

For the Love of Wine

Wise-up on Wine Every Saturday
We Ship Anywhere in Connecticut.

Volume XVI—No.1, June 2002
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THE WINE

Editorial

Madison
Wine
Shop



Wines of the Future ...Rick's Picks Today

Every so often the press or the trade “discovers” a wine from an unusual grape or source, and just as frequently we say to ourselves - ‘Hey, that has been a Rick’s Picks for years!’

Mass-marketers care nothing about wine, only about money. Mass marketers push mediocre Merlot, cookie-cutter Cab, and woody Chard. Their forte is “White Merlot”! These are the wines retailers are pushed to sell, but when I am pushed, my natural inclination is to push back, and the diverse world of wine provides the means.

For me, seeking and discovering new experiences, as well as revisiting old ones, is, and has been for over fifty years, a rewarding source of pleasure and satisfaction.

Many, if not most of you know and enjoy my first Wine-Love—**Casal Garcia Vinho Verde**, by which I was smitten in Mozambique in 1946. You are enjoying it now only because you were willing to try something unfamiliar and different some 14 years ago.

I knew of **Grenache** and **Syrah** as grape varieties way back in the sixties—they are components of Chateaufort-du-pape—but I first became aware of the character they could impart to wine when I discovered a Cote du Rhone from **Gigondas**. That was before Gigondas had acquired appellation status, so it had to have been in the mid-seventies. That Cote du Rhone was about half the price of Chateaufort, and it had both fruit and a peppery, spicy finish that I had never before experienced. I found out where it came from and what it was made of, and I became aware of the role played by soil and climate—as well as grape variety, and the winemaker’s skill—in the production of wine. Today Syrah is my favorite grape and the slopes of the *magic Montmirail Mountains*, my favorite vineyard sites—**Vacqueyras, Gigondas, Rasteau and Sablet**.

Our first trip to Provence and Languedoc was in 1982. There were some good wines in Provence, but virtually none in Languedoc—probably the largest wine growing area in the world, producing probably the worst wine in the world (most of it drunk by the French). But the Common Market forced a change.

Today, in the Midi, as Roussillon, Languedoc and Provence are known, there are scores of appellations, and hundreds of producers, both large and small, that did not exist in 1982.

On our shelves today there are hundreds of wines from the Midi and both the northern and southern Rhone. They are made from Syrah, Grenache, Mourvedre, Roussillon, Tannat and countless other grapes, at prices ranging from \$7 and up; many under \$10 and most under \$20. *But what I find astounding is that these wines have so little following elsewhere—not yet!*

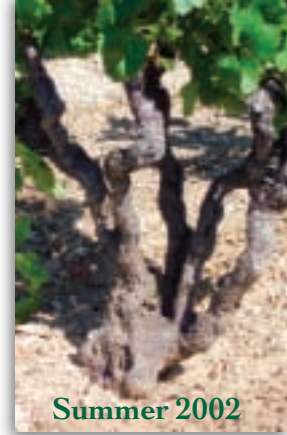
Shiraz (a.k.a. Syrah) has always been big in Australia. Shortly after I purchased the Madison Wine Shop, my predilection for Syrah led me to taste and scoop up most of the **Penfold’s Grange Hermitage** ‘81 and ‘82 that was available in Connecticut. At that time it sold for \$35 a bottle and most of our customers thought I had gone mad. I still have some of those and some ‘88s. They now sell for around eight times that original price. Now named **Penfold’s Grange**, it is still unquestionably Australia’s greatest wine and it continues to be ranked among the world’s best. I have stopped buying them. They are priced out of our market!!

The first “big-time” Syrah at MWS was **Domaine de la Coste**, starting about 14 years ago. Today there are hundreds of Syrah and Syrah-based blends in our inventory, while the rest of the world outside of Australia and France is barely beginning to recognize the grape. I would not be surprised if the percentage of Syrah-aware wine shoppers is higher at the Madison Wine

Continued on p.2, col.1



Vineyards on Hermitage Hill, Looking down on the Rhone.



Summer 2002

Inside

Wines of the Future	1
Wine Delivery—	
Rick’s Picks Quick	2
Rick’s Evening Express	2
A World Without Italy...?	2
Do They Have Tin Palates?	3
With Love from the Loire	4
Cabernet Franc...the Other Cab	4
A Diamond from the Rough	5
“Bad” Wine—the Retailer’s Worst Nightmare ..	5
BYOB to the Savory Café	5
Our Burgundian Bonanza	6
Labels Bedevil Burgundy	6
Burgundian Chardonnay	6
Pinot Noir	7
Wines of Alex Gambal	8
Rick Recants	8
Sensational Summer Sizzlers	9
Return of the Killer Wines	9
Les Here+iques	10
Don’t Drink Wine...Kiss It!	10
Jump for Joy with Julia—	
Grape Expectations	11
Wise-up on Wine	12



Wise-Up
on wine

WHO?
YOU!

WHAT?

TASTE & COMPARE
RICK'S PICKS &
AN OCCASIONAL
RICK'S NIX

WHY?

IT'S FUN
IT'S INFORMAL &
IT'S INFORMATIVE

WHERE?

THE
MADISON WINE
SHOP, MADISON
CONNECTICUT

WHEN?

EVERY
SATURDAY
12NOON-8PM
& MOST OTHER
DAYS, TOO

Wine-tasting

has top priority at MWS. We rarely buy wine without tasting, and Saturday wine tastings have been a fixture at the Madison Wine Shop since 1985. Back then, we gathered, with three or four customers at a time, around an up-ended wine barrel.

In 1987, our then new display racks incorporated a removable tasting counter that we popped into place every Saturday. As word of our tastings spread, and their popularity grew that arrangement was no longer adequate to handle the number of attendees and we cast about for an alternative.

Chronically short of space, we did what had to be done—out with wine-coolers, ice and soda refrigerator. We reduced our beer storage and built our current wine tasting counter that will, in a pinch, serve as many as ten people at a time. That counter covers a beer storage pile, and also serves as our 'executive dining room', our 'order department', our 'shipping and receiving department', and, at holiday-time, as the 'wrapping department'.

While we always have Saturday tastings, we will always offer anything we have open during the week.

Our Prices

We show two prices for each item, e.g. \$9⁹⁹ / 8⁹⁹. The first is the bottle price, the second is the bottle-by-the-case price—usually reflecting a **10% discount**—Mix-or-Match.

Our Ratings

✓✓ = Exceptional Value ✓ = Exceptional Quality

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Our wine tastings have evolved into a casual two-way process of education. We learn from you and you learn from us. We even learn to communicate. When you say 'dry' we need to know that you don't mean 'tannic'. When we say 'dry' you need to know that we mean 'not sweet'. Without tasting, that's impossible.

Even **how** you taste is important—we are all guilty of gulping and wasting whatever sensual experiences are lurking in that glass—and we are working on that—to the delight of many!

I have been asked to publicize, ahead of time, what will be tasted on a particular Saturday. But that will not work. Our tastings are informal and somewhat spontaneous. We often taste what we have bought and/or tasted in the past week. We pick other wines from inventory as a comparison. We share with you our experiences: good wines, bad wines, quirky wines, good values, poor values, all of which we encounter in abundance. **Above all we have irreverent fun and lots of laughs.**

You are required to be open-minded. **We have rules, which we enforce lightly-heartedly.** You may not pick and choose—you must taste all four of the wines we offer in the order we suggest. We are not offended if you don't like every one of them.

While we always have Saturday tastings, we will always offer anything we have open during the week.

In the course of 17 years, a philosophy has evolved, reflecting what we think a wine shop should be about. We cast about for a slogan that would reflect that philosophy and we came up with '**Wise-Up on Wine**'. We can open a whole new world of wine appreciation.

At the Madison Wine Shop you may, if you prefer, simply purchase a wine of your choice, or you can take advantage of a philosophy that is aimed at giving you an opportunity to explore the diversity and pleasure of wine, often for less than you expect, which is why we often ask '**what do you NOT want to spend**'.

To err is human, to forgive dewine.

Shop than any other wine-shopper group in the country.

Rioja is synonymous with Spanish wine, but where else will you find wines from **Priorat, Bierzo, Jumilla, Ribero del Duero, Toro** and many more Spanish appellations? Where else will you find **Txakoli** from the Basque region of Spain? Where else will you find obscure but inexpensive and exciting wines from Italy, from Uruguay, from Argentina? Where else will you find **Cour-Cheverny** from the Loire valley—my **“Wine of the Millenia”** and my **“Ultimate Shell-fish Wine”**?

Where else will you find our selection of Portuguese wines—especially **old Madeiras** which, when we first offered them 15 years ago were being given away when compared to prices today—if you can find them. Portugal is producing world-class wines at eye-rolling prices—I tasted some new ones last night—look out for **Marques de Borba** and **Quinta Mimosa**. Then, in June, we are taking a trip to Portugal to attend a Wine Fair in Porto and to simply snoop around!

Where else will you find our best-selling sparkling wine, **Comte Bernex**, or anything like it? Take a look at our *House Champagne*—**Jean Laurent** and particularly the especially disgorged, trend-setting “no-dosage” bottling. (Could “no-dosage” be the Champagne wave of the future?)

Where else will you find our **Malbec Carmenère** and **Tannats**, Rick’s Picks from South America?

Scan this newsletter, and you will get an idea of the breadth of our selections—focused for the most part on affordability. Visit the store (but do not look for nationally advertised brands—you will not find them).

Rick Lewis



directly at the multi-level Gaja winery built into the hillside on which the town sits. And who is Gaja—he is the “Robert Mondavi” of Italy—in spades!

Having lived in Italy for several years, having had memorable relationships with upstairs neighbors, with business people from clerks to executives, with construction workers, and especially having an Italian daughter-in-law, I have an affinity for most things Italian. I might even take my headline a step further, to posit that the world might well be a better place if populated entirely by Italians (sensa Mafiosa)!

We usually think of France as THE wine country, but I believe that honor belongs to Italy. For the most part Frenchmen do not make their own wine, but wine is so much a part of Italian culture, that Italian-Americans, especially those whose roots are in the south, still take pride in their home-made wine.

There is hardly any region of Italy that does not produce wine—in the past much of it was of questionable quality, but not any more. Those harsh, rustic wines, especially from the south are now a rarity, at least on this side of the pond.

In Italy, the word “wine” virtually implies the prefix “red”, and while France and the New World have doted on *Cabernet* and *Merlot*, the traditional Italian “thoroughbred” varietals have been *Nebbiolo* and *Sangiovese*. *And are they ever different! The palate that loves the black fruit of Cab and Merlot, has a hard time getting a handle on Nebbiolo and Sangiovese.*

You will never—no I dare not say that—you will hardly ever find fruity *Nebbiolo* or *Sangiovese*, at least not in the sense that we define “fruit” and “flavor” synonymously. They have bouquet, aroma and flavor, but of a different kind, one that is not always appealing to the lovers of “fruit bombs”, and one that is hard to describe, but I will try.

Traditional upscale Italian winemaking uses aging in “old” rather than “new” wood and when new wood is used I am happy to say it is usually restrained.

Nebbiolo, the aristocrat of Piedmontese grape varietals is incapable of being made

into a vinous “fruit bomb”, or so it would seem. It is responsible for the “royals” of Italian reds—*Barolo the King* and *Barbaresco the Queen*. *Nebbiolo* wines are often described as full-bodied but I disagree—partly because “full-bodied” is a shop-worn, virtually meaningless wine descriptor that implies a “mouth-feel” that is thick or viscous. On the contrary *Nebbiolo* wines often have a light mouth-feel, belying their complex, sometimes intense bouquet and flavor. *They offer depth and complexity rather than “density”, muscle rather than voluptuousness and they display rather austere, smokey, tarry, earthy, woody, mushroomy flavors that can be intense, literally overwhelming the senses.*

Tannins often dominate, and my nagging question when evaluating them is “will the tannin out-live the fruit”. Finding good *Barolos* and learning to love them is a worthwhile endeavor. A great *Barolo* will leave “tar and faded violets” floating around in my head for days.

The boundaries that demarcate the appellations of *Barolo* and *Barbaresco* are separated by no more than five miles, but the “ter-

roirs” are different, as are the wines. Their common *Nebbiolo* provenance is readily apparent but the *Barbaresco* is usually softer, perhaps rounder, more accessible to both palate and purse.

Langhe is the region of Piedmont that encompasses both *Barolo* and *Barbaresco*, and wines labeled *Nebbiolo de Langhe* can be both affordable and exciting.

Barbera, the workhorse grape of Piedmont makes wine for the masses (snobbery is neither implied nor intended). Much of it is very drinkable if not downright delicious—flesher, fruitier and more affordable than its upscale brethren. The better ones are labeled *Barbera d’Alba* or *Barbera d’Asti*, but do not shun “plain” *Barbera*. Good *Barbera* has what I can only describe as a very characteristic tannic “edge” that balances the fruit to perfection.

Some Rick’s Piedmont Picks

And now back to the wines of Carlo and Carla Giacosa. These three wines, waiting for you on our shelves, offer pleasure and satisfaction far beyond their modest prices. I urge you to go for them—fast! **Giacosa ‘99 “La Lina” Barbera ‘99** ✓✓

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Call 800-899-rickpick, or Email rick@rickspicks.com but do it now!

“Remember, the Wine Editorial is not a catalogue. It is a newsletter and it reflects only a sampling of our Extensive Inventory. Call or email us with your requests, come in and browse or scan our entire inventory on a computer terminal.

A World Without Italy, Italians or Italian Wine?...Unimaginable!

This thought was sparked by a pair of wine-makers, husband and wife, who showed up in the store a couple of months ago. Carlo and Carla Giacosa—warm, outgoing Italians, with workman’s hands and limited English—proudly displaying their Estate Bottled wines from northern Italy’s Piedmont region. And what wines they are—affirmation, if any is needed, that *mass-produced, mass-market wines may outsell artisanal wines but will never replace them.*

The Giacosa’s winery and vineyards are across a valley from the northern Italian town of *Barbaresco*, in Piedmont, looking

\$17.99/16.79, Giacosa '98 Langhe Nebbiolo, ✓✓ \$18.99/17.09, Giacosa '98 Barbaresco, ✓ \$29.99/26.99.

My Barbaresco Picks include several wines from *Produttori*, a co-op (of all things) that makes single-vineyard wines that are, in my opinion, consistently tops. Ask to see our list. I also recommend **Romano Marengo '96 Ca Rome Barbaresco**, well worth its **\$50.00/45.00** price tag.

If you are interested, please ask to see our complete listing of Barolo (or any other wine). We can pop it up on the computer screen for you in seconds. To spark your interest, I am going to aim high and low on Barolo—our rich-man's offering—fit for a king—**Aldo Conterno '97 Colonnello, \$120.00/108.00**. Stellar winemaker and stellar vintage. Buy it while you can, but wait a while before enjoying it. And then our poor man's Barolo—guaranteed to make you jump for sheer joy. Get more than a glimmer—much more—of what Barolo is all about—**Dezzani '96 Il Barolo**, and only ✓✓ **\$24.99/22.49**, and while you are about that, pick up a bottle of **Dezzani '98 Scaglioni Barbera d'Asti, \$16.99/15.29**. Wow!

Gattinara was, back in the sixties, my first encounter with Nebbiolo. *Gattinara* was, and probably still is, virtually unknown, a secret guarded by Italian wine cognoscenti. But I have a treat for you, **Sergio Gattinara's '95 Gattinara, ✓ \$15.99/14.39**. Velvety, rich, mature Nebbiolo for a song. And, if you act fast there are just a few bottles of **Sergio Gattinara's '90** masterpiece, **\$26.00/23.40**

Finally, two lovely wines that are simply "*Piedmontese Reds*", **Ombra '00, \$11.99/10.79** **Lissandro '00, \$17.99/16.19**.

Some Rick's Tuscan Picks

The slopes surrounding the hilltop town of *Montalcino* in southern Tuscany are home to *Brunello di Montalcino*. The Brunello grape is a superior clone of Sangiovese, allegedly isolated in the mid-19th century by Ferruccio Bondi Santi. The house of Bondi Santi is to this day, as reflected in their prices, the most prestigious Brunello producer, but I have been consistently disappointed in the wines.

When you come upon good Brunello, it is hard to beat for sheer pleasure. It has the leathery quality which I find in most Sangiovese wines—distinctly Italian, and distinctly Sangiovese. Better bottlings age beautifully, acquiring depth and mellowness that can make one shed tears of joy. Unfortunately, picking and choosing is tough—price and vintage no guarantee—go for Rick's Picks!

Originally the cask ageing period for Brunello was 5 to 6 years and, until 1960, there were only 11 producers. Now there

are nearly 100 and the minimum ageing period has been reduced to 48 months, still a financial burden for producers. However, beginning in the eighties, a second DOC, *Rosso di Montalcino* was established, requiring only 1 year of aging, and the wine, affectionately but unofficially dubbed "*Baby Brunello*", has been proliferating. Many offer exceptional value.

Such is **La Gerla '99 Rosso di Montalcino** at ✓✓ **\$18.99/17.09**, which blows away many of the \$60 and up Brunellos that I have tasted in the past two years. It prompted me to try several vintages of **La Gerla's regular Brunello** and I ended up buying all of the available '95. **\$54.99/49.49**. You must taste these wines!! They are at the other end of the spectrum from new world Cabs and Merlot. How can I describe them? They creep up on you starting with the earthy bouquet, and in the mouth you are impelled to linger, with a gradual realization that this is different, more powerful, more esoteric, and then...a revelation which reappears with every mouthful.

You will also enjoy **Rosso de Altesino '98 Toscana, \$4.99/13.49**, another Baby Brunello.

Then in true Madison Wine Shop style we have our **Single-digit Super Tuscan** (forgive us, we cheat just a little)—✓✓ **\$9.99/8.99**. We sold hundreds of cases of the '**96 Conti Contini**. Passed up the '97 and '98, but now rolling out cases of the '**99**. One hundred percent ever so tasty Sangiovese and proud of it.

Chianti is of course the flagship of Tuscan wines, and it is changing—for the better. Of our many offerings here are a few picked at random. **Pierozzuoli '95 Chianti, ✓✓ \$11.99/10.89**, packs a wallop of flavor, texture and just enough tannin. **Salcineto '97 Chianti Classico, ✓ \$19.99/17.99** and **Villa Cafaggio '97 Chianti Classico, \$20.99/19.98** are good examples of the great '97 vintage. One of my all-time favorite Chianti's is **Vignamaggio Mona Lisa, a Chianti Classico Riserva**. For current drinking I recommend the superb '**95 at \$27.99/24.99**.

Cinderella becomes a Princess

Every now and then a wine-maker succeeds in making a silk purse out of a sow's ear. In this case the sow's ear is *Trebbiano* (a.k.a. *Ugni Blanc*), the world's most ubiquitous white grape, responsible most of the world's white plonk (and Cognac!). The *silk purse* is ✓✓ **Avanzi '00 Lugana Sirmione, \$9.99/8.99**. When I tasted this gem I was forced to rethink my prejudice.



Check it Out!
www.rickspicks.com

DO THEY HAVE TIN PALATES?

Apparently, "good taste" is no more a prerequisite for making wine than it is for composing music, or painting or any of the other creative arts

Those who make mass-market wines are no doubt doing the bidding of the "*marketing department*"—they are, perhaps through no fault of their own, technicians rather than winemakers. Then there are "*artists*" who make wine as a form of artistic expression. Some struggle for recognition, some achieve cult status, and some are reaching for it. But, when their art appears no longer to be a slave to the marketplace, I am frequently driven to the conclusion that *the wine maker in question has no taste*. Specifically, why are they unable to taste what they are doing to beautiful wines when they tar them with oak—the MSG of Wine (to borrow a phrase from Willy Gluckstern's *The Wine Avenger*).

If a particular wine has no character I guess it is OK to obliterate it with oak. But if the wine had character and was so treated by the winemaker—what was he thinking? What was he tasting? My finger is pointing not only at Californian and Australian winemakers but also at French, where I have had the opportunity on occasion to taste a wine (albeit successive vintages) before and after barrel-aging, and my conclusion was *either they have no taste or they are persuaded that oak is what the market wants*.

What sparked this tirade is a delicious South African Cabernet/Syrah labeled **Guardian Peak**. The **2000 vintage** sells for ✓✓ **\$12.99/11.69**. A bargain! Complex fruit, wonderfully balanced by tannin and oak.

The back label, and my supplier, confirm that it is vinified and bottled by *Rust en Vrede Vineyards in Stellenbosh South Africa*, but presumably the grapes were grown elsewhere. When I tasted and bought this wine I also tasted and rejected the estate bottled wines of *Rust en Vrede*—*the oak not only obliterated the taste but doubled the price! Who should we blame? The winemaker? The marketer?*

When my ranting and railing has fallen on the ears of those responsible those ears appear to be deaf, or perhaps they have no taste. But I know for certain from our Wise-up on Wine tastings that you, our customers, can taste *the difference between oak-flavored wine and wine-flavored wood-extract* and you prefer the former and in many cases, no oak at all!



With Love... from the Loire

It is now three years since *Romorantin* and **Cour-Cheverny** came roaring into Madison and the applause continues unabated. Is there anyone who doesn't know what I am talking about? Just in case—*Francois Cazin's Cour-Cheverny* is a Loire white wine made of a grape called Romorantin. It is my "**Wine of the Millennium**" and my "**Ultimate Shell-fish Wine**". In those three years you have consumed hundreds of cases of three vintages—'95, '96, '97 and now in the store—'98 and '99; all five vintages remarkably consistent. It debunks the marketing "wisdom" that we Americans want wine with residual sugar, no acid and plenty of fruit. I describe it as the "most acidic wine in the store". We're not afraid of the "A" word—wine without acid is grape juice. If you still have not tried it may I ask "What are you waiting for?" It's only **\$13.99/12.59!**



I often scoff at those who choose wine by labels—but here is a case where picking the attractive label and the pretty package will also get you a **Dynamite** wine. **Cailbourdin's '99 Triptyque Pouilly-**



fume, ✓ \$27.99/25.19, is not only a stunning package, but is one of the most exquisite Sauvignon Blancs I have ever tasted. **Highly Recommended** —



Cabernet Franc... The Other Cab

Why do we dote on *Cabernet Sauvignon* and *Merlot*? Nothing wrong with many wines made of these popular varieties—at best they are the stuff of our greatest wines—but many are pretty boring. Not the fault of these varieties—*blame the wine-grower, winemaker or marketer, or all of them.*

And then, why is *Cabernet Franc* virtually unknown? It lurks unrecognized and unknown in many Bordeaux reds, especially those from the right bank of the Gironde river—*St Emillion, Pomerol and Fronsac*. It lurks unrecognized in most red Loire Valley wines like *Chinon*. But 100% Cab Franc is a rarity—except perhaps at the Madison Wine Shop

But the beginning of my Cab Franc story goes back to my second or third year at MWS, when I found and scooped up all 40 cases of a "distressed" Spanish red wine from an obscure appellation in Galicia called *Bierzo*. The label proclaimed that it was made of "*Black Mencia*" which, according to the sources I consulted, is none other than Cab Franc, and that it had been brought to Spain in the middle ages from France by priests traveling to missionaries in Galicia. That "*chocolate*" wine, as it became known at MWS, was a hit and quickly disappeared, never to be found again. *People still ask for it.*

I have since read that there is some uncertainty regarding Mencia; that there are two distinctly different varieties, both called Mencia and only one appears to be a local strain of Cab Franc. So, while Spanish "Cab Franc" tastes somewhat different from Loire Cab Franc, so does Cab Franc from Washington state and Australia. *A rose by any other name would smell as sweet, so I will not be diverted by nomenclature.*

Well, we now have no less than three Spanish "chocolate" wines from Galicia, and although all are Mencia, each is different—could not choose so I bought them all. **Noite '00 Galiciano Mencia, \$9.99/8.99.** From *Abadia da Cova* in the appellation *Ribeira de Sacra* we have the '98 Mencia, **\$12.99/11.69**, and the '00 *Seleccion Especial*, **\$19.99/17.99**. The *Noite* is a terrific wine value and the *Seleccion Especial* is particularly rich and full of dark fruit with distinct chocolate/cocoa undertones.

I had read somewhere that there was some Cab Franc in Australia and finally one showed up at a trade tasting. *Wow! ✓✓Paracombe '99 Adelaide Hills, \$27.99/25.19*, is a luscious, complex, textured, balanced, blockbuster. Nothing like the typical Australian Syrah or Cab. *This is probably the most unique and exquisite Australian wine I have ever tasted. Do not wait!*

Many *Chateau Saint Michelle's* Washington State wines, especially their single-vineyard bottlings, have found their way to the MWS, and the best (my opinion, and yours) has been their **Cab Franc**. The last vintage was the **1993 Cold Creek**

Vineyard. I, and you, bought a ton. It ran out last November, and the distributor said "No more and no more coming". I screamed and screamed and finally found that there were 22 cases of the '93 still available at the winery. They shipped me a sample. It is aging beautifully. It peaked about the second or third day after it was opened and only then began to fade. It is round, mellow, spicy and ready. *It will be back in stock long before you read this and still at its original price, \$27.99/25.19.*

How about a Cab Franc from Connecticut? And one that has my vote for the best red wine produced in the state. It is **Sharpe Hill's '99 Cab Franc, \$16.99/15.29**—a beautiful wine more in the style of Loire Cab Francs than any of the others discussed above. Here is a winery that is doing good things in Pomfret, CT—the boonies in the northeast corner of the state. I am told that they have a great restaurant—877-771-7147. I have not yet eaten there

Cab Francs from the Loire almost always have a "*bell pepper*" bouquet and taste that some folks do not like. It sometimes shows up in wines from other regions that contain the grape—even as little as 5%. Another characteristic that often stands out in Loire wines and Bordeaux wines containing Cab Franc is a "*dusty*" tannin taste in the back of the mouth. When present, these Cab Franc telltales come across loud and clear.

Our most popular Cab Franc, *and now our replacement for Beaujolais Nouveau*, which has become so obscene both in price and quality that we no longer offer it, is **Petit Bourgeois Rouge '99, \$8.99/7.89.**



The Loire valley wines like *Chinon, Bourgueil, and St. Nicholas de Bourgueil* showcase the true character of this lovable grape, frequently exhibiting bell pepper aroma and taste and dusty tannins. Of these my personal favorite is **Coteau de Noiré '99 Chinon, \$24.99/22.49**, where I find the varietal character intensely mouth-filling with what I can only describe as a granular mouth-feel. *A Must Try!* Do not overlook **Alliet '99 Chinon, \$20.99/18.89** and **Baudry '98 Chinon, \$13.99/12.99**, but probably best of all is **Joel Talau's '97 St Nicholas de Bourgueil, ✓✓\$13.99/12.99.**



A Diamond from the Rough

Over the past few years I have been singing the praises of a little-known wine growing region of South Australia—*Langhorne Creek*, on the coast east of Adelaide. *Its wines stand out.*

Frank Potts was one of the first settlers in South Australia—he arrived in 1836 and we can guess why! He established *Bleasdale Vineyard* in 1850 (how it got the name *Bleasdale* is another story) and he devised a system of irrigating the otherwise dry, deep, alluvial soils by winter flooding from the *Bremer River*.

The soil and the relatively cool micro-climate must account, at least in part for the unusual character and quality of the wines from *Langhorne Creek*. Commenting on *Langhorne Creek*, Hugh Johnson says, “a region plundered by most of the big companies for its soft, gentle mouthfilling Shiraz and, especially, Cabernet”.

But winemaking must play a part—I do not necessarily find these wines “soft”, they have adequate tannin. They certainly have fruit, and it is not the ubiquitous one-dimensional kind—fragrant, complex, rich, minty and spicy and these characteristics are displayed in each of the wines we offer from the *Bremerton Vineyards*, and from *Bleasdale Vineyards*. And, thank the Lord, **they restrained the oak.**

Try, **Bremerton '98 Young Vines Shiraz, \$21.99/19.89, Bleasdale '98 Mulberry Tree Cabernet, \$16.99/ 15.29, Bleasdale '99 Cab/Shiraz, \$14.99/13.49.** You will be delighted.

However, you will be **transported** by **Bleasdale '99 Frank Potts, ✓ \$27.99/25.19.** Tasted this wine over a year ago and *was determined that it be mine—and yours.* After countless communications, cajoling and coercing the importer, and the distributor *we have it! Cabernet (75%), Shiraz (15%) and Malbec (9%). What a combination. Black fruits of all kinds, mint, spice—never ending—with underlying sweet oak and soft tannin. My reaction—Omygosh!*



“BAD” WINE—THE RETAILER’S WORST NIGHTMARE.

Wine is unlike any other consumer product—availability of the better wines is limited, vintages are limited and variable, there is sometimes bottle variation, they change over time, and there is no way to non-destructively sample or test a particular bottle. Finally, the judgement of quality is largely subjective.

Some years ago I sampled and bought a wine at the winery in France. When it arrived I tasted it and concluded that it was not the same wine I had tasted at the winery. We sent several bottles back for them to check. They came back with the response that the wines tested ok in the lab. I insisted that testing and tasting are not the same thing. “Taste”—our subjective olfactory response to literally hundreds of trace compounds in wine—cannot be duplicated by “testing”. We had a tough time settling that argument.

In the wine retailer-consumer relationship there is nothing close to an industry standard for handling consumer complaints, in part because alcoholic beverages (and therefore wine) may not be sold on consignment, at least in this state, and therefore cannot (legally) be taken back. No serious retailer wants to alienate any customer if he can help it, but this particular issue is a mine-field, and I believe that I should address it.

We do not always agree on what constitutes “bad” wine but when we do my response is fairly straight forward. If it is a “current” vintage, I replace it or offer to exchange it for full credit. When it is a “collectible” the buyer buys at his risk. My definition of current and collectible depends on the wine—a five-year old classified Bordeaux would be current, but a five-year-old Pinot Grigio would not. And it would also depend on how long ago the wine was purchased. Generally any wine 10 years or more old is sold at the buyer’s risk—I take seriously my responsibility to store wine correctly.

The really thorny issues arise when we do not agree, and that mostly happens when the consumer encounters something unfamiliar or unexpected, especially with older wines. Wines do not necessarily get better as they get older—they change and beauty is in the eye of the beholder. To some palates, expecting an extension of the black fruit of a young red, the dried fruit, nutty, woody or earthy quality of a mature wine is a disappointment. To others it is sought after. To some a “barnyard” bouquet in an old red Burgundy is a treasure, to others it is offensive.

I like to warn someone buying an older wine as to what they should expect, while taking care not to offend a customer who is more wine knowledgeable.

In the end many of these situations become a “called shot”. I try to be as fair as possible. I probably tend to bend more for a regular customer, but I become unyielding when confronted by someone who is unwilling to at least listen to my side of the argument. Regardless, I encourage you to speak up any time you have a question regarding a wine, *but please, bring the bottle back promptly with most of the wine in it.*

BYOB (a Rick’s Pick of course) to the Savory Café Patio.

When—every Friday and Saturday evening during the Summer.

Why—Dine informally and inexpensively, on **great grilled food** accompanied by **wonderful wine** and **live music**. For a fraction of what you will spend elsewhere for comparable quality and ambiance, you can have a terrific evening on the town. Treat yourself and your favorite dinner partner.

How—It’s easy—pick out your wine—at the **Wise-up on Wine Tasting** or from our shelves—then stroll 10 paces to the Patio, or do it the other way around—order your food, than step over to the Wine Shop and choose your wine.

No Reservations—First Come First Served from 6pm to 9pm (no reservation needed at the Madison Wine Shop, but be sure to leave enough time to taste and browse!!)



Rick and Alison on her Savory Café Patio.

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Our Burgundian Bonanza

Think Big, Think Beautiful, Think Burgundy... Stop Thinking Big Bucks!

When most wine-drinkers think Burgundy, if they think of it at all, they think big bucks. *But I can offer you white Burgundy (Chardonnay) for \$9.99 and red Burgundy (Pinot Noir) for a mere \$10.99.* Now, I'm not offering Romanee-Contee or Le Montrachet (not my style), but wine that you can really enjoy every day and, for just a few bucks more I can make your day—every day.

"Wines of the Times" in the May 5th edition of *The New York Times* covered Pinot Noir from California's Russian River—it was interesting. First, while the prices ranged from a low of \$13 to a high of \$54, six of the ten wines were over \$30 and four were over \$40. More importantly, the reviews were less than exciting—of the top-rated wine, at \$50, one reviewer, Amanda Hesser said "I can't get passed the wood", and of the group of wines tasted, "I wouldn't be willing to pay a lot of money for them; I'd say \$25 tops. Otherwise I'd turn the page to Burgundies." Bravo Amanda!

Only the previous Saturday we tasted what I call a "Get on your knees" Gevrey-Chambertin that sells for \$49—sky-high for MWS, but I could not resist! Many did get on their knees and many more pulled out their wallets! **Geantet-Pansiot '99 Gevrey-Chambertin "Les Jeunes Rois", ✓ \$49.00/44.10.** *Les Jeunes Rois*, is, by the way, the single vineyard from whence the grapes for this wine came.

So, yes, there are expensive Burgundies, and I have to confess at having succumbed to the spell of a **Clos Vougeot 1999**



Cote de Nuits that I am obliged to sell for **\$150**—if I can! But I do not fret that I might not be able to. I would be quite happy to take it all home. There is no doubt in my mind that the wine is worth every penny (yes our 10% case discount, mix-or-match, does apply)—*it is as*

exquisite as any wine I have tasted—the glory of Pinot Noir in all its hedonistic splendor.

But \$150 is a far cry from my norm, and I keep finding irresistible red and white Burgundies at beat-down-the-door prices. *Let me entice you. But first an explanation.*

With California and Australia you only need to remember a brand and a varietal—the simplicity, and dumbing-down that comes with brands. With Burgundy, many consumers (and believe it or not, many in the trade) are confused, if not intimidated, by appellations, vintages and labels. They are compelled to regard price as the yardstick of quality, sometimes spending more than they should or would prefer to, or they tend to stick with what they know or think they know (how does/did "Pouilly-Fuisse" become a household word in the English language). I am fond of telling people that they can stand with one foot in Pouilly-Fuisse and the other in Saint-Veran—*these are place names—not nearly as important as the vigneron's name, or the wine in the bottle.*

It is labels that bedevil Burgundy.

I have heard it said, not entirely in jest, "To find a complete list of all Burgundian wine-makers, look in the phone directory". Nearly everyone in Burgundy makes wine, and the winemaker's name may be the most important piece of information on the label—that is if it is on the label and if you know who is making good wine!

There are those who grow grapes, there are those who make wine, there are those who bottle wine and those who market wine. All things being equal your best bet, but no guarantee, is a wine bottled by the guy who grew the grapes, made the wine and bottled it—*Estate Bottled*—on a French label it would be something like *Mis en Bouteille a la Propriete* or *Mis en Bouteille a la Domaine* or *Mis en Bouteille par le Vigneron*.

At the very least every label will tell you who bottled the wine—"Mis en Bouteille par —". If that is all it tells you, you are looking at a "negociant" wine—not necessarily bad, but all other things being equal, a second choice. A negociant is someone in the wine business who does not grow grapes, but may make wine, may blend wines and may bottle wine, or may simply buy bottled wine (which may be estate bottled) for re-sale. Negotiants, who may also produce estate bottled wines, are more likely to be large enterprises and as a group they dominate the market.

Thanks to Napoleon's inheritance laws, ownership of vineyards in Burgundy is widespread. Owners of small plots may simply sell their grapes (*how good are their vineyard practices*) or make their own wines (*how good is their winemaking*) and sell it in bulk to negociants. The larger negociants offer a wide range of "branded" products, some of which (especially those that are *Domaine bottled*) can be excellent, but many are disappointing and frequently expensive. *Unfortunately, price and perceived reputation usually coupled with an appellation, and or a vintage, is no guarantee of value or quality.* **A Rick's Pick at any price point is.**

I note a happy trend in Burgundy, contrary to what is happening elsewhere in the wine world. A younger generation of talented Burgundian winegrowers have taken to making and marketing their own wines. Some of these people are foreigners—at least one is a native Bostonian *Alex Gambal*—more about him and his wines later. Complementing them, are a number of independent, persistent individuals who have good taste and who "smell-out" these producers and bring them to the market. They go by the name of shippers, or importers, and they function in many areas of the world—I love them. *Bless them!!* Let me name a few—you will find them on the back-label of many MWS wines. *Alain Blanchon, Daniel Johnnes, Dan Kravitz, Peter Weygandt, Joe and Louise Dressner, Horge Ordonez* (whose forte is Spain), to name but a few.

At this time we have more Burgundy than any other single appellation and they are selected solely by what is in the bottle and what they cost. You will find many appellations not represented and relatively few producers responsible for the bulk of our selections. *I never buy appellations—only taste and price.*

The Burgundian expression of Chardonnay (and Pinot Gris!!!)

These are not big, buttery, oaky Chardonnays, and the reds are not blockbuster fruit- and oak- bombs. *Even at the low-end these are refined, complex gems that you can revisit time after time, and never be bored.*

To start—*experience a Chardonnay Revelation.* Pick up a bottle of **Brun '01 "Terres Dorees", White Beaujolais, ✓✓ \$9.99/8.99.** It is Burgundy and it is Chardonnay, Discover the taste of *Chardonnay Devoid of Oak!*

Domaine Jean-Francois Cognard '99 Chateau De Chaintre, ✓✓ \$11.99/10.99, is THE Macon Chaintre. *Bargain White Burgundy at its Best!*

Dom. Jean-Marie Bouzereau '99

We Ship! Anywhere in Connecticut!
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Bourgogne Blanc, ✓ \$14.99/13.49. Do not let the plain old Bourgogne Blanc appellation fool you—*Labels Lie!*

And then four **Extreme Rick's Picks**

Domaine Thevenot-Le Brun's 2000 Cote de Nuits Blanc "Clos du Vignon" is a Sleeper that sells for **✓\$16.99/15.39**. Pop the cork and you will be underwhelmed—perhaps even disappointed! But this wine is *oxygen hungry*—aerate by decanting and returning it to the bottle—replace the cork and wait a few hours—even a day. Now I can hear many of you moaning and groaning—*Wait a Day!!! But Wait till you have taken my advice* and then re-tasted the wine. You will find truly exquisite Chardonnay fruit, that refuses to finish, and subtle oak, simply begging for seafood, offering a vision of what Chardonnay can be but so often is not. I discovered this wine's charms, and its secret, by accident. The salesman's sample had been opened the previous day, but I did not know that. The wine swept me of my feet and I bought plenty. When it arrived I eagerly brought a bottle home and was disappointed—so much so that I decided to return it. Did not get back to re-tasting that bottle until two nights later—and there it was as I had remembered my initial tasting. I have since had a bottle of this wine open on our tasting table for a week and it still wows the customers.



Here is an extraordinary wine, also from **Domaine Thevenot-LeBrun, his 2000 Hautes Cotes de Nuits, Pinot Beurot, ✓ \$19.99/17.99**. What in the world is *Pinot Beurot*? It is the ancient Burgundian name for Pinot Gris which, according to Jancis Robinson, is no "longer grown there". That may have been true but it no longer is. It took Daniel Thevenot 25 years

to obtain appellation status for his Pinot Beurot—the only such wine in Burgundy, and what wine this is. *Exotic, floral perfume, creamy, full and rich in the mouth, hints of almond and spices, the "sweetest" vanilla oak imaginable, and all in perfect balance. I kid you not!*

Domaine Roally's '99 Macon-Village, ✓ \$21.99/19.79 is the latest of at least five vintages of this rich Burgundy to grace our shelves and seduce our customers. It comes loaded with its unfiltered tartrate crystals that fall in a literal snow shower when you turn the bottle over. This natural phenomenon of white wine must NOT be allowed to deter you from a very happy wine experience. Tartrates are tasteless, harmless, and fall rapidly to the bottom of the bottle. They are there because this winemaker refuses to filter his wines, as he explains in a little note that comes in every case. *Just one taste and you will never again lust after buttery, block-busting, budget-busting New World chard.*

Geantet-Pansiot '99 Bourgogne Blanc, ✓ \$21.99/19.79. Do not let that Bourgogne Blanc designation blind-side you.

Jadot '98 Auxey-Duresses Blanc, \$24.99/22.49, great with any summer fare—seafood, chicken, cold cuts and salad.

Brenot '99 Bourgogne Chard, \$17.99/16.19 is yet another white Burgundy that you can enjoy for no more than popular Chardonnays from wherever—*be bold, do not be afraid. Burgundy will not bite.*

For another flight of fancy, pick any **Bernard Morey Chassagne-Montrachet**; the **'99 Embrazees, ✓ \$49.99/44.99**; the **'97 Vieilles Vignes, \$42.99/38.69**; the *plain* **'95, ✓✓ \$29.99/26.99** or the **'00 Embrazees 1er Cru, \$65.00/58.50**. *Bernard Morey is the reason why Chassagne-Montrachet dominates our white Burgundy inventory.*

**Pinot Noir
The Crown Jewel**

Pinot Noir has been called the heart-break grape—taste the average Pinot Noir and then taste one from the top drawer and you'll know why. At its best it is from another world. It is a fickle grape, touchy about where and how it's grown, unforgiving of clumsy wine-making—and it mutates like crazy. But, no matter what your level of wine-awareness, when you taste a good Pinot Noir, you **will** know it. **Bells will ring, trumpets will sound and you may well sink to your knees.**

There are some exceptional Pinot Noirs which are not Burgundian (New Zealand for example)—ask us. But the Burgundians are largely correct when they claim that the terroir of Burgundy produces Pinot Noir that is unequalled anywhere else—*on the other*

hand many Burgundies are less equal than others—buyer beware and Rick to the Rescue. The most exciting wines come from individual growers—hands-on from vineyard to bottle, and limited production.

Our Pinot Noir Powerhouse—**Latour '99 Pinot Noir, ✓✓ \$10.99/9.89**, (it's a negociant wine—check out the label) has put Pinot Noir on the map at MWS. Hundreds of cases have been wheeled out the back door. It offers true Pinot character—light in body and color, bright acidity, lovely fruit and moderate tannins. *Wash down lamb, goose, hamburger, grilled sausage, even salmon in any shape or form. An ideal summer red—Hotdog and hamburger wine!*

Mancey '98 Bourgogne Rouge, ✓✓ \$9.99/8.99—a super value. **Brun '00 Pinot Noir, ✓✓ \$10.99/9.89**, has depth, color and fruit far beyond its modest price.

We recently tasted and bought **Domaine Capitain-Gagnerot '00 Bourgogne, ✓ \$14.99/13.49**—a small producer, new to us. *Outstanding. I bought every case I could get.*

Maranges is a somewhat obscure appellation at the extreme southern end of the Cote d'Or. Years ago I stumbled on a wine from *Dezize-Les-Maranges*—I think it was a 1972 vintage, dark and bold and it got better and better over the years. In retrospect, remembering how dark and full it was, it was probably laced, illegally, with Algerian wine. We trust that no longer happens—in recent years I have not tasted a Burgundy that I suspected had been beefed-up—nowadays it would be with southern French wine. I can recommend **Latour-Geraud '96 Maranges 1er Cru, ✓ \$18.99/17.09**. *Lovely wine—a far cry from my '72.*

Domaine Francoise & Denis Clair '99 Cote de Beaune Village, ✓✓ \$16.99/15.39, made me sit up and take notice. A *Pinot Noir explosion!*

Another **Thevenot LeBrun** and this **'88 Haute Cote de Beaune, ✓ \$17.99/16.19**, is a "Taste Vinage" bottling, with 12 years of bottle age. *When last tasted it was acquiring a hint of beautiful Burgundian barnyard.*

I buy almost every **Geantet-Pansiot** I can get. They are invariably muscular wines with plenty of substance, adequate fruit and firm tannin. The **'96 "Pinot Fin"** is plain Bourgogne, but there is nothing plain about the wine. "Pinot Fin", as best I have been able to determine is merely a trade or brand name with no particular significance **✓✓ \$19.99/17.99** and **Highly Recommended.**

Faiveley '99 Dom. de la Croix, Mercurey, \$19.99/17.99. Faiveley is

Continued on p.8, col. 1

Burgundian Bonanza cont. from p. 7

one of Burgundy's largest negociants, but this is a Domaine Bottled wine from Mercurey in the Chalonais. *Delicate, lovely.*

Santenay, from the southern part of Cote d'Or, typically produces wines that are light and delicate, and an absolute joy.

Paul Pernot's '98 Santenay Bieveau, ✓✓\$18.99/17.09 is a winner, vintage after vintage. You can enjoy this with virtually any light fare from seafood to veal. The **Lequin '83 Santenay**, \$19.99/17.99, is literally "Loot From the Loft", where it has lain hidden for some 16 years. It was one of the first Burgundies I purchased for MWS. I am tempted to take a bottle home, but only one case is left.

We do not think of Beaujolais as Burgundy, but it is, and the ten Cru Beaujolais are not to be confused with Beaujolais Village or plain Beaujolais let alone Nouveau! While made of the Gamay grape, Cru Beaujolais age beautifully and are virtually indistinguishable from regular Burgundy. *I still have a 1983 Moulin-a-Vent in my own cellar—its dynamite!* I buy nearly every vintage of **Jadot's '99 Clos St. Jacques Moulin-a-Vent**, ✓✓\$19.99/17.99. It is Estate Bottled—terrific.

Labels not only lie—unfortunately they either sell or do not sell. "Do not Sell" is probably why this gem moves so slowly off the shelf. The plain vanilla label boldly proclaims "Bourgogne" and nothing more but fine print, telling that it is Domaine Bottled by Lucien Boillot. That fine print alone on a label is good enough for me. **Boillot '97 Bourgogne**, ✓✓\$19.99/17.99. A Super Steal.

I recently added **Didier Fornerol** to my Burgundy winegrower short-list. His '99 **Cote de Nuits-Village**, \$22.99/



Rick Recants: Lo these many years I have been guilty of vilifying an innocent little grape that goes by the name of *Pinot Meunier*—I have even gone so far as to call it *Pinot "Manure"*. I have picked on it as an unwelcome component of Champagne, a cheap, sharp characterless filler, and have drawn anonymous hate mail as a result. I believe that it finds its way into Champagne because it will ripen where Pinot Noir and Chardonnay will not—on north facing slopes—even though it produces acidic mean little wines. Our house Champagnes, "estate bottled" by Jean Laurent are pure Chardonnay and Pinot Noir—*Laurent neither uses nor grows Pinot Meunier.*

The bad rap bestowed on Pinot Meunier by me probably should be bestowed on the growers and wine makers rather than the grape.

20.69, was too good to pass-up. Gorgeous Pinot fruit—a whole symphony.

More Santenay—**Domaine Rene Lequin-Colin '99 Santenay Vieilles Vignes**, \$20.99/18.89 is irresistible. There is obviously a Lequin tribe in Santenay. **Lequin '86 Santenay** (the same producer as the '83), \$22.99/20.69, is a sleeper.

Here's another **Paul Pernot**—'95 **Beaune Marconnets**, \$25.99/23.39. A Beauty.

And three more big beautiful Beaunes—**Dom. Bouchard '97 Clos de la Mousse**, \$33.99/30.59; **Jadot '96 Beaune Chouacheux**, \$34.99/31.49, and **Les Cent Vignes '99 Beaune, 1er Cru**, \$34.99/31.49. I'm hard pressed to choose among them. Your choice, or try them all and be prepared to come back for more.

We have only 11 bottles left of **Bouzereau '96 Les Duresses, 1er Cru**, \$34.99/31.49.

I love good Chambolle-Musigny. For the biggest bang for your Pinot Noir wine buck, regardless of origin, pick one of these: **Amiot-Servelle '95**, \$36.99/33.29; **Geantet-Pansiot '98**, \$46.00/41.40; **Geantet-Pansiot '99**, \$45.00/40.50; **Drouhin '96**, \$37.99/34.19. Then please come and tell me what happened!

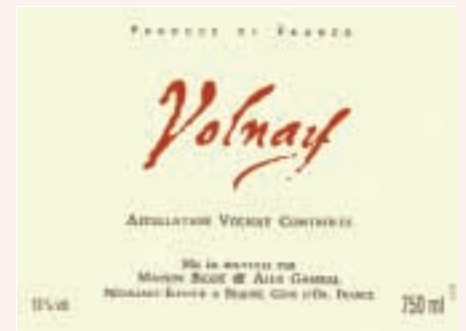
Finally, since you have read this far, you must have some interest in Pinot Noir and so I have a recommendation for you. The enjoyment of wine demands to be shared. So this summer, make a Friday or Saturday date with someone you love—it does not have to be a special day, although it will become one. Then break the mold. Instead of an expensive restaurant, go to the *Savory Café*. Order your barbeque-grilled lamb and stroll across the courtyard and pick up a bottle of **Rebourseau '99 Clos de Vougeot Grand Pinot Noir**. It will cost you ✓✓\$150.00/135.00, but that is not as outrageous as you think. What you will save on your restaurant tab will go a long way towards the wine, but more importantly, you will enjoy a wining and dining experience that you will remember forever. **Guaranteed!**

(If the **Clos de Vougeot** is too rich for your blood—pick ANY Red Burgundy.)

The Wines of Alex Gambal

Alex Gambal is an American, a Bostonian I believe. He makes wine in Burgundy. I came across him and his wines at a tasting a year or two ago. Very impressive wines—justifiably expensive but I nevertheless bought one. A year later—the same thing—I bought another. This last spring, I came to the realization that this man is making monumental wine and *I came to attention.* There is not a big market at the Madison Wine Shop for wines in this price range, but those who have, on nothing but faith, taken my advice and sprung for them have been ecstatic. *They are Burgundian masterpieces.*

Dip a toe in the water and take home a bottle of **Gambal '99 Pouilly Fuisse**, \$32.99/29.69. You may not buy it, but you probably do not not bat an eye at \$40 Oregon Pinot, or a \$50 Carneros Pinot (which you will NOT find at MWS), but I promise that if you spring for **Gambal '99 Volnay for only \$37.99/34.19**, it may



be the most exciting wine of your life. The first time is always the hardest, and having taken that first step, you may want to mortgage the farm and go for broke. **Gambal '98 Morgeots 1er Cru Chassagne-Montrachet (White)**, \$57.00/51.30; **Gambal '99 Vosne-Romanee Beaux Monts 1er Cru**, \$67.00/60.30. **Bigot Gambal '97 Vosne-Romanee Malconsort**, \$89.99/80.99. *What a Way to Go Bust!*

Keep an eye open—I hope to have Alex Gambal and his wines at a Saturday tasting soon.



But I have now discovered that Pinot Meunier can make can make respectable, even intriguingly attractive wine. **Chandon's** rather pricey **Pinot Meunier '00, from Carneros**, \$26.99/24.29, had me guessing when I tasted it blind. The closest I could come was Pinot Noir but I knew that was not it. It is light, nicely balanced, fairly acidic, well made, and would serve as a stand-in for Pinot Noir.

Nevertheless, do not expect me to embrace Pinot Meunier in Champagne anytime soon, and do not expect a flood of Rick's Picks Pinot Meunier. My guess is that the terroir (growing conditions) in Carneros for the Pinot Meunier in that Chandon bottling are a far cry from the Pinot Meunier terroir in Champagne.



Sensational Summer Sizzlers

Cider

I'm betting that we will sell more cider this summer than has been sold in Connecticut in the last 17 years (that's how long I have been here), and it will be **Eric Bordelet Poire Authentique (Sparkling French Pear Cider), '00, \$13.99/12.59**. We also have **Eric Bordelet Sydre Doux (Sparkling Apple Cider), '00, \$12.99/11.69** which is slightly sweet. Both are only 4% alcohol.

The *Poire Authentique* is light as a feather and almost completely dry, but it is the effervescence and the incredible, delicate, complex pear flavor **that drives me insane with pleasure**. I can only think of a summer picnic, on the beach or in the back yard, or simply sitting back and relaxing at the end of a glorious day. *Come and get it!*

Rosé

After years of crusading we now rarely need to convince shoppers that our selection of Rosé wines is serious—meaning that they are **not** White Zin or, Heaven forbid, White Merlot—they are dry, crisp and tasty. While they are great with the appropriate foods in all seasons, they are Wines of Summer—they go with lighter fare and warmer weather.

Headed for a third straight summer sell-out, **G&M Fleur de Lys Sparkling Rosé Cab Franc, \$15.99/14.39**, from the Loire valley. If you have not tasted this wine, give it one try. Chances are that you will forever abandon your wine color-prejudice. This pale pinky-bronze sparkler is delicate, zesty, festive and refreshing—a winner, day or night, with almost any kind of food, and almost any kind of occasion from *Sunday brunch to family Thanksgiving dinner*, beloved by devotees of either white or red

wine who have overcome their prejudice, aficionados of every stripe.

Exception du Comte Negret '00, \$10.99/9.89, from Frontonnais, near Toulouse, France, is made of Negret, a grape unique to the region. It is a **bold, full rosé that will go beautifully with a summer barbecue**. Chill slightly.

Bargemone '00, \$11.99/10.79 is a classic Provencal Rosé. A tell-tale orange hue proclaims Mourvedre, in part or whole. Tangy, zesty, refreshing—*fond memories of lunch on a Mediterranean beach*.

Drouet '00 Rosé Sancerre, \$14.99/13.49, is *Pinot Noir—delicate, subtle, stunning*, Sunday brunch wine. Out-a-sight with the likes of smoked white fish.

Summer Whites

✓✓ **Casal Garcia Vinho Verde, \$5.99/5.39**, the Portuguese, slightly effervescent, quaffable elixir. Light (only 9% alcohol) and refreshing. Serve cold with or without food. *THE wine to go with spicey dishes*.

I do not believe that our ✓✓ **Fontenilles '01 Picpoul de Pinet, \$6.99/6.29** needs an introduction to anyone who lives within 20 miles of Madison. Our only problem—enough space to keep it in stock.

✓✓ **Bordes '00, \$7.99/7.19**, a light, bright, lemony, Gascogne white, owes its character to two very ordinary varietals—Colombard and Ugni Blanc—magically transformed by terroir and wine-making skill. *Seafood!*

Domaine de Montmarin is a Languedocian producer that we found last year in France. The **'00 Viognier and Roussanne, both ✓✓ \$8.99/8.09**, are treasures—the product of modern wine-making. Light, devoid of oak, with bright acidity and an expression of true varietal character. The Roussanne is the more elegant, wonderful with light food, while the Viognier is the fruitier with classic notes of peach and apricot fruit. *Superb sipping wines*.

Entre deux Mer (between the two “waters”—the Dordogne and Gironde Rivers) of bygone days was nothing less than battery acid. *No more!* ✓✓ **Ch Jacques '01 Entre deux Mer, \$9.99/8.89**, is typical of the new expression of the appellation. Semillon, Sauvignon Blanc and Muscadelle are the grapes.

Eizaguirre '00 Txakolina, ✓ \$9.99/8.99, made from a grape called Hundarrabi in the Basque region of Spain, is *seafood wine supreme*. Sharp and “prickly”. The 2000 vintage is stunning, blessed by our visit to the vineyard.

A rarity, white **Corbieres, Bouchard '99, \$9.99/8.99**, is another of those refreshing little white wines that are becoming ever-more popular at MWS. Bourboulenc, Grenache, Muscat and Clairette are the magic ingredients. Similarly, **Loxarel '00**

RETURN OF THE KILLER WINES

No, this is not a movie ad.

I vividly remember my first taste of **Domaine de la Coste Cuvee Especial**. It was the 1988 vintage. It comes from the vineyards and winery of *Luc and Elisabeth Moynier in St. Christol, Languedoc*. It was (and still is) 100% Syrah—my first **Super Rick's Pick** and probably our *first Languedocian Best Seller*.

We visited the Moyniers in 1992—they grow the grapes and make the wine almost single handed. Besides that Elisabeth teaches school. They use no oak. We sold, I believe five vintages until the 1995 when importer/distributor politics sabotaged our supply-chain.

Early this year I received a letter, part French and part English, from which I was able to glean that the supply-chain saboteurs had gone back into the wood-work, and would I like to buy their wine again? *You bet I would!*

Look for **Domaine de la Coste '99 Cuvee Selectionee, ✓✓ \$10.99/9.89**. Syrah, Syrah! A Mourvedre wine is coming.

At VinExpo in France in 1995 I found the wines of *Cave Gigondas*—the co-op of my all-time favorite appellation. Among the wines that I bought from them, in significant quantity, was the monumental 1990 “Signature”. By the time of the 1997 Vinexpo our '90 Signature was history, but the winery still had some which I bought—it was getting better and better, and at \$20 was, I think the best value in the store. The only extant case of that wine is now in my personal cellar.

Last June we visited the winery and tasted what they had available. I had a tough time choosing between the '95 and the '98 Signature wine. The good news is that the **'98 Signature Gigondas** will be on our shelves by late May. Try it! Its fabulous and only ✓✓ **\$21.99/19.79**.



Gigondas Vineyards, looking up at my 'Magic' Montmiraille Mountain.

from Spain's Penedes, \$9.99/8.99 is a blend, but primarily Parellada and Xarel-lo. Light and very tasty. And finally, a '00 Chardonnay from Castillo de Monjardin in Navarra, Spain, which will provide a surprising alternate to whatever Chard you happen to be hooked on, and only ✓\$10.99/9.89.

Freie Weingartener Wachau Federspeil '00 Riesling, ✓\$14.99/13.49, from Austria is a Holy Grail which I have been seeking for the longest time—a Dry Riesling with exceptional fruit and good acidity. It seems that when winemakers attempt to make Trocken (Dry) Rieslings, they lose both the fruit and acidity. But this winemaker got it right! A Heavenly Experience—look for seafood.

Summer Reds

Here are three delicious, bright, light and tasty summer reds from the southern Rhone; **Brusset '99 Cote Ventoux, \$9.99/8.99; Dom. Fondreche '00 Cotes Ventoux, \$9.99/8.99; Dom L'Ameillaud '99 Vaucluse, \$8.99/8.09.**



What I fondly call my "fish red", Le Paysseil '98 Gaillac, ✓✓\$8.99/8.09, comes from south-west France and is largely made of a grape called Duras. It is my red for swordfish, tuna, and the like, and it will also enhance summer chicken dishes, hot or cold. It is light but not lacking structure. The fruit is delicate with some hints of spice. **Recommended.**



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LES HERÉTIQUES.

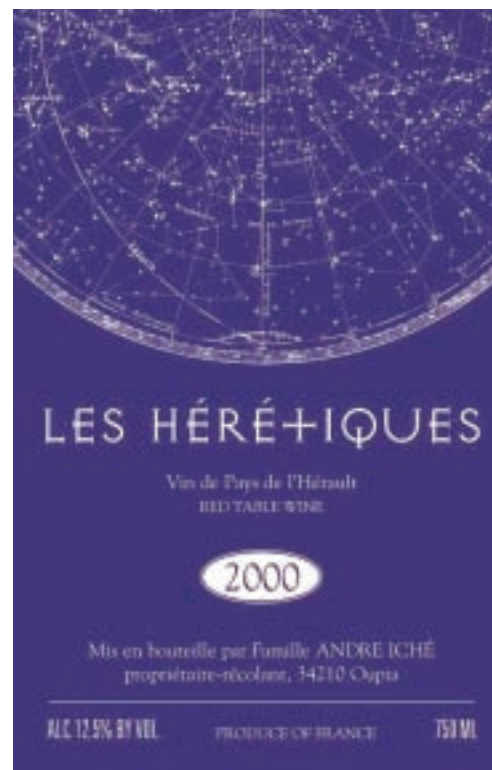
At a tasting back last October I tasted a wine that grabbed my attention. When asked, and was told the price, I went ballistic! I had found my red equivalent of Picpoul, our over-the-top out-of-sight, best-selling white. The striking blue label says that the wine is estate bottled by the Family Andre Iche in Oupia, and the appellation is Vin de Pays de l'Herault. I happen to know that Andre Iche is the proprietor of Chateau D'Oupia and the wine by that name was one of the first Minervois wines on our shelves, and continues to be a best-seller—for only \$7.99. Now, if you happen to buy a case of Les Héré+iques, as well you might, you will see that it comes in a Chateau D'Oupia box, What is going on?

The wine labeled Chateau d'Oupia is appellation Minervois and is made almost entirely of Syrah. Les Héré+iques is made almost entirely of Carignan, a grape with a "low-life" reputation, disqualifying it from being Minervois AOC; hence the lesser Vin de Pays l'Herault appellation.

Now the truth is that Carignan's poor reputation is more the fault of the vigneron who planted the vines in inappropriate places, and used poor viticulture and viniculture to produce the miserable wine of the Languedoc as recent as twenty years ago. Héré+iques, and several other Carignan-based wines on our shelves attest to fact that Carignan's reputation is undeserved.

So Les Here+iques✓✓ is a new venture for Chateau D'Oupia and it threatens, at \$7.99, to steal some of the limelight from its thoroughbred sibling. **It is loaded with rich, full, complex flavors, well-balanced tannins, and, as best I can tell, oak-free. Belly up!**

I was so taken with the wine that I failed to ask about the name until the wine was delivered. The name, and the poetic license taken with the spelling—"Les Héré+iques",



aroused my curiosity, leading to my learning of a fascinating aspect of the history of the Languedoc. I knew that "Languedoc" means language of the Oc—the Ocian people who inhabited this land spoke Occitan as opposed to the Franks who spoke what is now French.

The land of the Ocs was also the land of the Cathars, believers of a Christian, non-conformist religious order, that had a wide following in the Middle Ages. The Cathars came into conflict with the Catholic Church which considered them to be heretics (Les Heretiques) and waged war on them. The Cathars became the victims of a Crusade which led to the siege of town after town and the annihilation of their populations. In May

Continued on p. 11, col. 1

Don't Drink Wine...Kiss It!

Over the years I have been refining my own techniques for effectively tasting wine and at the same time I have been searching for effective ways to teach those techniques to others.

Kissing is the ultimate technique.

You can practice by simply kissing the air, but you must make a noise. And you must do it repeatedly. Once you have mastered this you can graduate to the real thing -

Take a **Tiny** sip of wine—half a teaspoonful at most. Keep it right behind your lips at the cusp of the kiss, then **Kiss!**

If you have taken only a small amount of wine, if you keep your lips almost closed, with the wine right behind them, you will neither dribble nor choke when you Kiss.

The Wine Will Kiss Back....and Will You Ever Taste It!

If you need a demo, or would like an explanation of how and why this works, attend a **Wise-up on Wine** session any Saturday and most other days.



Julia 'Kissing' Wine

Les Here+iques cont. from p. 10

of 1204 it was Beziers, and, in 1208 the inhabitants of the town of Minerve. It is specifically this massacre that the Les Héré+iques wine commemorates. I quote from my source a book called “Cathars” by Yves Rouquette, “Often the Cathars will be marginal to my story, as I tell of the slow death of the independent land of Oc, and the horrors of a holy war which soon turned into a war of conquest and, for the Cathars,

extermination”. That story, which I read in part, reflects on one hand the unquenchable spirit of man, and on the other, the inhumanity of man. To quote again, “This shameful episode in the history of France and the history of Christendom is still glossed over...and too easily forgotten. It is important to tell what were the circumstances and what were the issues that led to good nonconformist Christians called Cathars being utterly wiped out”.

Those ruined towers and castles, some sitting high, and seemingly inaccessible, on a mountaintop, will have new significance when I again visit this beautiful, bountiful land.

Meanwhile, splurge everyday on **Les Here+iques for only ✓✓\$7.99/7.19.**



JUMP FOR JOY WITH JULIA GRAPE EXPECTATIONS

I remember the day it all began...several years ago, my wine enjoyment was forever changed with a visit to Deerfield Ranch Winery in Sonoma, California. The proprietors, Robert and P.J. Rex, are dedicated family winemakers who only produce about 2500 cases per year (but they're growing!). They opened my eyes to all of the amazing nuances of wine appreciation. Until that time, I was, at best, a part-time novice wine-drinker. Although I read lots of wine books, my tasting was limited to California Cabernets, Merlots and Chardonnays. *ISN'T THAT SAD?*

The point of no return was when Robert led me to his cellar and I sampled a luscious late-harvest dessert wine straight out of the barrel – I left my job to begin a career in the wine industry, and I've never looked back. At that moment, my quest for wine knowledge began and I have been a wine junky ever since. Now I'm not suggesting a major career change is a necessary precursor to the enjoyment of the wine, but there is one requirement...you *MUST* be open-minded! So here we go!

Let's start with *grape varieties*—there are hundreds of them. Jancis Robinson has written an eye-opening little book entitled **Guide to Wine Grapes**. So many people are amazed when we refer to this book during our Saturday tastings. It is literally a 202-page dictionary of grape varieties! Unfortunately, I think most of us don't get past a page or two, but that's about to change...

Next time you're feeling a little adventurous, open a bottle of **Viu Manent Carmenere, \$9.99/8.99**. The Carmenere grape originated in Bordeaux in the 1700's, then made its way to Chile where it has become a star. This wine possesses so much rich berry fruit and just the right amount of peppery spice on the finish, that you won't want to brush your teeth after you drink it! Knowing the grape variety(ies) used to make a wine provides us with a road map of sorts, a guide as to what to expect from a bottle of wine. But many grape varieties go by different names in different countries. Syrah in France and California is the same as Shiraz in Australia and South Africa. But then the difference in style of wines between two countries can further compound the confusion.

For fun take home a bottle of **Wyndham Bin 555 Shiraz, \$9.99/9.99** from Australia, and a bottle of **Maris '98 Minervois, \$8.99/ 8.19**. The Maris is Syrah (although the label does not tell you that—trust me) the same grape as the Wyndham. The names are different. But, open the bottles, compare the wines. They are completely different. The Wyndham is fruity and oaky, the Maris is much less fruity, has no oak taste and is more spicy. However with some practice you will learn to readily distinguish between the two styles and to recognize the similarities that tell you both are made from the same grape regardless of what you call them.

Suddenly (or so it seems) Sicily, is producing some of Italy's best values from grape varieties we'd never heard of. If you want real bang for the buck, pick up a bottle of **Cusumano Nadaria Inzolia, \$9.99/8.99**, a completely unique dry white wine that is unlike anything you've ever tasted. When you're ready for the

main course, open the **Cusumano Sagana, \$19.99/17.99**, made from 100% Nero d'Avola, also known as Calabrese. This red grape thrives in Sicily, as you'll discover when you drink this wonderfully structured, full-flavored wine. A staff favorite!

The Tempranillo grape is Spain's answer to Cabernet Sauvignon. Tempranillo is an early-blooming varietal, which is a valuable characteristic since Spain's climate can be extremely hot and dry, and irrigation is prohibited there. Tempranillo is often blended with other grapes, as in the **Lan Crianza, \$10.99/9.89**, 85% Tempranillo, 10% Mazuelo and 5% Garnacha. This wine exhibits rich, slightly raisiny fruit and a hint of nutty woodiness. Now, to confuse the issue further, Mazuelo is the Riojan name for Carignan, and Garnacha is called Grenache in France, Australia and the U.S.

Southwest of Rioja is Rueda, where Verdejo is the star. When you're ready to experience the quintessential summer white, reach for the **Castelo de Medina '00 Verdejo, ✓10.99/ 9.89**. The rich aroma, herbs and fruit make this a wine of substance. Serve it with grilled swordfish, Chilean sea-bass or sauteed prawns.

How long has it been since you've opened a bottle of Chenin Blanc? Although you've heard of the varietal, you may not realize how many different *styles* of wine this grape is responsible for. In the Anjou region of the Loire Valley, Chenin Blanc reaches peak ripeness. The **Domaine des Petits Quarts Le Malabe, \$24.99/22.49**, hails from Bonnezeaux, a 240-acre appellation where superior dessert wines are produced. This rich velvety nectar can only be described as heavenly!

Towards the other end of the spectrum (not the very end—we'll get to that soon) is **False Bay, \$9.99/8.99**, from South Africa, a lovely, dry wine bursting with tropical fruit and an underlying mineral-like quality. Chenin, often called Steen in South Africa, is that country's most planted vine.

Taking Chenin to its limit is the world's longest-lived, and perhaps most acidic, white wine—*Savenniers*, the appellation at the western-most end of the Loire valley. Grape yields here are quite low, so the wine produced is extremely concentrated, and can be virtually unpalatable in its youth. Wait a few years, though, and you're in for a rare treat. The **'98 Domaine du Closel, \$18.99/17.09**, and the **'92 Clos de la Bergerie, \$32.99/22.69**, are likely to age for another 20+ years. A heavenly experience when paired with Clams Casino!

My point amidst all this confusion is to alert you to the infinite joys and wonders of wine appreciation, which can only be discovered when you venture into the unknown. Think of all of the years of happy wine drinking you will have if you experience a new varietal every week! The world of wine is mind boggling to say the least, and so fascinating! Until next time, keep raising your “Grape Expectations.”

Julia Corcoran (Rick's Alter Ego)