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WINE, SPIRITS & FINER FOODS SPEC'S Update!



Mon-Sat October 12
to October 17, 2009

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Fun Things, Read on...

Oktoberfest Travels

WurstFest (New Braunfels, TX)
October 30th through November 8th.
www.wurstfest.com/

Hill Country Festivals

Fredericksberg Food and Wine Fest 2009
October 24th (12noon - 7pm)
www.fbgfoodandwinefest.com

South Shore Dockside Food and Wine Festival

October 17 from 11am- 11pm

CHARIVARI-PORTUGUESE VINTNER DINNER

Wednesday, October 21 at 7pm

Italian Cultural and Community Center

Tuscany Part 1: Montalcino &
Emerging Treasures
Wednesday, October 28 at 6:30pm



Relax...with Spec's Radio
featuring Spec's Jazz Brunch
every Sunday, 9 to noon.
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Coming Soon!
Bee Cave

SPEC'S UPDATE is a publication of Spec's Wines, Spirits & Finer Foods. All prices listed are subject to change without notice. **ALL PRICES LISTED ARE FOR SPEC'S SMITH STREET SUPERSTORE AND INCLUDE A FIVE PERCENT DISCOUNT FOR CASH.** (Many items are available at Spec's Neighborhood Stores at different prices.) All items are offered "first come, first served" and are subject to availability; some quantities may be limited. Spec's reserves the right to restrict quantities. Spec's is not responsible for errors in printing. Typographical errors will not be honored. "Spec's" and the rabbit logo are service marks of Spec's Family Partners and are registered with the State of Texas.

WOW! WHAT A DEAL!



Moët White Star NV

"A blend of 38% Pinot Meunier, 31% Pinot Noir, and 31% Chardonnay, this Moët flagship is an easy drinking, very commercial Champagne offering juicy spicy lemon fruit, good earthy-mineral notes, and a touch of Moët's trademark biscuity character. Try it with spicy foods or a simple snack of Parmegiano Reggiano. Still the best selling Champagne in the US, it is better than expected. Fine. Spec's score: 89+

\$28.99

Sale Good Through 10/31/09

RANDOM MUSINGS

by Charles M. Bear Dalton

CHAMPAGNE GUARANTEE

Ever wonder why the bottles of most of the Brut non vintage and Extra Dry wines offered by the big Champagne houses look the same? I'm not talking about the labels and foils. I mean the actual glass bottles. The dirty little secret of Champagne is that some (maybe most) of the big houses buy and sell sur latte wines - which is to say that they buy nearly finished Champagne in the bottle from the co-ops and some independent growers that they merely finish (disgorge and dose) and label and then sell as if they made them. This can lead to several very different products being sold under the same label as if they were the same wine when all they are likely to have in common is maybe a generally similar blend of grape varieties (cepage) and the same house dosage. Almost all sur latte wines are sold as basic Brut NV or are sweetened up as Extra Dry NV, Sec NV, or Demi-Sec NV. In general, these are entry-level (aka bottom-of-the-line) products but they make up the lion's share of the Champagne business. Contrary to what the grower geeks say, sometimes can even be pretty good. Generally though, they are inconsistent and dosed on the sweet side in order to hide any flaws and disguise any dis-similarities.



There are two ways to guarantee that the bottle of Champagne you are buying was actually made by the producer whose name is on the label. One is to buy recolte-manipulant (RM) Champagnes. Also known as "farmer fizz", these are estate-bottled Champagnes made, bottled, and finished by the grower on his premises. The other is to buy Champagnes that come in "other than standard" bottles - which is to say Champagne that comes in a bottle specialized to one producer.

continues on page 3

Inside This Issue: *Collin's Column, The 12, Deli Specials, Beer Buzz, Delicious Mischief, Wine and Cheese of the Week & more!*

Random Musings from page 1

Such is the case with the Demoiselle Champagne - a marque owned by Vranken - Pommery but treated as a separate brand with its own separate production facilities and vineyards. Each of the Demoiselle wines comes in a unique proprietary bottle proving it was made by Demoiselle. The reason we carry these wines is they are authentic and delicious expressions of both Champagne and a legitimate Chardonnay-dominant house style. The wines are different than the Vranken or Pommery wines. Due to a large purchase, we have been able to lower the prices on the Demoiselle Brut Tete de Cuvee and the Demoiselle Grand Cuvee Rosé while we were also able to bring in some alternate sizes (also very well priced) and the exceptional mature luxury cuvee Demoiselle Brut Millesime 1er cru 1996.

Here are my notes on the quite authentic Demoiselle Champagnes:

DEMOISELLE Brut "Tete de Cuvee", Champagne, NV

12x750ml \$39.88 \$449.16

6x1.5L \$81.90 \$461.16

24x375ml \$19.98 \$450.03

24x187ml \$10.60 \$238.63

This is Demoiselle's basic Brut NV but as my note notes, it is much better than "basic." Tech Note: 12% Alcohol. 80% Chardonnay and 20% Pinot Noir fermented using Methode Champenoise with 36 months aging on the yeast. Sensory: Straw in color, bright, clear and sparkling. Offers refreshing acidity under white and yellow citrus and tree fruit (lemon and green apple fruit with hint of peach), clean toasty yeast notes, and dusty-minerally terroir. It is long, lively, and refreshing with a clean finish. Elegant, fresh, and focused; alive-in-the-mouth. *Excellent. BS: 91.*

DEMOISELLE Brut Grand Cuvee Rose, Champagne, NV

12x750ml \$48.75 \$549.00

24x187ml \$13.99 \$315.05

Tech: 12% Alcohol. 85% Chardonnay and 15% Pinot Noir de Bouzy produced using Methode Champenoise and aged 36 months on the lees (the rosé color comes from a small percentage of the Pinot Noir being made as a red wine and added to the blend just before the "Champenization"). Sensory: Pale salmon - onion skin in color, bright and clear and sparkling; dry, medium-bodied with fresh acidity and a long, refreshing finish. Earthy with chalk and darker earth. The fruit is in the red cherry and citrus range with grace notes of black pepper and plenty of toasty yeast. Elegant and integrated, satisfying; lovely-in-the-mouth. Almost exotic and quite delicious. Rich and rounded with the balance to go with food but all-the-while retaining its elegance. *Excellent. BS: 92.*

DEMOISELLE Brut Millesime 1er cru, Champagne, 1996

12x750ml \$89.99 \$1,013.38

This is the Luxury Cuvee. We tasted both this 1996 and the 2000 and chose the 1996 because of its extra development and richness. The 2000 is also excellent and we will likely carry it at some point after the 1996 is sold out. It is just that the 1996 is a rare find that is drinking beautifully. Tech Note: 12% Alcohol. 80% Chardonnay and 20% Pinot Noir exclusively from premier cru vineyards fermented using Methode Champenoise and aged 60 months on the yeasts. Sensory: Straw in color with a hint of gold, bright, clear, and sparkling; dry, medium-bodied with fresh acidity and very light phenolics. Offers developed fruit and toasty bread that is very well integrated with the chalky mineral component. Very long finish. Satisfying, complete, and delicious; lovely-in-the-mouth. Richer and quite developed with pure, precise, almost smoky flavors. If you have never tasted a great Champagne with more than ten year's aging, this is a beautiful one to try. *Really Excellent. BS: 95+.*

**FAVORITE WINE and FAVORITE WHINE**

People often ask me what my favorite wine is. I can tell them what my favorite whine is but even that changes from time to time. I don't have a favorite wine. Maybe I could say I have lots of favorite wines but even that is too limiting. I like wine and one of the things I like most about is its diversity. Not diversity in the sense of red white, rose, sparkling, dry, sweet, etc. although I like all of that. I mean diversity in the sense of some fairly black and white "this versus that" issues. Blended-versus-varietal or punch-down-versus-pump-over are more likely to define the diversity I'm talking about. On most of the many seemingly dividing issues I say "yes" to both sides. I like both blends and varietals and I like both punch-downs wines (usually Pinot Noir and the new style US Syrahs) and pump-over wines (most Cabernets).

I am thinking about this just now as I am in Paso Robles to taste and look at some wineries and vineyards. Paso Robles is a fairly young AVA (American Viticultural Area) and is currently the largest AVA in terms of square miles. I just visited l'Aventure where the wines are getting better and better with each passing year. The owner/winemaker there is Stephan Asseo who was previously the owner/winemaker at Domaine de Courteillac in Bordeaux before selling it to move to California. Rather than make Bordeaux style wines at l'Aventure, Stephan has planted Rhone varieties (Syrah, Grenache, Mourvedre, Rousanne, Viognier, Grenache Blanc) along with Bordeaux's two most heat tolerant varieties (Cabernet Sauvignon and Petite Verdot). For his signature Estate Cuvee, he blends Syrah with Cabernet Sauvignon and Petite Verdot making a big but somehow balanced and elegant red. I tasted the 2007 from bottle and the 2008 from barrel. l'Aventure Estate cuvee is not Bordeaux, is not Napa Cabernet, is not a "Rhone Ranger", and is not an Aussie Shiraz. It is Paso and it is delicious. So, also, is the 2007 Vina Robles Suendero, a very similar blend I tasted last night. (The 2006 Vina Robles Suendero took the Grand Champion Best of Show saddle at the 2009 Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo International Wine Competition).



I love these wines but I also love Bordeaux and California Cabernet and Red Burgundy and a whole slew of other wine types. The glory of wine is that there is so much to sample and enjoy and no one expects loyalty to one brand or even one type. And tasting wine is not a beauty contest - there doesn't have to be a "winner." A couple of wines before tasting the above mentioned l'Aventure Estate Cuvee from barrel, we tasted the 2008 l'Aventure Optimus (which as a sort of "second wine" will sell for about half the price of the Estate Cuvee). I found it delicious. When we finished tasting, I asked Stephan if we could taste the Optimus again. He was initially reluctant because he thought it might not stand up after the Estate Cuvee but he said OK. He needn't have worried. The wine again showed beautifully. I liked both wines. A lot. While I acknowledge that the Estate Cuvee is the "better wine", for the money I will drink more Optimus. Does that make Optimus my favorite wine? Maybe, of those two. As to my current favorite whine, it is "Is the bottle empty already?"

QUINTESSA and OPUS ONE

I know it is tough and that you feel sorry for me but I have to taste a lot of wine - some of which are excellent and some of which are not so good. I sometimes say that I take tasting notes to remember the ones in the middle because the very best and the very worst are indelibly imprinted on my brain. Nevertheless, I often refer back to my notes on even the greatest wines I get to taste. Here are my notes on two just released great wines - Quintessa and Opus One - I am happy to have and happy to share.

continues on page 4



*Random Musings from page 3***QUINTESSA, Rutherford, Napa Valley, 2006**

6x750ml \$119.99 \$675.71

Tech: 14.6% Alcohol. 82% Cabernet Sauvignon, 12% Merlot, 3% Cabernet Franc, 2% Petite Verdot, and 1% Carmenere aged 18 months in all French oak barrels (85% new). Sensory: Red-black-purple in color with well formed legs; dry, medium-to-full-bodied with balanced acidity and moderately chewy phenolics. Offers developed fresh elegant black raspberry black currant blackberry kirsh cassis & a hint of mure fruit with dusty gravelly terroir and accents of pencil shavings, tobacco, black pepper, hints of coffee grounds and menthol, and a beefy note; Very long, chewy finish; elegant but still big and still a bit tight. Back in June 2009, I said "It's all there but it needs a few more months to come together and scored it 94+. After re-tasting it in in September, now (10/07/09), I say "Really Excellent. BS: 95+."

OPUS ONE, Napa Valley, 2006

6x750ml \$169.40 \$932.40

Tech: 14.4% Alcohol. 77% Cabernet Sauvignon, 12% Merlot, 5% Cabernet Franc, 3% Petite Verdot, and 3% Malbec aged 17 months in all new French oak barrels. Sensory: Purple in color with well formed legs. The color stains the glass. Dry, medium-to-full-bodied with balanced acidity and chewy phenolics. Developed, dusty, and ripe with black and red fruit with dusty-gravelly terroir notes and dusty oak accented with black pepper, cedar, mocha, black pepper, and spice; Very long finish. Elegant, quite delicious, ripe, rich, and succulent but focused & pure. Lovely-in-the-mouth. *Really Excellent. BS: 95+.*

No arms were twisted in the making of these notes. Getting to taste and drink wines like these is one of the pure pleasures of being in the wine business. 🍷

**SPEC'S Events & Classes**

SAVE the DATES ...

October 13 - Pinot Places: Burgundy **LAST CALL**

October 22 - Cool Cabs and Bordeaux Blends

October 29 - Symington Port Class

November 3 - The State of Zinfandel

November 17 - Pinot Places: New Zealand and Australia

WINE SCHOOL CANCELLATION POLICY

To cancel a reservation, please call Jessica Toner at 832-660-0250 as soon as possible. Reservations canceled before 4pm on the last business day before the event will not be charged. Late cancellations may be charged. No-shows will be charged.

L'Alliance Francaise is located at 427 Lovett Blvd. (on the Southeast corner of Lovett and Whitney, one block south of Westheimer, three blocks east of Montrose).

**THIS WEEKEND****"Sippin' on the Dock of the Bay"**

Join us on **Saturday, October 17th** from 11 a.m. to 11 p.m. and enjoy four themed pavilions presenting wines from all over the globe and Here's the Beer & Spirits Pavilion.

Entertainment includes Texas Johnny Brown, Luther and the Healers and Hamilton Loomis. There will be cuisine from popular local eateries, culinary demonstrations, high end artists and exhibitors plus automobile and boat displays. Plus, Kinky Friedman will be the featured guest. Just 20 minutes south of downtown Houston, the Festival will be at the prestigious South Shore Harbour Resort & Conference Center Marina in League City. 2009 charity partners of the Festival are Autism Speaks, Communities in Schools and Bay Area Pet Adoption.

**For tickets or to become part of the event,
check the website www.southshorefestival.com
or call (281) 727-0131.**



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