



JADED (WINE) LOVER

by Charles M. Bear Dalton



(with help from and apologies to both composer Chuck Pyle and singer Jerry Jeff Walker)

*“Well now it won't be but a week or two
'Till you'll be out lovin' someone new,
Seems like it's happened a hundred times before
But I can see you been spreadin' yourself thin too.
It's a lonely stage that we been goin' through
So don't get up I can find my own way to the door.”*

I'm sure I've heard that song a thousand times and more. Aside from any dating associations it might have (and there are several), it puts me in mind of my relationship to wine. Unfortunately, it occurs to me that I am the sometimes (often-times?) jaded wine lover. I'm the fickle taster with too much experience, not enough discretion, remembering great old wines while finding new wines that often don't seem to live up to the past. Did I say “live up to”? A lot of what I taste every week is either “not good” or actively bad. For instance, you won't see Green Hills Cabernet Sauvignon or Chardonnay at Spec's but you might elsewhere. I tasted them so you don't have to. Avoid them. These wines are actively nasty. And there are lots of others that, while not pure, unmitigated yuck, are at best blah and bland. There are times when I've had so many of these, I just don't want to taste anymore. And yet...

And yet, there are wines that excite me. They pop up with surprising irregularity and often from the most unlikely quarters. Some of the best emerge from tastings that are more duty than pleasure. “Bear, I need to taste you on two wines from Mexico.” “Bear, I need you to taste this 1998 Cabernet Sauvignon.” “Bear, I need you to ...” You get the idea. On the other hand, I do get to taste a lot of really spectacular stuff. Most of it is pretty famous and some of it is from older vintages. (There are advantages to having been born in 1959.) After enough of this – both good and bad - a fellow can get fickle or even - dare I say it – jaded.

So what turns my taste buds on? What floats my vinous boat? What excites the sometimes weary palate? Here are some things that caught me unawares or at least commanded my attention recently. Most of these are “geek” wines or at least wines with some geek appeal. Many are a bit pricey but all deliver both on quality and that sort of intangible excitement factor that grabs your jaded attention.



BONNY DOON

Bonny Doon equals Randall Graham equals some combination of unorthodox, unexpected, noncommercial, fun, and more. His Texas broker Chuck Weintraub serves as an amplifier for all of these qualities. Although I was expecting to taste some good red wines, it was this excellent Rosé that commanded my attention.

BONNY DOON Vin Gris de Cigare, Central Coast, 2010

12x750ml \$13.79 \$154.31

Tech: 12.8% Alcohol. A blend of 71% Grenache, 16% Roussanne, 11% Grenache Blanc, and 2% Mourvedre (all from the Bonny Doon estate vineyard) made using batonage, native yeasts, and less skin contact than in past years. Copper-pink-salmon in color with well formed legs; dry, medium light-bodied with balanced acidity; light phenolics. Delicious, minerally focused mostly red fruit (with a hint of citrus) vivid character. Lovely fruit and a bit of dust. The deal here is that unusual for rose mineral component that adds life and interest to what is already a pretty good wine. Excellent. Spec's Score: 91.

FORMAN

Ric Forman is old school. He was the first winemaker at Sterling (before Sterling became the corporate mess it is today). He was the first winemaker at Newton (before Newton became the corporate mess it is today). Now he is on his own and making the sort of wines that originally put both Sterling and Newton on the map. Forman's style is ripeness and balance.

FORMAN Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley, 2007

12x750ml \$81.59 \$918.66

Tech: 14.8% Alcohol. Winemaker Ric Forman blends 75% Cabernet Sauvignon, 12% Cabernet Franc, 8% Petit Verdot, 5% Merlot from vineyards in Howell Mountain and St. Helena (yield from 3.25 to 4 tons per acre) using temperature controlled stainless steel fermentation for 3-4 weeks and 20 months aging in 80% new French oak and 20% 2nd year French oak barrels. Deep purple in color with well formed legs; dry, medium full-bodied with freshly balanced acidity and chewy phenolics. Big and juicy with lots of black berry and some cherry cabby fruit well accented with tobacco, black pepper, cedar, oaky spice, and earth. Thankfully, there is none of the over-ripe canned-chocolate-syrup component or chalky over-extraction so often found in the flashier Napa cabs today. This is classic, tobacco-y, old school Napa Cab and I like it. Excellent. Spec's Score: 93.

AUTEUR

Auteur is a new-to-me winery with several interesting wines but this Durell vineyard Chardonnay is what jumped out and grabbed me. Durell is a great source with Chardonnay and Pinot Noir grapes going to Kistler, Patz & Hall, Loring, Sand Hill, Steele, Edmunds St. John, Ch. St. Jean, and others. Auteur has joined a good list and done the grapes proud.

AUTEUR Chardonnay Durell Vineyard, Sonoma Coast, 2009

12x750ml \$40.84 \$461.16

Tech: 14% Alc. 100% Chardonnay (old Wente clones) grown in the Durell vineyard fermented and aged in all French oak barrels (25% new) with no malolactic fermentation. Yellow straw in color with well formed legs; dry, medium-full-bodied with balanced acidity; and light phenolics. Deep and rich with lots of oak and terroir under brighter, cooler fruit. Delicious, juicy, succulent, thrilling but still somewhat old school California Chardonnay. Spec's Score: 93+.

continues on page 2

EFESTE

F-S-T, get it? Daniel Ferrelli, Patrick Smith, and Kevin Taylor are the winery's three founders.

Also, fairly new to me, it seems these guys are doing top drawer work in Washington state. During a tasting of mostly yawners, from other producers, these two wines stood out. Tasting them again a bit later on confirmed the excellent first impression.

EFESTE Evergreen Riesling, Columbia Valley, 2010

12x750ml \$14.99 \$168.36

Tech: 12.25% Alcohol. 100% Riesling, given a 100% Stainless Steel Fermentation with no malo-lactic fermentation. Straw in color with good legs; light-bodied with crisp refreshing acidity. Fresh, crisp, Kabinett Halb-Trocken style Washington Riesling offering green apple with peach and peach stone, and some salty minerality. Bright and alive. Perfect for mussels and other shellfish. Really grows on you. YUM. Spec's Score: 91+. (This is even in quality with the Loosen-Ste. Michelle Eroica wine which has been my reference standard for northwest Riesling.)

EFESTE "Final Final" Cabernet Sauvignon Syrah, Columbia Valley, 2008

12x750ml \$25.39 \$285.48

Tech: 14.39% Alcohol. A blend of 58% Cabernet Sauvignon and (42%) Syrah aged 19 months in French oak barrels (54% new). Deep purple-red in color with well formed legs; dry, medium full-bodied with freshly balanced acidity and moderately chewy phenolics. Rich but still elegant and even focused blend offering fine red and more black fruit (backberries, raspberries, cherries) with notes of tobacco, black pepper, white pepper, and a bit of coffee. This is just what you think a Cabernet Syrah blend should be. Spec's Score: 92+. (And all that from someone who is generally unimpressed with even the fanciest Washington Cabernets.)

FONCAILLIEU

Foncaillieu is a group of co-ops we work with in the south of France. Their holdings stretch from Gascony, across the Languedoc and up into the western half of the Southern Rhone. At some point, I'll have a detailed article on the wines and the value offered here. For now, let me tell you about two wines (neither actually called "Foncaillieu") that really impressed me.

RESERVE St. MARC Cabernet Franc Cuvee l'Ours, VdP d'Oc, 2009

12x750ml \$9.49 \$106.87

Tech: 14.5% Alcohol. 100% Cabernet Franc fermented using pump-over and aged all in tank. Purple in color with well formed legs; dry, medium-bodied with freshly balanced acidity and medium chewy phenolics. Chewy, fresh, spicy; more dark red than black fruit with mineral earth and accents of tobacco, black pepper, leather, cedar, and a bit of Asian spice as well as just a hint of garrigue. Really very long finish; elegantly focused and refreshing. Classic Cabernet Franc flavors from an unexpected source. If you are a fan of Loire Cab Franc or wish you could find a good cheap Pinot Noir, give this a try. Spec's Score: 90. (While this is not a spectacular wine, it really works on several levels including tasting about as good as it possibly could - and it is within an awful lot of people's everyday drinking budget.)

Domaine SARCIN Cotes du Rhone, 2009

12x750ml \$9.49 \$106.87

Tech: 14% Alcohol. A blend of 60% Grenache and 40% Syrah fermented using rack-and-return and aged 12 months in all tank. Medium-dark-red-purple in color with well formed legs; dry, medium full-bodied with balanced acidity and chewy phenolics. Elegant mix of dark ripe red fruit with some black fruit and an earthy richness. Dark cherry and red and black raspberry with notes of wild strawberry. Earth notes and a bit of garrigue (the smell of herbs and earth peculiar to the south of France). Lovely and balanced. Very easy to like and drink - and then it opens some more to reveal a more serious wine than you expect. Really Fine. Spec's Score: 90+.

TRIMBACH

Trimbach is old school Alsace. As such, they think of themselves as specialists in Riesling and the house style is to make pretty dry Riesling. I find most of them too dry for me and I think for most Houston consumers. I tend to like their non-Riesling wines better, as they offer more richness. For the last few years, Trimbach has had some distribution problems in Houston as the old Chateau and Estate Wine Company disintegrated, so they are behind from one to five vintages from where the market would indicate they should be. When Jean Trimbach came to town, I was not looking forward to tasting through these back vintage wines. I did taste them though, because Spec's and Trimbach and Jean and I have a still good relationship that goes back a number of years. I'm glad I did. While I did not like most of the Rieslings - due much more to style than vintage, I did like several wines and I liked these four - one of which is Trimbach's top Riesling - most of all. Don't be scared off by the vintages; these wines are drinking GREAT.

TRIMBACH Clos Sainte Hune, Alsace, 2002

3x750ml \$190.94 \$538.02

Tech: 13% Alcohol. 100% Riesling grown on limestone (1.67 Hectares in Grand Cru Rosacker) with a south & southeast exposure. The vines are 50 years old and yield at 40-50 hl/hectare. Medium golden straw in color with green highlights (still) and well formed legs; dry, medium-bodied with fresh acidity and very light phenolics (which great Rieslings often have). Very rich, supple, developed. Still austere but gathers richness and weight. Incredible length and focus. The aromas have become a bouquet that fills the glass and captivates the palate with a meld of apple, citrus, and stone fruit accented with minerals, floral notes and development. This is a Katherine Hepburn of wines; beautiful (rather than pretty) but with a sharp edge. Really Excellent. Spec's Score: 95+.

TRIMBACH Gewurtztraminer Gold Label Ribeapierre, Alsace, 2001

12x750ml \$31.89 \$358.39

Tech: 13.5% Alcohol. 100% Gewurtztraminer, grown into the "Osterberg" Grand Cru (old vines) and old vines from lieu-dit "Muellforst" in Hunawih. Golden-straw in color, and with well formed legs; dry, medium full-bodied with balanced acidity and very light phenolics. Focused, supple, juicy, succulent. Ripe and rich. Pear, spice, ripe citrus, peach. Packed with flavor and richness. This is the very definition of a great aged Alsace Gewurtztraminer that is perfectly ready to drink. Spec's Score: 93+.

TRIMBACH Pinot Gris Gold Label Reserve Personnel, Alsace, 2001

12x750ml \$28.99 \$327.94

Tech: 13% Alcohol. 100% Pinot Gris sourced from Grand Cru vineyards. Pale-gold in color with well formed legs; dry, full-bodied with still-fresh acidity. Supple, bright, alive. Deep and delicious with developed pear and lime fruit that fully incorporates both its naive minerality and its bottle development complexity. Offers more of a bouquet than it does easily-separated aromas. Complete. Spec's Score: 93+.

TRIMBACH Gewurtztraminer Yellow Label, Alsace, 2007

12x750ml \$19.49 \$213.79

Tech: 14% Alcohol. 100% Gewurtztraminer made leaving 9 grams per liter of residual sugar. Yellow-straw in color with green highlights and well formed legs; dry, medium full-bodied with balanced acidity. Lots of spice and richness with fruit mostly in the peach and citrus range along with notes of hops and toasted grain. Still very fresh. This has a piercing focus that balances its richness. Truly delicious. Spec's Score: 93.

BOROBO by Lapostolle

Bordeaux-Rhone-Bourgogne. What nonsense is this? Pinot Noir blended with Carmenere, Caberet, Syrah, and Merlot. Really? And Carmenere? Carmenere has recently edged out Nebbiolo as my least favorite wine grape. This has all the makings of a train wreck. And yet ... somehow it works. It works so well in fact that BOROBO may become one of the icon wines of Chile.

LAPOSTOLLE "Borobo", Chile, 2005

6x750ml \$46.49 \$261.69

Tech: 14.5% Alcohol. A blend of 37% Carménère (Apalta Vineyard), 24% Pinot Noir (Atalayas Vineyard), 20% Syrah (Las Kuras Vineyard), 10% Cabernet Sauvignon (Apalta Vineyard), and 9% Merlot (Apalta Vineyard). Hand harvested, hand de-stemmed, wild yeast fermented in small French oak casks for 10 to 15 days at 28°C, followed by a post fermentation skin contact for two days in the case of the Pinot Noir, to three weeks in the case of the Cabernet Sauvignon. Blended and aged for 22 months in French oak barrels (93% new) and then bottled without fining or filtration. Deep purple in color with well formed legs; dry, full-bodied with balanced acidity; chewy phenolics. Dense and rustic. Mostly black fruit with dark spice, dust, coffee, cocoa, and black pepper. Somehow it all works even though the blend is without precedent. Opens up to reveal some freshness and even some charm. Excellent. Spec's Score: 93+.

AVV CYRUS

AVV is Alexander Valley Vineyards. Cyrus is named for Cyrus Alexander who originally settled the Alexander Valley. There should be no surprise here. I LOVE AVV's red wines. The 1999 was the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo International Wine Competition's first Grand Champion Best of Show winner. And the 2006 won again in the 2011 competition. So what's the deal with this 2005? I like it better than either of those two wines and while it is not cheap, it does represent a GREAT value.

ALEXANDER VALLEY VINEYARDS "Cyrus", Alexander Valley, 2005

6x750ml \$42.74 \$256.44

Tech: 14% Alcohol. 76% Cabernet Sauvignon, 10% Merlot, 10% Cabernet Franc, 2% Malbec, and 2% Petit Verdot fermented using pump-overs and aged 24 months in all French oak barrels (30% new). Inky purple-red-black in color; stains the glass. Well formed legs; dry, full-bodied with balanced acidity and chewy phenolics. Rich, ripe, chocolatey (but in a good way) Cabernet (and at 76% it could legally be called Cabernet) offering black with a little red fruit, dusty, cocoa, tobacco, black pepper, earth and oak. Pencil shavings are immediately present on the mid palate and in the finish. As the wine opens, they move into the nose. Supple, rich and utterly delicious but still has enough cut and tobacco nuance to satisfy an old school Cab-lover. Yum. Pushes all the right buttons. Outstanding. Spec's Score: 96.

CUVELIER

Sometimes producers in one part of the world look to another part of the world and think that they can do it there too. Over the last decade, a connection has been made between Bordeaux and Mendoza. The Cuvelier family, owners of Ch. Leoville Poyferre is part of that connection. Under the label Cuvelier Los Andes, they are making excellent wines in Argentina. While all their wines are excellent, this – the Los Andes Grand Malbec – is the best.

CUVELIER Los Andes Grand Malbec, Mendoza, 2006

12x750ml \$47.49 \$534.80

Tech: 15.5% Alcohol. 100% Malbec aged 18 months in all 100% French oak barrels (100% new). Inky purple-black in color with well formed legs; dry, medium full-bodied with softly balanced acidity and chewy phenolics. Dusty dry, juicy, supple and developed. Lots of black fruit and a hint of red fruit. Lots of spice from the new oak. Sweetens in the glass and is lovely and delicious. It is easy to believe that this is from the same family that owns Leoville Poyferre in St. Julien. Excellent. Spec's Score : 94+.

As Jerry Jeff Walker intones at the end of his recording of "Jaded Lover" - "Think about it, darlin'." *

