

Amherst Wines & Spirits

July/August 2010

SATURDAY IN-STORE TASTINGS

We have a terrific lineup of tastings in July. With a nod to the season we're lightening up a bit and we think you'll find things both new and interesting. The tastings happen each Saturday from 2:00 – 5:00. You get to sip wines, learn about them from a tasting sheet you can take home, and munch fresh baked baguettes in the process. All compliments of the house. Please join us when you can. Fun and informal. August schedule on web site (see below).

July 3: Whites from South Africa

With its heritage firmly rooted in Europe these whites tend to a more elegant style. The more we taste from this place, the more we become real believers. Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc, Chenin Blanc, & blends.

July 10: Summer Reds

Nothing too heavy or serious, reds we can enjoy with barbecue, salads, and other seasonal fare. This will be a collection from hither and yon, under \$15. Some terrific discoveries to be made here.

July 17: Chardonnay Around the World

The world's #1 fine wine grape shows its range of styles as we move from California to Washington, France, Australia, maybe Chile. You will really get to understand this grape.

July 24: Spain's Unknown Whites

While justly known for its reds, the whites we're tasting from Spain are nothing short of exciting. Grapes such as Verdejo, Albarino, and others you've never heard of. It's a big world – experience the roads not taken.

July 31: Beaujolais, Summer's Iconic Red

If there's a better all-around warm weather red than Beaujolais, we haven't found it. Big flavors framed by the Gamay grape's natural acidity keeps these fresh and lively.

FINAL WINE DINNER OF 2010: LOCALLY GROWN

We live in the midst of a wonderful food growing region and want to devote our final wine dinner of the year to honoring the local farmers who provide this bounty. All of the major food ingredients served will come from within 50 miles of Amherst. We plan to identify the local sources and will focus on those whose farming practices are the most natural – organically grown produce and meats raised humanely and without resort to the magic of modern chemistry. The adverse environmental by-products associated with transporting food long distances will be moot. Kermit the Frog sang "It's not easy being green", but he apparently didn't live around here. We will pair the food with U.S. wines, nothing shabby we can promise. This far in advance both the food sourcing and wine pairings are still happening, so we can't furnish precise details just now. In many ways we think this may be our most exciting wine dinner yet. Hope you can make it.

DATE: September 22 (Wednesday)

PLACE: Bistro 63 at The Monkey Bar, 63 North Pleasant Street, Amherst
(parking in town lot just behind)

TIME: 6:30

COST: \$75.00, includes gratuities, tax extra

TASTINGS UPDATED

The Saturday tasting schedule is on our web site ahead of this newsletter. If we're sometimes late getting the newsletter out, you can log on to www.amherstwines.com and get the skinny on what's coming up. The August schedule will be up at the end of this month.

SOUTH AFRICAN WHITES

About 2/3 of South Africa's wine production is white, much of not memorable – jug wines for supermarket sales. Over the last several years, however, it seems to us as if there have been giant strides on the quality front. The wines are clean, fresh, and well made. They may not achieve the heights of the best whites from France, Germany, and California, but do offer serious drinking pleasure, excellent food compatibility, and seriously impressive value. Take a look.

Steen, KWV 2009 . . . \$8.99

Steen is one of the local names for Chenin Blanc. This grape can be vinified either dry (see below) or just off-dry with a soft texture and peach-y flavor. This is the latter. This is just delicious.

Petit Chenin, Forrester 2009 . . . \$8.99

The Chenin Blanc grape is an important player in the pantheon of South African whites. Here's a fine example for everyday enjoyment – crisp, dry, fresh. Totally different style from above. A versatile grape, to be sure.

Beyond 2009 . . . \$9.99

This is as good as the Sauvignon Blanc grape gets at this price. Quite dry with a mineral/kiwi/gooseberry slant. Firm, steely, vivid. Reminds us of a Sancerre from France's Loire Valley. The acidity pops the flavors. Don't miss this.

The Ruins 2009 . . . \$10.99

Unusual (but terrific) blend of 60% Chardonnay and 40% Viognier. The Chard provides the oomph and a touch of green apple while Viognier kicks in flowery bouquet and a sense of elegance to the flavors. It's a beauty.

Chardonnay, Graham Beck 2007 . . . \$13.99

The ripe apple, toasty vanilla bean, supple and full-bodied. This is a beautifully made Chard. Beck is not afraid to use oak, but applies a deft touch. More complex without burying the pretty fruit.

Chenin Blanc, Forrester 2008 . . . \$14.99

The flavors of pear, nectarine, and peach are knit together beautifully this upper tier Chenin Blanc (see 1st & 2nd wines above). Dry but not tooth-rattling. Elegant, unoaked, lovely perfume. Hard not to love this.

Sauvignon Blanc, Neil Ellis 2007 . . . \$15.99

If you love 'em very dry, this is for you. Delicate, unoaked, & crisp with a mineral and wet stone flavor profile. This really comes alive with fatty fish, such as salmon, and delicate fare like scallops. The brisk acidity also works beautifully with chèvre or other richly flavored soft cheeses.

LESS IS MORE

When the weather gets warm we sometimes need a break from the supercharged reds we enjoy in the winter. If it's gotta be red, here is a terrific bunch to consider which lighten up on the volume while still offering plenty of flavor interest.

Notro 2008 (ARG) . . . \$6.99

Two grapes of Italian descent, Sangiovese & Bonarda, but these are grown in Argentina. It's a lovely blend, fresh and clean, with Sangiovese's red fruit flavors nicely balanced with the darker Bonarda.

Chianti, Cavatina 2007 (IT) . . . \$8.99

Chianti is always a good choice when you don't want something too heavy. The bad news is we can't get any more of this one. The good news is we do have some, it tastes like real Chianti (which it is), and the price is great.

Chateau Paraza 2007 (FR) . . . \$9.99

The elegance of finesse of this red has France written all over it. The blend is 40% Syrah, 40% Grenache, & 20% Mourvèdre from the region on Minervois in the south. One of our real faves.

Pinot Noir, Dipinto 2008 (IT) . . . \$10.99

With its lighter, easy drinking style Pinot Noir is a perfect summer red. Problem is, finding one which actually tastes like Pinot Noir at anything close to this price. We did it! From the foothills of Alps in northern Italy this happy red shows the earthy side of the grape with a streak of wild strawberry. A beauty for the \$. Try it with a light chill if you're feeling frisky.

Mencia, Luna Berberide 2008 (SP) . . . \$16.99

The region of Mencia in northwestern Spain is a small, hidden jewel. There the Mencia grape yields reds of charm and delicacy. Spicy black fruits, excellent concentration, just a bit young (a quick decant helps). The wine shows an elegant, refined style while also displaying impressive concentration. It's a wine and region worth getting to know.

OLIVE OIL

Some of the very best olive oils are produced in Italy's Umbria region. The good news is that we are now carrying an organically-grown Umbrian oil imported by Tuckaway Farm (<http://tuckawayfarmllc.com>) right here in Conway. Amy-Louise Pfeffer and Mike Sola, now our neighbors, lived and grew olives in the superior olive growing region in western Umbria, *Colli Orvietani*, and now import this nectar for us to experience. This is extra-virgin olive oil which actually far exceeds the legal requirements for this top category of oil. We cannot remember tasting a better olive oil. It is called Trasimeno Mills. We love to drizzle this oil on fresh tomatoes, cucumbers, and grilled eggplant. Living where we do, this is too good an opportunity to pass up. We carry three sizes: 250ml (\$12.99), 500ml (\$19.99), and 750ml (\$26.99).

BORDEAUX 2009

It has been a long time since we've seen a feeding frenzy such as happened this past month with our "futures" offering of Bordeaux from the 2009 vintage, which has been dubbed by all the responsible wine press as one of the greatest ever. While prices of the big boys are through the roof, our offering focuses on smaller chateaux which have received excellent reviews from at least two credible critics. We think this is the best way to max out value in an overheated market. For a current list of wines available on our offering, please visit our web site, www.amherstwines.com. If you'd like to reserve some, please don't delay. Feel free to phone us if you'd like to discuss options. We have acquired these at the opening prices and with a favorable dollar-euro exchange rate. Still some great buys left. If you're a lover of good Bordeaux, you won't want to miss out on these wines.

AN INTERESTING RUM

At the end of a major trade wine tasting we noticed a table of what appeared to be some unusual rums. We wandered over and were blown away by what we tasted. These were all from Venezuela and the one we selected is **Diplomatico Reserva Exclusiva**. It is aged in small white oak casks for up to 12 years. Bouquet and flavors of honey, dried apricots, candied fruits, caramel, and things we can't begin to describe. Bold and complex, a rum to sip and savor slowly. Why are we going on about this? A few months ago we got some in gift boxes along with 2 tumblers etched with the "Ron Diplomatico" logo. Too big for the shelf, so we kept the box with glasses in our stock room and put the rum out. The rum is \$31.99. The glasses – no charge. While supplies last.

CHILE'S MERLOT AND CARMENERE

During the 1980's and 1990's the demand for inexpensive Merlot in the U.S. outstripped supply, first from California and then from Chile, an increasingly important source of value reds. Many years earlier Chile had brought the Carmenere grape over from Bordeaux where it was a major player in the 19th century. Like Merlot, Carmenere yields a fruit-forward, soft, easy drinking red, especially at the lower price range. What to do about the shortage of Merlot? Why, stretch what you've got with Carmenere, which there was lots of, while waiting for new Merlot plantings to come of age. By the time the new Merlot plantings began yielding enough fruit, the demand for Merlot in the U.S. began to wane. At this point a few producers began bottling Carmenere as itself. Some slight of hand here? Perhaps, but there are two points to be made. First, the overall quality of Merlot, especially from Chile, has improved dramatically. Second, Carmenere can be a lovely wine in its own right with flavors offering hints of fresh herbs and coffee we don't normally find in most Merlots. Here's a chance to compare and have some really lovely reds in the process.

CARMENERE

Santa Digna, Torres 2007 . . \$9.99

Torres, the formidable Spanish wine producer, has taken its skills to Chile where it bottles this lovely red. You may notice some plum, a hint of cracked pepper, and a clean, fresh style we really enjoy.

Terra Andina 2007 . . \$12.99

A bit more muscular, loaded with bright red fruits, a hint of licorice and spice and smooth, silky tannins. These vineyards are naturally irrigated by runoff from the Andes snowpack. Worth more, we think.

MERLOT

Montes "Classic" 2008 . . \$10.99

Aurelio Montes may be our favorite Chilean wine producer. His wines reflect a more chiseled, precise style. You will notice it in this red, somewhat more firm than U.S. versions with pretty berry and vanilla notes.

Lapostolle 2007 . . \$14.99

A French owned property (the French are big investors in Chile). This winery hits a perfect midpoint between the more reserved French style and the opulent fruit of California. Hints of raspberry, black plum, smoke and earth.

Lapostolle "Cuvée Alexandre" 2006 . . \$23.99

The "reserve" Merlot from the same winery. A bit more supercharged and showing pretty cocoa, black plum, and just a hint of licorice at the finish. The tannins provide structure for the big fruit. Big league.

Special Offer

Choose any 4 bottles, to include at least 1 bottle of each type, and deduct 10%.

A FASCINATING NEW BEER

Perhaps beer isn't the first thing to come to mind when you think of us, but we do stock an interesting and eclectic selection (75 at last count) of malt beverages from around the world. Our latest discovery is **Pere Jacques** from Chicago's **Goose Island Brewery**. Like a fine wine, this Belgian style ale is vintage dated. It actually changes and gains complexity from bottle age! It is full-flavored brew, rich in fruits and malt flavors, similar in style to a good Belgian dubbel. Check out their web site, www.gooseisland.com, for the full story. Available in 22oz. bottles, \$7.95. Well worth it

NEW ARRIVALS

WHITE

Le P'tit Loire 2009 (FR) . . \$12.99

Sancerre, the Sauvignon Blanc based white from France's Loire Valley, may be the supreme (but pricey) expression of this grape. Our new discovery is from the growers' coop in Sancerre. It delivers a full-flavored version of Sancerre at a fraction of the price. Aromatics of gunflint & smoke, stoney/mineral flavors, dry but not at all edgy. We're not saying it's the same as Sancerre, but we are saying it's closer than the price. If you're a fan of Loire SB's, check this out.

Chardonnay, Chevalier 2009 (FR) . . \$12.99

Here's a new one for us – Chardonnay grown in the vineyards of the Loire Valley's Muscadet area. These mineral rich soils leave their mark on both. The green apple flavors you expect from a good Chard are here, but the style is very crisp, clean, slatey, and fresh showing what wine writers refer to "nerve." Very elegant, beautifully made.

Sauvignon Blanc, Oberon 2008 (CA) . . \$14.99

When the Mondavi wine operation was sold and broken up, Robert's oldest son, Michael, created this Oberon label and has carried on. This is the kind of SB we used to be able to get from Mondavi before the label was taken over by a giant wine conglomerate – a hint of pink grapefruit in the bouquet, drier than many CA Sauvignon Blancs without being at all sharp. Elegant and with the mineral underpinning we look for in good SB's. Bravo.

Chateau Gravielle Lacoste 2009 (FR) . . \$17.99

About 25% of Bordeaux' production is white and the best comes from the Graves region just south of the city. Here's a great example which blends 75% Semillon, 20% Sauvignon Blanc, and 5% Muscadelle. The floral aromas, forward and complex, lead into a rather full-bodied white which balances rich flavors of earth & mineral with crisp acidity. A beauty.

RED

Viña Alta 2009 (SP) . . \$7.99

Here's the kind of red you want to keep around, especially in the summer. The flavors are ripe without the sweetness you sometimes get at this price. Enough acidity to support the ripe fruit and keep the palate fresh. Perhaps you won't be inspired to wax poetic, but show us a better bottle at this price. Bet you can't.

Raisins Gaulois 2009, Lapierre 2009 (FR) . . \$12.99

Marcel Lapierre is one of Beaujolais best producers, making small quantities Morgon, one of the "Grand Crûs" of Beaujolais. Pricey and quite wonderful. The fruit from his younger vines is not used in his trophy Morgon, rather it finds its way into bottlings like this. From the superior 2009 vintage (remember how good the Nouveau was last Fall?) we can sample the joys of the Gamay grape, bursting with ripe flavors, fresh and lively. A better summer red is hard to imagine.

Pinot Noir, Shooting Star 2008 (CA) . . \$16.99

Lake County, well north of Napa & Sonoma, has the advantage of less expensive vineyard land resulting in some real bargains in wines which hail from this agricultural region (pears mainly). This label is owned by Jed Steele, perhaps Mendocino's finest winemaker. He has crafted a lovely Pinot Noir, showing ripe red cherry flavors and elegant style.

Pinot Noir "Bohan Dillon", Hirsch 2008 (CA) . . \$34.99

Hirsch is a tiny producer located in the Sonoma Coast appellation, considered one of the very finest for Pinot Noir & Chardonnay. The Bohan Dillon bottling is composed of small lots from several different vineyard sites. Previously available only via mailing list, we have been able to secure a few cases. Pinot people – take note. These folks truly understand this most elusive red grape. One sip might convince you – bright fruit beautifully balanced with natural acidity, hints of Asian spice, earthy, wonderfully fragrant and with a long finish. Oh, yes.

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