

French Lessons

One of the (many) benefits of working in the wine biz is that one gets to travel. And, since grapes are grown and wines are made mostly in interesting places, one gets to travel to interesting places. Well, I just got back from France, and I gotta tell you, it was pretty interesting.

Of course, the French suffer from ridiculous stereotypes. First of all, not all of the French men that I encountered were suave and charming. Nor were all the women sexy and glamorous. While it certainly seemed true that everyone smokes, it was absolutely not true that everyone hates Americans. Perhaps all French people hate George Bush, but certainly no more than they hate Jacques Chirac.

The wines also suffer from silly stereotypes. There is not a definitive style that one could call 'French'. Not only are the wines vastly different from region to region, but within each region, the styles of individual producers vary dramatically as well. And contrary to popular opinion, not all 'village' wines are cheap and good (some are horrendous), nor are the very best wines extremely expensive and seldom exported.

The French wine industry, much like the wine industry throughout the world, is suffering. Wine consumption is down as the government has embarked on a campaign to curtail drinking. Production is heavily regulated; so many growers are incensed that there is no market for their grapes. Regional rivalries are highly emotional as the 'haves' (such as Bordeaux) struggle to maintain their position while the 'have-nots' (such as Languedoc) struggle to grow their market.

All that notwithstanding, I found at least one positive constant. The 2004 vintage, which has been largely overlooked by the American wine press, is astoundingly good. Crisp, fresh, and often priced lower than in recent years (as the dollar climbs back against the euro), the wines that I sampled from Champagne, Alsace, Burgundy, Beaujolais, Rhone, Minervois, Rousillon, Cahors, Fronsac, and St. Emilion were well-made, balanced and exciting. Almost to a person, the winemakers' expressed relief that the 'normal' vintage of 2004 would allow them to make wines of distinction. They also wondered why the wine press is once again missing the story. I tried to explain that the US wine press is not really interested in facts, they prefer to deal in hyperbole and exclamation marks, but I fear my language skills were not up to the task. Perhaps, like the wine press, I too need French lessons. [PW]

2004 Thierry et Pascale Matrot Meursault (Burgundy)

Reg. Price: \$29.99

TWS Price: \$23.99

Thierry Matrot, grandson of founder Joseph, is a bit of a maverick. He doesn't believe in vinifying or aging his wines in new oak barrels, so every year he buys new barrels and lends them to a friend to use for two years. Only then, in his opinion, are the barrels aged enough for use on his wines. His wines are always 100% estate-bottled; the family owns some 45 acres, many of which are among the finest vineyards in Burgundy. He feels that great wines are made in the vineyard, *not* in the cellar, as many seem to believe. His goal is to make wines that retain their elegance, exhibit ripe fruit characteristics, and remain true to the vineyard site.

But what *really* sets Thierry Matrot apart from his contemporaries is that he has embraced the use of Stelvin (screw-cap) closures on both this wine and his 2004 Bourgogne Blanc. With this, one can *finally* age white Burgundy with confidence! [PW]

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vintage '04 à la français

2004 Domaine La Bastide Viognier Vin de Pays d'Hauterive (Languedoc-Roussillon) Reg. Price: \$14.99 / TWS Price: \$11.99

Technically Domaine La Bastide is located within the Corbières appellation of Languedoc-Roussillon, however, since Viognier is not a recognized grape under the AC rules, this wine is classified as a Vin de Pays (even though these vines probably grow right beside the AC ones). Owners Anne-Marie and Guilhem Durand bought the property (complete with 18th century château) in 1989. Since then they have put a lot of emphasis on developing quality wines and improving the vineyards by uprooting ordinary ones and replacing them with prestigious varieties...like Viognier. Their '04 bottling shows succulent aromas of peach and spring flowers, while on the palate a streak of mineral and crisp, bracing acidity aids in balancing the expressive fruit. Dry, rich, and round, this wine is a perfect accompaniment to Indian-spiced chicken satay or halibut with mango-salsa. [IAS]

2004 Domaine Bourillon Dorléans Vouvray Sec "La Coulée d'Argent" Vieilles Vignes (Loire Valley) Reg. Price: \$18.99 / TWS Price: \$14.99

Vouvray is the largest white wine appellation in the Loire Valley and the wines from there run the gamut from crisp and apple-green to honeyed and candied sweet. The grape is Chenin Blanc, and when it's right, it rivals the greatest whites on the planet for versatility and complexity. This excellent choice walks the line between lean and rich, austere and flamboyant. Not possible you say? Pour it into a glass...smell the fresh apple and pear with honeysuckle and floral tones. Taste the full, waxy, apple skin flavors dancing around barely ripe Bosc pear. The finish is clean, crisp, and makes you salivate, wanting another sip. Go ahead, the next one is even better. [PW]

2004 Domaine des Berthiers Pouilly-Fumé (Loire Valley) Reg. Price: \$22.99 / TWS Price: \$17.99

We're often frustrated by the high price of the typically flinty, tangy, Sauvignon Blanc-based Pouilly-Fumé. So you can imagine our excitement when we discovered this (relatively) inexpensive gem! Situated in the small village of Verdigny in the Sancerre region, the Fournier family has been making wine for several generations; the estate has grown from 5 hectares in 1950 to almost 30 hectares today. Giving off aromas of stone and fruit, the palate of their Pouilly Fumé is precise and refreshing. Ideal as an aperitif or with delicately prepared white fish, its clean, memorable finish will have you going back for more. [IAS]

2004 Francois et Jean-Marie Cherrier Sancerre Chavignol Cuvée Vieilles Vignes "Les Chailloux" (Loire Valley) Reg. Price: \$16.99 / TWS Price: \$12.99

There seem to be a good number of Cherriers both residing and making wine in the Sancerre region of the Loire Valley, creating great confusion both for the retailer and the consumer. However, after much research and tasting, we have found the absolute best Sancerre value out there, Cherrier-made or not! The brilliant combination of tropical fruit and minerality makes "Les Chailloux" a knockout. Medium-bodied and lightly textured, this new '04 bottling is a breath of fresh air after a host of rather flat and flabby 2003 Sancerres. Bargain Sancerre? Yes indeed! [IAS]

2004 Philippe Colin Premier Cru Maranges "La Fussièrre" (Burgundy) Reg. Price: \$37.99 / TWS Price: \$29.99

At the southern end of Burgundy's Côte d'Or, the soil gets heavier as clay mixes with limestone. The hills gently slope to the south and the aristocratic feel vanishes. This land is of the farmer, and while the wines from *les Maranges* (the combined villages of Cheilly Lès Maranges, Dezize Lès Maranges, and Sampigny Lès Maranges) are less renowned, they don't suffer in quality beside their more exalted brethren. Philippe Colin and his brothers are now at the helm of Domaine Marc Colin, with Dad only semi-retired still keeping a watchful eye on everything. While still the undisputed kings of St. Aubin Chardonnays, the Colin's Maranges showcases their skill with Pinot Noir as well. Full, highly aromatic, and dense, the wine is Pommard-like in its intensity. The bold black fruit tangles with wet stone aromas and the firm tannins suggest that the wine will evolve nicely. If you can't wait, pour it into a decanter before imbibing. [PW]

2004 Domaine de Boissieu Beaujolais-Villages (Beaujolais) Reg. Price: \$14.99 / TWS Price: \$11.99

Just over the border from the Macon lies the village of Leynes. The Boissieu family has been tending the vines and making wines from old vine Gamay for centuries. The stable in the front yard is a testament to the family's history; an ancestor who fought in the Franco-Prussian War was saved by his horse, whereby upon his return he constructed the stable so he could see said horse every morning upon his wakening. Really. Anyway, the estate is still a family run operation and the wines show the attention to detail that perhaps only a family operation can provide. The wine is richer than most Beaujolais-Villages and, although it's decidedly Gamay in character, I'd suggest that it would benefit from some time in bottle. I had the pleasure of tasting the '02 and '97 vintages with the family; both were incredibly lively, fresh and full of fresh strawberry and herbs. Drink this one now or keep it around, either way, you'll benefit. [PW]

It is well to remember that there are five reasons for drinking: the arrival of a friend, one's present or future thirst, the excellence of the wine, or any other reason.

--Latin Proverb

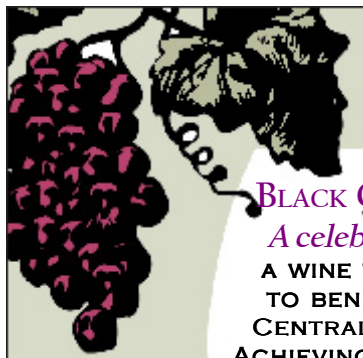
2004 Montirius "Le cadet de Montirius"

Vin de Pays Vaucluse (Rhône Valley)

Reg. Price: \$14.99 / TWS Price: \$11.99

The wines of the southern Rhône Valley ceased to be a secret in the last decade; now everyone knows about the great values produced from there. But among this veritable ocean of vines, a few producers are carving out distinctive niches. Montirius is one of those. Eric and Christine Saurel's almost fanatical devotion to biodynamic farming and determined use of concrete tanks for both fermentation and aging of their wines has illustrated the virtues of both practices to their neighbors and customers.

This is a charming wine, fresh and crisp, simple at first taste, but more alluring with each subsequent sip. Made of equal parts Grenache and Syrah with a touch of Cinsault, its clean berry flavors delight. The wine finishes easily with herbal nuances gently tinting the fruit. This is a wine for any occasion, but will shine with anything grilled. [PW]



Join us Friday, March 31st from 6-10 pm at the Evergreen's Carriage House, 4545 N. Charles Street, for

BLACK GRAPES IN BALTIMORE:
A celebration of pinot noir
A WINE TASTING FUNDRAISER
TO BENEFIT UNITED WAY OF
CENTRAL MARYLAND'S YOUTH
ACHIEVING POTENTIAL INITIATIVE

Bid for wine-related items at live & silent auctions!

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Enjoy delicious light fare from Watson's Catering!

Support United Way of Central Maryland!

Tickets are \$65 per person. Reserve your spot today!

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Beer of the Week

Abita Fleur-de-lis Restoration Ale

Abita Springs, Louisiana

\$6.99 per 6-pack

Despite the fact that Louisiana has dealt with both Katrina and Rita in the past six months, the city of New Orleans is going forward with this year's Mardi Gras celebrations. The festivities, which started last Saturday and will finish on February 28, the day before Lent, are less extensive and shorter than in years past, but the fact that they are occurring at all is a testament to the determination of the folks that still remain there.

In honor of the Big Easy and Mardi Gras 2006, our beer of the week is the Abita Brewing Company's Fleur-De-Lis Restoration Ale. A committed Louisiana company, Abita has pledged itself to the rebuilding of New Orleans by donating one dollar of every six pack of Restoration Ale sold to the Louisiana Disaster Recovery Foundation (www.louisianahelp.org). Even if the Mardi Gras celebrations in New Orleans are a little smaller this year, perhaps we can pick up the slack by drinking as much Restoration Ale as possible. [Bear]



Mark Your Calendar!

FREE CHEESE & SOUP TASTING

***Aged Manchego &
Chicken Tortilla Soup***

Thursday, February 23, 5:30-7:30 pm



LAST SUNDAY
SUPPERS
AT IGGIES

WINE DINNER

Sunday, February 26, 5:30 pm
at Iggies, 818 N. Calvert St. (Mount Vernon)
\$40 per person, including tax
For reservations, call the store at 410.467.7777

WINE DINNER

Tuscan A.B.C.

"Anything But Chianti" Dinner

Monday, February 27, 6:30 pm
at b Bistro, 1501 Bolton St. (Bolton Hill)
\$75 per person, including tax and gratuity
For reservations, call the store at 410.467.7777

WINE TASTING

Austrian Wine Tasting

Wednesday, March 8, 5-7:30 pm
Join Austrian winemakers Anton Bauer,
Leo Hillinger, Martin Mittelbach,
Brigitte Steining, and Gustav Strauss
for an evening of eye-opening wines
from Austria, one of the most unique
wine producing countries.

**For a complete up-to-date
listing of our events, check our website
at www.the-wine-source.com**

Comments from the Cheese Cave

This Week's Fresh Cheeses!

Hudson Valley Camembert: Made with a creamy blend of cow and sheep's milk by the Old Chatham Shepherding Company in New York. Super smooth, buttery texture, and a flavor that is totally addictive! Get out the bubbly for this one! *\$6 each*

Pee Wee Pyramid: Cypress Grove Chevre of McKinleyville, California makes this tiny (5 oz) pyramid-shaped version of their flagship cheese, Humboldt Fogg. It's the perfect size for any cheese board. *\$5.00 each*



Sally Jackson Renata: Single vineyard wines? Ha! How about a single cow cheese? Sally names all of her hand-made raw-milk cheeses after each of her goats, sheeps, and cows. Renata (at left) is her single brown Swiss heifer and only her milk is used to make this semi-firm, leaf-wrapped marvel. We have only a few pounds of this one to go 'round so get yours quick! *\$18.00 per pound*

Haystack Mountain Goat Dairy Red Cloud: We keep getting requests for interesting goat's milk cheese and we think Red Cloud will satisfy all you chevre lovers out there! Made with raw milk and aged for just over 60 days, Red Cloud is a soft, washed-rind cheese with a powerful aroma and flavor. *\$12.00 each 8 oz. round*

New Charcuterie

Molinari Hot Coppa: Dry cured pork shoulder seasoned with black pepper and spices. Excellent on an antipasto plate or all by itself. A killer addition to any cold-cut sandwich! *\$11.25 per pound*

Rosette de Lyon: Dry-cured, French-style pork salami with wine and garlic from Salumeria Biellese in New York City. These guys make some of the best salamis found anywhere. They use the best quality cuts of fresh pork, fresh spices, and natural casings to make their traditional salamis. Treat yourself to a taste of the best! *\$16 per pound*

Prosciutto di Parma On Sale!

Regularly \$18 per pound, our Prosciutto di Parma is on special this week for **only \$14 per pound!** Use it to spice up your workday sandwich or weeknight pasta!

Coming Next Week...

Back by popular demand! Our second installment of goat's milk cheeses from **Capriole Farms** in Greenville, Indiana. We'll have Banon, Mont St. Francis, Old Kentucky Tomme, Piper's Pyramid, and Wabash Cannonball! You might want to call ahead to reserve some--our last shipment sold out fast!

THE WINE SOURCE
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