen Kamens, Ed.D., CSW
CEO: Chief Education Officer
and
Jared Michael Skolnick
COO: Cork Opening Officer

Tasting Notes

Nick Faldo Selection, Sauvignon Blanc, 2006, Coonawarra, Australia, \$14.00

Indicative of the warm climate from which it comes, this fuller-bodied Sauvignon Blanc has peach and lime/lime peel aromas, and an herbal note, all of which persist on the palate.

Mike Weir, Chardonnay, 2006, Niagara Peninsula, Canada, \$16.00

A youthful wine with aromas of apple, lime and wet stone; the palate includes flavors of red apple, stone and a slight woody note.

Arnold Palmer, Chardonnay, 2005, Santa Barbara, CA (USA), \$15.00

Typical of an oaked Chardonnay, this wine has aromas of red apple, oak, butter and butterscotch. These are joined by flavors on apple, oak, vanilla and spice on the palate.

Nick Faldo Selection, Cabernet Sauvignon, 2005, Coonawarra, Australia, \$15.00

From the red terra rossa soils of Coonawarra, this wine displays typical Australian Cab characteristics with its deep ruby color and youthful aromas of blackberry, vanilla and blueberry. On the palate, it is medium-bodied with medium tannins and flavors of blackberry, blueberry, spice and vanilla.

Greg Norman, Shiraz, 2005, Limestone Coast, Australia, \$12.00

A Shiraz from one of Australia's cooler climates, this wine shows off its complexity with black cherry, cut grass, spice, cedar and chocolate aromas. Its medium-high acidity is balanced with medium tannins and flavors of cocoa, black cherry and pepper.

JULY

Summer is off to a bang and, as fireworks abound for July 4th, we are ready to launch our next set of classes with new schedules and new content. Among our July course offerings, we are pleased to add our Mad About Merlot class. Part of our Great Grape Series, this class takes participants on a journey through the world of Merlot from Long Island, across the "pond" to France and around the globe to California and Chile. In recognition of our new course line-up and in honor of this international grape, we are re-visiting Merlot wines this month, with a slightly different spin than we took in our March issue. Whether or not you join us in the classroom this summer, please join us for some additional Merlot madness as this oft-used blending grape has truly earned its independence and shines on its own.

With our own space just beginning its renovations, we are not so independent this year. Accordingly, we continue to be extremely grateful to those vineyards/wineries who have graciously offered us the use of their facilities this summer. In addition to using Bedell Cellars, Castello di Borghese, Martha Clara Vineyards and Vineyard 48 as our class venues, we are delighted to add Lenz Winery to our July line-up and Palmer Vineyards for August, with another venue in the works.

Wherever we are, we hope you will consider joining us for a class this summer. As an added incentive, we are pleased to offer our Grapevine readers a special discount of \$15.00 off. Please use coupon code: GCG070615 when registering online.

Grand Cru Grapevine

July 2006

More Merlot Madness

As you may recall, we devoted the March edition of the *Grand Cru Grapevine* to extolling the virtues of the Merlot grape. In concert, our tasting notes featured a nice array of local and other examples of this varietal wine. However, we didn't feel that we were able to do justice to the grape, which is becoming somewhat synonymous with Long Island wines. A group of winemakers has gathered together to form the Merliance in support of this initiative. Others are more hesitant about hitching their wagon solely to this star. Regardless of where you fall on this debate, there are reasons to celebrate Merlot in all its glory. This month's tasting selections highlight the mid to upper-end of the spectrum. These wines still reflect Merlot's varietal characteristics, but benefit from additional attention from the winemaker's care in the winery, producing more complexity and finesse than their entry-level brethren.

Drink wisely and well,
Tracy Ellen Kamens, Ed.D., CSW
CEO: Chief Education Officer
and
Jared Michael Skolnick
COO: Cork Opening Officer

Tasting Notes

Wölffer Estate Premier Cru Merlot, 2002, The Hamptons, Long Island, \$125.00

In our December gift-giving guide to wines, we lauded the Premier Cru and invited its receipt as a gift for us. We must have been very good in 2005, as Santa, in the guise of the Wölffer Estate itself, generously sent us a sample to enjoy. This youthful nose was redolent of cherry and plum, along with some earthiness, light leather, gaminess and a hint of oak. The cherry flavor persisted on the palate and was joined by minerality, vanilla and slight spiciness, with a touch of leather in the long finish. While the wine was drinking delightfully, it could certainly stand some age.

Vineyard 48, Reserve Merlot, 2004, North Fork, USA, \$34.95

While Vineyard 48 is a relative newcomer to Long Island, the vines are over 20 years old and the Pipia family has a vinous history from their Italian roots. On the nose, this wine has notes of black cherry, tobacco, cinnamon and earth. The attack was sour cherry, followed by mushroom and straw in the mid-palate and a hint of vanilla and spice (possibly nutmeg) toward the end. With its medium-high tannins, this wine is capable of ageing.

Shinn Estate Vineyards, Six Barrels Merlot, 2002, North Fork, USA, \$120.00 (*Magnum only*)

Owned by husband and wife team David Page and Barbara Shinn, Shinn Estate is devoted to sustainable agriculture and is actively engaged in research on new organic approaches to farming. This wine was produced by selecting the best barrels of wine from the 2002 vintage Merlot and providing them with an extra year of barrel ageing. The result is a wine with aromas of blackberry, black currant, plum, vanilla, nutmeg and chocolate, along with a slight note of wet leaves. On the palate, the luscious black cherry and plum fruit give way to flavors of chocolate and cedar. The tannins are still a little rough, indicating that the wine still needs time in the bottle.

Chateau Bourgneuf, 2001, Bordeaux (Pomerol), France, \$33.99

While Bordeaux wines are generally a blend of several grapes, those hailing from the Right Bank (St. Emilion, Pomerol and their satellites) are frequently Merlot-dominant and this one is no exception with 85% Merlot and the balance made up of Cabernet Franc. This wine is just starting to develop, showing aromas of plum, spice, cocoa and black cherry. In the mouth, flavors of black cherry, plum, nutmeg, chocolate and cedar abound.

Pride Mountain Vineyards, Merlot, 2003, Sonoma, CA, USA, \$54.00

Perched atop Spring Mountain in the heart of California's wine country, this vineyard and winery literally straddles both Sonoma and Napa Counties. It's worth a visit, if only for the amazing view, but their wines are certainly top notch. With a complex nose of cherry, slate, oak and spice, this wine rewards the palate with notes of cherry and berries, accompanied by vanilla and a very long finish.

July is the month for declaring your independence. Not only do we celebrate July 4th, which marks America's independence from Great Britain, but our friends from France will set off their own fireworks in celebration of Bastille Day. This holiday commemorates the overturning of the monarchy, placing France under a democratic, as opposed to aristocratic, rule. But, what wines to drink with our festive meals? Of course, as long as you have wine, it is always more festive, but if you wish to find some French wines to mark the occasion, our brief overview of France's wine regions may help point you in the right direction.

Grand Cru Classes is moving in the right direction, having completed its successful presentation at the Society of Wine Educators, which has become a new class in our curriculum, listed as *Long Island Wines* on our current schedule. This class provides a good introduction to the local North Fork wine region and its history. In July, we debut our *Winning at Wining & Dining* class, which discusses the principles of food and wine pairing along with how to navigate a restaurant's wine menu. Additional classes will be launched as the season continues, but if you have an interest in a topic that is not yet offered, please let us know; we just may add it to the list.

Grand Cru Grapevine

July 2007

Take a Chance on France

As noted in last month's newsletter, French wines can be somewhat confusing to more novice wine drinkers as they generally don't include the grape variety on the label and instead, use the *terroir*-driven appellation system, which may or may not be familiar to the consumer. Recognizing the importance of place, the French put great emphasis on the climate, soils, topography and viticultural techniques, which will best fit a particular grape variety. Hence, after centuries of growing grapes in a wine region, the best vineyard areas can be demarcated because history has shown this to be true. With so many different wines coming from France, it is impossible to generalize too much about French wine. However, as with most Old World wine producing countries, the wines tend to be food friendly, with fruit aromas and flavors appearing somewhat muted as compared to many of their New World counterparts, providing the opportunity for secondary characteristics to shine through.

France is made up of several major wine regions, which are defined by geographic as well as climatic boundaries. The primary regions include: Bordeaux, Burgundy, Rhone Valley, Loire Valley, Provence and Alsace. Certainly, wine is grown outside these areas, but these are the most widely known regions for making quality (as opposed to table) wine. The largest of these is Bordeaux, situated on the western coast, along the Atlantic Ocean and is made up of the Left Bank, located within which are several famous communes (Margaux, St. Julien, St. Estephe and Pauillac) and the Right Bank, the latter of which includes St.-Emilion and Pomerol. Wines from both banks are primarily blends, with reds made up of Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Merlot, Malbec and Petit Verdot. The Left Bank is more dominated by Cabernet Sauvignon, while the Right Bank has a higher percentage of Merlot. Whites are both dry (Entre-deux-Mers, Bordeaux Blanc) and sweet (Sauternes, Barsac), blended from Sauvignon Blanc, Semillon and Muscadelle.

Moving north to the Loire Valley, varietal wines predominate, with white grapes Melon de Bourgogne (Muscadet); Chenin Blanc (Vouvray, Saumur and Savenieres); and Sauvignon Blanc (Sancerre, Menetou-Salon and Pouilly-Fume). Reds include Cabernet Franc (St. Nicholas and Chinon) and Pinot Noir (Saumur-Champigny). Heading south to the Rhone Valley, we find Syrah on its own in the North (Côte Rôtie, Cornas, Hermitage) and blended in the South with Grenache, Cinsault and others (Chateauneuf de Pape, Côtes-du-Rhone). Further east, the Provence region shares similar grapes, with

much of it made into dry roses (Côteaux de Provence) and some heavy reds (Bandol). Shifting north again, this time to Burgundy, Chardonnay (Chablis, white Burgundy) and Pinot Noir (red Burgundy) are the starring players with Gamay (Beaujolais, Beaujolais-Villages) sharing the southern spotlight.

Of course, I've forgotten to mention hundreds of different wines and other grape varieties. And, of course, this is an extremely simplistic presentation of the wines of France. However, the world of French wines is a wonderful one to explore and I hope this introduction will spur you to begin your journey.

Drink wisely and well,
Tracy Ellen Kamens, Ed.D., CSW
CEO: Chief Education Officer
and
Jared Michael Skolnick
COO: Cork Opening Officer

Tasting Notes

Domaine de la Pepiere 'Cuvée Eden' Muscadet Sèvre et Maine, 2005, Loire, France, \$14.00

Made from the Melon de Bourgogne grape, this white wine has youthful aromas of citrus, minerality and a waxy/yeasty note that comes from the extended time on the lees (spent yeast cells). Its balanced structure and flavors of lime, apple and minerality will continue to develop with a few years of bottle age.

Benjamin de Vieux Château Gaubert, Graves Blanc, 2004, Graves, Bordeaux, France, \$17.00

This white Bordeaux, made from a blend of Sauvignon Blanc and Semillon, is showing some slight development, with medium intense aromas of green apple, citrus, burnt toast and coconut. Flavors of apple, grapefruit, oak and grassiness provide long persistence on the palate.

Domaines Ott, Rosé, Château Romassan, 2005, Bandol, Provence, France, \$30.00

A blend of Mourvèdre, Grenache and Cinsault, this Provençal rosé has gained some popularity among the jet set, which accounts for its high price (similar wines will be much less expensive). Perfect for a summer day, its youthful aromas include strawberry, floral and spice, which continue on the palate.

André Brunel 'Cuvée Sommelongue' Côtes du Rhône, 2004, Rhône Valley, France, \$15.50

Medium intense aromas of violet/floral, black cherry and herbal notes persist on the palate, showing sweet, ripe fruit along with leather/animal notes. This wine will continue to improve over the next 2-3 years.

Chateau Lastours, Gaillac, 2003, Gaillac, France, \$10.00

From Southwest France, this red wine is made from the grape, Fer. It is beginning to show some development with aromas of cherry, herbal fig, menthol and sweet spice. The medium intense flavors include black cherry, leather, black pepper and mint. With its firm, ripe tannins, this wine could age 2-5 years.

With the celebration of July 4th, we are reminded of the liberty and independence that came with the American Revolution. Not quite so revolutionary, but equally freeing, Tracy has taken the leap and quit her “day job” at New York University to devote her attention to *Grand Cru Classes* full-time. This will provide her with the freedom to focus on marketing efforts as well as on writing and other wine projects.

An equally bold and exciting move is Michael Dorf’s new project – [City Winery](#) – a custom-crush facility currently under construction just north of Manhattan’s TriBeCa neighborhood. The 20,000 square foot facility will feature a wine bar with a tapas-style menu and event space with a capacity of 500 standing / 250 seated guests. But, the main attraction is the limited membership, whereby members can select their preferred grapes (mostly sourced from prime vineyards in California) and make their own wine under the guidance of winemaker David Lecompte. The \$5,000 membership fee (slightly higher for those choosing among premium grape selections) provides each member with a full barrel of wine, which will eventually yield 250 bottles. We visited the space mid-construction last month and can’t wait to see it all finished. Among other partners who have signed on to the project, *Grand Cru Classes* will be one of the providers teaching wine classes in the new space.

We are also delighted to announce that Jared has successfully completed his MBA degree from Baruch College, graduating this past May. With his business classes behind him, he has traded in his Economics and Business Policy textbooks for *Weeds of the Northeast* and the Cornell Co-operative Extension’s *Pest Management for Grapes* as he spends more time out in our educational vineyard. It is in this vein that we turn our attention to viticultural practices in this month’s newsletter.

Grand Cru Grapevine

July 2008

(Bio)Dynamic Duo

With the arrival of *The Dark Knight* in theaters this month, Batman is top of mind and, in an interesting twist to this movie genre, director Christopher Nolan has chosen to eschew digital-animation in favor of “[gritty naturalism](#)”¹. Similarly, in today’s agricultural practices, many farmers are returning to a more natural approach to growing grapes. Yes, while it is easy to forget while sipping a superb wine in a lovely restaurant, wine is an agricultural product. Consequently, it requires the same time and effort in farming as other crops. As I sit at the computer to write this newsletter, [Jared has donned his farmer hat](#) and is busy as a bee in the vineyard. Our vineyard (or perhaps I should say *vinyette*?) comprises only 99 vines, but, despite its diminutive size, there is no shortage of work. Each week brings new tasks and challenges as we seek to find ways of eliminating pests and disease without the use of pesticides and other similar products.

Although agro-chemicals are a more recent addition to the farming repertoire, farming practices have been a part of the American culture since the very beginning. As commercial farming became more prominent in the late 19th century and forward, the 1930s saw the formation of the Dust Bowl – no, not another yet-to-be-sponsored football bowl game, but rather, the ugly consequence of poor farming practices coupled with drought. In the absence of crop rotation and cover crops and presence of deep plowing, there was little to anchor the topsoil to the earth and much of it blew away.

Today, farmers are much savvier about the farming techniques they use, taking the consequences of their actions into account. These decisions can be classified as Sustainable Agriculture, Organic Farming

¹ Brown, Scott. *Dark Knight Director Shuns Digital Effects For the Real Thing*. *Wired*, 16.07.

or Biodynamics. While there are similar principles at stake, each method has its own set of rules that it follows. An admittedly simplistic overview of each method follows.

Sustainable agriculture seeks to make good decisions about farming practices that are environmentally friendly and socially responsible. Thus, there is limited use of chemicals and, when feasible, natural solutions are sought. More specifically, sustainable agriculture works to avoid irreversible damage to the health of the ecosystem within the context of profitability and productivity. The most flexible among these practices, sustainable agriculture is adaptable to large-scale farming and has the least limitations with respect to what can and can't be done. In a perfect world, all farming would adhere to sustainable practices, at a minimum, and I am pleased to note that most, if not all, Long Island vineyards follow sustainable practices, at least.

On a more stringent level, organic farming restricts its practices to those that are completely natural. Consequently, no man-made chemicals are used in any aspect of the production. In this manner, only naturally-occurring compounds may be utilized to combat disease and other pests that plague the vineyard. For example, downy mildew is treated with organic substances as opposed to conventional fungicides. Additionally, cover crops are encouraged to reduce weeds, manage soil fertility and promote a habitat for "good" insects, which eat the "bad" insects. As organic farming becomes more prevalent, the ability to monitor and certify these practices has too. By 2007, more than 60 countries had implemented regulations concerning organic farming. It is useful to note that wine can be "Made with Organic Grapes" but not be considered organic wine, if any additives or preservatives are used. Conversely, vineyards and wines might be organic, but may not have received formal organic certification or may simply not be labeled as such. "Certified Organic" for wine and other products is subject to rules and regulations set by the USDA.

Lastly, biodynamics takes organic farming yet another step further, drawing on the spiritual insights of philosopher, Rudolph Steiner. Introduced in 1924 through a series of agricultural lectures given by Dr. Steiner, biodynamics is a form of organic farming that recognizes and reveres the link between the ecological system of the farm and that of the universe. Bringing a holistic approach to farming, many key decisions and actions are made to correspond with phases of the moon and/or the astrological zodiac. Most notable is the use of a humus and cow manure mixture, which is stuffed into a cow horn and buried in the Fall. Interestingly, Steiner never grew anything in his life, but his ideas captured the attention of many and are now practiced throughout the world.

Whether or not you adhere to Steiner's spiritual beliefs, clearly, the importance of choosing positive agricultural practices is vital to the health of our environment. Pesticides and fertilizers have a way of seeping through the soil and finding their way into the water table. As farmers of all crops seek to limit their use of these and other harsh chemicals, we, as consumers and community members alike, will benefit.

Similarly, it is equally important to look at ways to recycle as well as reduce and reuse. Along these lines, many wineries are reducing their reliance on fossil fuels through solar and wind power while others are reusing organic waste to create compost for natural fertilization and still others are recycling plastic containers. In this regard, some producers are considering a switch in the weight of the bottles used for their wines – yet another reason that cask (a.k.a. bag-in-a-box) wines may soon find their way into respectability. Of course, eating and drinking locally is also a good way to go green.

When taken together, the use of sustainable agriculture and green practices are truly a dynamic duo, not unlike Batman and Robin, in protecting and preserving our environment for generations to come.

Drink wisely and well,
Tracy Ellen Kamens, Ed.D., CSW
CEO: Chief Education Officer

and

Jared Michael Skolnick
COO: Cork Opening Officer

Tasting Notes

Bonterra, Chardonnay, 2005, Mendocino County, CA, USA, \$12.00

With a 378-acre property in the Russian River benchlands of Mendocino County, Bonterra's vineyards are certified organic and practices include composting and cover crops among others. This Chardonnay is youthful with aromas of citrus, apple, floral and tropical fruit. A full-bodied wine, it has ripe fruit flavors of green apple and pineapple, along with a slight hint of oak.

J.M. Brocard, Domaine Ste Claire, Petit Chablis, 2006, Chablis, France, \$9.99

This family-run property in the Chablis commune of Burgundy is proud to be herbicide and pesticide free. Jean-Marc (the JM in JM Brocard)'s son is the head of viticulture and a strong proponent of biodynamics. Their Petit Chablis is slightly lighter in style than an AOC Chablis, coming from vineyards planted outside the more revered Chablis appellation. It has aromas of stone and floral, which are repeated on the palate, accompanied by notes of lime.

Errazuriz, Merlot, 2006, Aconcagua Valley, Chile, \$9.99

While only some vineyards of the Errazuriz estate are certified organic, owner Eduardo Chadwick has been adopting these principles throughout his vineyards. Additionally, biodynamics is practiced for its Sena vineyard and similarly named wine, which was initially a joint venture with Robert Mondavi. With notes of plums, cherries and oak, the 2006 Merlot is blend of 85% Merlot, 11% Carmenere and 4% Sangiovese, with 50% of the wine aged for six months in a combination of American and French oak.

Domaine Albert Mann, Pinot Blanc, 2004, Alsace, France, \$16.00

With a history spanning back to the 17th century, the Albert Mann philosophy is to "produce a wine in harmony with nature". With such a philosophy it is not surprising that this estate is among the most committed in the region to organic and biodynamic principles. This youthful wine displays notes of lime, green apple, faint floral and minerality. The medium-bodied wine shows ripe white fruits – particularly melon and pear – on the palate, along with some spice in the finish.

Powers Winery, Merlot, 2004, Columbia Valley, WA, USA, \$12.99

Badger Mountain Vineyards began the conversion to organic farming in 1988 and by 1990, it was the first vineyard to be Certified Organic by the Washington State Department of Agriculture. It produces both organic (no sulfites added) and non-organic wines from these grapes. In addition, it produces wine under its Powers Winery label for grape varieties not grown in their organic vineyards. Its 2004 Merlot is blended from 88% Merlot and 12% Syrah grapes, which spend 24 months in French oak barrels, 10% of which are new.

AUGUST

With the heat wave and following thunderstorms behind us, we are enjoying the days of summer and watching our young vines precociously emerge from their individual grow tubes. The speed at which they are growing is quite remarkable to us. Annabelle and Sabrina (resident vineyard dogs) have been busy chasing away the rather large groundhog who seems to have made our backyard his home. In fact, such critters are so in tune to the East End lifestyle that, as we have learned, they actually build both a winter burrow and a summer home. How very *chi chi!* We are also working to eradicate Japanese beetles, which find the grape leaves quite tasty.

As Billy Joel was wont to remind us, "Some folks like to get away, take a holiday from the neighborhood.." but our neighborhood is replete with vineyards and wineries, so we are less inclined to head out of town. Living in New York State, we are blessed to have such wonderful wines right in our backyard (literally and figuratively), so we are also less prone to thinking that U.S. wine equals California. However, we know that many people aren't quite as familiar with New York wines, so with harvest creeping closer, we are put "...in a New York State of mind..." with respect to wines are therefore, delighted to provide an overview of New York's wine regions this month.

Grand Cru Grapevine

August 2007

In a NYS of Mind

While California easily springs to mind when thinking about wines from the United States, you may be surprised to know that wine is made in all fifty states. That being said, most of these states produce very limited quantities and you will be hard pressed to find most U.S. wines in your local wine store, unless you happen to live in that particular state. A recent trip to Missouri permitted a chance to [taste a local dessert wine](#), but I wasn't running to the store to buy it again. However, these small wine regions do serve a positive purpose; at a minimum, they further tourism in those states and add to the local economy. Of more commercial importance, Washington, Oregon and our own New York State, lead the way, although this path starts out well behind the Golden State, which produces 95% of all U.S. wine production.

In third place, New York State produces 40 million gallons of wine annually. Its principal wine regions include the Finger Lakes, Hudson Valley and Long Island. While grapes have been grown in New York for centuries, these grapes were of native origin (*vitis labrusca*) and were not the familiar European (*vitis vinifera*) grapes with which most of us are familiar. In the mid-1950s, Dr. Konstantin Frank, a plant science professor with Cornell University's Geneva Experiment Station, began to advocate the planting of *vitis vinifera* grapes in the Finger Lakes region. While his Cornell colleagues were not in agreement, he was joined in his efforts by Charles Fournier, of Gold Seal Vineyards, with the first commercial *vinifera* wines made in 1961.

The Finger Lakes region lies in the center of New York State, with most vineyards situated near one of the many finger-shaped lakes left behind by the retreating glaciers during the last ice age. Much like the Rhine River and its tributaries in Germany, these bodies of water work to mitigate the climate despite its northerly location, helping the grapes to ripen by warming the air and reflecting the sun off the lakes and onto the grapes. Similarly, the Finger Lakes region has the propensity to create great Riesling, which has been garnering much attention as of late. With its more consistent cold weather arrival in the autumn, it is possible to produce late harvest wines as well.

Further south, but still "upstate," the Hudson Valley is home many hybrid grapes (those of combined European and American parentage), which offer hardy, cold weather resistance, necessary given the lack of lakes or rivers. Also, as home to much history, a visit to the region could include both the Vanderbilts

(to their former mansion in Hyde Park) and vineyards, including Brotherhood (the oldest, continuous winery in the U.S., established in 1839), Allison Vineyards and Millbrook, owned by John Dyson of the eponymous Smart-Dyson* trellis system (as far as I am aware he has no relation to the vacuum and, I will assure you, his wines definitely don't suck) and one of the architects of the Farm Winery Act. This piece of legislation, enacted in 1976, was a boon to the NYS wine industry, permitting small wineries (first defined as those producing less than 50,000 gallons, now increased to 150,000 gallons) to sell direct to consumers, restaurants and retailers. This allowance makes it viable for such small production businesses to earn a reasonable profit without having to share the mark-up with a distributor. Hence, cellar-door sales are particularly important for these wineries.

Of course, making headlines both nationally and internationally, the Long Island wine region is putting New York on the world wine map. Established in 1973 by Louisa Hargrave and Alex Hargrave, this area is truly making a name for itself. Made up of three American Viticultural Areas (AVAs), the majority of grapes are grown on the North Fork of Long Island. However, the Hamptons (aka the South Fork) is home to three wineries as well. The climate here is most often likened to Bordeaux in that it consists of a temperate climate, with thin strips of land surrounded and influenced by several bodies of water (Long Island Sound, Peconic Bay and the Atlantic Ocean). Depending upon one's point of view, Merlot is the pinnacle grape, while others are backing Cabernet Franc as their horse in this race.

Any of these areas would make a wonderful trip, but you need not go too far to enjoy the fruits of these local labors. While wine lists have yet to catch up to quality of these wines, the new(ish) direct shipping laws permit consumers to order wine directly from these wineries, most, if not all, of which have websites. For those living in New York City, [Vintage NY](#) carries an extensive array of New York wines and has two locations, both of which have wine bars. In keeping with the sentiment to "think global, act local," why not drink local and lapse into a NYS of mind?

Drink wisely and well,
Tracy Ellen Kamens, Ed.D., CSW
CEO: Chief Education Officer

and

Jared Michael Skolnick
COO: Cork Opening Officer

**Smart refers to the Australian viticulturist, Richard Smart.*

Tasting Notes

Baiting Hollow Farm Vineyard, Rosé, 2005, North Fork of Long Island, NY, USA, \$16.99

Baiting Hollow Farm Vineyard is a relative newcomer to the Long Island wine region, with their tasting room set to open soon. We had the wonderful opportunity to meet several members of this lovely family and taste a number of their wines, where I was especially struck by their rosé. This wine is made from Cabernet Sauvignon, which gives it a deep, almost ruby color. It displayed youthful aromas of raspberry and strawberry along with floral notes. On the palate, the wine was lush and ripe with continued notes of raspberry and strawberry, joined by slight herbal and spice characteristics, which lingered in the medium+ finish.

Raphael, First Label Merlot, 2001, North Fork of Long Island, NY, USA, \$30.00

With six years under its label, this wine is beginning to show some development with aromas of plum, earthiness and some oak, the secondary characteristics dominating over the fruit. Its medium+ acidity and medium+ body provide nice structure for its flavors of cherry, plum, oak and slight earthiness and long length. While it is drinking well now, it could continue to develop over the next 2-3 years.

Dr. Konstantin Frank, Riesling 'Dry' 2006, Finger Lakes, NY, USA, \$24.00

This wine has lovely aromas of peach, floral, lime and mineral notes. As indicated the designation on its label, it is made in a dry style. It has medium-plus acidity with ripe, concentrated fruit flavors of lemon/lime, nectarine, and green apple.

Millbrook, Tocai Friulano, 2005, Hudson River Region, NY, USA, \$16.00

The winery attributes Tocai's winter "hardiness" as one of the reasons it does so well at Millbrook. This grape hails from Northeast Italy and produces crisp, white wines. Preserved by stainless steel fermentation, the fresh aromas of apple, melon and grapefruit persist on the palate, with a slight hint of banana.

Millbrook, Hunt Country Rosé, NV, New York State, USA, \$14.50

This is a slightly off-dry rosé with aromas and flavors of strawberry, cherry and baking spice. The current release is made from a blend of 43% Pinot Noir, 41% Chardonnay and 16% Gamay Noir, but this varies from year to year, the previous release being much more dominated by Gamay Noir (62%).

If you are a member of the ABC Club (Anything But Chardonnay), please take a moment to reconsider this much maligned wine. Chardonnay is known as the winemaker's grape due to its ability to take on new flavor characteristics during the winemaking process. On its own, the grape has limited varietal character. Accordingly, this grape has frequently been over-manipulated, masking its fresh fruit with excessive oak. When handled more gently, Chardonnay is capable of creating some of the best wines in the world, as any white Burgundy lover can attest. Yes, if you have been drinking white Burgundy wines, you have been enjoying 100% Chardonnay grapes at their finest. Ditto for Chablis (true Chablis from the Chablis area in France, not a U.S. wine labeled as Chablis). Chardonnay is also the key ingredient for top Champagnes and other sparkling wines. When grown well and crafted into great wines, Chardonnays can truly sing. Thus, it's time to start a new club – Hooray for Chardonnay! – which just so happens to be the name of the next class we are adding to our line-up this month.

As we celebrate this great grape, we're also delighted to celebrate a milestone for Grand Cru Classes – this issue marks our first anniversary of the *Grapevine*. We hope you continue to enjoy receiving these monthly missives from us.

Grand Cru Grapevine

August 2006

Hooray for Chardonnay

Chardonnay is one of the most ubiquitous grapes, planted worldwide from California to the Cotes de Beaune and everywhere in between. Throughout the world, this grape is highly regarded by growers as it is easy to grow in a wide range of climates and can achieve high yields (amount of fruit produced per vine). When yields are exceedingly high, known as overcropping, the wine quality suffers, but if grown and harvested at lower yields, Chardonnay really shines. These diverse production levels can account for some of the variance in quality found from producer to producer with this noble grape.

On its own, it has few distinct characteristics that define it as unique, but it takes well to numerous cellar treatments, which can greatly enhance the flavor profile. Generally, Chardonnay is full-bodied with high acid and alcohol levels. The caveat is that harvest time is critical as acid levels fall quickly if picked too late. On the palate, it is primarily known for having apple and citrus notes. In the New World, Chardonnay is often fruit-forward and the trend, now somewhat reversed, had been toward the use of considerable oak. Conversely, Old World Chardonnays are frequently more focused on minerality, especially in Burgundy where the wines take on the characteristics of the various vineyard soils. Top notch Chardonnays from both parts of the world include those from: Napa and Sonoma Valleys (California); Burgundy and Chablis (France); and Eden Valley and Adelaide Hills (Australia).

Depending on how it is handled in the cellar, Chardonnay can achieve a range of wine styles. It has a high affinity for oak, making it a great candidate for barrel fermentation and/or barrel maturation. When fermented in oak barrels, the wine can take on nutty or woody characters as well as tannins. These phenolic compounds are further enhanced when the wine is matured in oak barrels. Winemakers have a choice between new and used barrels, with newer barrels imparting more oak flavors than older ones. Barrels become relatively inert after their fourth year of use. Winemakers also need to decide the degree to which barrels are used. For example, only half of a given batch of wine might be placed in new oak, while the other half is placed in older oak or in stainless steel, with the two halves blended together for a softer oak effect. Regardless of the choice, at a cost of \$850 per new barrel, wines that have seen oak generally command higher prices than their stainless steel counterparts.

Another cellar option frequently associated with Chardonnay includes malolactic fermentation, in which the sharp mallic acid (*think apples*) found in Chardonnay is converted to the softer lactic acid (*think milk*)

through the addition of key bacteria. This process can be conducted with the entire batch of the wine or just with smaller lots blended back into the whole. Either way, the result is a softer, rounder wine with less obvious acidity. There is often a buttery note as well, stemming from the keytone, diacetyl, which is created during the process. Finally, the winemaker can choose to leave the wine on its lees (spent yeast cells) for a period of time, known as *sur lie*, which can imbue Chardonnay with bready/yeasty notes.

Given the possibilities, Chardonnay can provide the wine drinker with many different wines from which to choose, all from the same grape. Accordingly, there should be room in the club for nearly everyone to find a Chardonnay that suits them.

Drink wisely and well,
Tracy Ellen Kamens, Ed.D., CSW
CEO: Chief Education Officer
and
Jared Michael Skolnick
COO: Cork Opening Officer

Tasting Notes

Sherwood House, Chardonnay, 2001, North Fork of Long Island, \$20.00

A visit to Sherwood House's relatively new tasting room is a particular treat in that one can taste through several different vintages of their highly-regarded Chardonnay. The 2001 is starting to develop nicely with aromas of lime, butterscotch, apricot and some oak. These flavors persist on the palate with the addition of pear and spice. While it is enjoyable now, the wine will continue to develop in the bottle.

Galluccio Family Wineries, Cru George Allaire Chardonnay, 2003, North Fork of Long Island, \$19.99

This is a very soft and round wine with lower acidity than the other wines tasted for this newsletter. It has a youthful nose of orchard fruits ranging from apples and peaches to pears. The peach and pear notes are very prominent with a nice creaminess to the palate and a long finish.

Robert Mondavi Winery, Chardonnay, 2003, Carneros, California, USA, \$17.99

This wine has been barrel-fermented and then underwent *sur lie* barrel-aging. As a result, the nose has tropical fruit aromas accompanied by hints of butter and oak. On the palate, the tropical and oak flavors continue, along with some citrus and spicy notes.

De Wetshof, Bon Vallon Chardonnay, 2005, Robertson, South Africa, \$16.95

We had the opportunity to visit this lovely winery on our recent trip to South Africa where we tasted through several of their wines in their grand tasting room. The winery produces several different Chardonnays including the D'honneur and Danie De Wet Limestone Hill. The Bon Vallon is produced unwooded and *sur lie*, with citrus, peach and nuttiness on the nose. This dry wine has a round, medium-plus body with fruit characteristics of lemon/citrus and a slight bread character in the finish.

Pierre Guillemot, Savigny-les-Beaune Blanc "Dessus des Golardes", 2003, Burgundy, France, \$32.00 (2002 vintage)

The "Dessus des Golardes" is a single, but unrated, vineyard within the Cote d'Or, comprising 3.5 acres, where producer Pierre Guillemot uses large old vats for fermenting, along with lees stirring. This dry wine has lively acidity with aromas of minerality/slate, apples, hazelnut and a slight herbaceous note. On the palate the tart, green apple flavor persisted, with the minerality making an appearance in the long finish.

August finds us in the heat of the summer with steamy days and sultry nights. But, even hot, sticky days require some wine and this month we turn our attention to the ripe, reliable and relatively inexpensive wines of Argentina.

In addition to the wonderful wines discussed below, Argentina is credited with giving the world the seductive dance known as the tango. With partners pressed close together as they glide over the dance floor, it is clear that such movement takes great collaboration. In this spirit, *Grand Cru Classes* has established a special partnership with Gattorna, a creator of high quality, handcrafted, Argentine wine accessories, which include leather and canvas wine bags as well as brass corkscrews. As making wine is a handcrafted art, pairing these magnificent accessories with your wine is a perfect match. A selected set of Gattorna's merchandise will be available on our website, with actual samples displayed in our tasting classroom in Mattituck.

Stepping out of classroom, Tracy has now earned the Wine & Spirit Education Trust's internationally recognized Diploma of Wine & Spirits, *with Merit*. This two-year intensive program encompasses rigorous study, along with research papers and written and blind tasting examinations and serves as a prerequisite for pursuit of the Master of Wine credential. Tracy has also been selected to participate in the Napa Valley Vintners' Wine Educators Academy and will thus travel to Napa later this month.

Of course, you don't need to travel quite so far to get good wine education... simply visit us on the North Fork for our public classes or arrange for a private event at the location of your choice.

Grand Cru Grapevine

August 2008

Two to Tango

While Argentina may seem to have a relatively short history in the world of wine for the consumer, this country has actually had a long viticultural history. Initial plantings were achieved by the Jesuit missionaries in the mid-late 1500s in the foothills of the Andes. These towering mountains line the western border of this lengthy country, providing high altitudes at which the grapes are grown (the average vineyard is 900 m above sea level). This height ensures that the climate is cooler than this southern country's location would permit as well as ensuring good sun exposure. These conditions, along with a lack of moisture that prevents pressure from mold or mildew, make it easier to grow healthy vines that come to full maturity and ripeness.

Although initially colonized by Spain, Argentina became an independent country in the 1820s, after which followed an influx of European settlers from Spain, Italy and France, bringing their viticultural heritage, including vine varieties and regional growing techniques with them. This influence, coupled with the construction of a railroad between Buenos Aires and Mendoza, led to changes in grape growing practices, spawning the birth of a commercial wine industry.

After a period of domestic wealth, by the 1950s, Argentina's succession of military governments resulted in its failing economy, which severely reduced the ability of companies to invest in its wine industry. Despite these economic obstacles, with an extremely high per capita consumption of 90 liters per person, producers were able to supply cheap wines at home. However, as per capita consumption declined and inflation continued to increase, many producers were not content to produce such poor quality wines and thus began to create higher quality wines with an eye toward exports. As the economy began to stabilize, these efforts were realized with much success and today, Argentina is the world's fifth largest wine producer with vineyard plantings increasing more than 10,000 acres per year.

With its diverse cultural influences, top red grape varieties include the French classics of Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Syrah. Of particular interest, the French variety, Malbec, has come into its own in Argentina thanks to the foresight from the Catena family, which championed this grape's ability to produce world-class wines early on. In addition, immigrants from Italy brought Bonarda and Sangiovese to the vineyards, while Spaniards brought Tempranillo. And, the uniquely Argentine variety, Torrontés, which is descended from the Muscat grape, gives Argentina a white wine identity along with plantings of Sauvignon Blanc as well.

The Mendoza region includes the Maipú and Lújan departments and accounts for 80% of all wine production and 90% of all wine exports. Outside of central Argentina, in the farthest north, Salta is known for its Torrontés while the southern regions of Neuquén and Rio Negro are areas still being explored for which grapes grow best. With its hospitable wineries and natural beauty, Argentina is a perfect destination for wine tourism and several wineries boast luxurious accommodations, gastronomic restaurants or both. But, even when enjoyed by you at home, these wines can be very food-friendly and provide great value for their quality with many wines available under \$15.00.

A great wine at a great price, now that's something to dance about. But, be sure to find a partner, for, as they say, it takes two to tango.

Drink wisely and well,
Tracy Ellen Kamens, Ed.D., CSW
CEO: Chief Education Officer
and
Jared Michael Skolnick
COO: Cork Opening Officer

Tasting Notes

Bodegas y Viñedos Sur, Torrontés, 2006, Cafayate, Salta, Argentina, \$8.00

A highly aromatic white wine, one's nose is greeted by aromas of tropical fruit and peach. On the palate, it is dry wine with flavors of citrus and peach. A perfect picnic wine!

Crios de Susana Balbo, Rosé of Malbec, 2007, Mendoza, Argentina, \$12.00

With refreshing notes of candied raspberry, cherry and rose petals, this rosé shimmers brightly in a deep pink hue. Ripe fruit flavors of strawberry, raspberry and spice complement the vibrant acidity of this dry wine.

Fabre Montamayo, Malbec, 2004, Lújan de Cuyo, Argentina, \$15.00

This wine has youthful aromas of black cherry, blackberry, vanilla and a hint of spice on the nose. Its medium-bodied palate has medium, ripe tannins and pronounced flavors of blackberry, black cherry, clove, game and pepper with the spice notes lingering in the finish.

Trivento, Select Syrah, 2005, Mendoza, Argentina, \$10.00

Named after the three winds that sweep across the vineyards, Trivento was established in 1996. Its Select Syrah is harvested by hand and aged for six months in French oak. However, the oak is barely perceptible on nose or palate. What is apparent are its floral and red fruit aromas. On the palate, it is dry with very ripe fruit notes of black cherry, leather, dusty tannins and long length.

Trivento, Golden Reserve Malbec, 2004, Luján de Cuyo, Mendoza, Argentina, \$19.00

From the same producer, the Golden Reserve label sees more oak influence with fermentation in French oak, followed by oak ageing for one year. Aromas of deep mulberry, wet leaves and chocolate give way to flavors of ripe blackberry, wet leaves and cedar along with its long length.

SEPTEMBER

Sometimes a good grape can provide pleasure akin to a soloist's performance – on its own, the melody is quite beautiful and enjoyable to hear. However, the pleasant voices of a choir can often be equally stunning as the various parts (tenors, basses, altos and sopranos) each bring a single note, which harmoniously blend together to form a fuller, richer sound. Similarly, while our Great Grape Series focuses on varietal wines (wines produced predominantly from a single grape), many of the world's greatest wines are actually blends of several different grapes. Much as one might use several different herbs and spices in their cooking, so too, might a winemaker select several different grapes for their wine to appreciate the way the various components work together.

Speaking of working together, we are delighted to be working with Duck Walk Vineyards to make our first and only "South Fork" appearance on September 16, 2006. We'll round out the month with classes at Palmer and Lenz (September 23 and September 30, respectively). See our website for October dates. We're also working with our contractor to begin construction on our state-of-the-art tasting classroom, which will provide us with a home for our classes next year.

Grand Cru Grapevine

September 2006

The Gestalt of It All

Just as individuals have their own unique qualities, so too, do individual grapes. Among the internationally known noble grapes, some stand on their own quite well, while others do better as supporting players within a blend. However, even solo grapes such as Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Chardonnay can create wonderful blends as well. In addition to the synthesis of flavors and characteristics that come with creating blends, blended wines also have several advantages over their single varietal counterparts. Specifically, the use of several different grapes helps to provide vineyard success through different responses to climate and annual weather conditions. If the Cabernet Sauvignon doesn't fully ripen one year, its earlier-ripening vineyard partner Merlot can be used in greater quantities to round out the wine. This approach is frequently used in wine regions with varying annual weather conditions.

Among the most well known blends is Bordeaux. Nestled on the west coast of France, Bordeaux has been a highly-praised wine for centuries. For its red wines, Bordeaux producers are authorized to use any combination of the following grapes: Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Cabernet Franc, Petit Verdot and Malbec. Cabernet Sauvignon brings lots of structure to the wine, with Merlot softening the blend and filling out the mid-palate. Cabernet Franc adds an herbal quality. Petit Verdot and Malbec feature much less prominently in the recipe, much as a cook would use herbs and spices more sparingly than the main ingredient. Wines from the Left Bank tend to be more heavily stocked with Cabernet Sauvignon, while Right Bank wines are infused with Merlot. White wines from Bordeaux are also blends, but with fewer grapes. Dry whites are primarily Sauvignon Blanc, with Semillon, providing a roundness to the otherwise angular wine, and Muscadelle added for its aromatic qualities. Conversely, sweet wines such as those from Sauternes make use of Semillon's thin skins, which are susceptible to noble rot, but rely on Sauvignon Blanc to balance the sweetness with vibrant acidity.

Further south in France, wines from the Chateauf-neuf-du-Pape appellation in the Southern Rhone Valley are permitted to include up to thirteen designated varieties. These wines primarily feature Grenache (most are at least 60%), along with Syrah, Cinsault and Mourvedre. But the wines can also include Muscardin, Cournoise, Clairette, Bourboulenc, Picpoul, Roussanne, Terret Noir, Picardan and Vaccarese. Most of these grapes are not widely planted outside the region. The Grenache is highly alcoholic, with little color. Thus, the other red grapes provide deeper tones of red as well as robustness. White varieties such as Roussanne and Picpoul lend finesse and acidity to the blend, although the recent trend has been to dispense with them altogether.

Some blends have long histories, dating back one or more centuries, while others are new experiments, but, regardless of the grapes used, they all bring grapes together to create a whole wine, which is greater than the sum of its parts.

NB: Although it is a little beyond the scope of this discussion, I would be remiss if I did not point out that Champagne and Port are both blends, not just in the multiplicity of grape varieties used, but also in their blending of several different wines to create the house style.

Drink wisely and well,
Tracy Ellen Kamens, Ed.D., CSW
CEO: Chief Education Officer
and
Jared Michael Skolnick
COO: Cork Opening Officer

Tasting Notes

Ternhaven Cellars, Claret d'Alvah, 2000, North Fork, New York, USA, \$18.75

The reports of Ternhaven's demise back in March were, fortunately, quite mistaken. In fact, we had the opportunity to taste a barrel sample of his 2005 vintage, which was outstanding. While proprietor Harold Watts did sell his vineyard property, his winery in Greenport is still very much in business and his wines are now also available at [The Tasting Room](#) in Peconic. His Claret d'Alvah is a Bordeaux-style blend with aromas of blackberries, violets and cedar. Upon tasting, the wine is full of bright red fruit, along with sweet spice and an undercurrent of oak.

Roanoke Vineyards, Blend One, 2003, North Fork, New York, USA, \$30.00

Roanoke actually makes two Bordeaux-style blends, both made from Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Cabernet Franc. The wines are not labeled as such and are only distinguishable by the artwork on the label, so you need to know which one you are buying to know whether you have Blend One (48% Cabernet Sauvignon, 30% Merlot, 22% Cabernet Franc) or Blend Two, which is more heavily dominated by the Cab Franc (and currently SOLD OUT until the 2004 is released). Blend One has a pronounced nose with aromas of mushrooms, green pepper and barnyard, which are layered over notes of dark, red fruit. On the palate, the fruit (black currant and plum) is more prevalent than it is on the nose and is joined by herbal and earthy flavors and a hint of spice.

Warwick Estate, Three Cape Ladies, 2002, Stellenbosch, South Africa, \$24.95

We visited this vineyard back in April and tasted through their wines. We later had the good fortune to dine with Mike Ratcliffe from Warwick Estate on his trip to New York for the WOSA (Wines of South Africa) tour. The Warwick line, together with their spectacular Vilafonté series, definitely makes this a winery to watch. The Three Cape Ladies is a South African-style Bordeaux blend in that the Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot are not joined by Cabernet Franc, which is instead replaced with the indigenous variety, Pinotage. This wine is developing with aromas of blackberry, violets, coffee and hints of cedar. Upon tasting, the tongue is greeted with flavors of black cherry, pepper, sweet spice, smoke and coffee. The tannins are firm and ripe, providing sufficient structure for further ageing, but if you don't want to wait, the wine is drinking beautifully now.

Mas de Daumas Gassac, Daumas Gassac Blanc, 2005, Vins de Pays de l'Herault, France, \$38.99

Some of you may recall Monsieur Guibert of Mas de Daumas Gassac from the movie *Mondovino*. He was the one talking about keeping Mondavi out of the Languedoc. Whether or not one agrees with his politics, his wines are well regarded in the region and beyond. His white blend seems to contain everything but the kitchen sink. It is primarily produced from Viognier, Chardonnay, Chenin Blanc and Manseng, but the remaining 10% is made up of another sixteen different grape varieties. With its vibrant citrus, peach and floral notes, this medium-bodied white is more reminiscent of a New World wine, rather than the French one it is. On the palate, the ripe fruit provides green apple, lemon and a hint of stoniness, with a long finish.

Anselmi, San Vincenzo, 2003, Veneto IGT, Italy, \$11.99

Lest you should think that blended wines are the bastion of French and French-style wines, here is an Italian offering for you from the Veneto region. This dry, white wine is a blend of Garganega (80%), Chardonnay (15%) and Trebbiano (5%). It has a youthful nose of lime, apple, almond, blossom and a faint steely note. The lime and apple persist on the palate with a slight yeastiness. The structural elements are all in balance and the wine is ready to drink.

If you are constantly strolling down your wine shop's aisles and reaching for Chardonnay, Merlot or Cabernet Sauvignon, you are missing out on so many other wonderful grapes. Of course, these stand-bys make some of the greatest wines in the world, but if you only eat vanilla ice cream, how would you know that you also liked chocolate? In this spirit, we invite you to take the "grape less traveled" in your path toward wine exploration.

If you are interested in exploring grapes, without the travel to the East End, you will be pleased to know that Tracy will be teaching a four-session class on several great grapes (Merlot, Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc and Pinot Noir) at New York University's School of Continuing and Professional Studies, in March 2008. We are also thrilled to announce that Tracy will be teaching classes on Italian wine at the newly launched restaurant, Accademia di Vino, on Manhattan's Upper East Side, beginning in October 2007. Details will follow next month. Of course, we are always happy to have you visit us at our state-of-the-art tasting classroom in Mattituck, NY.

Grand Cru Grapevine

September 2007

The Grape Less Traveled

*Two roads diverged in a wood, and I --
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.*

From: Robert Frost, The Road Not Taken

As Robert Frost notes, choosing the less popular route can lead to an exciting new destination. Similarly, choosing wine made from a grape with which you are less familiar can provide you with great pleasure and open up a new world of possibilities. The *vitis vinifera* species of grape, from which the majority of quality wine is made, has hundreds, if not thousands of varieties. While many of these grapes are grown in very limited quantities and some are relatively extinct, there are still many more grapes on the shelves from which to choose. Looking beyond the internationally known varieties, many wine regions grow indigenous species that thrive in their native environment and provide a lovely array of aromas and flavors.

The Wine Century Club (of which we are both members) is an organization that celebrates the diversity in grapes, and thus, ultimately, wine. The brainchild of Steve and Deborah De Long, authors of the Wine Grape Varietal Table, wine lovers are invited to download and complete the form by which the applicant must attest to having tasted a minimum of 100 different grape varieties. Of course, blended wines count for each of the included grapes, so a Chateaufeuf-du-Pape, which permits up to 13 varieties can be a big coup in completing your application! There is no fee to join and if your application is accepted, you will receive a formal certificate, suitable for framing. Current club members range from novice wine consumers to professionals in the wine trade, but all have a love of wine in common. Events are held periodically at which members get to enjoy ... more wine tasting!

As just two alternatives to consider, the Rhone Valley (France) varietals, Syrah and Viognier, seem to be gaining ground beyond their native borders and are finding favor with wine consumers. Syrah is a red grape variety, which is increasingly popular. At home in France, it creates big, bold wines in the Northern Rhone and is blended into the red wines in Southern Rhone and frequently in Languedoc. Elsewhere, Syrah is grown in California, Australia (where it is known as Shiraz), South Africa and is being experimented with in Argentina, Chile and New Zealand. The Viognier grape is responsible for the

wonderful wines of Condrieu and is an aromatic variety with deep scents of floral and peach. The wines are generally full-bodied with rich, ripe fruit predominating the palate.

Regardless of whether you are a member of Wine Century Club or not, there are a host of grapes out there waiting to be tasted. So, the next time you find yourself sashaying down the wine aisle, take up the grape less traveled by and it will make all the difference!

Drink wisely and well,
Tracy Ellen Kamens, Ed.D., CSW
CEO: Chief Education Officer
and
Jared Michael Skolnick
COO: Cork Opening Officer

Tasting Notes

Channing Daughters, Tocai Friulano, 2005, The Hamptons, NY, USA, \$24.00

While many Long Island vineyards take their cue from Bordeaux, France, the team at Channing Daughters is looking to Northeastern Italy for inspiration, particularly the Friuli-Venezia Giulia region. This wine has youthful, medium-plus intensity of aromas of almond, floral, and lime. In the mouth, the wine has bright, lively acidity with flavors of apple, almond and lime, which remain in the wine's long length.

Domaine Chatelus de la Roche, 2004, Beaujolais, France, \$10.00

That other Burgundian red grape, Gamay hails from Beaujolais, which is the most southern district in Burgundy. It is generally light in tannins since it undergoes carbonic maceration, which is an intracellular fermentation, as opposed to a traditional fermentation. This wine has aromas of cherry syrup, cedar and earthy notes on the nose. On the palate, fruit flavors of sour cherry are joined by earth and an undercurrent of stone.

Four Vines, Syrah, 2005, Paso Robles, CA, USA, \$18.00

We visited the Four Vines winery back in June and had the opportunity to taste through a number of their wines including, Loco (Tempranillo), Heretic (Petite Syrah), Anarchy (self-described unconventional Rhone blend) and "The Biker" (Zinfandel). Although less flamboyantly named, the Paso Robles Syrah exudes intense aromas of raspberry, black cherry, plum, smoke, earth and tobacco. The flavors persist on the palate, with concentrated fruit and a balanced structure.

Fritsch, Gruner Veltliner, Windspeil, 2005, Donauland, Austria, \$12.00

Are you groovy for GruV? Gruner Veltliner is a white grape variety, indigenous to Austria, which, with their naturally high acidity, produces very food-friendly wines. The wine has notes of mineral, citrus and a hint of blossom. The crisp acidity balances well with flavors of stone, lime, and an undercurrent of white pepper. There is some slight spice in the finish.

Los Cerros de San Juan Cuna de Piedra, Tannat, 2000, Colonia, Uruguay, \$15.00

The Tannat grape hails from Southwest France and, not surprisingly, given its name, produces heavily tannic wines and might just be a heart-healthy choice as tannin content is becoming linked to the positive affects of red wine. Transplanted in South America, Tannat does nicely in Uruguay. This wine is beginning to show some development with aromas of damp earth, herbal, plum, dried fruit and spice. The tannins are high, but ripe and integrated. Flavors include sour cherry, dried fruit, cedar and herbal notes.

Having just returned from the Napa Valley Vintners' Wine Educators Academy, where I spent a week studying about the geology, climate and grapes of the Napa Valley, thoughts of school fill my mind. Similarly, as the summer gives way to fall, it is once again time for children to return to the classroom, where they will study reading, writing and arithmetic. While it is nice to be an adult and not have to worry about school, it is still nice to learn new things. In fact, we suggest that you can get the best of both worlds – take a wine class with us to learn about this fun topic, but we promise, there will be no homework or exams!

This month, in the spirit of "Back to School," we draw inspiration from the New York Public Library and those two literary lions, Patience and Fortitude. To this end, we focus on the subject of fortified wines and provide a brief primer on Sherries, Ports and other similarly produced wines.

And, should you need a new "backpack" to bring your wines to school (or wherever you wish to take them), we have now posted our [selection of Gattorna handcrafted, Argentine wine accessories](#) on our website. They make great gifts, too!

Grand Cru Grapevine

September 2008

Patience and Fortitude

Aside from family and friends, there are few things I love as much as wine, but reading would be a close tie. With school back in session, students are laden down with books and head for the library. For those of us in New York City, we are blessed to have the New York Public Library at our disposal. This venerated institution comprises 86 branch libraries and four research centers and is home to more than 15 million books. The library's main building, completed in 1916, is an icon in itself with its beautiful Beaux-Arts design, marble façade and grand entrance on famed Fifth Avenue. At the foot of these stairs, two regal lions, Patience and Fortitude, greet library patrons and guard this precious resource.

It is with similar patience and fortitude that winemakers are able to produce beautiful wines. Waiting for grapes to ripen and wines to age requires great patience. Further, it takes tremendous fortitude to tend to a crop that is at the whim of Mother Nature and beyond one's control. These stalwart workers are to be commended for their efforts.

Requiring particular patience and fortitude, fortified wines, of which Ports and Sherries are the most well known, need significant time in their production, but the reward is well worth the wait. More specifically, fortified wines are those to which a neutral grape spirit has been added. This act of fortification raises the wine's alcohol level to 15% alcohol by volume (abv) or higher, depending upon the purpose and type of wine. In general, fortified wines can be categorized as either port-style or sherry-style wines.

In the Port method, the spirit is added to the wine at an early point during the fermentation process. After an initial fermentation, these red wines reach about 4% abv and are then fortified to 18-20% abv. At this alcohol level, the yeast die off, halting the fermentation process. The result is a sweet wine since at 4% abv, not all of the grape sugar had been converted into alcohol and residual sugar remains. These wines are then aged either reductively (without air contact) in bottle or oxidatively (with some air influence) in wood. Bottle-aged ports are referred to as "ruby" ports because the lack of oxygen preserves their deep ruby hues. Conversely, wood-aged Ports lose color with oxidation and become "tawny" in color. Tawny ports are labeled based upon the average age of the wines in the specific blend such as 10 years, 20 years or 40 years. Vintage ruby ports, those listing a harvest year, are produced from the grapes of a single year's harvest and are generally only made in exceptional years. Vintage tawnies, which are quite rare, are called Colheitas.

Port wines originate from Portugal with grapes grown in the extreme, dry heat of the Douro Valley. Only wines with the Douro Valley, Portugal origin can be considered Port; all other wines made in a similar fashion are port-style wines, not technically, "Ports." The port-style category encompasses France's Vin Doux Naturels such as Banyuls, Greece's Mavrodaphne and Cyprus' Commandaria.

In Andalusian Spain, another approach to fortification is taken with wines fortified at the completion of the fermentation process. In the Sherry method, wines made in the Jerez (Sherry) region are vinified dry into low alcohol wines, transferred to casks (aka butts) and left to begin an initial ageing period. In this climate, a special indigenous yeast known as flor (Spanish for flower) may be found in the barrels of wine during this initial ageing. At the conclusion of this period, the wines are graded according to their ability to grow *flor*. Wines that maintain *flor* are classified as finos and are fortified to 15.5% abv, which permits the *flor* to flourish and the wine to age both reductively (no oxygen) and biologically (under the influence of *flor*). Wines without *flor* are fortified to 18% abv and become olorosos, aged oxidatively and without biological influence (there is no *flor* or yeast present). Amontillados fall somewhere in between with these wines undergoing initial *flor* development and then continuing as olorosos.

After additional time has lapsed and/or the *flor* has died off, a fractional blending process called a solera is used to age the wines, further adding to their complexity. The butts are added to the solera system, whereby they form the first criadera. Over time, one-third of the contents are drawn off and shifted to the next level of the solera, from which one-third of these casks have been transferred to the level below. Wine from the lowest (oldest) level is drawn off and bottled.

The term Sherry is limited to those wines produced within the Sherry triangle – Jerez de la Frontera, Sanlucar de Barrameda and El Puerto de Santa Maria. Similarly produced wines made elsewhere include the Spanish Montilla-Moriles, Fortified Cyprus wine and Fortified British wine. For the most part, sherries are dry wines unless a sweetening agent is specifically added, which are typically indicated by "cream" on the label. Manzanilla Sherry is a fino-style sherry, matured in a bodega situated in Sanlucar de Barrameda as opposed to Jerez de la Frontera or El Puerto de Santa Maria. Because Sanlucar de Barrameda is closer to the sea, the climate is more humid and the butts develop slightly differently than their counterparts in the other areas. As a result, the sherry develops slightly salty/seaside notes in aromas and flavors.

Sherries and sherry-style wines, especially the dry styles, are quite food-friendly and pair nicely with tapas bar cuisine and salty foods. Ports and port-style wines are generally rather sweet and tend to be relegated to dessert. Ruby ports are particularly well-suited to chocolate and chocolate-based desserts, while sweet styles of sherry have nutty characters that match well with desserts such as pecan pie.

Drink wisely and well,
Tracy Ellen Kamens, Ed.D., CSW
CEO: Chief Education Officer

and

Jared Michael Skolnick
COO: Cork Opening Officer

Tasting Notes

Justino's, 10 Year Old Malmsey, NV, Madeira, Portugal, \$25.00

Madeira is a tropical island off the coast of Portugal, which produces fortified wines that have been heated to accelerate the ageing process. This wine has smoky aromas with butterscotch, figs and orange marmalade. A medium-sweet palate shows notes of maple syrup and butterscotch.

Wisdom & Warter, Extra Amontillado Sherry, NV, Jerez de la Frontera, Spain, \$8.50

Falling somewhere between Fino and Oloroso sherries, Amontillado sherries strike a nice balance. Showing some development with medium-intense aromas of citrus/orange, sweet spice, fig and a resinous note, this wine has a slight oxidative character to the nose as well. On the palate, there are

medium intense flavors of almonds, raisin and vegetal notes.

RL Buller & Son, Premium Fine Muscat, NV, Rutherglen (Victoria), Australia, \$16.00

This hot, dry climate within Victoria is responsible for high quality, intense fortified Muscats and Tokays. With aromas of fig, apricot, sweet spice, citrus peel and faint wood notes, the medium-sweet palate gives way to flavors of caramel, cinnamon and fig. It has a long length.

Domecq, “La Ina” Dry Fino Sherry, NV, Jerez de la Frontera, Spain, \$14.00

The quintessential accompaniment to tapas, fino sherries can be very food friendly, especially with salty, savory food. Its youthful aromas include almonds, nuts, yeast and vegetal notes, all of which persist on the palate, along with citrus flavors.

Taylor Fladgate, Late Bottled Vintage Port, 2000, Douro Valley, Portugal, \$18.00

With a longer period of wood ageing than traditional vintage ports, these wines are made in good, but not great vintages and provide consumers with a vintage ruby port which is ready to drink at a young age and won't break the bank. The aromas on this wine include dried red fruits and cherry cough drops. The off-dry, pronounced palate shows flavors of chocolate and dried cherries. It would pair equally well with aged cheeses or chocolate.

Kourtaki, Muscat of Samos, NV, Samos, Greece, \$8.00

This fortified wine hails from Greece and provides aromas of apricot, raisins and spice. Its pronounced, medium-sweet palate includes flavors of dried apricot, baking spice, orange peel and honey.

OCTOBER

Borrowing from Halloween for our theme, this month's wine selections took us off the beaten path as we searched for wines based more upon visual style than their possible substance. While such an approach was certainly fun, it made it more difficult to be flexible in our choices and made for a diverse and disparate selection. With this emphasis on labels, we are pleased to include the images, which inspired our search, alongside our tasting notes.

Grand Cru Grapevine

November 2008

Halloween Costumes

As Halloween approaches, we can't help but to recall our favorite childhood costumes. What comes to mind for you? A witch? A ghost? Or perhaps some lions and tigers and bears? Oh my!

It is certainly common these days to find many wines at our local merchants that are, well, in costume. With the global market for wine growing at a frenetic pace, wine makers are looking for some way to catch our eye as we walk through the endless shelves of, often, anonymous wines. How do you distinguish one wine from another while shopping when you can't possibly know every producer? Often, we are left with just a label and our personal knowledge to guide us. Even the savviest buyer has probably found themselves attracted to a bottle, at least partly, because of its label, at one time or another.

In keeping with the Halloween theme, we went in search of wines with labels that suggested potential Halloween costumes. We found a profusion of animals, from a lion in a tuxedo to an elegant, prancing deer, as well as a witch and Bacchus riding astride a leopard. Of course, choosing wine based solely on a label may turn out to be a Trick or a Treat, but it will always be an adventure. We hope you will be equally adventurous in seeking out new wines for your drinking pleasure.

Drink wisely and well,
Tracy Ellen Kamens, Ed.D., CSW
CEO: Chief Education Officer
and
Jared Michael Skolnick
COO: Cork Opening Officer

Tasting Notes



Viola, Dogale C.G.M, Pinot Grigio 2004, Italy, \$9.99

Spooky Halloween themed labels aside, this is simply a classic Pinot Grigio. The nose has typical citrus flavors of grapefruit and lime. The same citrus flavors engulf your tongue, with the addition of green apple. Although primarily a dry, white wine, a slight sweetness carries through on the palate. The finish is crisp, clean, tart and long.

© Label artwork by [Natalie Ascencios](#)



Martha Clara Vineyards, Riesling 2004, North Fork – Long Island, USA, \$14.99

One of the larger vineyards in the North Fork, Martha Clara has become known as an event destination as much as it is known as a winery. This Riesling has a floral nose along with tropical fruit notes and a slight rubber undertone. Pineapple and banana are the first to appear on the palate with a faint mineral nuance as well. The medium finish of this white wine gives way to spice (white pepper) and herbal (green pepper) flavors. Descriptors like “zippy” and “zingy” come to mind when describing the tartness of this wine.



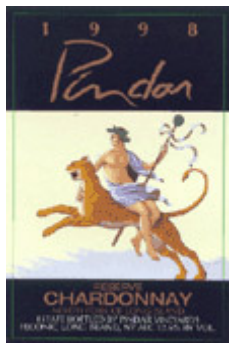
Crocodile Rock, Shiraz NV, Murray Valley, Australia, \$5.95

This is a good example of a commercially produced Australian Shiraz. The nose has strong flavors of berry fruit such as blackberry along with a subtle coffee note underneath. On the palate, this dry, red wine bursts with ripe fruit, including plum, blackberry and cherry. Coffee notes continue as a secondary characteristic on the palate and with a slight spice in the finish, particularly at the back of the mouth.



Roaring Red, Chateau Lafayette Reneau, Finger Lakes – New York, USA, \$9.99

One of many vineyards in the Finger Lakes region of New York State, Chateau Lafayette Reneau grows both native American grapes as well as the more noble *vitis vinifera*, from the Old World. While this particular red blend is a combination of *vinifera* and American hybrids, the characteristics of the American grapes are more prominent. On the nose, this wine provides herbal tea, light strawberry and barnyard smells such as leather and hay. The fruit flavor is more pronounced on the palate with raspberry and strawberry and is more off-dry than dry. The finish is short and sweet.



Pindar, Chardonnay Reserve 2001, North Fork – Long Island, USA, \$14.99

By far the largest vineyard on the North Fork, Pindar has a wide selection of different wines available. This white wine has a medium-deep golden hue that fades to a paler water-white rim. It is 100% barrel fermented and this was evident immediately on the nose with notes of vanilla and toasted marshmallow. Additional aromas of butter and pear were exhibited. Luscious pear and orange flavors come out on the palate along with spice such as nutmeg and white pepper. In combination with its creamy body, the flavors of this wine make a nice match for a spicy meal.

In keeping with our approach to Halloween last year, we are once again looking to the wine's label as our inspiration for the October issue. This year, we have rounded up a group of wines, which all feature a truck as part of the label's design. Generally, this is a pick-up truck that has served as a trusty tool in the vineyard's management or as a symbol of bygone eras on the farm. Viewing these vehicles causes us to focus firmly on the land. Further apropos, October finds us in the middle of harvest, so this month we pay tribute to the pick-up truck and the agricultural heritage it represents. Along those lines, we encourage you to support sustainable agriculture and the family farm. For more information, please see [The Meatrix](#).

Grand Cru Grapevine

October 2006

Keep on Truckin'

As they say, great wine is made in the vineyard. Although wine is ultimately produced through vinification in the winery, it is only one of the six factors, which influence the final outcome of a given wine. The other five factors emphasize the importance of what is grown (grape variety), where it is grown (climate, soil and annual weather conditions) and how it is grown (viticultural practices). In other words, viticulture is key to the success of making wine. Thus, the time and effort expended among the rows of vines is perhaps the most critical in creating a world-class wine. While we are no longer an agrarian society, the image of a farmer in a well worn pick-up truck is iconic of the relationship between humans and the soil and reminds us of our dependence on such cultivation to bring forth nature's bounty.

Farming is hard work, eased only by tools of the trade as tractors and trucks. However, even in our age of modern machinery, it is still labor-intensive and tough. Despite what it may say on one's deed, those in agriculture are merely guardians of the land, not true owners, as they live at the whim of Mother Nature in planting and sowing their crops. While harvest is undoubtedly the busiest time of the year, the life of the vineyard is active all year long. From winter dormancy during which much of the pruning takes place through spring's bud break and berry set to summer's veraison, the work of the vineyard manager is never done. In each season, there are new activities which must be attended to, carefully preparing the vines for the next stage of their development.

Grapes are fickle friends, demanding attention nearly all of the time and only producing their best under a narrow set of circumstances. Left on their own, grapevines would flourish, but would not necessarily produce spectacular fruit essential to the production of an outstanding wine. It is out in the field where trimming and training are practiced with an eye toward finding the proper balance. Too much foliage could result in under-ripe grapes or could promote moldy fruit, while excessive leaf removal could overstress the vines. Likewise, water is essential, but vines need a limited amount as they don't like "wet feet." If it is too cold, the vines may die; too hot and the vine shuts down. And, while sun exposure plays an important role in ripening, too much sun can burn the skins, lead to baked flavors in the wine or both. Accordingly, coaxing quality fruit from the vine is a delicate dance in discovering the perfect confluence of each element in the field.

Upon reaching the desired ripeness, the vineyard manager and winemaker will determine that it is time to harvest the grapes. But, beyond brute force, growing grapes requires a keen attention to detail and the need to walk the line between science and art. Determining ripeness is not simply a matter of measuring the sugar content in the fruit and arriving at the correct brix (measure of sugar levels). Rather, it is equally important to ensure that the grapes have also achieved phenolic ripeness by which the skins have colored nicely and the tannins and other phenolic compounds have matured. But, if you wait too long, you run the risk of heavy rains or frost, both of which can ruin the crop.

For some vineyards, machines can handle much of harvest work, but for many vineyards such as those planted on steep terraces or producing wines from whole (as opposed to crushed) grapes, hand-harvesting is required. This back-breaking work takes skill and care to avoid damaging the fragile grapes.

Once the grapes have been picked, the bins will generally be loaded onto trucks and hauled back to the winery to begin the winemaking process. The vehicles will keep on truckin' back and forth to retrieve the next batches until they all have arrived safely at the winery, ready to be made into great wine.

Drink wisely and well,
Tracy Ellen Kamens, Ed.D., CSW
CEO: Chief Education Officer

and

Jared Michael Skolnick
COO: Cork Opening Officer

Tasting Notes



Bedell Cellars, Main Road Red, NV, North Fork of Long Island, New York, USA, \$10.00

For its entry-level wine, Bedell pays homage to the red, 1951 Ford pick-up, which helped Kip Bedell plant his initial 50 acres with “the vines that grew to produce Main Road Red.” This red table wine is blended from Merlot, Cabernet Franc, Cabernet Sauvignon and Petite Verdot grapes. With aromas of cherry, some oak, a hint of vanilla and a faint herbal note, the wine provides flavors of sour cherry and blackberry, along with a bit of oak and herbal character.



Bedell Cellars, Main Road White, NV, North Fork of Long Island, New York, USA, \$13.50

A companion wine to the one above, this entrant is white, made from blend of Chardonnay, Riesling and Gewürztraminer. On the nose, one is greeted with tropical fruit and floral aromas, which carry through to the palate, accompanied by flavors of lime and wet stone. The wine has a long finish and is ready to drink.



Cline Cellars, Red Truck Red, 2004, Sonoma Coast, California, USA, \$12.00

As they state on their website, red truck “makes you feel good – just like that old red truck your granddad had... reliable, well-crafted [and] full of life.” Made from a blend of Syrah, Petite Sirah and Cabernet Franc, the red offering in Cline Cellars’ truck-labeled wines has aromas of blackberry and plum, with a slight vegetal note. Similar fruit flavors persist on the palate, along with notes of cedar.



Cline Cellars, Red Truck White, 2003, Sonoma Coast, California, USA, \$12.00

The white submission in Cline Cellars’ truck-labeled wines is a blend of Sauvignon Blanc, Viognier, Rousanne and Marsanne. These grapes are quite aromatic, providing aromas of apple, citrus and apricot. The latter three are more frequently known for their use in Northern Rhone (France) blends. Flavors of tart/green apple, lime and vanilla are found on the palate.



Green Truck Cellars, Pinot Noir, 2004, Napa, California, USA, \$33.99

Proprietor and winemaker Kent Fortner inherited the eponymous green truck, a 1966 Ford, from his grandfather, a former Kansas farmer. The [story](#) about how his grandparents met is truly touching; I dare you not to cry. The wine itself is a lovely array of berry, herbal (cut grass), earthy (leather) and floral aromas. With medium-high acidity, it shows bright, juicy raspberry flavors, accompanied by green pepper, wet stone, violets and a faint spicy note in the finish, with long length.

NB: Green Truck Cellars is still in production, but has been renamed Road 38.

In celebration of our new partnership with Accademia di Vino, we are getting excited about Italian wines. As announced previously, Tracy will lead a series of Italian wine classes at this newly opened restaurant. Classes begin October 16, with the first session focused on the treasures of Piedmont. We hope you share in our excitement and, in an attempt to whet your appetite, are delighted to share a brief overview of Piedmont with you this month. The full Exploring Italian Wine schedule is on our website.

Grand Cru Grapevine

October 2007

Perusing Piedmont

Italy's Piedmont region lies to the Northwest of the country and is home to some of the most highly-regarded Italian wines. This is truffle territory -- *think mushrooms/fungi, not chocolate* – and home to other specialties such as carne cruda (raw meat with lemon and oil) and hazelnuts. With nearly 130,000 acres (~53,000 hectares) under vine, the region ranks 6th among Italy's 20 wine regions, but is the 2nd largest source of high quality Italian wines. Reds rule, leading with 70% of wine production, compared to 30% white wines. To the uninitiated, none of these wines will be familiar as the red and white grapes both center on indigenous varieties and wine names include grapes, places or both. However, an introduction to these wonderful wines is worth the effort.

The primary white wines include Gavi di Gavi, produced from the Cortese grape, with steely, sharp acidity and nearly bone dryness. Additionally, the Arneis and Erbaluce grapes are grown, which are also rather acidic. Arneis is considered fruitier of the two, with Erbaluce known for its herbaceousness. However, as the statistics indicate, Piedmont is prized for its red wines. Two easily accessible wines are Barbera and Dolcetto. These are generally fresh, fruity wines, most of which are meant to be drunk young, while we wait patiently for their colleagues to mature. The grape varieties, Barbera and Dolcetto, will be appended to their place of origin, i.e. Barbera d'Asti or Dolcetto d'Alba, indicating the town in which the grapes were grown. Barbera wines tend toward sour cherry fruit and higher acidity, while Dolcetto leans to soft, plummy notes and is often compared to Beaujolais in style.

The continental climate provides severe winters, but, thanks to a long autumn, the late ripening Nebbiolo can reach full ripeness in the foothills of the Alps. This grape is the star of the show, producing wines with good ageing potential (high tannins), power and perfume. These wines are known as Barbaresco, Barolo and, to a lesser extent, Gattinara and Ghemme. The former two are 100% Nebbiolo, while the latter two can be blended with Bonarda and Vespolina, which soften the wine. All are aged in wood, with various minimum requirements. Dropping slightly in the wine hierarchy, Nebbiolo wines produced from grapes grown throughout a wider demarcated area are labeled as Langhe DOC.

Beyond the still wines, Piedmont also delivers several sparkling treasures, with Moscato (white) and Brachetto (red) most frequently used. Moscato d'Asti is a lightly sparkling wine (*aka frizzante*) with only one atmosphere of pressure (by way of comparison, Champagnes and other fully sparkling wines have 6 atmospheres of pressure), a low alcohol content and is lightly sweet. Brachetto d'Acqui is fully sparkling, deep pink and similarly low in alcohol. Both are made with perceptible residual sugar remaining after fermentation and are a good accompaniment to lighter desserts. With its wealth of grapes and diversity of wines, you are sure to find a treasure as you peruse the wines of Piedmont.

Drink wisely and well,
Tracy Ellen Kamens, Ed.D., CSW
CEO: Chief Education Officer

and

Jared Michael Skolnick
COO: Cork Opening Officer

Tasting Notes

Neirano, Barolo, 2001, Piedmont, Italy, \$21.00

This ruby red wine showed some salmon highlights and displayed medium intense, developing aromas of strawberry, floral, plum, tea and cinnamon. On the palate, the tannins are medium+ and ripe, joined by medium intense flavors of strawberry, oak, plum, leather and an earthy/herbal note in the finish.

Pira, Barolo, 2001, Piedmont, Italy, \$39.95

Luigi Pira, now deceased, was highly regarded as one of the great Barolo producers. Although similar to the one above, this wine has greater intensity of aromas and flavors. On the nose, aromas of violet/floral, meatiness, mushrooms and dried strawberries lingered. The palate showed brighter fruit, but echoed notes of strawberry, cherry, earth, mushrooms and dried flowers. The length was long.

Bruno Giacosa, Dolcetto d'Alba, 2006, Piedmont, Italy, \$19.95

Bruno Giacosa, another well-known Barolo producer, takes equally careful effort in crafting his other red wines. Hailing from the town of Alba, this Dolcetto has a youthful nose with aromas of cherry, vanilla and plum. The palate provides flavors of plum, spice and color and a medium+ length.

La Merlina, Gavi di Gavi, 2006, Piedmont, Italy, \$12.99

The aromas included sweet blossom, apple and pear, which shifted on the palate, giving way to more acidic fruit – lemon and white grapefruit – with a hint of minerality in the finish. The flavors lingered for relatively long.

Funtanin, Roero Arneis, 2006, Piedmont, Italy, \$9.99

This pale, white wine has a clean nose with light and youthful aromas of white flowers, almonds and faint notes of citrus. On the palate, it has high acidity, light body and medium-intense flavors of lemon, lime, stone and floral.

In 1492, Columbus sailed the ocean blue. As you may recall, Christopher Columbus sailed for Spain in search of a water-based route to India to purchase spices. Equipped with the Nina, the Pinta and the Santa Maria, Columbus set off to the west in the belief that the Earth was actually round, not flat as was the commonly-held belief at the time. Of course, he didn't find a spice route, rather, he found the Americas and the rest, as they say, is history. For some, his history means a day off from work this month, but for most of us, it is simply a good excuse to open up a bottle of Spanish wine and drink a toast to Columbus.

Grand Cru Grapevine

October 2008

Spanish Acquisition

While France and Italy generally grab the spotlight for their wines, there are actually more vines planted in Spain than anywhere else on earth (admittedly, many of those grapes are distilled into brandy). For years, Spanish wines were marred by decrepit cellars and less than clean winemaking practices (i.e. in some regions, the same presses used for making wine were also used to produce olive oil). Now, modern winemaking and new facilities are the norm, rather than the exception, and some exciting wines are coming out of Spain from both standby and up-and-coming areas.

Like the majority of European wine countries, Spain adheres to an appellation system. Its main wine regions are denoted by Denominación de Origen or Designation of Origin (DO) with higher quality regions classified as Denominación de Origen Calificada (DOCa). Table wines are labeled as Vinos de Mesas, while regional wines are Vinos de la Tierra (VdIT). Other terms to know include Joven, Crianza, Reserva, and Gran Reserva, which legally indicate the minimum level of oak and bottle age a wine has seen, with Joven wines being the youngest and least oak influenced.

Among the most well-known wines from Spain is Rioja DOCa, which hails from the north-central region by the same name, with climatic influences from both the Atlantic Ocean and Mediterranean Sea. This position puts the area in close proximity to France's Bordeaux region and, not surprisingly, there are several similarities in the wines produced. In fact, when French winemakers fled France during the phylloxera epidemic, many of them found work in Rioja. Specifically, like Bordeaux, Rioja is produced from a blend of grapes. In Rioja's case with its red wines, the key ingredient is Tempranillo. This late-ripening grape provides strawberry, leather and blackberry aromas and flavors, which is joined by Garnacha (aka Grenache when running around France), Mazuelo and Graciano. These wines are typically aged longer than in other regions within Spain and generally have some oak influence. The region also produces white wines from the Viura, Malvasia and Garnacha Blanc grapes, which were traditionally aged in American oak, but are now produced in stainless steel vats and bottled young.

Adjacent to Rioja is the Navarra DO, which produces wines that are similar in style, but are usually found at a lower price point. In addition to its modern Chardonnays, Navarra is also highly regarded for its light, fresh and fruity rosés. These dry wines are generally deep salmon in color and pair well with food throughout the year and thus, should not be solely relegated to warmer weather.

Moving east to the coast, we find the Catalunya area of Spain, with standout region, Priorat DOCa. In Priorat, the Garnacha and Cariñena (aka Carignan) grapes shine. The arid, terraced vineyards sit high in the mountains on tiger-striped, volcanic soils, known as *llicorella*, which is a reddish slate with mica that reflects the heat up onto the vines. The harsh environment puts stress on the low-yielding old-vines, resulting in massive bramble fruit and highly tannic wines that are built for the long-term, capable of aging for decades. Less expensive wines from Catalunya include DOs: Costers del Segre, Tarragona and Catalunya, where Tempranillo, Garnacha, Cariñena and Cabernet Sauvignon are grown for red wines, while Parelada, Chardonnay and Macabeo produce white wines.

On the Western coast, one finds the area of Galicia, with its damp, cool climate and lush greenery, which resembles Ireland more than the typical image of Spain. Here, just south of Portugal, the Albariño grape produces white wines with high acidity in Rias Baixas that are frequently found to have herbal/sage aromas accompanying those of citrus fruit and minerality.

South of Rioja, Castilla y León is on the rise, with 9 DOs, three of which are new. It now represents the largest region, accounting for 1/5 of Spain's land area. It is a region of great diversity, with a wide range of indigenous grapes, wine types and ageing regimens. Most DOs feature great value. In Rueda DO, the first DO in this region, wines produced from Verdejo make elegant, aromatic whites, with Sauvignon Blanc and Viura also grown here. Elsewhere in Castilla y León, Tempranillo reigns, finding its way into wines from Cigales DO, Toro DO and Ribera del Duero DO, the latter of which was put on the map by famed wine Vega Sicilia from noted winemaker Miguel Torres.

With its wealth of wines and wide diversity, it is easy to find a Spanish wine you will like. And, with many of them priced to provide great value for their quality, a Spanish acquisition should be an easy decision.

Drink wisely and well,
Tracy Ellen Kamens, Ed.D., CSW
CEO: Chief Education Officer
and
Jared Michael Skolnick
COO: Cork Opening Officer

Tasting Notes

Artazu Artazuri, Garnacha, 2006, Navarra, Spain, \$12.00

This red wine is produced from 100% old-vine Garnacha grapes (~ 60 years old). It has fruity aromas of black cherry and black berry along with slight herbal notes. It has medium+ acidity, with cherry, berry and herbal flavors, as well as a slight spice and dusty note in its finish.

Pazo de Barrantes, Albariño, 2004, Rias Baixas, Spain, \$18.00

While the winery itself was not founded until 1991, the Pazo (palace) de Barrantes was built in the sixteenth century. With youthful aromas of green wood and slight citrus notes, this white wine displays high acidity with medium-intense flavors of lemon/lime, minerality and slate on the palate. It has a medium+ length.

Bodegas Roda, Roda I Reserva, 2002, Rioja, Spain, \$39.00

From one of the newer Rioja producers (it was established in 1987), this wine features developing aromas of earth, spice and berries on the nose. The medium-bodied, red wine was produced from 100% Tempranillo from vines averaging a minimum of 30 years old. Its flavors of strawberry, leather, earth, pepper and spice show beautiful age and balance, coupled with its long length on the palate. As a Reserva wine, it was aged in French oak (50% new, 50% one year old) for 16 months, followed by an additional 20 months ageing in bottle, before its release.

Blanco Nieva, Sauvignon Blanc, 2007, Rueda, \$14.00

On the nose, the wine shows aromas of citrus, cut hay, and some tropical fruit notes. On the palate, its vibrant acidity is nicely balanced with lemon, pith, and slightly herbal flavors.

Mas Perinet, Priorat, 2003, Priorat, Spain, \$35.00

A deep, rich wine, it has aromas of plum, spice, cedar and floral, showing some development. Its supple tannins and pronounced flavors of black cherry, plum, vanilla, cedar and spice with menthol and minerality result in a balanced wine with long length. However, it needs some more time to soften the tannins further and to integrate the flavors more fully.

NOVEMBER

After a full meal of turkey, stuffing, cranberry sauce and everything else that makes up our holiday table traditions, we don't really need to eat another bite. But, sooner or later, most of us crave something sweet to end our meal. This year, instead of being seduced by the siren call of those perennial favorites – apple and pumpkin pies – perhaps a liquid dessert might be more refreshing. Dessert wines offer a lovely way to sip away the evening and provide a range of options from which to choose. This month, we share an overview on some of the different styles and methods of production of dessert wines, all of which offer a pleasant end to a delicious meal. Just another thing for which to be thankful when you gather with family and friends!

On a personal note, we are delighted to announce that our Chief Education Officer, Tracy, has successfully earned her Advanced Certificate in Wines and Spirits, with distinction, from the Wine & Spirit Education Trust.

Grand Cru Grapevine

November 2005

Dessert in a Glass

Building from the general principles of wine making in which wine is made from the partial or full fermentation of grapes through the conversion of sugar (in the grapes) along with yeast, into alcohol and carbon dioxide, several possibilities exist in producing a sweet wine. As grapes ripen, their sugar content rises and acid levels fall. The longer they stay on the vine, the higher the sugar content. During the fermentation process, the winemaker can choose to let all the sugar convert into alcohol, producing a dry wine or they can prematurely stop the process, leaving some residual sugar and thereby producing a sweet wine. If the grapes are extremely high in sugar, the fermentation process may halt naturally, as the yeast work too hard to convert all of the sugar and die off. Among sweet style wines, the consumer will find late harvest, ice, fortified and botrytized wines, which are described in more detail below.

Late Harvest wines

As grapes spend the summer on the vine, they continue to grow and ripen, with sugar levels rising steadily. The longer harvest is delayed, the riper the grapes become and the higher the sugar levels build up inside. With so much sugar present, the yeast will die off before it can convert all of the sugar into alcohol, again leaving a fair amount of residual sugar and thus sweetness. Late harvest wines are typically picked several weeks later than the usual harvest, leaving the grapes more susceptible to possible rot or ruin.

Ice wines

Hanging on the vine even longer than grapes selected for late harvest wines, grapes for true ice wines remain through the frost, with even greater risk for damage to the fruit. (Some commercial producers freeze their fruit off the vine as opposed to letting it happen naturally.) When successful, the frosty temperatures freeze the water in the grapes, thereby concentrating the sugar and fruit to create rich, sweet wines. The best ice wines come from Canada, upstate New York and Germany (*eiswein*).

Fortified wines

Fortified wines are those to which a neutral grape spirit is added. If the spirit is added to the wine before the fermentation process has been completed, the yeast are killed off and the resulting wine will be sweet due to the high level of sugar remaining (that which wasn't converted into alcohol). The most well-known sweet, fortified wines are Ports and Sherries. The terms Port and Sherry are geographically specific, so truthfully, only wines from the Douro in Portugal and Jerez in Spain qualify to be labeled as such, respectively. However, in the U.S., it is legal to use these terms on American wines (as long as they are not exported to the E.U.) and you will find several "ports" on the North Fork, not including the Village of Greenport.

Botrytized wines

The vineyard has many pests that can wreak havoc on the vines from viral disease and insects to mildew and birds. Among these potential enemies, *botrytis cinera* can use its power for good or evil. Its evil infestation is known as grey rot and it will ruin the grapes and render them unusable. However, when this mold is facilitated by misty mornings followed by warmth and sunshine later in the day, it is transformed into noble rot. The mold forms on the grapes and working its magic, shrivels the grapes until they resemble raisins, thereby concentrating the fruit and sugar, yielding very concentrated, sweet wines. Conditions for noble rot are ideal in certain areas of the Bordeaux region of France, on which Sauternes has built its reputation. Botrytized wines can also be found in Austria, Germany and Australia.

Drink wisely and well,
Tracy Ellen Kamens, Ed.D., CSW
CEO: Chief Education Officer
and
Jared Michael Skolnick
COO: Cork Opening Officer

Tasting Notes

Late Harvest Riesling, Bedell Cellars, 2003, North Fork, USA, \$39.00

This wine is a blend of 88% Riesling and 12% Gewürztraminer whose deep golden color sets the stage for aromas of honey, dried oranges and dried apricots. The wine has a viscous weight on the tongue which delivers luscious flavors of honey, peach and tropical fruit. Despite its intense sweetness, the wine is sufficiently acidic to avoid being flabby and it has a nice, medium length finish.

Ice Wine, Selaks, 2004, Marlborough, New Zealand, \$16.99 (375 ml)

Another Riesling and Gewürztraminer blend, this deep gold wine presents dried fruit aromas of fig along with honeysuckle and nutmeg. On the palate, it is medium-dry with flavors characteristics of dried fig and apricot, honey and nutmeg.

Blueberry Port, Duck Walk, 2004, Southampton, New York, USA, \$16.95 (375 ml)

A twist on a traditional port, this wine has been flavored with fresh blueberries from Maine. Not surprisingly, the nose offers intense blueberry fruit, which is echoed on the palate. While this sweet wine works well on its own, it pairs especially well with dark chocolate, adding even more decadence to your dessert.

Sauternes, Castelnau de Suduiraut, 2002, Sauternes, France, \$17.99 (375 ml)

Within the Bordeaux region, Sauternes is a small area south of the Garonne River known for its sweet, botrytized wines. Conditions in Sauternes are such that noble rot occurs with relative consistency. On the nose, this wine exudes apricot and honey with a faint floral note (possibly Hawthorne or Acacia). The intense apricot and honey flavors are continued on the palate along with nutmeg and almonds. This wine can be enjoyed now, but has the potential to develop even more complexity with time. Castelnau de Suduiraut is the second wine of Chateau Suduiraut, a premier grand cru classé (first classified great growth) producer.

With harvest behind us, Turkey Day looms large, bringing forth a bountiful array of food to our tables. As you carve the big bird this year, you may wonder what wines to serve with the fowl, for which we provide an array of suggestions that should appeal to the majority of your dinner guests.

This year, Grand Cru Classes has much to be thankful for. We are particularly thankful to the wineries that hosted the homeless Grand Cru Classes in its first season of operation. Specifically, we are grateful to: Bedell Cellars, Castello di Borghese, Duck Walk, Lenz Winery, Martha Clara Vineyards, Palmer Vineyards, Pindar Vineyards and Vineyard 48 for their generosity and gracious hospitality.

On a related note, we are also thankful for our architect and contractor who have helped us transform the former Catapano cheese-making facility into a state-of-the-art tasting classroom. We hope to complete the renovations over the next few months and look forward to hosting an open house early this spring.

Finally, we would be remiss if we did not also note our appreciation to importers Frederick Wildman & Sons and Palm Bay Imports, along with producers Ferngrove (Australian Shiraz), JLohr (California Chardonnay), Red Bicycleette (French rose), Rodney Strong (California Pinot Noir) for their generous donation of wine for the seminar we presented at the NY Wine & Food Expo last month. The latter two were especially helpful in providing wine at the last minute, when some of the other bottles hadn't been found.

Grand Cru Grapevine

November 2006

For the Birds

When it comes to food and wine pairing, even the most intelligent people can find themselves in a panic. They are concerned that there is one right (and many wrong) choice(s) of wine to serve with their selected menu. Not to worry, such pairings are not so black and white. Moreover, the key principal is to drink what you like. However, some wines can more easily complement your fare if a few food-wine pairing principles are kept in mind.

Sparkling wine is always a good option as it is among the most versatile of wines with respect to food matches. It also lends an air of festivity to the occasion and can be served before or at the beginning of the meal as an aperitif as well as to make a nice toast. With a big crowd expected, this is probably not the time to pour a vintage Champagne. However, sparkling wines from Italy and Spain, specifically Prosecco and Cava, can provide a nice alternative with a reasonable list price as can those from French regions other than Champagne (i.e. Loire, Bourgogne and Limoux).

If you are serving soup, you can match the wine to the soup's texture. A broth-style soup might pair nicely with a lighter wine, while the heavier mouth feel of a cream soup would be counterbalanced by a fuller-bodied one. Here again, sparkling wine can work well, refreshing the palate between spoonfuls of soup. Another possible approach might be a Riesling such as the one listed below. The slightly off-dry character of the wine will also work well with sweeter side dishes (i.e. candied yams), while the spicy note to the wine can balance spicier dishes.

The traditional Thanksgiving feast is replete with turkey, stuffing, cranberries, yams and other assorted casseroles and side dishes. As turkey is a hearty poultry, it can be paired with a fuller-bodied white such as Chardonnay (discussed at great length in our September newsletter) or a lighter-bodied red like Beaujolais or Pinot Noir. Pinot Noir, which has gained more notoriety of late, is food-friendly, with its subtle and gentle aromas and flavors that won't compete with your meal. Beaujolais will generally be

more fruit-driven in comparison to Pinots, which provide notes of raspberry and violet, often set off with varying levels of earthiness.

Pinot Noirs hailing from the New World, notably New Zealand, Oregon and California (especially the Russian River Valley), are easy to recognize. As long as the wine is made from a minimum of 75% Pinot Noir grapes, they will generally be labeled as such. However, some of the world's greatest Pinot Noir wines go incognito to the uninitiated. Burgundy, France is the heartland of Pinot Noir, but French (and for that matter EU) law doesn't permit the producer to include the grape variety on the label. Instead, with a greater emphasis on terroir, wines are labeled by region. Grapes from wider areas and/or lesser vineyards will be labeled by the village from where they were grown, while grapes from the best vineyards (those rated as Grand Cru), will simply include the name of the vineyard. In between, the Premier Cru vineyards will have the village name preceded by the vineyard name and often include "Premier Cru" on the label. These vineyards are better than non-rated vineyards, but are not as excellent as Grand Cru wines. However, the price for enjoying such quality is evident in the bottle price. Village level Red Burgundian wines can provide good value and will range in price from \$12.00 to \$45.00 a bottle, dependent upon the lineage of the grapes.

Falling somewhere in the middle, a dry, fuller-bodied rosé could equally serve you well. While we've discussed rosés in the past, many people immediately associate pink wines with summer. Certainly, these wines are a wonderful accompaniment to nearly any picnic or summer dinner, especially when served chilled on a hot summer's day. But, rosés are also very food friendly wines and can come off the shelves at times other than summer.

Unless they are your absolute favorites and you can't live without them, you may find that Cabernet Sauvignon and Shiraz are fowl-weathered friends, being too tannic and heavy for turkey. These are wines that generally cry out for the protein in beef. So, if your menu is less traditional and features red meat, proceed accordingly.

We hope you all have much to be thankful for and wish you all the best at the start of the holiday season.

Drink wisely and well,
Tracy Ellen Kamens, Ed.D., CSW
CEO: Chief Education Officer

and

Jared Michael Skolnick
COO: Cork Opening Officer

Tasting Notes

Saint-Hilaire, Blanquette di Limoux, 2003, Languedoc, France, \$9.79

Hailing from the southwest of France, this inexpensive sparkling wine is produced by the traditional method used in Champagne, but from the Mauzac grape. This wine shows some development on the nose with a bready character, along with the fresh fruit aromas of apple and pear. It has medium-high acidity and some creaminess to the texture. The apple and pear notes are also found on the palate.

Vineyard 48, Riesling, 2005, North Fork of Long Island, USA, \$16.99

This wine provides apricot, floral and light herbal notes on the nose. As a product of the hot and dry summer of 2005, the sugar content of the grapes was particularly high, which may be partly responsible for the wine being off-dry instead of dry. This slight sweetness emphasizes the fruit character of apricot, peach and tangerine.

Channing Daughters, Rosato Cabernet Sauvignon, 2005, North Fork of Long Island, USA, \$17.00

As we reported in May, Channing Daughters produced not one, but three rosé wines in 2005, each one from a different varietal and a specifically designated vineyard. The Cabernet Sauvignon grapes were harvested from the Mudd Vineyard in Southold and resulted in bright red fruit aromas of raspberry and strawberry with a slight woody or herbal note in the background. On the palate, this wine explodes with

the same fresh fruit flavors with notes of herbal and spice, all of which are well balanced with medium-high acidity.

Louis Jadot, Bourgogne, 2004, Burgundy, France, \$15.99

This regional, red Burgundy (Pinot Noir) is made from grapes purchased from throughout the Burgundy region and thus is less specific than the Village wines discussed above, but with the well-respected négociant, Louis Jadot, on the label, basic quality can be practically assured. On the nose, it has aromas of raspberry, violet and a hint of woodiness or spice. On the palate, it has medium-high acidity with low tannins. The fruit flavors include cherry and strawberry, while a woody/bark lurks underneath, providing a slight bitter note to the finish.

Beringer, Stanley Ranch Pinot Noir, 2003, Napa Valley, USA, \$35.00

This wine is produced from grapes grown in the Carneros district of the Napa Valley, which is cooler than Napa's more northern districts due to wind currents from the San Francisco Bay and Pacific Ocean, and thus, is more suitable for Pinot Noir, which doesn't do well in the heat. The youthful nose bursts with raspberry, pine, nutmeg and cloves. Fruit flavors persist on the palate with notes of sour cherry and raspberry, along with chocolate and clove.

With three of the Accademia di Vino classes behind us, we are pleased to announce that the partnership has been a success. Thank you to those readers whom have joined us for one or more of these adventures into Italian wines. We still have a few seats left in our Italian Sparkling Wines class (November 27).

For some of you, Italy is not only a great country; it is also your heritage. Others may hail from any number of other places in the world from Azerbaijan to Zimbabwe. But, regardless of our place of origin, for most Americans, this time of year brings Thanksgiving and a time to reflect. This month, we connect our literal and figurative roots to Europe.

As Thanksgiving comes and goes, the holiday season and gift giving is just ahead. Thus, we'd like to remind you that *Grand Cru Classes* gift certificates are available and can make a wonderful option for someone on your list or perhaps you might like to host a private wine event for friends, family or clients. Beyond classes, we are working on developing Grand Cru Classes' merchandise and hope to formally launch these products in early 2008. In the meantime, we are offering custom-designed wine charms (please contact us if you are interested in placing an order). And, of course, wine itself always makes a great gift.

Grand Cru Grapevine

November 2007

Tracing Our Roots

As we recall the origins of the Thanksgiving holiday, we consider the arrival of the Puritans on the Massachusetts shore, as they fled from religious oppression in Europe. In Plymouth Rock, they made their new home, tilling the soil and planting grain and vegetables. With the generosity and assistance of the Native Americans, they were able to enjoy a bountiful harvest as the late autumn gave way to winter.

Most Americans celebrate Thanksgiving each year, with the majority of us perhaps connecting our own heritage to arrival on American shores from distant or not so distant lands. As we trace our roots, there are other, more literal roots, which also hearken back to Europe and connect our viticulture tradition with theirs.

When our colonial ancestors came to America, they sought to plant vines and produce wine as they had at home. Before the age of water purification and sewage systems, wine and other alcoholic beverages were much safer than water. Finding indigenous grapes upon their arrival, they worked to tame these vines and make wine. However, the American vines belong to a different species of vine than what they were used to. They found that the American vines, *vitis labrusca*, produced "foxy" wines that lacked the elegance and complexity of the European vines. Consequently, the European vine species, *vitis vinifera*, was soon planted in its place. These grape varieties, such as Chardonnay, Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon, are the grapes with which we are familiar today.

Yet interest in the American vines remained. In the 1850s, before the advent of strict quarantine laws, people could bring horticulture across national boundaries. One such trip was made by an American who brought some American vines to Europe. However, unbeknownst to the traveler, he had a stow-away in his luggage. Shortly after his visit, the vineyards of England started to exhibit signs of disease. These symptoms rapidly spread from vineyard to vineyard, into France and ultimately throughout Europe. Farmers tried flooding their vineyards or spraying, but to no avail.

After years of devastation and loss, the cause of the problem was finally identified. A tiny, little louse called *phylloxera* was responsible for the extensive damage to the great vineyards of Europe. A solution was found shortly thereafter. It was discovered that the American vines, having grown up among *phylloxera* had a natural immunity to the pest, while their European counterparts did not. Consequently, the use of American vines now figure prominently in today's viticulture. The two vines are grafted with the

disease-resistant *vitis labrusca* forming the vine's root system and lower trunk, while the *vitis vinifera* is joined above, providing fruit of the selected variety. Nearly all vines planted worldwide are done so in this manner. Thus, American roots are still firmly planted on our soil and around the world, hearkening us back to our own heritage and our own roots.

Drink wisely and well,
Tracy Ellen Kamens, Ed.D., CSW
CEO: Chief Education Officer
and
Jared Michael Skolnick
COO: Cork Opening Officer

Tasting Notes

This month's wine selections are all very food friendly and should work well with various Thanksgiving menus.

Forstreiter, Gruener Veltliner Tabor, 2005, Kremstal, Austria, \$22.00

Austrian Gruener Veltliner's have crisp acidity and a nice weight to them, two characteristics which work well with food. This white wine has floral and lemon blossom aromas with lime, stone and lemon rind flavors on the palate. The length is quite long.

Harbes Family Vineyard, Chardonnay, 2005, North Fork of Long Island, USA, \$15.00

Long regarded for their farming acumen and wonderful fruit and produce, the Harbes Family has recently entered the wine industry with two offerings – Chardonnay and Merlot. The Chardonnay has medium intense, youthful aromas of melon, guava and some slight oak give way to a heavier display of oak on the palate, along with notes of melon, vanilla and spice.

Tobin James, Syrah Rosé Paradise, 2005, Paso Robles, CA, USA, \$16.00

This deeply colored, rosé wine looks more like a light red than a rosé, but still has the freshness one would expect from such a wine. Aromas of strawberry, herbal and floral notes greet the nose, while ripe fruit flavors of strawberry and raspberry fill the palate, making this wine immensely food friendly and a perfect foil for fowl.

Paraiso, Pinot Noir "Estate", 2005, Santa Lucia Highlands, CA, USA, \$25.00

The Santa Lucia Highlands area is found within Monterey County, CA and is recognized for producing some of California's best Pinot Noirs with its cool climate and rocky terrain. Paraiso's "Estate" bottling has typical Pinot aromas of floral, raspberry and damp earth. On the palate, bright acidity is balanced with ripe fruit flavors of cherry, red berries and wet stone. The tannins are ripe and the length is long.

Taurino, Salice Salentino Riserva, 2001, Puglia, Italy, \$10.99

Southern Italy is in the midst of a renaissance as its focus shifts from quantity to quality. The Salice Salentino DOC produces wines from the indigenous Negroamaro grape, which translates as "black bitter." With developing aromas of vanilla, floral, anise and red fruits, this red wine has flavors of strawberry, raspberry, oak, licorice and chocolate.

We are thrilled to announce that Tracy has successfully completed the Society of Wine Educators' Certified Wine Educator (CWE) credential, recognizing her wine knowledge and tasting skills!

On the heels of this achievement, we attended the Wine Bloggers' Conference in Sonoma, CA, where we had a chance to enjoy locally-farmed produce and many of the region's wonderful wines (Please see [Tracy's Sonoma Travelogue](#) and [Jared's trip summary post](#) for accounts of this adventure). Both here and in California, it's the height of harvest season, which means that Thanksgiving is around the corner. A time to give thanks for what we have as well as to count our blessings, it is a good opportunity to look past the current economic situation and take stock of the important things in life – family, good friends and great wine! In this vein, we explore the myriad of options available to consumers who wish to pair charitable giving with their wine purchases by buying wines that support worthwhile endeavors.

Among our new endeavors, *Grand Cru Classes* is partnering with Maven Events. If you plan to celebrate the season or other big event with a festive affair, let Maven Events help you find the perfect venue, caterer, music, etc. Expertly led by Jes Parker, Maven Events is your one-stop shop for event planning. Jes also offers venue consulting services for food and beverage packaging; marketing and advertising planning; and PMS programming. For more information, please visit the [Maven Events blog](#) or its corporate site at: www.MavenEvents.com. Of course, you can work with *Grand Cru Classes* to include a wine class, tasting or other wine theme at your party, making it even more fun.

And for additional great holiday ideas, don't forget to check out our beautiful [selection of Gattorna wine accessories](#), perfect for the gift-giving season!

Grand Cru Grapevine

November 2008

Doing Well by Doing Good

If my mother is reading this, she may be concerned that she is about to be in for a grammar lesson, but adverbs and adjectives aside, this month we look at wines whose profits serve those in need. As Thanksgiving and the holiday season roll around, it is a perfect time to remember those less fortunate than ourselves. Accordingly, we thought that bringing the joys of wine together with the joy of charitable giving would be an even nicer way to get into the holiday spirit. Buy these and other wines in good conscience, knowing that you are helping to support the cause or causes that are near and dear to your heart.

Wine importer, Vin Lozano Imports, has launched a philanthropic division, Charity Wines, which partners with superstar athletes, celebrities and other high profile people to produce a unique wine brand. Wines produces a perfectly matched wine for the project in question, with a charitable organization chosen by the celebrity. Roughly 70% of pre-tax profits are donated to the celebrity's charity; the celebrity does not make one penny on the project. Current projects include Arbreu's Finest Merlot from Bobby Abreu, which is produced with Merlot grapes from San Martin, CA and benefits the Police Athletic League, the official youth agency of the New York Police Department. From athlete Brian Schneider, the "Schneider Schardonnay" supports Brian Schneider's Catching For Kids Foundation, which was established to support children and their participation in sports by providing funding and creative programming.

Not surprisingly, a number of wines focus on raising money and awareness for cancer. Breast cancer seems to be particularly popular, with projects in this arena including Pink Ribbon Wines (see tasting note below), Victories Rosé and Cleavage Creek. From Napa Valley winery owner and activist, Budge Brown,

comes Cleavage Creek, created in the wake of his wife's death. The wines honor cancer survivors by picturing these courageous women, including Carson Daly's mom, showing off their décolletage on its labels with their stories told on the company's website. Each year, a new set of models is chosen for each of the eight varietal wines on offer, all produced from grapes grown in Budge Brown's own vineyards. Ten percent of the gross proceeds of all wine sales will be donated to breast cancer research. Olympic medalist and skater Peggy Fleming was diagnosed with breast cancer in 1998. A year later, she and husband Dr. Greg Jenkins planted a vineyard in the Santa Cruz Mountains and began making wine a few years later. Their Victories Rosé wine was created specifically to raise funds for breast cancer research and awareness, with two dollars from every bottle sold donated to charities supporting the cause. In addition to The Lombardi Comprehensive Cancer Center at Georgetown University and The V Foundation for Cancer Research, sales support local organizations including the Community Health Breast Project and the VMC Foundation at Santa Clara Valley Medical Center for the Sobrato Cancer Center. The current release is their 2007 vintage, which is produced from 100% Syrah and is available on their website for \$20.00.

Supporting dog and other animal causes is also popular among wine producers. On a local level, the Dog and Cat Lover's Wine Club benefits the Animal Protective Association of Missouri (APA), with wines sporting either dog or cat labels, including the humorous Puppy P-No (an Italian Pinot Grigio) or the Kitty Cat-bernet (Cabernet Sauvignon). Providing a broader base of support, the Dog Lovers' Wine Club helps to sustain the Humane Society of the United States. As a California boutique winery, Dog Lovers Wine Club's wines sport colorful labels depicting dogs, some of which are limited edition art. You can also customize your own labels by sending them digital photos of your pup or other pet. Monthly, bimonthly and quarterly memberships are available, with the wine shipped to the recipient's home. They even offer the opportunity to sign up to host a "Yappy Hour Wine Tasting," which includes a sample of limited production wine for you and your friends to taste.

Staying with animal causes, but moving beyond the typical pet, Sherry Lehmann's Bald Eagle selections provide funding to The Audubon Society of New York, which helps protect endangered species such as the Bald Eagle. The selections include a Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon and Chardonnay, all from California at a price of \$8.50 per bottle. A "Save the Eagle" sampler of 12 bottles (4 of each variety) is also available. As an unusual approach to charitable wines, Napa Valley's Juslyn Winery produces a blended wine from Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Cabernet Franc known as "Rescue" with 100% of the proceeds benefiting the Golden Triangle Elephant Foundation. This organization rescues elephants that have been abandoned in city environments and brings them back to a safe, jungle habitat. Owners Carolyn and Perry Butler were inspired to create this wine after seeing an elephant caught in Bangkok city traffic during a visit to the Four Seasons Tented Camp in Thailand. Among charitable wines, it is a more expensive option with the wine available as either a magnum (1.5 L) for \$225, three 750 ml bottles for \$250 or a double magnum (3.0 L) for \$495. Carolyn Butler also commissioned a Manolo Blahnik pump to support the cause, available for \$645/pair.

Helping a wide variety of causes, the newly launched Hope Wine donates 50% of its proceeds to charities such as Breast Cancer (Chardonnay), Autism (Cabernet Sauvignon), AIDS (Merlot), The Troops (Zinfandel), and The Planet (Savignon Blanc). With this range, there should be something for everyone. With a similarly altruistic focus, Newman's Own, founded by the late actor Paul Newman, has entered the wine market with a Chardonnay, sourced from coastal vineyards, and a Cabernet Sauvignon, from Napa, Sonoma and San Luis Obispo fruit. Both priced at \$16 a bottle, the wines were created in collaboration with Trincherro Family Estates, one of the largest wine producers, and Three Thieves, which represents great winemaking talent from Joel Gott, Charles Bieler and Roger Scommegna. All profits and royalties from the wines after taxes support educational and charitable purposes.

Drink wisely and well,
Tracy Ellen Kamens, Ed.D., DWS, CWE
CEO: Chief Education Officer

and

Jared Michael Skolnick
COO: Cork Opening Officer

Tasting Notes

Pink Ribbon Wines, Chardonnay, 2007, California, USA, \$13.00

The Pink Ribbon Wines line was specifically developed to reach the female wine drinker, while raising funds for breast cancer research, with \$.50 per bottle donated to the Breast Cancer Research Foundation. The available wines include this Chardonnay and a Cabernet Sauvignon, both sourced from California fruit. A relatively typical California Chardonnay, the nose provides apple, butter and oak aromas. On the palate, the wine is dry and full-bodied with notes of apple, citrus, oak and vanilla.

Dancing Bear Cellars Wines, Shea Cuvée, Pinot Noir, 2006, Mendocino, USA, \$20.00

Eric Munson, proprietor of Dancing Bear Cellars, spent his initial career in investment banking. However, on September 11, Eric's two brothers-in-law, Danny and Joe Shea lost their lives in the Towers on that fateful day as employees of Cantor-Fitzgerald. Realizing that life is too short not to pursue your dreams, Eric established Dancing Bear Cellars with 10% of the proceeds from his proprietary-labeled Pinot Noir raising money for the September 11 Memorial Fund in their honor. Showing varietal aromas of raspberry and cherry, this is the fifth bottling of this wine.

Lieb Cellars, September Mission Merlot, 2006, North Fork of Long Island, USA, \$9.11

This limited production wine is also dedicated to honoring the memory of those lost on September 11, 2001 with 91.1 cents of each bottle donated to the September's Mission Foundation, which provides educational and cultural programs to remember the victims of 9/11 and to fund the 9/11 Living Memorial Project. (www.septembersmission.org). The wine has aromas and flavors of dark fruits, vanilla, smoke and white pepper.

Lieb Cellars, Syrah, 2005, North Fork of Long Island, USA, \$26.00

Lieb General Manager, Gary Madden's beloved dog, Petit Syrah, succumbed to kidney disease in 2007. Featuring the dog on the label, this wine honors his memory with 20% of the profits benefiting the non-profit Animal Medical Center in NYC for research and treatment of kidney disease in animals. The wine is a blend of 76% Syrah and 24% Merlot, produced in a cool climate Syrah style, aromas of black cherry, cedar, spice and charcoal. Its flavors include black cherry, oak/cedar, plum and spice which persist nicely through the wine's medium+ length.

Mike Weir, Vidal Blanc Ice Wine, 2006, VQA Niagara, Canada, \$60.00 (375 ml)

From the world of sports, golfer Mike Weir is producing a full range of wines from Canada, with the net proceeds benefitting the Mike Weir Foundation, dedicated to helping children in need. His Vidal Blanc ice wine is produced from grapes that have frozen on the vine and become concentrated with the reduction in water content. The wine displays youthful aromas of honey, pear and a slight spice note. This is a beautiful dessert wine with a medium-sweet palate nicely balanced with acidity and providing flavors of apricot, honey and citrus peel with long length.

DECEMBER

The first week of December brought the first winter snow as well as the closing on our new property in Mattituck. In addition to serving as our weekend home, we hope to use the property as home base for our Grand Cru classes, set to begin in late spring. We'll be spending the early months of 2006 renovating and preparing the classroom to provide you with the best possible environment for tasting and learning about wine. We truly cannot wait to host you in our classroom and share some fabulous sips with you as well! In the meantime, let's all celebrate the season with good cheer and good wine!

Grand Cru Grapevine

December 2005

Cellar-Stocking Stuffers

With the holidays fast approaching, trees are being trimmed and festive décor fills the stores and people's homes. Traditionally, stockings were hung on the mantelpiece, waiting for Santa to fill them with toys and treats. Bad girls and boys would find the dreaded lump of coal, instead, in their stockings. Almost as bad as a lump of coal, or maybe even worse, is an empty wine cellar. Whether you celebrate any or all of the holidays that occur at this time of the year, you may have a wine lover on your gift list. Help him or her (or yourself) fill the cellar with wonderful wines to share now or stock up for the future. The wines featured in this month's newsletter are more expensive than those we usually feature, but in the spirit of gift giving, we felt a more generous price point was in order.

Drink wisely and well,
Tracy Ellen Kamens, Ed.D., CSW
CEO: Chief Education Officer
and

Jared Michael Skolnick
COO: Cork Opening Officer

Tasting Notes

Schramsberg, J. Schram, 1999, Carneros, USA, \$80.00

Schramsberg vineyard, owned by the Davies family in the Napa Valley was among the first to re-colonize that wine region in the mid 1960s. The winery was catapulted to instant success when President Nixon served the Schramsberg 1969 Blanc de Blancs at his "Toast to Peace" meeting with Premier Chow En-lai in China and it has been poured in the White House by every president since. The J. Schram, made from 75% Chardonnay and 25% Pinot Noir, has a pale, gold color and a small bead necklace of effervescent bubbles. The toasty aroma, from its five years ageing on the lees (spent yeast cells), carries through to the palate with dry, bready and crisp citrus flavors, along with a creamy mousse in the mouth.

Pugliese, Sparkling Merlot, NV, North Fork, USA, \$19.99; \$50.00 for the gift basket

With Merlot as one of the hallmark grapes of Long Island, this wine offers a novel approach to sparkling wines. Made from 100% Merlot grapes, in the traditional method (as used in the Champagne region), the wine offers a richer, fuller body than the usual sparkling wine. This semi-dry wine has an unusual, deep red color. While the wine in and of itself is a lovely treat, it is particularly well-suited for gift giving since it is available in beautiful, hand painted bottles, paired with a set of toasting flutes, painted to match, all wrapped in a well-presented basket.

Wölffer Premier Cru Merlot, 2002, Sagaponack, USA, \$125.00

The Wölffer Estate is among the three Long Island vineyards located on the South Fork (aka the Hamptons). Their wines tend to be classic examples of each varietal. Wölffer has bottled the Premier Cru Merlot, which is presently the most expensive wine in the region. This wine receives high praise from

several wine critics, including Howard Goldberg of the *New York Times*. While certainly worthy of gift giving, our wine budget didn't permit us to taste it for this newsletter, but if someone wants to send us a gift, we'd be delighted to share our notes for an upcoming newsletter...

Louis Jadot, Beaune 1^{er} Cru "Chouacheux", 2002, Côte de Beaune, France, \$31.00

If your recipient has gone *Sideways* and sworn off Merlot (we hope not), send them a bottle of Burgundy. This French red wine is 100% Pinot Noir and is the true expression of this grape. The finer Burgundy wines hail from the districts of Côte de Nuits and Côte de Beaune, which together make up the Côtes d'Or (Golden Coast). Burgundy is also the truest expression of how terroir (climate and soil) can make all of the difference. Unlike other French regions, the awarding of Grand Cru (the highest) or Premier Cru status is specific to the plot of land (not the wine) and adjacent plots can have different designations based upon the quality of the soil. The Beaune Chouacheux is a Premier Cru property and the 2002 vintage was a good year for the Burgundy region. This wine has nice floral and fruity (cherry) notes, with vanilla and mineral undertones. On the palate, it is dry, with high acidity, medium tannins and a light-medium body. The predominant flavors include cherry, vanilla, spice and a slight hint of oak. The long finish has an herbal characteristic to it.

Patz & Hall, Zio Tony Ranch Chardonnay, 2004, Russian River, USA, \$55.00

However, if your wine lover is boycotting France, why not send them this scrumptious Chardonnay from California? Created from a single vineyard, producing low yields of fruit, only 507 cases of the 2004 Zio Tony Ranch Chardonnay were made. This dry, white wine has lovely minerality balancing the zingy fruit flavors of lime, lychee and green apple, with both depth and complexity. Its limited use of oak is more reminiscent of French Chardonnays than California Chardonnays.

Happy Holidays! From Thanksgiving through New Year's Day, this time of year is filled with a festive feel in the air as people prepare for gatherings with family, friends and co-workers. Whatever holiday you do or don't celebrate, it's hard not to get caught up in the excitement of the season. Even the most devout atheist may feel compelled to give in to the holiday spirit and buy a few gifts.

This is also a nice time to remember those less fortunate than ourselves and to give to those in need. Grand Cru Classes will be donating four gift certificates to a future wine class as part of a special Long Island gift package to be raffled off as part of the [Menu of Hope](#) campaign in support of [United Nation's World Food Programme](#), which has been feeding the hungry since 1962.

Grand Cru Grapevine

December 2006

The Gift-Givers' Guide to the Holiday Galaxy

With the gift-giving that usually accompanies the December holidays, you may be in a quandary as to what to give everyone on your list, including the many hosts and hostesses who will be providing you with their hospitality. From the easy to please to the more discriminating palate, a bottle of wine may prove to be the best gift (as long as the recipient is at least 21, of course). And, as you take a respite from a stressful day of shopping, you may wish to treat yourself to a bottle or two as well. Here are some suggestions on what to buy and for whom.

Host/Hostess Gift

Price point: \$15.00

Whether you are heading out to family or friends, it's easy to ensure you don't arrive empty-handed. For well-made wines that won't break the bank, try Merlots and Cabernet Sauvignons from Chile or Malbecs from Argentina. White wine options could include Alsatian Gewurztraminers, Rieslings, Pinot Blancs and Pinot Gris or perhaps a Sauvignon Blanc from New Zealand.

Dog Walker/Cat Sitter

Price point: \$25.00

To thank those who make sure that Fido's been walked or your feline's been fed, you might choose a few bottles to fit the theme. These days, animals abound on wine labels, so you are sure to find something cute and cuddly if you stroll your local wine shop; check the Australia section first.

Wine Lover

Price point: \$50.00

For that someone special, give them a special bottle of wine that they might covet from afar, but wouldn't buy for themselves. Anyone can pull an expensive wine off the shelf, but knowing to look for a great bottle of Burgundy (white or red), vintage port, wines from older vines (vielle vignes) a Priorat from Spain, or a *trockenbeerenauslese*-level wine from Germany or Austria will show you took the time to find something wonderful.

Label Lover

Price point: \$35.00 and up

If your gift recipient is a label-conscious consumer, you'll want to make sure that your selection has sufficient cache in addition to its good taste. Among sparklers, two well-known names include Moet et Chandon's Dom Perignon (~\$130) and Veuve Cliquot Yellow Label (~\$35). Other good bets, depending upon your price point, include Grand Cru vineyards in Burgundy, first-growths in Bordeaux or California cult wines (if you can get your hands on them).

Sweet Tooth

Price point: \$35.00 and up

As discussed in our November 2005 newsletter, there are many different dessert wines out there from late harvest and ice wines to fortified (sheries and ports) and botrytized (i.e. Sauternes and Tokaji Aszu) wines. Dessert wines can be the perfect accompaniment to a dinner's finale or they can serve as dessert themselves.

Drink wisely and well,
Tracy Ellen Kamens, Ed.D., CSW
CEO: Chief Education Officer

and

Jared Michael Skolnick
COO: Cork Opening Officer

Tasting Notes

Doghouse Wine, Maxie's Merlot, 2002, California, USA, \$10.00

You would be hard pressed to find a better gift for your dog walker or any dog lover on your list. Not only is the wine aptly named, but also their sales support Guide Dogs for the Blind, a non-profit organization and wine.com even has a gift package inclusive of three bottles of wine (Maxie's Merlot, Charlie's Chard and Checker's Cab), a logo'd frisbee and dog biscuits. Aromas include black cherry, strawberry and floral, which persist on the palate, along with toasty and earthy notes.

Willm, Gewürztraminer, 2004, Alsace, France, \$15.00

This is a classic Gewurztraminer from a well-regarded Alsatian wine producer. The pronounced nose provides floral/rose aromas accompanied by lychee and spice. Like many traditional Gewurztraminers, there is an oiliness to the mouthfeel, giving it depth and body. The lychee and floral are repeated as flavors with a hint of spice at the back of the palate and a light licorice note in the finish.

Vilafonte, Series M, 2003, Paarl, South Africa, \$49.95

This wine label is an up-market offering resulting from the partnership between Warwick Estate in South Africa and Zelma Long, a highly regarded winemaker from California. They produce two blended wines, Series M, which is Merlot dominant, and Series C, which has a higher percentage of Cabernet Sauvignon. At the helm of this venture is the indomitable Mike Ratcliffe, with whom we had the pleasure of dining back in April. Blackberry, currant, plum and black olive aromas beautifully introduce this wine, to which mushroom and a hint of spice are added on the palate. With its medium-high acidity and good tannic structure, this wine could age for a few additional years.

Chateau Musar, 1994 Red, Bekaa Valley, Lebanon, \$51.99

From an unlikely locale, the Hochar family has been creating wine since 1959, gaining international recognition in 1979 and continuing to impress critics and consumers alike. At a recent tasting, we preferred the 1994 to the 1997 and 1998 vintages, but both were wonderful wines in their own right and are available as well. The 1994 shows its age in its pale brick hue, but that's the only place it shows. With aromas of dried fruit, barnyard and a candied note, the wine is still fresh with ripe strawberry and raspberry fruit with dried cherry underneath showing intense concentration and depth of flavor and long length.

Lanson, Noble Cuvee Brut Millésimé, 1998, Champagne, France, \$90.00

Lanson's tête du cuvée from a declared vintage is produced with grapes sourced only from the top rated vineyards and is heavily weighted with Chardonnay (70%). Showing some development on the nose with yeasty and biscuity aromas coupled with minerality, citrus and honey. Its creamy mousse gives way to high acidity and buttery, almond, toast and mineral flavors, which persist on the palate. While ready to drink now, the wine will continue to develop over the next five to ten years, yielding even more complexity.

As holiday celebrations abound, this is the perfect time to pop open those sparkling wines and send corks flying (figuratively, not literally, please).

If you are still in a quandary about what gifts to give, it's not too late to purchase a *Grand Cru Classes* gift certificate for friends and loved ones this holiday season. We'll send out an attractive certificate personalized for the recipient, which they can redeem toward public or private classes. We can also assist in helping you design a full package.

With 2007 drawing to an end, *Grand Cru Classes* is delighted to celebrate the season and rejoice at the good fortune it has found in its friends and business associates. We raise a glass to you all!

Grand Cru Grapevine

December 2007

Bubble, Bubble, Toil & Trouble

Standing over their cauldron in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, the three witches stir their magic, bubbling brew. Among the most magical of brews, sparkling wines lend an air of mystique and a sense of celebratory gusto in their effervescent quality. With the fermentation of sugar into alcohol, heat and carbon dioxide are given off and generally released from the fermentation tank. However, when the energy of CO₂ is harnessed into a wine, the result is quite magical.

Among the most readily recognized sparkling wines is Champagne, due in part to the creative force and marketing magic behind it. But, as the witches foretold, Macbeth was not of woman born. Similarly, not all sparkling wines are born of Champagne. Champagne is a special wine – special in that it is a wine that comes specifically from a designated wine region in the north east of France, namely Champagne. Thus, while all Champagne is indeed a sparkling wine, not all sparkling wines are Champagne.

With its limited geographic area, Champagne is consequently limited in supply. Moreover, Champagne producers have successfully branded their wines as a luxury good, which adds to demand. For those that recall their Economics, the laws of supply and demand will conspire, as is the case with Champagne, to achieve high prices for the product in question. And, with the Euro escalating in value against the U.S. dollar, Champagne becomes even more expensive to purchase.

Fortunately, despite economist John Maynard Keynes's lament that, "The only thing I regret is not having drunk more Champagne [.]" there are a lot of other sparkling wines available, many of which will be less offensive to your pocketbook, while similarly pleasing on your palate.

While Champagne is often regarded as the gold standard of sparkling wines, many regions produce their own quality sparklers. Those emulating the labor-intensive and time-consuming (lots of toil and trouble) process of re-fermenting the wine in bottle followed by a lengthy ageing on the lees will prove to be the most similar in style and will have aromas and flavors that develop from the process of autolysis, which occurs during the time the wine is spent in contact with the dead yeast cells. Lombardy's Franciacorta, France's cremant wines and some of the higher end California bubbliies come to mind in this regard.

Alternately, other production methods, notably cuve close (aka tank method) produce sparkling wines with fresh fruit aromas and flavors and differ markedly from their Champenois counterparts. The Italian sparklers Asti and Prosecco personify this technique. These are much less expensive to produce due to the bulk nature of their production, but can provide the right lift and freshness and extra dry (which is sweeter than brut) and demi-sec styles can pair well with fruit and lighter desserts. Regardless of origin, the bubbles found in sparkling wines can provide a wonderful cleansing sensation on the palate.

As we head into the holiday season, we hope you will have a lot to celebrate and what better way to do so than with a glass of effervescent bubbles.

Drink wisely and well,
Tracy Ellen Kamens, Ed.D., CSW
CEO: Chief Education Officer

and

Jared Michael Skolnick
COO: Cork Opening Officer

Tasting Notes

Ca' del Bosco, Franciacorta, Brut, NV, Lombardia, Italy, \$27.95

Made in the same method as Champagne and to an exacting quality standard, Franciacorta serves as a good alternative to Champagne, with the depth and complexity to match. And, Ca' del Bosco is regarded as one of the top Franciacorta producers earning high praise from wine writer Hugh Johnson. On the nose, there are autolytic aromas of yeast, bread and caramel, which are echoed on the palate with flavors of yeast, lemon and a bready character in the lingering finish.

Schramsberg, Blanc de Noirs, 2002, Napa Valley, CA, USA, \$27.99

This wine's designation as a Blanc de Noirs means that it is a white wine produced entirely from black (*noir*) grapes, in this case, Pinot Noir. Aromas of biscuit, yeast, nuttiness and red fruits are found on the nose. The palate finds flavors of fresh yeast, citrus, slight nuttiness and a hint of strawberry. It has a creamy texture and delicate mousse.

Martha Clara, Sparkling Brut, NV, North Fork of Long Island, USA, \$21.99

From 37% Pinot Noir and 63% Chardonnay grapes, the Sparkling Brut provides a nice balance between fruit and yeasty character. Aromas of toast, apple and yeast are repeated on the palate with a hint of stone/mineral in the finish.

Lucien Albrecht, Cremant d'Alsace, Blanc de Blancs Brut, NV, Alsace, France, \$14.99

A French sparkler from outside Champagne, the quality of this wine shines through in its small, persistent bubbles and delicate mousse. The wine is made from 100% Pinot Blanc, which is used in Alsace for both still and sparkling wines. Its nose includes notes of citrus, stone and bread/yeast, while similar flavors linger on the palate throughout the long length and balanced finish.

Tattinger, Cuvee Prestige Rosé, NV, Champagne, France, \$59.99

If only the real thing will do, here is a classic rosé option. The Tattinger family recently bought back a controlling interest in their Champagne house and is continuing to produce wines in the family tradition. Pale pink and produced with 45% Pinot Noir and 55% Pinot Meunier, this wine has typical aromas of yeast and bread, but these autolytic flavors joined by notes of raspberry and strawberry.