



Getting My Geek On

by Charles M. Bear Dalton



Back in September, I had a great tasting in my office with John Paine of Rosenthal Wine Merchant and Doug Skopp of Dionysus Imports. That tasting inspired me to write three articles. The first, Get Your Geek On, was on some high-geek-appeal wines we had in stock back then. These wines have/had nothing to do with Neal Rosenthal but the tasting of his wines inspired me to focus on geek wines (to “get my geek on”) so I wrote about these others. The second, Houston’s Own Rhone Ranger, was about that same wine importer Doug Skopp and the unique Rhone portfolio he imports and sells. “Mild mannered” Doug Skopp is a good guy

and a good sport as he let me photograph him in a black mask and cowboy hat for the article. The third is this article about some of the unique wines of Neal Rosenthal.

While all of these Rosenthal wines are excellent, they also are all “geek wines” ... which is to say that they are not wines of broad appeal. Rather, they appeal specifically to the wine geeks. Without going into the whole history and etymology of geekdom, let me briefly recap the concept of a “wine geek.”

Wine geeks come in both professional and amateur versions with some overlap. Regardless of sub-type, we are wine drinkers who are often out in front of trends – and sometimes way out. Often youngish (which keeps meaning something older as I get older), mostly tech-savvy, always looking for the next interesting thing, today’s wine geeks are the heirs of those who embraced the Rhone Ranger movement in the 1980s and flirted with (but ultimately abandoned) California Ital-Varietals in the early 1990s. We are the wine drinkers who originally sought out the best small Pinot producers in California. Without wine geeks, Sideways author Rex Pickett could not have created his character Miles. Geeks drove the Riesling revival (which, like Pinot Noir, has jumped over to non-geek wine lovers). Geeks “get” California Syrah and we don’t get why everyone else is still missing that boat. (That will no doubt be the subject of another column.)

The Rosenthal wines I tasted meet all the geek criteria. They are from smaller, lesser known but high quality producers. They are made using traditional methods in artisanal quantities. While they are not cheap, they do offer fine value. And they are all delicious. Unfortunately, they are all also of very limited availability. On all of these wines, you might want to check the Spec’s mother-ship at 2410 Smith Street (713-526-8787) in Houston first.

Bubbles

What could be cooler or geekier than a high-end, bone-dry Cava (Spanish Methode Champenoise Sparkler) made in an artisanal fashion?

RECAREDO Cava Brut Nature, Penédes, 2006

12x750ml \$38.94 \$436.03

Tech: 12% Alcohol. A classic Cava blend of 45% Xarel-lo, 36% Macabeu, and 18% Parellada, all from certified organic vineyards in Alt Penedés: St-Sadurní, Torrelavit & Subirats; 5% base wine aged 11 months in oak; 32 months secondary on lees; all riddling and disgorgement done by hand. Straw with green highlights; fully sparkling; bone dry, medium-light-bodied with crisp acidity. Very tasty but it does take a minute to grow on you. All citrus, yeast, and mineral. Excellent. BS: 92+. (This is better and certainly more distinctive than a lot of Champagne.)

A Domaine in Minervois

The Languedoc has been out of fashion since the first Gulf War, not that the best wines from the Languedoc EVER enjoyed much of a following in the US. So what could be geekier than an artisanal domaine in Minervois (in the heart of the Languedoc) offering two refreshing, vividly structured, mineral whites and a classic artisan Red?

Domaine MASSIAC Sauvignon Blanc, VdP d’Oc, 2009

12x750ml \$13.89 \$156.36

Tech: 12.5% Alc. 100% Sauvignon Blanc grown at 35 hl/hla on a mix of argile (clay), calcaire (limestone), and sedimentaire (sedimentary rock) at 150 meter of altitude on this Southwest facing, 2-ha parcel. Fermented in tanks with weekly battonage and bottled with no fining or filtration. Straw in color with good legs; dry, medium-to-light-bodied with fresh acidity. Juicy, ripe, fresh, and refreshing. Somewhere between Bordeaux and California Sauvignon Blanc in style. Offering lots of fruit and minimal grassy-herbal notes. YUM. Fine. BS: 89+VHR

Domaine MASSIAC Viognier, VdP d’Oc, 2008

12x750ml \$15.89 \$178.90

Tech: 13.5% Alcohol. 100% Viognier fermented and aged in tank with no malolactic fermentation and bottled unfined. Straw in color with well formed legs; dry, medium light-bodied with freshly balanced acidity. Fresh, classy, not oily, non-fat Viognier. More citrus than anything else. Only hints at floral. Refreshing. Fine. BS: 89+. (This is the rare Viognier I can actually drink and enjoy.)

Château MASSIAC Minervois Rouge (Languedoc) 2008

12x750ml \$16.99 \$190.32

Tech: 13% Alcohol. 75% Syrah and 25% Carignan. (50-year-old-vines) All grown on rocky clay-over-limestone all fermented and aged in tank. Purple in color with well formed legs; medium-full-bodied with freshly balanced acidity and chewy phenolics. Richer and riper with more black but still some red fruit. Black pepper, leather, earth, and mineral. Yum. Deep and dense. Excellent. BS: 92+VHR

BURGUNDY

Here are three DELICIOUS red Burgundies that deserve your attention. All are slightly idiosyncratic and, with its fragmentation and hierarchy and interrelated families, nothing is geekier than Burgundy.

BITOUZET PRIEUR Bourgogne Rouge, 2006

12x750ml \$23.74 \$267.47

Tech: 12.5% Alcohol. 100% Pinot Noir from several parcels outside of Volnay aged 12 months in large neutral oval oak casks (Foudre). Medium red in color with well formed legs; dry, medium-bodied with freshly balanced acidity and lightly chewy phenolics. Offers a spicy red cherry nose. Pretty and elegant. Notes of tart cherry, cranberry, raspberry, and spice. Hints at black pepper and cola. Yum. Fine. BS: 90++ VHR.



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Domaine HARMAND GEOFFROY
Gevrey-Chambertin Vieilles Vignes, 2007
12x750ml \$60.79 \$685.88

Tech: 13% Alcohol. 100% Pinot Noir from 3 parcels north of the village; 50 to 60 yr-old vines; aged 12 months in 20% new oak. Medium-red-purple in color with well formed legs; dry, medium-full-bodied with freshly balanced acidity and lightly chewy phenolics. Very earthy, almost fecal nose. Very rich in the mouth with focused dark red and some black Gevrey fruit. Dark spice and black pepper. Note of cola with lots of earth. Really Fine. BS: 90+.

Domaine HARMAND GEOFFROY
Mazis-Chambertin Grand Cru, 2007
12x750ml \$129.99 \$1464.00

Tech: 13.5% Alcohol. 100% Pinot Noir. From six different parcels in both the upper and lower parts of the Mazi Chambertin Grand Cru vineyard (average vine age: 45+ years) made using no chaptalization. Aged 15 months in French oak barrels (90% new). Medium red-purple in color with well formed legs; dry, medium-full-bodied with freshly balanced acidity and lightly chewy phenolics. Deep, ripe, delicious sweet dark red and some black fruit with lots of spice, earth, and oak. Classic. Offers power and real elegance as well as being completely delicious. YUM. Excellent. BS: 94+.

The Sweet Life

All wine lovers know about Ch. D'Yquem but how many know about tiny Arche Pugneau whose vineyards adjoin and even interlock with those of Ch. d'Yquem? And how many know about little Ste. Croix du Mont, across the river and looking down from the cliffs on Sauternes? Both are well worth the search.

Ch. La RAME Sainte-Croix-du-Mont, 2005
12x750ml \$34.99 \$393.08
24x375ml \$19.94 \$450.03

Tech: 13.5% Alcohol. 75% Semillon and 25% Sauvignon Blanc fermented 75% in tank and 25% in barrels. Yellow-gold in color with well formed legs; sweet, medium full-bodied with freshly balanced acidity; deep, delicious, dense, fresh but focused. Ripe citrus with ripe, succulent tree fruit. The spice and mineral notes hint at the exotic. Delicious. Excellent. BS: 91VHR.

Ch. La RAME "Reserve de Château" Ste-Croix-du-Mont, 2005
24x375ml \$23.00 \$540.22

Tech: 13.5% Alcohol. 75% Sémillon; 25% Sauvignon Blanc. All fermented and aged in French oak barrels (1/3 new). This reserve cuvee was the result of selecting the parcels with the most botrytis and making several passes; through them picking only the most affected grapes. Yellow gold in color with well formed legs; medium-full-bodied; sweet with vivid fresh acidity. Nutmeg, vanilla, citrus, and spice nose. Exotic ripe fruit. Vivid. Wildly succulent, and utterly delicious. Incredible wine. WOW. Outstanding. BS: 97+. (We bought every bottle available to us.)

Cru d'ARCHE PUGNEAU, Sauternes, 2005
12x750ml \$58.59 \$658.80

Tech: % Alcohol. Semillon and Sauvignon Blanc from vineyards are "intermixed with those of Ch.d'Yquem". Yellow-gold in color with well formed legs; sweet, medium-full-bodied with fresh acidity. As sweet as it is, it is still refreshing. Smells like vanilla and cinnamon French toast made from brioche. Rich and rounded texture. Classic Sauternes feel. A swirl of sweet citrus and more fruit with exotic spice and minerals. Delicious and intriguing. Excellent. BS: 94+.

Pretty good day at the office, huh? ✨

