

Hyde Park Wine Experiences and Culinary Adventures

Issues 24

The Holiday Season is a time of celebration, for reunions with family and friends and a moment to reflect on the year gone past and a new one to begin. Champagne and sparkling wines are in demand during this time of the year, yet the question becomes, which one will fit your taste? I have a few recommendations.

Purchasing a gift for someone is sometimes very hard to do but I have a few suggestions that will conquer this yearly problem.

CHAMPAGNE AND SPARKLING WINES:

HOW TO OPEN THEM?

HOW TO STORE THEM?

HOW LONG DO THEY LAST?

HOW TO PURCHASE THEM?

A celebration is not complete unless a bottle of bubbly is popped, but what is a good bottle of sparkling wine or Champagne and are they all about the same? The answer: No! When we are talking wine, the only thing similar between brands is the price. Every wine will taste differently including sparkling wine. Some may be sweeter, drier, have more bubbles or be flatter; it's all about your taste.

Flat will spell disaster: Never let the cork fly out of a bottle of Champagne or sparkling wine when you open it. This is absolutely the worst thing you could possibly do to a bottle of bubbly. First, it is very dangerous if there's someone in the room or close by. The bottle of any sparkling wine or champagne is under a great deal of pressure. Always hold the cork firmly and make slightly small twists of the cork when taking it out of the bottle. All you should be able to hear is a small hiss when the cork is removed.

Additionally, you want to keep as much carbonation inside the bottle as possible. Letting the cork fly lets out about 70 percent of it out of a bottle of wine. This will result in the wine going flat much faster and it will drastically change the taste of the product.

How does one store a bottle of champagne or sparkling wine? I am asked this question often. A bottle of bubbly is no different from a bottle of white wine. Always store them on their side, keep them in a dry, cool, dark area. If you're going to use the bottle, refrigerate the product several hours ahead of time. Once white wines or sparkling wines are in the refrigerator, it is recommend to keep them there. Never take white wine or sparkling wines out of the refrigerator and put them back in your cellar or a warm area.

The length of time you can hold a bottle of Champagne or sparkling wine varies from producer to producer. An inexpensive bottle of sparkling wine will last two years. Sure, you could open an inexpensive bottle of sparkling wine many years later, but the carbonation in the bottle will be far less than it was when you first purchased it. The wine itself will lose its balance and taste. Two years on a sparkling wine is a logical. A more expensive bottle of sparkling wine may last four to five years but no longer, while real French Champagne can last several years if stored in proper conditions.

How to purchase a bottle of bubbly depends on the buyer. If you enjoy real Champagne then you need to look only at the French. Here are a few of my recommendations:

Taittinger Brut La Francaise retails for \$49.99

Perrier Jouet Fleur retails for \$149.99

Mumm Carte Classique N/V retails for \$52.99

Piper Heidsieck Extra Dry retails for \$42.99

Domestic Sparkling

Mumm Cuvee M Retails for \$39.99

Korbel Brut Cuvee Retails for \$15.99

Domain Carneros Brut Retails for \$28.99

Greg Norman Brut Retails for \$19.99

Piper Sonoma Blanc de Noir Retails for \$19.99

Imported Sparkling

Cordorniu Pinot Noir Rosè retails for \$12.99

Santa Marghera Prosecco Retails for \$21.99

Luna D Sparkling Chardonnay/Pinot Grigio retails for \$13.99

Freixenet Blanc de Blanc Retails for \$8.99

LAYER CAKE, THIS WINE WILL BE BACK IN RETAIL SHOPS SOON:

Layer Cake, an excellent product that's still in demand, has hit a snag. All four of their wines were given rated highly, but months later they were all sold out. This is what happens when wines costing less than \$13.99 a bottle are given high marks by The Wine Enthusiast and other magazines.

Layer Cake produces four different quality Shiraz

- Layer Cake Pure Love
- The Maverick
- Desert Eagle
- Barossa Jack

Every one of these wines is truly excellent. Each one has different tasting profile but all are of exceptional quality. All have lush forward fruit, spice and hints of oak on the finish.

Now the wines are gone from store shelves and the timetable for them to appear down the road is perplexed. At first I heard that the vineyard produced a smaller than normal grape production thus created a supply and demand problem. Recently I had some inside scoop that Layer Cake will be back on the shelves within the next three months. Here at the club we too are looking forward to picking up several cases in the near future.

RED WINE OF THE MONTH:

Joseph Carr wines are very elegant, are produced in limited production and offer the quality one looks for in an excellent bottle of wine.

Joseph Carr Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley 2005 is one great bottle of red wine. Only 2,500 cases were produced in 2005 and this Cabernet shows nice black cherry, plum, and dark cassis. A touch of smoke and subtle vanilla reflects the twenty-four months of French Oak barrel aging. More of a European style but shows elegance and sophistication. *Retails for \$19.99*

WHITE WINE OF THE MONTH:

Joseph Carr Chardonnay Napa Valley 2005 shows a tropical expression of citrus, pineapple, and layers of green apple. Aged in small French Oak barrels the wine offers nuances of smoke and vanilla. *Retails for \$15.99*

CELLARING WINE OF THE MONTH:

I just had the opportunity to taste Rubicon Estate CASK Cabernet Sauvignon a few weeks ago and I must say, this is a beautiful bottle of wine. There are 235 acres of vines at Rubicon Estate with 130 acres dedicated to growing ultra-premium Cabernet Sauvignon. The renowned Chateau and Cohn Vineyards, which provided the grapes, produce Cabernet with tremendous depth, rich color, profuse berry aromas and unmistakable flavor of ripe Bing cherries.

The 2004 vintage has a classic style showing big robust tannins, plenty of dark fruit and a long and complex finish. *Retails for around \$75.99 a bottle.*

QUESTION FROM A MEMBER:

LES, WE JUST RETURNED FROM A TRIP TO FRANCE AND ITALY AND VISITED SEVERAL VINEYARDS THERE. WE FOUND THAT NONE OF THE WINES HAD SULFITES. I THOUGHT ALL WINES HAD SULFITES.

This is the most asked question I receive every month. Yes, all wines have sulfites. Sulfites are part of the natural process in the making of wine and are found in the soil where the grape vines are planted. If you look at any bottle of wine, you will see that every bottle has in print "Contains Sulfites." No matter if the wine is a Meritage red or white, a Sauvignon Blanc, a red or white table wine, a Pinot Grigio or a Burgundy. All wines contain a percentage of sulfites.

Some wines contain more sulfites than other wines. If the winemaker or the winery wishes to add more sulfites as a preservative, then this is easy to do. The more sulfites induced into a wine, the longer that wine can be preserved in the bottle. I have read that most French and Italian wineries do not induce many sulfites in their wines. If you have health reactions or concerns about sulfites, it may be best to purchase wines from these countries.

ROSÉ AND WHITE ZINFANDEL:

Many years ago, when drinking was unpopular, Rose was a hot item. Lancers Rosé, Meier's Rosé, Nectar Rosé, and even Mateus from Portugal were hot back in the sixties and early seventies. I remember back in the day when I began to work here at the club in the early 70s, we stocked all four and we sold cases of Nectar Rosé on banquets and behind the bar. Yes, believe it or not, many members at that time enjoyed drinking Rosé.

Today when a guests or a member comes up to the bar on a banquet and asked for a Rose or Blush, they most often mean they would like a White Zinfandel. These are two completely different wines. Rose is made from red-skinned grapes that a crushed and the skins are allowed to remain in contact with the juice for a short period of time. The grapes are then pressed, and the skins discarded rather than left in contact throughout the fermentation process. The longer the skins come in contact with the juice, the more color you will see in the wine. Rose wines are dry, and go very well with food.

White Zinfandel's are light and sweet and really don't pair well with food. We have one member here at the club (no names) who drinks White Zinfandel all of the time. I think he may even drink White Zin for breakfast. **The first person who names that member gets a nice gift. The member I am referring to is not included in this special promotion.** White Zinfandel, or White Zin as most consumers call it, is sweet and pink in color. The color of the wine comes from the skins of the wine staying in contact with the juice, the same as the process of Rose. Yet White Zinfandel is low in alcohol content, contains more sugar, and is almost like drinking fruit punch, although some have a crisp acid balance. White Zinfandel accounted for 10 percent of the wine sold by volume in 2006, making it the third most popular varietal in the United States.

Below are a few of my favorites Rose recommendations:

Tule Bay, Rosita Rose California 2006 Retails for \$14.99
Les Jamelles, Cinsault Rose 2005 Retails for \$8.99
Bodegas, Muga Rose 2006 Retails for \$11.99
Fireblock, Rose Australia 2005 Retails for \$19.99

Cavia, Malbec Rose Argentina Retails for \$9.99
Joguet C, Chinon, Rose 2005 Retails for \$18.99

PURCHASING THE RIGHT GIFT:

Selecting the proper gift during the holiday season for family, friends or that special someone can be a challenge. Purchasing spirits could be the best way to go. During the holiday season, gift packs are readily available at most wine and spirits shops in the area.

Generally speaking, low proof spirits like Amaretto Di Saronno, Frangelico, Sambuca Romana, Godiva Liqueur, Bailey's Irish Cream, and Kahlua always have a gift box selections which can include glassware and or coffee cups. Courvoisier and other Cognacs and Brandies also offer holiday gift packages that usually include glassware. Make sure you check out your local wine shop for holiday gift packages. I'm sure you can find something for anyone's taste.

WINES UNDER \$12 BUCKS:

Get out a pen and paper and check out these deals now available at your local retailer.

Red Tree, Petite Sirah 2006 (Very good) \$9.99

Lo Duca, Lambrusco 2006 \$10.99

Boundary Road, Shiraz 2006 (Tasty) \$7.99

Rosenblum, Cuvee XXIX Zinfandel (Good bottle of Zin) 2005 \$11.99

Costillo De Molina, Cabernet Sauvignon Reserve 2005 \$9.99

Melania, CE Collecion Especial Chardonnay 2006 \$8.99

La Terre, Pinot Grigio 2005 \$10.99

Robert Pepi, Cabernet Sauvignon 2005 \$10.99

Raymond, Amber Hill Chardonnay 2006 \$11.99

Wente, Chardonnay 2006 \$11.99

Argyle, Chardonnay 2006 Complex and elegant \$11.99

Covy Run, Riesling 2005 \$11.99

Norton, Malbec 2006 \$9.99

Two Brothers, Big Tattoo Red 2005 (Nice little Blend) \$9.99

Fat Bastard, Chardonnay 2006 \$11.99

La Playa, Block Selection (Has some backbone) Merlot \$11.99

Mark West, Pinot Noir Vd Corse 2005 (A little light but tasty) \$10.99

Riff, Pinot Grigio 2006 \$9.99

Mad Dogs and Englishmen, (from Spain very nice Blend) \$9.99

PROMOTIONS FOR THE NEXT FEW MONTHS AT THE CLUB:

Guest Bartenders Night is back for the next few months. All of these events begin at 7:00 p.m. in the old main bar.

Here is the planned events in detail

Friday, December 28, the Steamers Bowling Team show their bartending skills.

Friday, January 4, Diz and Carol Brown with family will show what they can do for you.

Friday, January 25, the Rohde family makes their annual return visit. Batten down the hatches.

On Friday January 18th we will have our **annual Cellar Wine Tasting**. No the tasting isn't in the cellar, but I blow the dust off the bottles and bring some of the expensive stuff up for you to sample. More details will be available in the December and January club newsletter.

For the beer connoisseurs, we do have a beer and food paring coming up on **Friday February 15th, featuring the brews of Grolsch**. If we have over 80 reservations, we can bring in one of the brew masters from Grolsch Brewery. The price of this event has been changed to \$36.99 per person as we have added on a few extra food items. More details will be available in the January newsletter.

A CLOSING WORD OR TWO:

It is hard to believe but 2007 is coming to a rapid close. It has been a very interesting year, with many changes in the wine industry. Takeovers, mergers between vineyards, wholesalers, and even major new retailers has formed some very interesting times.

Taking a peak preview of 2008, it will also be a year of intrigue. There is a glut of wine in California and you will see more off the wall names like "Two Buck Chuck" and "Twin Fin" on your area wine store shelves. The more elegant wines will still be pricey. High-end wines from California, Oregon and Washington State will see increased pricing on certain varietals. Import wines will also show a price increase due to the valuation of the dollar. The wine regions that show real promise of quality and variety include Spain, Argentina, and Australia.

As we end this year, we finish on a good note. The wine newsletter continues to gain a good deal of support from you, the readers. This year I have received hundreds of emails and letters from members and from non-members of the club. This is a unique publication, which gives you a little insight and information on how to purchase nice wines for your home and your cellar.

This is a time to celebrate. Hold up your glass, weather it be filled with White Zinfandel, Bordeaux, Champagne, a nice Pinot Noir, Pinot Grigio, Chardonnay, Miller Lite, Maker's Mark, Cabernet Sauvignon or Diet Coke. A toast to you... Drink well, drink responsibility. To friendships and lasting relationships, to peace in the world, to happiness and good health in the future.

Happy Holidays.

Les Hemingway
Bar Manager

Some of the information used in this newsletter was sought in the following publications:

**The Wine Spectator
The Wine Enthusiast
The Wall Street Journal
Market Watch
Bartender Magazine
The Ohio Beverage Journal
Santa
Food and Wine Magazine
The World of Wine**