

The Bluffs Food & Wine *gazette*

Event Report:
The Art of the Cellar

Inside Seller
The Art of the < Cellar

Amador County Wines:
The Big Crush Part 2

Zinfandel—America's Wine

the BIG CRUSH



President's Comments



WE HAVE A JAM packed Gazette in store for you this month!

Those members and guests that we able to attend the **Art of the Cellar** event certainly were in for a wonderful evening. Our venue was V. Mertz, the perennially top notch Old Market restaurant known for its gourmet touch. There were many such touches, such as the Butter Poached Cabbage, poached for 12 hours, or the Potato Soup whose richness and thick consistency was the result of simmering the potato peels for 12 hours. You just don't get that kind of culinary dedication at very many places. But we also had a spectacular list of unusual wines to sample, a guest speaker flown in from California, and member art to support the theme: **The Art of the Cellar**. There was a lot of information given that evening, great for members intent on learning as much as possible about wine and food in all its different aspects. Twelve members also brought art display for others. This event displayed all the hallmarks of a carefully planned, unusual, and extremely interesting dinner.

Since our guest, **Michael Glasby**, spoke to us (in his English accent) before or after every course, I decided to distill his comments into his own section so it would be more user friendly to extract. If you are a neophyte collector, or even if you have an established cellar, you will find Michael's comments quite interesting. Basically, Michael was speaking about selecting a wine merchant who can really guide you according to your tastes, not his. Those bottles you select will be your art in your cellar.

Our Valentine's Day event will feature the wine theme of Amador County, California, wines, which emphasize Zinfandel and Rhône varietals. After attending **The Big Crush, Amador Vintners Harvest Wine Festival**, I thought we would all enjoy wines of Amador County. Accordingly, I thought a little education was in order, so here is Part 2 of a series of 3 on the subject. Some of the wineries you will recognize: **Montevina**, and **Turley**, but probably not **Story Winery or Terra d'Oro**, which really is part of **Montevina**. Give it a read, especially if you attended the Valentine's Day event.

Finally, since Amador County produces so much **Zinfandel**, John Fischer writes of America's grape in his article this month. John writes of the history of Zinfandel and what flavor profiles to expect when you drink it or pair it with food.

Tom Murnan

"To be good, and to do good, is the whole duty of man comprised in a few words."

**-Abigail Adams,
second First Lady**





THIS WAS QUITE THE event. We had fabulous food and wine, of course, but we also had art work, we had one of the best venues in town at V. Mertz, we had a level two sommelier aspirant to guide us through the wine and food pairings, and we had a guest speaker who flew in from California to talk to us. If you summed it all up, we all learned a tremendous amount. **Jill Panzer** was the driving force here, and had the idea to bring in wine consultant Michael Glasby from **Courtier Wines** months ago, and it finally came to fruition on January 22nd. Twelve different members contributed art to adorn the walls of the restaurant. **John Fischer** painted a work displaying a wine glass and bottle of Château Lynch Bages, cheese and bread that adorns the cover of his book *Wine and Food-101*, **Mary Murphy** provided a watercolor from her atelier, **Derek Burdeny** had two terrific photographs of tornados, **Tom Murnan** and **Todd Lemke** brought a few favorite Gazette covers or stories. Tom also had a candle back lit close-up of a Versace crystal wine stopper of Medusa. **Jon Panzer** took the shot of Jill being reflected by the polished brass on the door at the French Laundry. Large photos from **Bill and Theresa Clark** were displayed as well. Finally, one example of vinous art: a bottle of **2015 Noiret Rosé**, a collaborative effort between the **Kossows** and the **Forristalls**. **Bob Kossow** grew the grapes, and **Diane Forristall** made the wine. The colorful bottle itself reminded me of the Meeker Winemakers' Handprint Collection, with its heavily applied, bright and cheerful paint.

Twenty eight people attended, but our numbers were plagued by illness. We had two substitutes and one other guest, but 3 stayed at home. All the wines came from the V. Mertz cellar except for an unexpected Champagne that Michael brought with him, the After some select charcuterie, artisan cheeses and quaffing wines, we proceeded to table, where we started with Michael's wine, a **Ulysse Collin Les Taillon Blanc de Noir Extra Brut**. This was a non vintage French Champagne. The Extra Brut means that it has even less sugar in the dosage than a typical Brut. Unless

specified to the contrary, all the wine notes below are from **Matthew Brown**.

Potato Soup was our first course. The soup portion, a **Potato Broth**, was poured at table over the various ingredients, which included **Smoked Oyster, Celery and Pickled Pepper**. I noticed the herbaceous taste of sage immediately. The oyster seemed to be deep fat fried. There was a touch of Callaberian chile as well. The soup was incredibly rich and creamy, but we were surprised to learn that **Chef Jacob Newton** had, in fact, used no cream! Instead he saved the peels from the potatoes and simmered them for 12 hours into a starchy and flavor rich broth that both thickened and flavored the soup with a tannic, earthy, slightly spicy tone. No flour, no cream. All the richness came from the potatoes themselves. Absolutely superb!

We had an unique wine with the soup: a white Rioja. **Lopez de Heredia Vina Gravonia Rioja Blanco 2006**. It uses the **Viura grape** and is made traditionally using oak and extended time in the aging chai. Only American oak is used. They have some of the largest cellars of any winemaker in the world. The current release is 2006, a 10 year old white wine. There is a cream soda tone, a bit of dill and herbaceousness that comes from the American oak, also some pineapple and tropical fruits. There's also a sherriness to it that gives a nutty note. This wine is considered just a baby. The Gran Reservas are released at age 20. Matt wanted a wine that had viscosity but also one with some weight on the tongue and enough body to stand up to the soup. A hot soup can overwhelm a wine if it doesn't have enough body. This is a wine of tradition, using native yeast, a wine of terroir and soul, a rare thing in today's world.

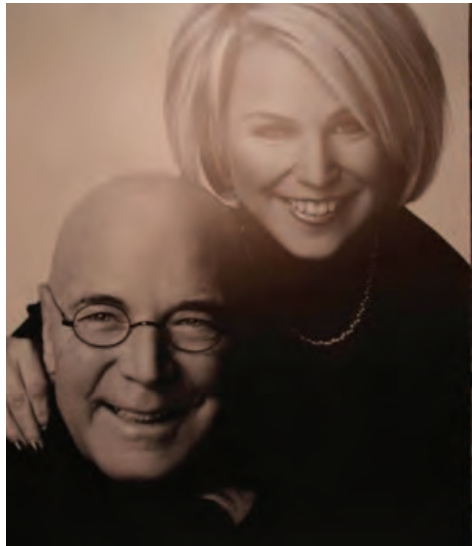
Butter Poached Cabbage with Bottarga, Hazelnut Yuzu and Juniper was our next course. The cabbage was poached in a juniper butter for 12 hours and then roasted for three hours, basting it in butter and other house blend herbs. Next the

chef let it sit and come to room temperature, then chilled it slightly so the butter incorporated in all the layers of the cabbage. It was cooked all the way through, but the butter acts like a kind of glue when cold. **Yuzu** is a Japanese vinegar. The juniper added a slightly bitter component, and that's where the wine pairing came in. **Grüner Veltliner** is what Matt calls "sommelier ketchup" as it matches up with many things that are difficult pairings: radishes, asparagus and the like. GV has a bit of a bitter tone, and it is a very phenolic [affects taste, color and mouth feel, editor] grape, crisp and fresh, acid driven, a mountain style, cool climate wine, there's a taste of bitterness on the back of the tongue. So you are getting that wine bitter which is cancelled out by the bitter of the juniper, so that the other components of the wine and food will come out. Our wine was the **2014 Loimer Grüner Veltliner**.

Chicken Roulade was next. This was made with **Mole, Sweet Onions and Winter Radishes**. The chicken was both breast and thigh meat. The dish had a great radish hot sauce which consists of fermented radish that gives a spicy taste. This was pureed so it was very smooth. Sunflower sprouts gave it a bit of peppery-ness. The chicken was perfectly cooked and incredibly moist and tender. The sweet onions provided a bit of a contrast and sharpness, earthy, lively, and a bit of a rebel compared to the usual staid chicken you many times encounter.

Matt told us that the **2015 Montescano "Refugio" Pinot Noir** comes from Chile. This is a wine that is waking people up. It sees no new oak. It is all about the purity of the fruit and the expression of where it comes from (very granite driven soil in the Casablanca Valley in a cool climate and a high elevation). It is a collaboration of two different families. The **Montescano family** hails from Chile and **André Ostertag** is a well known winemaker from Alsace. Not much Pinot Noir is made in Alsace, but the Montescanos got to talking with Ostertag about making a Pinot Noir in Alsace, a region that is not famous for it. Since the two work in opposite hemispheres, Ostertag now comes down to Chile in his off time to make this cool climate, floral wine. There's blackberry on the palate, and it is very lively on the tongue. It is dynamic with food. A lot of new world Pinot is shifting to this style: honest and pure, expressing where it comes from. The producer still uses horses, but is not afraid to use concrete eggs and other modern innovations. Michael pointed out that the wine is made on the 45th latitude, the same as Oregon and the best vineyards in France (Jaboulet Parallel 45 Rhône wine) and the northern hemisphere. If you are wondering, Napa is about the 38th parallel.

The **Braised Beef Cheek** was a little more traditional. Celery root in a puree, and also a poached celery root was utilized. Again, no cream was used in the celery root swirl. The celeriac (root) was roasted whole then pureed with water and a bit of butter. Thick and concentrated. A marvelous, flavorful garnish.



There's also a little bit of cocoa coming in on the palate, and the braised beef with its savory, earthy component, highlights the wine. I found it to be a rich, tender and satisfying dish, comfort food for a cold evening.

2006 Château Giscours, Bordeaux was paired with the Beef Cheek. Matt told us that the 2005 was a bigger year, heralded in the press, but you can get better deals with 2006 and it is drinking well now, while you wait for 2005 to mature. Giscours is a Third Growth Margaux. **Margaux** is known as being on the more elegant side of the Left Bank of Bordeaux. It is Cabernet driven with a little Merlot and a touch of Cabernet Franc and Petit Verdot. You can get this wine at a lower price point than other Margaux around them. The quality you have to decide on your own, and that's how you build a cellar. It should be for you, not to impress anybody else. If you are not buying fashion or labels, you can get some good values. I found the wine rich and mildly tannic, able to cut through the beef richness, providing refreshment.

We finished with the **Mascarpone Mousse** along with a **Skyr sorbet**, which is like a Scandinavian crème fraiche or sour cream, made into a sorbet. Underneath there's a herbal note and a basil meringue, along with a **Caramelized Basil leaf** on top, and underneath everything, the sweetness of cherries.

The **2009 Vin de Constance** from **Klein Constantia** hails from South Africa and uses [late harvest, unbotrytised, \$80.00 for 500 ml, editor] Muscat de Frontignan grape. This wine was Number 10 on the Wine Spectator Top Ten list for 2015. It is one of the most famous dessert wines in the world that you don't often see. It is grown on the western Cape near Cape Town and one of the first wines made in South Africa [originally established in 1685 the estate was devastated by phylloxera and resurrected in 1980, editor]. Sailors rounding the Cape would stop and buy the wine and carry it with them to other destinations. It was mentioned in **Jane Austen's *Sense and Sensibility***, and the only food or drink requested by **Napoleon** on his death bed. Ripe fruits with a marmalade tone going on the palate. Going with the dessert, there was an herbaceous touch to it.

During the dessert course, Jill Panzer informed us that it was **John Fischer's 80th birthday**. The Branch founder and first president was originally scheduled to attend but at the last minute could not make it. We all drank a birthday toast to John's health anyway!

Many thanks to **Matt Brown**, Chef **Jacob Newton** and the rest of the staff who gave up their day off to provide this sumptuous meal. Thanks as well to **Michael Glasby** for making the commitment to fly in from California to give us his thoughts on the wine seller / client relationship, and to **Jill Panzer** who found time in her hectic schedule to produce this very interesting and informative, not to say artistic, event. Finally, thanks to all those who provided art, whether traditional, photographic, or vinous.





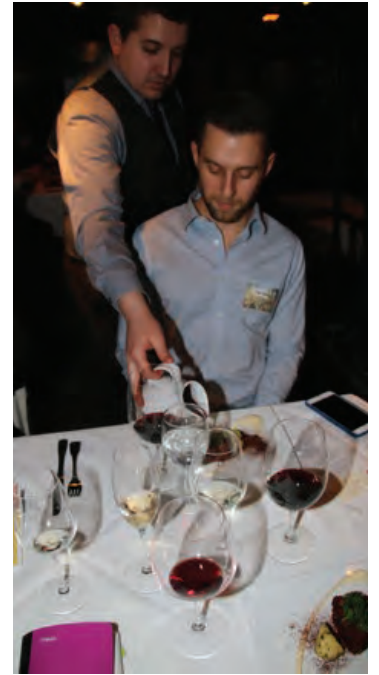
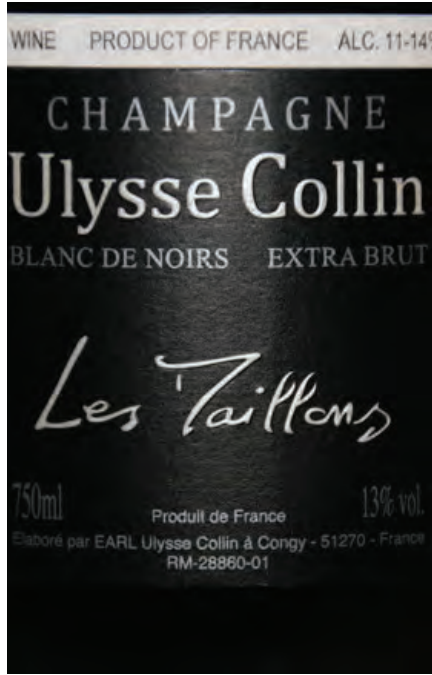












THE ART OF THE SELLER CELLAR



We were very fortunate that Michael Glasby took the time to speak to our group about the relationship one should be looking for in a wine merchant. Michael spoke of what it means to be a collector of fine wines and art. We consume food, wine and art where it then becomes a part of us. There is an art to constructing and consuming a cellar. There is an art to the winemaker as well. The matching of wine and food is the biggest talent. The sommelier doesn't always get credit for his skill. They find good wines and pair them to good food. Michael surprised us with a wine made with black grapes, or a Blanc de Noir. Michael carried in a few bottles of **Ulysse Collin Les Tailon Blanc de Noir Extra Brut**. Made only of Pinot Noir grapes from a small **Grow Zone** producer, it is almost impossible to obtain in the United States and not found in Nebraska. This is why you establish a relationship with someone like Michael. The wine is a good example of the new trend of growers taking back the fruit they used to sell to large houses and making their own wine. This is a very Burgundian tradition that has made its way to Champagne. It is now the most interesting way to make Burgundy and Champagne, rather than

selling it to the Grand Marques or other famous houses. It is kind of romantic, to make the wine under their own roof and own label, which is what the Elite Growers do.

As consumers, there is a huge universe of wine out there. But **you should build your cellar on your taste**. Whatever you think is right is right. Your own opinion trumps any other. But there is also value in getting to know a subject and finding the background behind it. You can then appreciate wines that are more sophisticated rather than just enjoying them passively. Selecting your wines doesn't mean finding only the best, but understanding and getting a relationship with the wines in your cellar, knowing when you want to open them, what's romantic or attractive about those wines, what's special about them. It's just your wines, not better or worse than anyone else's wines. Michael's job, as the art of the seller, is to direct people, to listen but also lead the client to wines they are going to like and keep buying, and form a relationship with the client.

Everybody has a relationship with the wine and food they consume, you get pleasure out of it, and everything you do is right. The collector and the consumer are different kinds of clients. **The collector** enjoys the thrill of the hunt, the chase. This is mostly a male pursuit. Men tend to collect wine. On the other hand there are **the consumers**, the rest of the population. When you are a consumer, you don't need to be buying the

BY TOM MURNAN

best things: you are released from that obsession. There is so much old wine available from collectors who bought too much. And you can get older wines from the seller with whom you developed a relationship.

To wrap up the art of the seller, it is a balance between leading and listening to your clients. Everyone loves an enthusiast. An enthusiast with a strong joy about something is really infectious. People want to see enthusiasm in anything to do with sales. It could be a sommelier, or a car salesman. But the enthusiasm of the salesman should not overtake his sense of what the customer wants. Then he is not listening. Don't bring up Beaujolais when the customer wants Bordeaux. You need to understand who the customer or collector is and lead him towards his interests. Wine is always changing, there's always a different idea. 2015 is a great vintage in Burgundy, and you either grab them now or forget it. If you don't grab them now, you have to wait 15 years when you want to drink them. Then they will be more expensive. In the wine business, there are two ways to sell Burgundy: pre-arrival or close out. In Burgundy there is the new generation who is making wine with new technology, but also traditionally.

Courtier has focused on a few campaigns in their sales strategy. Here is what is currently available and of possible interest to those who want to build a cellar.

- **2015 Red Burgundy.** Look for new releases as they happen.
- **Old and rare Borolo,** which are overlooked and under-valued.
- **2015 Bordeaux:** the Futures [buying before the wine is released] are now.
- **2014 White Burgundy:** the best vintage in 20 years.
- **Champagne:** the future is with the Elite Growers.
- **2015 Rhône:** the scores are back with a stunning vintage.
- **Vintage Treasures:** drink mature wine at its peak.
- **Rare Vintage Champagne:** for the ultimate connoisseur?
- **Beaujolais:** Burgundy's new heartbeat?

There is a whole world of wine, but you can shine a torch on bits of it that are interesting at any one time. Hopefully, your wine seller, your wine merchant will help you settle on what is important.

Michael Glasby is the founder of Courtier Fine Wine Merchant & Advisory Service and can be reached at michael.glasby@courtierwines.com or 415-350-3127.

Michael at V Mertz





AMADOR COUNTY WINES

THE BIG CRUSH PART II

BY TOM MURNAN



Story had some interesting wines to taste during the harvest weekend. The aforementioned **2013 Mission** was dark, tannic and earthy. I learned that the grape variety has gone from being one of the most ubiquitous to only having 700 acres planted today. Story has one acre planted to Mission, which was established in 1894. The winery has numerous Zinfandels in its portfolio. Story also has a wine called **Miss Zin** where both Zinfandel and the Mission grapes are blended from 100 year old vines. The most interesting one to me was the **2013 Picnic Hill**. That vineyard was planted in 1898 and was the most complex and interesting of the offerings that weekend. This is Story's signature Zinfandel, jammy and delicious, sporting 14.5% alcohol. At \$32.00, it is certainly affordable. The **2013 Creekside Zinfandel** comes from a 1936 vineyard. The winery also makes **Primitivo**. At one time, it was thought that Primitivo and Zinfandel were the same grape, but with modern DNA testing, it was discovered that Primitivo and Zinfandel are actually both clones, or genetic mutations, of a Croatian grape called Crljenak. Rosé, Sangiovese and Barbara are also all made.

I found Story to be a fascinating winery. Unfortunately they don't ship to Nebraska or Iowa.

Montevina was established in 1970 and bonded at the same time as Story, in 1973, but they claim to be the first winery to return to Amador County after Prohibition (1920 to 1933.) The whole county was hit by the double whammy of closed gold mines and then prohibition, which devastated the wine industry. It took 40 years after prohibition's repeal for the wine industry to revive! Montevina is Spanish for **mountain vine**. The winery is similar to Domaine de la Terre Rouge and Easton since it, too, has two names. Montevina and Terra d'Oro, or land of Gold (appropriate for the land of the Mother Lode) and are important Amador County wineries. The winery was founded by young winemaker Cary Gott and his father-in-law Walter Field. Fruit is grown in both Amador County and Lodi. Vines around the hilly home ranch in Amador thrive off the rocky, thin, decomposing granite soils, whereas the flat Lodi vineyards enjoy warm days and cool delta breezes at night. Pinot Grigio, Chardonnay, White Zinfandel, Zinfandel, Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Red Blend and Barbara are all made at Montevina.

Terra d'Oro was established in 2007 when the Trinchero family (of Sutter Homes and White Zinfandel fame) purchased Montevina and made Terra d'Oro their label for **premium selections**. With a special emphasis on Italian (Sangiovese, Barbera, Moscato, a rosé made from Nebbiolo

and Pinot Grigio) and Rhône varietals (Petite Syrah and Viognier), their top wines continue to be Zinfandel, what they do best. Their entry zin is the **Amador Zinfandel**. Shallow topsoils, granite hardpan, hot summer days and cool summer nights make for perfect growing conditions for zin. The **Home Vineyard Zinfandel** is a four acre plot right off the back door of their guest cabin. It produces intense, jammy zin, luscious body and soft, silky tannins. Zinfandel in general has a reputation as being an uneven ripener. The grapes on the crown of the cluster ripen sooner than those at the bottom, but the fruit in the Home Vineyard, with tip bunches being sweeter than the bottoms, balance each other out beautifully.

The **Deaver Vineyard** is Terra d'Oro's oldest, being established in 1881. We will be lucky enough to taste the 2013 Deaver Zinfandel at our Valentine Day's event. The 14 acre plot was planted by Italian immigrants who brought the cuttings from the east coast of the USA. This dry farmed vineyard produces less fruit as it ages, but its fruit is more concentrated than younger vines as the plant's roots grow deeper and pull water and nutrients from different layers of soil. The fruit is handpicked and placed in small bins, then hauled one mile to the winery for crushing. To improve extraction and concentration, some juice is bled off at the time of crush to maximize the juice to skin ratio. The result is a wine of great complexity, balance, power and restraint. Finally, the winery makes a sweet wine, a **Zinfandel Port**. We have had this port for a few Branch events.

CONTINUING OUR MINI-SERIES ON Amador County wines, this month we focus on more of the wineries Mary and I attended during the October 1st and 2nd, **2016 Big Crush Harvest Festival**. As you recall from last month, the area got its start during the California Gold Rush. Wineries sprung up around the **Mother Lode** area which proved to be a propitious place to grow grapes. Back in the old days, one of the most prominent grapes was the **Mission** varietal. This was brought from Spain by the Franciscans in their missionary work. It is almost never seen today, but interestingly, Story Winery is one of only about eight wineries in California making wines from the Mission grape

Story Winery was founded in 1973 by veterinarian Dr. Eugene and Ann Story. They had purchased 20 acres of land in 1969, some of which included vineyards dating from 1894. Story was one of the first post-Prohibition wineries bonded in 1973. The other was Montevina. In 1991, Bruce and Jan Tichenor purchased the winery from the Story's, and in 2013 they passed the day to day operations over to their daughter and son in law, Tina and Rob Campbell.



Terra d'Oro was our first stop for the Big Crush Harvest Festival. They provided paella as well as a live jazz band.

Many people know that **Turley Wine Cellars** has a winery in Paso Robles, but are unaware that there is also a crush facility in Amador County. Turley moved to Amador county in 2012 when it purchased Karly Wines from former fighter pilot Buck Cobb and his wife, Karly. The Cobbs had established their winery in 1980. When Turley moved to Amador, it raised some local eyebrows because Turley is the premier Zinfandel producer on California's west coast. Turley represents Zinfandel at its most ambitious, while Amador County was much more humble and low keyed.

Locals were afraid of what might happen when a west coast winery, more Napa like in its scope and approach, arrived. For example, Amador wines typically do not have wide distribution, a fact that I discovered when I tried to ship wine straight from the wineries to Nebraska. Most will not invest the money to buy a state permit outside California. With the arrival of Turley, some wineries are beginning to establish a broader range of distribution.

Turley put its tasting room right off Shenandoah Road, which is the equivalent to Napa's Silverado Trail for wineries. The winery facilities are about a half mile away. In addition to the "**Buck**" **Cobb Zinfandel** offering, which is owned by Turley and is planted at an altitude of 1500 feet in rugged volcanic and granite terrain, Turley also gets Amador County fruit from the **Judge Bell Zinfandel** vineyard which is owned by Story. Judge Bell was known as the "Hanging Judge" whose court was located in nearby Plymouth in the

Gold Rush era. The **Rinaldi Vineyard Zinfandel** is located in the Fiddletown AVA, just a few miles from Plymouth, and is Turley's newest Amador County addition. It comes from one of the oldest significant vineyards in California. Known as the Eschen Vineyard, it was originally planted in 1860. Just a few of those old vines remain today. However, the bulk of their fruit is coming from a block planted in 1910. The vineyard is at a 2000 foot elevation. The **Sadie Upton Vineyard Zinfandel** is very near the tasting room, a jewel of a vineyard. It is named after the then 21 year old Sadie Upton, who, in 1922, decided to plant a vineyard right during Prohibition, while her husband was away working on the Rail Road. The wine used to be made for Karly and still gives good fruit.

Turley was providing wood fired pizza for the Big Crush Harvest Festival from a mobile pizza oven made by Larry Turley. Considering Omaha only has about three wood fired pizzerias, I thought that was a treat. Hot slices were snatched up almost immediately after they came out of the oven.

Sources: www.storywinery.com/; <http://www.montevina.com/>; www.terradorowinery.com/home.php; www.turleywinecellars.com/; <http://www.sfgate.com/wine/article/A-bold-new-chapter-for-Amador-Zinfandel-5217522.php>



Pictures from Story



More Pictures from Turley



Zinfandel—America's Wine

by John Fisher



THERE IS A LONG and interesting history about the origin of Zinfandel. Although the grape is clearly of European origin, there is no doubt that the first use of the brand name “Zinfandel” occurred on the east coast of the United States during the early 1800s, and for tens of years the varietal was used there as a table grape.

It was not until the Gold Rush that the grape was introduced to California. With California's favorable climate and fertile soil, the grape thrived and plantings rapidly spread throughout the state. America's wine was born. Although the grape can be found in other parts of the world, this wine is uniquely American. In no other country has it attained the quality or the popularity that it has in the United States.

After it was discovered that Italy's Primitivo was the same grape as Zinfandel, it was believed that Zinfandel originally came from Italy. Indeed, in 1994, DNA fingerprinting confirmed that the Primitivo and Zinfandel grapes were genetically identical except for minor clonal differences.

Nevertheless, recent investigations have shown that Zinfandel did not likely originate in Italy, but from Croatia. Based on DNA analysis, the Croatian grape called Crijenak Kastelanski was found to be identical to Zinfandel. It is strongly suspected that it was from Croatia that the grape migrated to Italy and other various destinations. The vine most probably reached the New World from Austria, not from Italy.

A potential marketing problem has arisen from the fact that Primitivo and Zinfandel are genetically nearly identical. In 1999, the European Union granted Italian Primitivo growers consent to use the name Zinfandel in marketing their wine. This allows Italian producers to encroach on the American winegrower's market niche in the United States and the European Union. The move was advantageous for Italy, as Zinfandel is enormously popular in the U.S. and more likely to sell than the relatively unfamiliar Primitivo. Although, at this time, Italian wine producers have not taken advantage of the ruling, a marketing problem could occur in the future.

Although the climate in California and Puglia, the Primitivo-producing province in Italy, are similar, the soils are unlike. This fact, plus clonal variations and dissimilar methods of vinification result in different wines. Primitivo is smoother, less fruity and has a less aggressive character

and somewhat different flavors than the classic California red Zinfandel. However, in spite of these differences, there are many similarities, and the two can sometimes be difficult to tell apart in blind tastings.

Zinfandel is the third leading wine grape variety in California. Unfortunately, about 80% of these grapes are used for the production of white Zinfandel. Most connoisseurs consider this wine as second rate, but it sells and continues to be a very popular beverage in the U.S. The remaining 20% is vinified into a variety of styles of red wines that range from light red to heavy Port styled wines. However, the most popular and classical red is the one that mimics the structure of Cabernet Sauvignon.

At its best, this style of Zinfandel presents itself as a deeply pigmented and full-bodied wine, high in tannins, alcohol (sometimes over 15%), and flavorful extract. Although acidity is somewhat moderated, it is sufficient to effectively support the flavors in the wine and rounds out its balance. The varietal character expresses itself as a big, burly wine with aggressively spicy, brambly fruit. Look for flavors of raspberries, blackberries, and cherries, all wrapped up in an envelope of piquant black pepper and spice.

The predominant characteristic of the wine is its aggressive tactile impression on the palate. This “bite” softens with age, and with time, most wines lose their vibrant character and some take on a bitter finish. However, in the past few years, winemakers have made some Zinfandels that age more gracefully. With time, they become pleasingly soft and develop a montage of complex flavors such as cedar, tobacco, chocolate, mushrooms, herbs and spices.

Nevertheless, most Zinfandel aficionados are enamored by the aggressively spicy bite of the wine. This assertiveness combined with an immense mouthful of rich, ripe, fruity flavors gives the wine a hedonism all of its own.

Because of its full-body and high tannic content, Zinfandel has limited application in regard to matching with food. However, in some dishes it makes the consummate match. Do not use Zinfandel, or for that matter any tannic full-bodied wine, with light, delicately flavored foods. They will pulverize such refined dishes by usurping their flavors and crushing their delicate structure. The tannins in any wine cover over flavors, and the limited acidity in Zinfandel is not sufficient to enhance delicately flavored foods. This characteristic rules out the pairing of this wine with the vast majority of seafood dishes and many dishes composed of fowl, pork, and veal.

Where do Zinfandels shine? They not only make great matches for rich, flavorful, full-bodied dishes, they need such foods. Try Zinfandel with dishes such as pepper steak, barbecued ribs or chicken, grilled sausages, meatloaf, hamburgers, and seasoned wild game. Zinfandel is a big, rustically styled wine that needs to be matched with foods that have similar characteristics. It is also a great wine to quaff on a cold, dreary, winters day. It will warm up your innards and lift up your spirits. Take it from me: Zinfandel will cheer you up and brighten your day.





Upcoming Council Bluffs Branch Events

Mark Your Calendars!



March 11, 2017

Omaha Press Club

Theme: Todd and Joe's Birthday Extravaganza

Producers: Todd Lemke and Joe Goldstein



April 23, 2017

V. Mertz

Theme: All Champagne Dinner

Producers: Patti & Steve Hipple

Hosting an event?

Let us know when, where and a little bit
about what's going on!

We would love to include YOUR event on the calendar!

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The mission of the Council Bluffs Branch of the International Wine and Food Society is to develop a profound understanding and appreciation of both wine and the culinary arts and to enjoy this experience in the camaraderie of friends. Our task is to educate our membership about wine and to develop the skill of matching wine with food. We strive to drink high quality wines and to experience an eclectic array of foods prepared by the area's top chefs.

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to let her know if you are interested
in hosting an IWFS event.**

To access past Gazettes and other features about our Branch, go to the international website following this link: www.iwfs.org/americas/council-bluffs

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