

# *Amherst Wines & Spirits*

**December 2009**

## **. . . AND A HAPPY NEW YEAR**

Just a few brief words of “thanks” to start off our holiday newsletter. It’s been a challenging year. Faced with a weak economy and rising unemployment we have put much effort into finding more good wines at lower price points. Fortunately, the worldwide market weakness has created some unique opportunities to find these good values. It has forced us to look at areas we might have passed over and, as expected, we feel we’ve made some wonderful discoveries. But it would all be for naught without you. We very much appreciate your support over the 15+ years we’ve been at it. Our small band of wine warriors – Sharon, Mark, and John – join me in wishing you the very best for the holidays and New Year.

## **SATURDAY IN-STORE TASTINGS**

It’s the holiday season and we have some very special tastings planned. Take a few minutes out of your busy Saturdays and stop by to munch some fresh baked baguettes, sip wine, and share the holiday vibes. It’s fun, informal, and you’ll get to taste some wonderful things. Compliments of the house, of course. Here’s what December’s tastings look like.

### **December 5: California Cabernet Sauvignon**

*With the softening of prices the time has never been better to experience California’s finest red wine. Just now there are excellent vintages in the pipeline. We’ll taste some beauties.*

### **December 12: Port**

*“All wine would be Port if it could” boasts this Portuguese proverb. Who are we to argue? We’ll taste a range of Ruby and Tawny Ports. It will be awesome.*

### **December 19: No tasting**

### **December 26: Sparkling Wines**

*We will taste bubbly from France, including true Champagne, California, Italy, and Spain. This is always a great tasting and a good lead-in to New Year’s*

## **IMPORTANT HOLIDAY STUFF**

### **STORE HOURS**

We’re here to serve you during our usual store hours of 10 – 6:30, Monday thru Saturday and 12:00 – 5:00 Sundays. We’ll be closing at 5:00 on 12/24 & 12/31.

### **SHIPPING GIFTS**

We can pack and ship your gifts to any location where legal. We will accept gift orders for mailing until December 13.

### **GIFT CERTIFICATES**

This is a great gift idea. We can customize one for you quite easily and would be happy to email or snail mail it - either to you or the recipient. This can be done easily over the phone – great time saver.

### **WINE ACCESSORIES**

We stock a good selection of stemware starting at \$5. These include red & white “everyday” wineglasses as well as specialty stemware for Champagne and single malt scotch. Check out our new 4 glass sets, red or white, in a gift box for only \$29.95. You may want to consider wine decanters, quite useful to bring up the flavors in younger reds and add a note of elegance. Corkscrews, wine preservers, pourers, and the best basic wine book we’ve ever seen for only \$19.95.

### **GIFT WRAPPING**

We offer free gift wrapping for single bottles. We also have a selection of gift bags, 2 and 3 bottle gift boxes – all at very reasonable prices. A great time saver. Presentation counts.

## STEVE'S ALL-STARS – QUALITY

Each year we taste thousands of wines in our efforts to bring the best selection of wines to the store. During the course of all this slurping and spitting we sometimes come across a wine of truly exceptional pedigree, one which, at least in our opinion, defines the category. Here are a few of our finds from 2009.

### **Riesling “Linsenberg”, Schoenheit 2006 (FR) . . \$19.99**

*This totally dry Riesling from France's Alsace region displays both power and complexity. Beginning with the classic Alsatian Riesling bouquet of mineral and petrol this is a real beauty. The flavors show size and impressive depth, mineral and green apple, dry and almost a bit fat in its concentration.*

### **Zweigelt, Huber 2006 (AUS) . . \$19.99**

*Every so often we taste a wine, fall completely in love, and without knowing if we can sell it, just must have it in the shop. Here is such a wine. Zweigelt is a red grape grown in Austria, best known for its whites. This is a wine of finesse, elegance, and complexity rather than power, showing flavors of ripe red cherry perfectly balanced by natural acidity. There's a harmony and beauty here like a bouquet of Spring flowers which is hard to verbalize, a bit like the late supreme court Justice Frankfurter said in an obscenity case . . . “I can't define it but I know it when I see it.”*

### **Els Pics 2007 (SP) . . \$27.99**

*The region of Priorat in northeastern Spain is not well known to most and yet some of Spain's most exciting reds are coming from here. This beauty blends 60% Grenache, 35% Mazuela, and 5% Cabernet Sauvignon. Aged for 12 months in French oak this is a wine of plush, velvety fruit, ripe and fat, with a backbone of ripe tannins for structure.*

### **Pinot Noir “Calvert”, Felton Road 2006 (NZ) . . \$64.99**

*Pinot Noir is New Zealand's great red. Here's a supreme example – polished, vibrant, deep fruit which maintains the elegance, purity, and sense of a premier cru red from Burgundy's Cote de Beaune region. Layered, complex, long finish. Drinking just a bit young now, but a quick decant helps. This is what Pinot Noir is about.*

## STEVE'S ALL-STARS - VALUE

Same story as above, but here we recognize wines of exceptional value. We honestly get more of a rush finding these than the pricey wines. We waded through lots of plonk to find a very, very few. We're proud of these.

### **Monte das Oliveiras 2006 (PTGL) . . \$6.99**

*Don't be scared by the price. This Portuguese red has made believers out of many skeptics with its firm style, deep flavors of red & black fruits, and easy drinkability. It's our Tuesday night pizza wine.*

### **Sangiovese, Monti Degli Angeli 2008 (IT) . . \$6.99**

*Sangiovese, the grape of Tuscany's Chianti, but this time it's from Puglia, the “heel” of the “boot.” The same flavors as you expect from Chianti in a fleshier, earthier, more rustic style. This is true “vino.”*

### **Chardonnay, Opera Prima 2008 (SP) . . \$6.99**

*If there's a better Chard at this price, we haven't found it yet. Just a tad drier than most CA Chardonnays with a pretty lemon zest/green apple slant to the flavors. This shows impressive purity and style.*

### **Domaine Tariquet 2008 (FR) . . \$8.99**

*A blend of Colombard & Ugni Blanc from southwestern France. This quintessentially French white is clean, crisp, fresh, quite dry, and with a purity that belies its price. Unoaked, low alcohol (10.5%). If you like the big, lush, full- fruited whites, this is not for you. The rest of you owe it to yourself to check it out.*

## BUBBLES WITHOUT PAIN

It's easier than you might think to get wonderful sparkling wines without taking a second mortgage. Here are a few we suggest to add festivity to your holidays.

### **Prosecco, Villa Jolanda (IT) . . \$9.99**

*In a few short years this bubbly from northeastern Italy has become a really big deal. Not quite as dry as Champagne.*

### **Varichon & Clerc (FR) . . \$11.99**

*France's Loire Valley produces a wide range of sparklers, many of which don't travel far from the vineyards. This is a real beauty – elegant style, fine mousse. Just a half tick less dry than Champagne (drier than Prosecco).*

### **Aria Pinot Noir (SP) . . \$11.99**

*A red bubbly? From Pinot Noir? Yes on both counts, and we're thrilled to have found it. You really get the elegant red fruits style of the grape in between the bubbles. Also available as a traditional Brut, same price.. Either way, great stuff.*

### **Gruet (NM) . . \$14.99**

*The Gruet family are Champagne producers. They spotted an opportunity in northern New Mexico, planted vineyards, and . . . voila!! If anyone knows how to make bubbly, it's these folks. Our largest selling U.S. bubbly.*

### **Crémant de Bourgogne, Bouillot (FR) . . \$18.99**

*Elegant, brut style sparkler from Burgundy. Quite dry, in the mold of Champagne. Many folks would be hard pressed to tell the difference. This is really fine. Also available as dry rosé (\$19.99) – awesome stuff at this price.*

## 6 BOTTLE SAMPLERS

Each year we put together 6 bottle assortments in an attractive box. These are great as gifts, also a fun way to introduce you to some new things you may not have found on your own. They are pre-packed in a 6-bottle carry case so you can be in and out in a flash, no small matter this time of year. Hugely popular in past years. Two of these 6-ers make a case and qualify for our 10% case discount. Definitely worth a look.

### **Budget Reds . . \$44.99**

*A selection of well-priced reds from Italy, Argentina, Chile, France, & Australia. Impressive quality here for the \$\$.*

### **Budget Whites . . \$44.99**

*Ditto above. This selection features whites from France, Spain, Portugal, Italy, & South Africa.*

### **Around the World Whites . . \$66.99**

*Same as above, different color. You'll taste some beauties from California, France, Italy, & New Zealand, Ever compared a Sauvignon Blanc from New Zealand with a white Bordeaux from France? Here's your chance.*

### **South of the Border . . \$68.99 (all red)**

*If you haven't checked out the quality and value of reds from Chile and Argentina recently, you're not paying attention. An exciting selection of some of our faves – Cabernet, Syrah, Malbec, Carmener, Merlot & blends.*

### **Tour of Italy . . \$72.99 (4 reds, 2 whites)**

*Italian wine odyssey with selections from the major wine areas – Piedmont, the Veneto, Tuscany, Sicily, Puglia, and points in between. There are some real beauties here.*

## U.S. CABERNET SAUVIGNON – BETTER THAN EVER

The start of winter is as good a time as any to check out the current crop of Cabs. The news is good – stable pricing and excellent quality. We're increasingly interested in Washington as a source of good Cabernet and have found a few for your consideration. Way too many in the shop to list all, but this should give you a sense of it.

### **Lotus 2007 . . \$7.99**

*A terrific "everyday" Cab. Nothing fancy, but sometimes you don't need fancy. The flavors are right-on Cab.*

### **Avalon 2007 . . \$8.99**

*We think this is our largest selling CA Cabernet. Has been for a while. Round, medium-full, easy drinking.*

### **Huntington 2007 . . \$11.99**

*Full, ripe, forward – quintessential CA Cabernet. Nicely integrated ripe tannins add structure and depth.*

### **Snoqualmie 2005 . . \$15.99**

*Extra bottle age has rounded this out nicely. Classic Washington style with a light herbal nuance under black fruits.*

### **Michael Pozzan, Knight's Valley 2007 . . \$16.99**

*Pozzan always delivers the flavor goods. This is a big-boned Cab with a dollop of toasty oak wrapped with blackberry, vanilla bean, and plum. Nothing shy about this.*

### **Waterstone 2005 . . \$23.99**

*This small Napa winery blends 90% Cabernet Sauvignon with Merlot & Petit Verdot. A touch of French oak adds complexity. Ready to drink now with impressive balance, full without being "heavy".*

### **Mercer 2007 . . \$24.99**

*The bouquet of violets and crushed blackberry leap from the glass. A small-ish production Washington Cabernet showing ripe fruit flavors set against a backbone of firm tannins. Impressive depth and concentration.*

### **Stag's Leap Wine Cellars "Artemis" 2006 . . \$49.99**

*This is the winery that set the wine world on its ear by besting some of the greatest Bordeaux at a tasting in Paris in 1976. The "judgment of Paris" was rendered by top tier French judges, so there was little to say except that California Cabs had finally arrived. Stags Leap Wine Cellars has maintained its intense focus on Cabernet ever since. Judge for yourself.*

## COGNAC

The Cognac industry is dominated by a few multinational marketing-driven firms. You see their labels everywhere. As a rule, they are overpriced (someone's gotta pay for that marketing). We prefer to look for the smaller guys who focus on quality rather than quantity. What you pay for is what's in the bottle. Great gifting candidates.

**Gabriel . . \$34.99**

**Seguinot VSOP . . \$44.99**

**Maison Surenne . . \$52.99**

**Brillet VSOP . . \$53.99**

**Hine VSOP . . \$54.99**

**Moyet . . \$64.99**

**Normandin-Mercier . . \$71.99**

**Delamain XO . . \$87.99**

## NEW ARRIVALS

### WHITE

**Sauvignon Blanc, Line 39 2008 (CA) . . \$9.99**

*We have been frustrated by not being able to find a good \$10 SB from California. Now we feel better. The flavors are full, dry, and show the mineral/herbal slant of this grape beautifully. Not at all edgy. Worth a shot.*

**Chateau Flamande 2008 (FR) . . \$10.99**

*White Bordeaux from the Graves region, a blend of Sauvignon Blanc & Semillon grapes. A good Graves should display a stoney, minerally sense. Always dry, this is a good example of Bordeaux' famous white at a very good price.*

**Côte Est 2008 (FR) . . \$10.99**

*From southern France's Mediterranean coast just by the Spanish border, a blend of Grenache Blanc, Chardonnay, and Marsanne. The flavors show a ripe/tart gooseberry take, full and lush. The finish is crisp & dry. This has style!!*

**Campoli 2008 (IT) . . \$15.99**

*Here's your chance to experience Italy's Bianchello grape. It may not come around again soon. Bouquet of citrus and wild herbs - so pretty. The flavors of stone fruits are clean, dry, unoaked, and show a wonderful purity. Good stuff.*

**Chardonnay "Starmont", Merryvale Vyds. 2007 (CA) . . \$16.99**

*This Napa winery has been a source for outstanding Chardonnay for years. Starmont is their "starter" Chard and it's a beauty. The bouquet reveals lovely notes of apple with a hint of oak. Apple and citrus dominate the flavors which have a creamy style. Beautifully focused. A complete wine.*

**Pinot Grigio, Attems 2007 (IT) . . \$19.99**

*So you think you know Pinot Grigio? If so, you gotta try this one – rather full-bodied (you thought they were usually wimpy?) with flavors of peach, lemon & lime. Crisp finish. A real beauty, Shows what's possible with this grape.*

**Macon-Chaintré "le Clos", Domaine Cheveau 2008 (FR) . . \$21.99**

*Aromas of pine forest and crushed limestone jump from the glass to introduce this stellar white Burgundy. Full-bodied, quite dry, with vivid flavors of white peach & mandarine wrapped in minerals. Wine geeks would describe this as having lots of "drive". Try it and see if it fits. Big league.*

### RED

**Shiraz-Viognier, Rocky Gully 2007 (AUS) . . \$15.99**

*We love the silky texture of this Aussie red. Ripe tannins provide structure for the lush black fruits – currant & blackberry - and a touch of cracked pepper. A dollop of the white Viognier grape adds interest. A lush winter warmer.*

**Boom Boom Syrah 2007 (WA) . . \$17.99**

*Washington, with its somewhat cooler climate, has become prime growing area for Syrah. Despite the name, this one really delivers the goods – dark fruits, earthy, a touch of smoke, impressive depth, long finish. Firm and full. A beauty.*

**Chateau Haut Vigneau 2005 (FR) . . \$22.99**

*A wonderful example of a Bordeaux from the great 2005 vintage. Will continue to improve for another 2 – 3 years but even now showing the elegance and composure for which this region is famous. The flavors of black fruits are wrapped in a silky texture, the bouquet is an array of black fruits and a bit of spice. Bordeaux buffs – take note.*

**Il Canto 2006 (IT) . . \$23.99**

*This Sicilian red oozes with both muscle and charm. The ripe flavors of black and red fruits are supported by a backbone of ripe tannins. You may encounter notes of spice and cinnamon. This is a wine which gets noticed.*

**Barolo Castiglione, Vietti 2005 (IT) . . \$41.99**

*Italian wine freaks pay close attention here. Vietti, one of the region's top producers, has bottled a simply fabulous wine in this great vintage. It should take about 2 – 3 more years to round into shape but already the bouquet of leather and roses is beginning to emerge from the firm, focused, raspberry and blackberry tinged fruit.*

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