



Hyde Park Wine Experiences And Culinary Adventures

Where has time gone? Only a few issues ago we were talking about Spring wines and the Summer heat and now we're in the early months of Fall. Time moves on so quickly and so do beverage trends.

Before we venture into wine, let me bring up a subject that's on my mind: vodka. Many members and non-members have emailed me questions about this popular spirit, so I'll answer them here.

Now, as many of you know, I don't drink. I do like an occasional glass of wine but brown goods and white spirits are on the sideline with me, so I had to do my homework. I must say, I learned plenty in the two weeks as I sat down and read article after article on vodka.

It turns out that, years ago, brown goods (bourbon, scotch and Canadian) were hot sells in most bars in the US. Then gin became a popular spirit and rum had its hot moment. Now, Vodka is all of the rage, and it's been this way for the last several years. Here at the club, Vodka makes up a very large part of our yearly beverage sales. When I first came to the club 30 years ago, we only had five brands on the back bar. Today, we have 15 different brands and they all are hot sellers. Of course, standard call brands still sell the best: Smirnoff, Stolichnaya, Ketel One, Absolut, Grey Goose, Belvedere and Level, along with the flavored Vodkas.



VODKA, THE TRUE STORY:

One of the questions I get all the time is, "Is there really a difference in the brands of Vodkas?" Many people say it's all myth, greatly marketed yet unfounded. According to a recent article in the Wall Street Journal, Vodka was dubbed as passé. There has been a recent decline in vodka cocktails throughout the country. According to the article, Vodka is tasteless, overpriced, and a back bar bully to other preferred spirits. This article, though, has been deeply criticized by many hospitality experts and by the producers of Vodka, domestically and internationally.

As far as non-flavored vodkas go, there really isn't really a difference in taste, but there is a difference in bite. In a recent blind taste test conducted by an independent panel in Las Vegas, Grey Goose, Beveledere, Level, and Standard Vodka all had less bite than Smirnoff Red, Svedka, Absolut and Three Olives. Then there is the distilling process which varies from brand to brand. Some Vodka is distilled at 42-below-zero, some is distilled over limestone, while others are filtered as many as six times to eliminate any bite.

Yes, some brands of vodka have no bite whatsoever. They are so smooth they can get you in trouble since they almost taste like water. Just try Ultimat Vodka from Poland. This is by far one of the smoothest, cleanest, no bite Vodka's on the market today. Ultimat is available here at the club but the price is not for the faint of heart.

Now, you may ask, "Just how many different brands of vodka are sold here in the United States?" I really don't know, as Ohio is a controlled State and many brands out there never make it to Ohio.

Here is what I can tell you: In Ohio (as of July) there are 115 domestic brands and 110 imported brands. Many of these are interestingly flavored and they do sell, believe it or not. The latest is Three Olives Bubble Vodka, which has the aroma and taste of bubble gum and is actually made right here in Cincinnati. Now, many of these flavored Vodka's are fads and only last a few years. Normally, when the brand dies off (sales fall short of the quota), that particular brand or flavor is no longer sold in Ohio and a new brand or flavor comes down the pipe line as a replacement.

Vodka cocktails are a fad as well and they come and they go. A few years ago, the Green Apple Martini and the Cosmopolitan were all the rage across the country. Today, they've taken a back seat to more traditional cocktails made with juice served in long glasses.

Next question: "Are all vodka's made out of potatoes?" No! In fact, most vodka is made with wheat or rye. Always look closely at your bottle and read the fine print. Not many vodkas today are 100 percent potato-made, some are blends and many don't have even one potato in them.



So why are some brands of vodka more popular than other? A lot of it has to do with marketing. Take the Crystal Head Vodka. Have you seen this bottle yet? Crystal Head is the latest newcomer to the Ohio market. It is actor Dan Aykroyd's project and is made with the purest water. The vodka is packaged in a stunningly accurate glass rendering of a human skull and is very expensive. In fact, the packaging is part of the major cost associated with the price tag. Frosted bottles, hand painted bottles, colored bottles, bottles that have a cork finish top, streamlined bottles, or etched bottles are all part of the marketing game to catch the consumer's eye and eventually their wallet.

So, now you know the information in the Wall Street Journal was not 100 percent correct. Vodka remains the most consumed spirit in America, with 28 percent of total spirit sales by volume in 2008, according to the Distilled Spirits Council of the United States.

So what Vodka out there today is the best? I would say it is all personal preference, much like drinking wine. Go to The Party Source and experiment – find the right spirit for you.

HOLLIDAY SEASON BRINGS AN EXTRA GIFT SOMEONE:

Trying to find something for that special someone during the holiday season can be a challenge. Now, almost everyone enjoys wine, spirits and beer, so this is always an option. Alcohol gift packs are always popular during the holiday season and this year is no exception. Many companies are giving away collectibles such as glasses, flasks, decanters and shakers. To top it all off, spirit companies are going to be offering gift packaging this year to promote their products. Lower proof items like Bailey's Irish Cream, Pama, Frangelico, Kahlua and even Southern Comfort all have packages for any buyer. Pricing for these items range for \$12 to \$160 so, as you can see, there's something for every taste.

NEW AGE WINES GREAT FOR ALL OCCASIONS:

I often like to look for a new wine to try. Hey, that's what tasting wine is all about. Many consumers stay with Chardonnay and Cabernet Sauvignon, but I say you're missing the boat. You need to diversify. Below are four new age wines that are different but very nice:



Laurenz, Und Sophie Singing Grüner Veltliner Austria 2007

I've tried this wine three times and I must say it's something very special. The tasting notes on this wine are as follows: Very attractive fruit bouquet showing ripe apples, peach and citrus aromas along with nice spice and hints of white pepper. The soft and juicy palate is supported by fine acidity and the wine sings on the finish. The wine is from Austria, which is a good climate to grow grapes. The alcohol content is about 12 percent, yet the residual sugar is low and the wine is well-balanced. *Retails in Ohio for \$14.99*

Ridge, Monte Bello 2005

Ridge is the producer of a fine red Zinfandel and has made a very nice red blend from the Santa Cruz Mountains. This red blend is made up of Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Petit Verdot, and Cabernet Franc. It is a wine that could be cellared for year or two as there are a good amount of tannins found in the wine. The tasting notes are as follows: Intense black fruit, black licorice, sweet oak, mineral and spice. This red wine is balanced and sensuous on the long finish. Rated 97 points in Wine and Spirits and 93 points in the Connoisseurs' Guide. *Retails for \$86.99*

Blue Pirate, Pinot Noir Oregon 2007

Pinot Noir continues to remain strong among consumers. This particular Pinot is a 100 percent Pommard Clone and has some interesting characteristics. The tasting notes are much like a Pinot Noir found in Burgundy. Light in color with forward flavors of cherries, stone fruit, red plums, hints of earth and minerals with a nice finish. *Retails for \$19.99*

Chanson Bourgogne Rouge France 2006

Now, this is a lovely French Burgundy that you need to try. The wine shows a bright red color with purple nuances and intense aromas of raspberry and violets with hints of black pepper. Concentrated and well-structured showing a long and resilient finish. *Retails for \$18.99*

QUESTION FROM A MEMBER:

LES, MY MOTHER ENJOYS A GLASS OR TWO OF WINE WITH HER DINNER. SHE LIKES GOOD WINES AND ALWAYS HAS A FEW BOTTLES IN THE HOUSE WHEN WE COME OVER ON THE WEEKENDS. A FEW WEEKS AGO, THE DOCTOR PUT HER ON SOME STRONG MEDICATION AND INFORMED HER THAT SHE WASN'T ALLOWED TO CONSUME ANY MORE ALCOHOL WHILE SHE IS ON IT. QUITE FRANKLY, MY HUSBAND AND I FEEL MY MOM SHOULDN'T BE DRINKING WINE, AS SHE IS A LITTLE UNSTABLE ON HER FEET AND SHE LIVES AT HOME BY HERSELF. IS THERE A NON-ALCOHOLIC WINE OUT THERE THAT SHE MAY ENJOY? THANKS.

Many years ago, when non-alcoholic wines appeared in retail stores, they didn't fare very well. They tasted flat without any character. Sutter Home was one of the first companies to spend a good amount of money in producing a very good non-alcoholic product. The process that takes alcohol out of the wine is called Coning (spinning). Sutter Home perfected this process and their juice comes from Monterey and Napa Valley. Their non-alcoholic wines are exceptional in value and in quality.

I would recommend:

Sutter Home Fre Chardonnay Retails for \$6.99
Sutter Home Fre Merlot Retails for \$6.99

Now, if your mom enjoys sparkling wines you need to try some *Martinelli Sparking Cider*. This is a great non-alcoholic sparkling for the entire family. I would highly recommend this sparkling non-alcoholic and the price is *only \$6.99 a bottle*

LOOKING FOR OLDER VINTAGE WINES? BIG BOX STORES COULD BE THE ANSWER.

Many times I go to Kroger's and shake my head with I see back vintages of Insignia, Chalk Hill Cabernet Sauvignon selling for the same price as the current vintage. Here is a little inside scoop that not too many people know about: The next time you visit your favorite big box store or even a grocery store, look a few bottles behind the first bottle of wine on the shelf. For example, Kroger's in Mariemont had several bottles of Kenwood Jack London Cabernet Sauvignon last month. I needed to buy a bottle of nice wine for a wedding gift, so I pulled out a bottle from the very back of the shelf. Presto, a bottle of Kenwood Jack London 2000. This was a stellar Cabernet vintage and trying to find a 2000 vintage today at a wine shop is almost impossible. How much was the bottle you ask? The price of the bottle was \$39 - the same as the current vintage.

In today's market, the 2000 vintage of Kenwood Jack London would sell for about sixty bucks a bottle. Then, to top it all off, I continued to pull back vintages of this wine from the back of the row. Thus, I found a 2002 vintage and a 2004 vintage. Needless to say, I purchased the 2000 and the 2002 at an unbelievable price.

Owners of wine shops usually separate vintages, as they know that back vintages could be more expensive. Box stores have less storage space so they stack as much as they can get into a spot and never think about it again. Check it out the next time you go wine hunting.

SHOWCASE WINES READY TO DRINK NOW:

Wine connoisseurs continue to look for affordable luxury wines that show quality style and elegance. Here are some showcase wines that are ready to drink now.



Chateau St. Jean, La Petite Etoile Fume Blanc 2006

The appellation for this white wine is from the Russian River Valley. The wine shows vibrant acidity and bright flavors of kiwi fruit and melon that linger on the long fresh finish. *Retails for 19.99*

Etude, Carneros Estate Pinot Noir 2006

Aged for fourteen months in French oak barrels this Pinot offers sweet frambois strawberries, red cherries and mocha flavors with hints of spice. *Retails for 42.99*

Stags' Leap, Napa Valley Petite Syrah 2006

The grapes come from thirty year old vines that give this wine great backbone, perfect with steaks, ribs, pork and wild game. Flavors of ripe black plum, black cherry, bittersweet chocolate and spice. *Retails for 38.99*

NEW OHIO LIQUOR LAW:

It has been a long time coming, but in October a new Ohio Liquor Law was passed. It states that any liquor establishment in Ohio can now serve liquor at 11 a.m. instead of the old 1 p.m. serving time. The Ohio Restaurant Association has been pushing for this change in law for the past 10 years. This is a major victory for private clubs, restaurants and bars in Ohio.

That's about it for this issue. In February, I will get into the world of Scotch. As you know, we just had a Glenlivet Single Malt Tasting in October and the event was a major success. I have been in contact with Rick Hines who is the Glenlivet Ambassador and he would be delighted to come here in October 2010 to do a Woodford Reserve/Blanton's Bourbon Tasting. Rick is very diversified and represents all three distilleries.

**Until then,
Les Hemingway**

Note: Some of this information was taken from the following publications:

The Ohio Beverage Journal

The Wall Street Journal

Market Watch

The Wine Journal

Cheers

The Wine Spectator

