

Amherst Wines & Spirits

April 2010

SATURDAY IN-STORE TASTINGS

For 16 years we have been doing tastings in the shop every Saturday from 2:00 – 5:00. April 2010 will be no exception. These are focused tastings where we explore a narrow range in the broad spectrum of wines in order to max out the learning. You may really like the whites from Bordeaux. Or not. But after you've tasted a bunch of whites from Bordeaux (see April 24 below), you'll know. Wines and fresh baked baguettes compliments of the house. Hope to see you.

April 3: U.S. Syrah and Australian Shiraz Compared

Same grape, different countries. Australia has made Shiraz its go-to red while the grape has gotten off to a slow start here. This will be a fascinating tasting.

April 10: California Chardonnay

Better than ever, we say. Gone are the oaky monsters of yesteryear. The 2006 and 2007 vintages currently in the house are strong. We'll compare Chards from different growing regions in the state.

April 17: Cabernet Sauvignon Under \$15

The recession has put a hammerlock on price increases, but not on quality. Value hasn't been this good in a long time. We will concentrate on U.S. Cabs.

April 24: White Bordeaux

25% of the wines of Bordeaux are white. Not as well known as the reds, these make terrific warm weather companions to the lighter fare of the season. Crisp, dry, versatile – worth getting to know.

INEXPENSIVE PINOT NOIR?

Since the movie "Sideways" caused the Pinot Noir market to explode, we have been offered many inexpensive Pinots for the shop. We insist on tasting before buying and have rejected practically all as having almost no relationship to the grape we know. The market for these innocuous reds is, however, robust and should you (mistakenly) venture into another store, you're likely to find a few of these "bargains." So we couldn't help feeling vindicated when Gallo was recently caught bringing in "Pinot Noir" under their French "Red Bicyclette" label which failed the test of being Pinot Noir. Perhaps the Gallo folks were unaware, who knows. But it serves to remind all of us in the wine world that the pulls and tugs of market pressures can have unpredictable consequences for the ultimate user. Dealing with a merchant who does their homework and has your trust, whether us or another, is your best bet.

A VERY GREAT CHIANTI

2006 is among our very favorite years for Chianti. The grapes were ripe but not overripe and the resulting wines have shown a brilliant balance between the clean, bright flavors of the Sangiovese grape and the acidity which gives these wines structure and aging potential. Several months ago we were offered a very special wine from **Felsina**, a small estate in Classico which makes absolutely stellar wines. We already stock their regular Chianti Classico (\$24.99) but were able to acquire what we could of their Riserva, which they call "Rancia". It is due to arrive in about 2 weeks. Grown on poor soils at a higher elevation in Classico, the wine was aged for 16 months in French oak which added complexity and length to the flavors. The fruit is deep, vibrant, focused, and supported by ripe tannins. Just coming into its good drinking years, it will continue to improve in bottle and provide much pleasure for the next 10 years. If you'd like some, please let us know by phoning 413-549-0900 or by email – steve@amherstwines.com. The wine is due to arrive in mid-May and you pay when you pick up. This is a "heads up" for reservations only. Price - \$46.99/b.

WINE QUOTE OF THE MONTH

It is a sad fact that inexpensive, high quality Pinot Noir is almost non-existent. While it is possible to buy good quality, reasonably priced, entry level Cabernet Sauvignon or Chardonnay, alas this is not the case with Pinot.

Allen Meadows, Decanter Magazine

ADVANCED PURCHASE OFFER: GERMANY'S GREAT 2009'S

The weather gods smiled on Germany's great wine river valleys in 2009 and we're in for a treat. In this most northern of wine producing regions weather is everything. After a cool start the weather turned hot in July. The warm, dry conditions continued through the critical months of September and October resulting in ripe, healthy Riesling. "The physiological ripeness is extraordinary" according to Christof Graf, partner at the von Buhl estate in the Rheinpfalz. Quantity, however, was down 10%-15% in most of the better regions due to the early rain. This served to further concentrate the flavors in the remaining grapes.

The south-facing slopes of Germany's wine valleys are the epicenter of Riesling heaven. The best ones are delicate, highly perfumed, refreshing, complex, and just plain yummy. The aromas are an astonishing symphony of flowers, minerals, and fresh ripe fruits. In the mouth the interplay of subtle fruit, mineral flavors, and racy acidity yields fleeting impressions of sweet/tart which make your mouth water. These wines are naturally low in alcohol, usually 8%-9%, as compared to 13% for most other whites. While not tooth-rattling dry, the good ones display a natural acidity which plays off against the Riesling's natural fruitiness resulting in a crisp, dry finish.

<u>Qba</u> ("starter" level for the better quality wines)	Bottle
Kallstadter Saumagen	\$9.99
Piesporter Treppchen, Haart	\$12.99

<u>Kabinett</u> (next quality level)	
Niersteiner Paterberg, Schneider	\$9.99
Ayler Kupp, Simon	\$10.99
Wehlener Sonnenuhr, Kerpen	\$17.99

<u>Spatlese</u> (a bit riper, more concentrated)	
Urziger Wurzgarten, Erbes	\$16.99
Piesporter Goldtropfchen, Haart	\$19.99
Braunberger Juffer, Haag	\$20.99

THE FINE PRINT

** Special pre-arrival pricing applies – any **6b @ -10%, 12b+ @ -15%**.

** Orders must be received by April 30.

** Wines should arrive in May. We will contact you on arrival.

** Phone (413)549-0900 or email steve@amherstwinest.com to place orders.

** No prepayment – pay when you pick up.

PORTUGAL'S LITTLE KNOWN REDS

Politically and economically isolated from the rest of Europe during most of the 20th century, Portugal's wine industry developed mostly in isolation. Port, the sweet red after dinner wine, has been the calling card for this country although the same grapes used in Port are also used in Portugal's dry reds. These are, for the most part, indigenous varieties with difficult to pronounce names such as Tourega Nacional, Tinta Roriz, Trincadeira, and other tongue twisters. Since emerging from its troubled political past Portugal has joined the European Union, which has provided substantial support to assist in modernizing its wine industry. While there are stylistic differences, these reds tend to be on the dry side with a firm style. Deep, focused flavors of red and black fruits, brushed with dried herbs and wound around a core of firm tannins. In our opinion these represent serious value. Step outside the bubble. Try some.

TO SWEETEN THE DEAL . . .

Buy any 6 bottles listed and deduct **10%**.

Buy at least 1 of each (8b) and deduct **15%**.

Monte das Olivieres 2006 . . \$6.99

Charamba 2007 . . \$6.99

Loios 2008 . . \$10.99

Periquita 2006 . . \$10.99

Vale do Bomfim 2006 . . \$11.99

Aveleda "Follies" 2005 . . \$12.99

Crasto 2007 . . \$19.99

Villa Santa 2006 . . \$22.99

BARELY BUBBLY

Not quite sparkling, not really still. What to call them? In Italy the word is "frizzante", in France "petillant". Whatever they are called, the reaction of our customers has been near unanimous in favor. These wines show a zillion bubbles when poured, similar to any full sparkler. A minute later, the bubbles are gone and you're left with a sort of "crackling" sensation. Lots of fun, and these fit beautifully into warm weather entertaining. The driest of these (although not super dry) is **Prosecco Tradizione**, Villa Jolanda (\$9.99). **Moscato d'Asti "Dolceoro"** (\$12.99) shows how the light crackle serves as a counterpoint to the sweet Moscato grape. And **Sidre Doux** (\$12.99), a French apple cider, lightly sweet, will force you to re-think cider. It's that good.

AMERICAN SAUVIGNON BLANC

Among the world's premium white wine grapes, only Chardonnay is more widely planted. California dominates most of the production (about 16,000 acres under cultivation), although the acreage devoted to this grape is growing in Washington. Sauvignon Blanc offers a serious alternative to Chardonnay. In general, it is a more forceful style with flavors ranging from melon to fresh herbs and varying degrees of grassiness. The excessive use of oak has been toned down allowing the flavors of the grape to shine. We have lots. Here are a few to consider.

Line 39 . . \$9.99

Pretty pear and apple flavors with hints of lemon peel. Full-bodied style. Just what it should be.

Chateau Ste. Michelle 2008 . . \$10.99

Bright and lively, delivering a light, juicy mouthful of grapefruit and pear flavors

Pomelo 2008 . . \$10.99

Vivid, crisp flavors of pink grapefruit, full and juicy, with a snappy, dry finish. A customer favorite.

Morgan 2008 . . \$15.99

A bit more in the French style with bracing acidity playing off lightly grassy, gooseberry flavors.

Chateau Ste. Michelle "Horse Heaven Vyd." 2008 . . \$16.99

From a superior single vineyard in Washington's Columbia Valley. Vibrant grapefruit flavors and floral bouquet.

Starmont 2008 . . \$17.99

A real beauty from Napa's Merryvale winery. Intensely flavored, fleshy style, tangerine and peach. Not for wine wimps.

Hall 2008 . . \$19.99

Aromas of fruit blossoms introduce this full-flavored white. Ripe style with hints of apricot & tangerine.

Matanzas Creek 2007 . . \$22.99

Pear and tropical fruits presented in an elegant yet complex style. A light grassiness adds interest. This is a beauty.

Frogs Leap 2008 2008 . . \$23.99

This organically farmed winery from Napa offers a crisp, fresh, very dry SB. Minerals, hazelnut, fresh herbs. Yes!!

THE WHOLE – GREATER THAN THE SUM OF THE PARTS

Perhaps it was 10th grade geometry which first introduced us to the concept that the whole could be greater than the sum of its parts. As a mathematical model we found this a bit puzzling. As a wine concept, however, we understand it completely. Blending is the art of winemaking. A blend can be geographical – grapes grown in different areas – or different types of grapes. Either way, it enables a good winemaker to create a more complex and interesting finished product. This is well understood among winemaking circles and is quite common. In California, for example, the grape named on the label must account for at least 75% of the blend (could be more) and no mention is necessary to flag this, so many wines are blended without the consumer knowing. It's all good. Here are a few of our current faves where the winemaker has blended different types of grapes to achieve something more than was possible without it.

WHITE

The Ruins 2009 (S.AF.) . . \$10.99

26% Viognier adds a silky texture while the 74% Chardonnay provides the primary fruit flavors of citrus, lime, and peach. This is made using grapes from organically farmed vineyards. At this price, it's a beauty.

Torres "Viña Esmerelda" 2008 (SP) . . \$14.99

From Spain's northeastern Catalonia region comes this blend of 85% Moscato and 15% Gewurztraminer. Just a touch off-dry, the Moscato's peachy notes are accented by the spice of the Gewurztraminer. If it doesn't need to be too dry, this is one to check out. Really good stuff.

RED

Notro Sangiovese-Bonarda 2008 (ARG) . . \$6.99

Two grapes of Italian origin marry up in Argentina! The earthy Sangiovese, the principal grape of Tuscany, is balanced by the firm style of the Bonarda. A more delicate red just perfect for pre-meal sipping and to match with lighter fare.

Le Coq Rouge 2007 (FR) . . \$9.99

Grower coops are big in southern France and often provide serious value reds to the local market. Here's an export label well worth knowing about. It blends 45% Merlot, 32% Cabernet Sauvignon, 15% Syrah, & 8% Grenache into a supple, deeply flavored red with notes of plum & blackberry. The wine shows lovely balance and aromatics.

C.M.S. 2007 (WA) . . \$12.99

Hedges, one of our favorite Washington wineries, blends 42% Cabernet Sauvignon, 51% Merlot, and 7% Syrah into a muscular red. A backbone of ripe tannin supports flavors of black cherry, fresh herbs, & a touch of anise. Lovely balance here with the Cabernet providing structure and the Merlot and Syrah the fruit nuances.

Rapitala "Nuor" 2006 (IT) . . \$16.99

Nero d'Avola is a big deal red grape in Sicily. 30% Pinot Nero (Pinot Noir) has been blended in to add a softer, warmer, spicier aromatic touch to the Nero. Ripe, medium-full, seductive. This is a real beauty.

NEW ARRIVALS

WHITE

Casal Garcia rosé (P'TGL) . . \$6.99

This is the pink version of the famous Portuguese white, Vinho Verde. Like VV, it is quite dry with a lightly crackling sensation in the mouth, but this shows a touch of raspberry in the flavors. Crisp & refreshing, high value vibes.

Pinot Blanc, Valley of the Moon 2007 (CA) . . \$14.99

Originally from France, the Pinot Blanc grape has gained a dedicated following among CA vintners for its broad, full, lush flavors and supple mouth feel. We note flavors of white peach with gentle mineral undertones in this one from Sonoma. Silky mouth feel, dry but not mouth puckering.

Sauvignon Blanc, Russian Jack 2008 (NZ) . . \$15.99

From New Zealand's Marlborough region. A rush of upfront fruit - ripe lemon, pink grapefruit and tropical fruit, fresh and tangy. Not as dry as others we've tasted from NZ. A practically perfect warm weather white.

Chardonnay, Lake Sonoma 2008 (CA) . . \$16.99

From Sonoma's Russian River Valley, a cooler area and one of the state's prime growing regions for Chardonnay. The cooler climate results in clean, precise, pure flavors - pear and apple - with minimal oak influence. We really like this for its balance of vivid, ripe fruit flavors and natural acidity.

RED

Sangiovese "Poggio del Sasso", Cantina di Montalcino 2007 (IT) . . \$9.99

From a growers' coop in the famed Tuscan village of Montalcino. Using grapes which do not qualify for the exalted Brunello appellation this cantina has a reputation of bottling terrific wines at modest prices. Here's a great example - the classic Sangiovese grape shows ripe flavors of red cherry with a dusting of Tuscan earth and balancing acidity. Beautifully done at this price. Strong value vibes for you Tuscan-o-philes.

Shiraz-Cabernet, Longview Vineyards 2007 (AUS) . . \$14.99

Many of the Australian blends we taste are overripe and unbalanced. This one gets it right. The smokey bouquet clearly shows the Shiraz influence. The flavors are full and deep with the Cabernet providing the needed backbone. Good stuff.

Villa Bella "Montemazzano" 2005 (IT) . . \$15.99

Here's a gem from northeastern Italy. Made from the Corvina grape, same as Valpolicella and Amarone from this region. The style is slightly bigger than most Valpolicellas and showing a core of dried cherry & currant fruit in a plump, forward style. Hints of mineral and chocolate in the finish. Good stuff.

Alba, Tribouley 2007 (FR) . . \$24.99

Every so often (not often enough) we taste a wine which just stops us cold. Jean-Louis Tribouley organically farms about 30 acres in southern France, managing to produce a miniscule quantity of wine because his vineyard yields are incredibly low. He farms this way to insure concentration of flavors and one taste will convince you he succeeds. We were fortunate to get a few cases of his "Alba" bottling (about 300 for the entire U.S.). The grapes are hand-harvested and the wine is made using only the natural yeasts on the skins of the grapes, a rare occurrence. The aromas of sweet roasted herbs and dark fruits are followed by muscular flavors of ripe plum & chocolate with an herbal underpinning. This is a big red with dusty tannins and great depth which is terrific now and will evolve more over the next few years. Grab some.

AMHERST WINES & SPIRITS 233 North Pleasant Street Amherst
Tel: (413) 549-0900 www.amherstwines.com Email: steve@amherstwines.com