

Amherst Wines & Spirits

February 2010

WINE DINNERS

We're pleased and excited to announce our wine dinner series for 2010. Last year we enjoyed some memorable feasts accompanied by wines carefully chosen to match. Our commitment to offer you exciting food and wine events continues. All dinners will be held in the private room at Bistro 63 at the Monkey Bar in downtown Amherst with convenient parking in the town lot just behind the restaurant. The price for all dinners continues at \$75, including gratuities. Tax extra. Here's the lineup for 2010.

March 24: Game Dinner

See below.

June 23: The Food & Wines of Southern France

Provence, Marseilles, the Pyrenées – the foods from the south of France, like the wines, offer great diversity. Heavy foods are not common here. Same with the wines, and you'll see the magic happen as we pair some sleek reds, lively whites, and vivacious rosés with the foods they are made for.

September 22: Locally Grown

We live in the midst of a wonderful food-raising region and want to celebrate local producers, both meat and plant. It's a perfect time of year to do this. We will feature foods raised organically by small producers within 50 miles of Amherst. The wines will be U.S. produced, mainly from the West Coast.

WINE DINNER SPECIAL OFFER

Sign up for all three dinners and save 10%. This must be done before the first dinner.

DINNER #1: GAME AND BOLD WINES

We kick off our 2010 dinner series with an exciting food/wine event featuring game and wines from the U.S., France, and Italy chosen to match the rich flavors of the foods. Three courses followed by a light dessert. This should be an especially wonderful event held in the private room in Bistro 63 at the Monkey Bar in downtown Amherst. Reserve your places by phoning (549-0900) or emailing (steve@amherstwines.com). All reservations must be prepaid. Special discounts will apply to all wines served at the dinner. Hope to see you there.

First course: Duck confit served over fresh, handcut pasta drizzled with truffle oil

Second course: Quail wrapped with smoked Vermont bacon and stuffed with fennel sausage

Third course: Roast venison loin in a Chianti reduction served with apple/cranberry sauce

Dessert: Mango sorbet

DATE: March 24

TIME: 6:30

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

COST: \$75. Inclusive of tips, tax extra

WINE QUIZ (answer on back page)

What was President Richard Nixon's favorite wine? a) Chateau Margaux, b) Gallo Hearty Burgundy, c) Mondavi Cabernet Sauvignon, d) Rosemount Shiraz.

SATURDAY IN-STORE WINE TASTINGS

Come and rub shoulders with the Valley's beautiful people (our customers) each Saturday from 2:00 – 5:00 as we uncork some terrific wines. It's a great way to learn and taste things you otherwise might not have. Pick up a special tasting sheet with information about the wines we're tasting. Munch fresh baked baguettes. Casual and fun. Compliments of the house. All things considered, not a bad deal.

February 6: Argentina's Malbec

Malbec is Argentina's #1 red wine grape. The export market for these has exploded over the past few years and there are some really fine examples we'll be tasting.

February 13: Gruner Veltliner, Austria's Hidden Jewel

If you've never tasted a Gruner from Austria, you won't want to miss this. Richly flavored, powerful whites with their own unique personality. We love 'em.

February 20: Reds from Central Italy

Some of Italy's best red wine values come from central Italy – Umbria, Emilia-Romagna, the Marche. Blends of grapes such as Sangiovese, Montepulciano, Merlot and others to create wines of personality and terrific value.

February 27: Merlot from California & Washington

Merlot took a nosedive after the movie "Sideways". The result? Wines better than ever, prices stable. Some excellent reds at very good prices.

MALBEC – ARGENTINA'S GREAT RED HOPE

It's funny the way things happen sometimes. France's Bordeaux region, arguably the world's finest red wine area, permits five different grapes in its wines. Malbec is one, but used sparingly. Quick cut to Argentina's Mendoza region in the shadow of the Andes Mountains, whose snow melt provides a natural irrigation for these vineyards. Here the Malbec thrives, yielding a deeply colored, full-bodied red with enough natural acidity to support its big fruit. It is Argentina's wine trademark. Check 'em out. Worth a shot, for sure.

Tierra de Luna, Lurton 2009 . . \$8.99

Our "starter" Malbec, and a dandy. Plenty of weight, concentration, and pure drinking pleasure.

Altos las Hormigas 2008 . . \$10.99

Pretty ripe fruit flavors – cassis & raspberry with hints of mocha. Supple, lush, and fleshy.

Punto Final 2008 . . \$11.99

The notes of anise play against the ripe fruit forward, juicy style, with blackberry and licorice notes that stay lively on the medium-weight finish.

Broquel 2007 . . \$15.99

There's a toasty sense to the flavors of dark fruits and fig. A light note of mineral underlines the flavors which, although full, never seem heavy.

Layer Cake 2008 . . \$15.99

Richly fruity, ripe upfront flavors of mocha and blackberry. Lush and full. Hedonists take note.

Catena 2007 . . \$23.99

Intense, but here's the key – the flavors never lose their focus and have the natural acidity to support the fruit. Lovely texture here, deep flavors – mocha & plum. Something special.

Mendel 2007 . . \$29.99

Small producer, unknown to most, doing fabulous Malbec. Ripe style, showing spice, cream, & blueberry flavors. Long finish with notes of anise. Serious stuff.

GRUNER VELTLINER – AUSTRIA'S GREAT WHITE HOPE

It's pronounced *groo'-ner velt-lee'-ner* and if you haven't checked these out, you could hardly be faulted. Austria's #1 white wine grape barely existed prior to the 1980's. Only in the 1990's did a few growers begin planting Gruner in cooler climate vineyards and severely restricting yields to improve quality. This, along with investment in modern winemaking equipment, has wrought a revolution. Oak barrel aging is uncommon. Gruner is an aromatic grape and wood tends to mask bouquet. These wines are dry and full flavored, showing a definite mineral character, and are glorious matched for Chinese, Indian, and Japanese food. No palate-numbing alcohol here - most are in the 11.5% - 12.5% range. We can't say enough about these wines.

Huber "Hugo" 2008 . . \$10.99

Huber "Ober Steigen" 2008 . . \$17.99

Leth "Steinagrund" 2008 . . \$17.99

Angerer "Friesenrock" 2006 . . \$26.99

WIMPY REDS??

In the 1990's many wine producers, especially those in California and Australia, seemed fixed on offering supercharged reds, wines with big fruit and bigger (15%+) alcohol. Spurred on by some wine writers who awarded high scores and wine competitions which bestowed gold medals to brawny, intense, fruit-driven reds, many wineries raced to copy this style. In a highly competitive marketplace big scores and medals made the sale of the wine easier. Signs trumpeting "95 points!!!" sprouted in stores and consumers understood that these were wines they ought to like. The wine industry marched in virtual lockstep to the tune of "bigger is better" and everyone was happy. Well, almost everyone . . . European producers, who for centuries produced wines to compliment food rather than win medals and high scores, found themselves on the outside of this closed loop. Some opted for different bottlings for the U.S., hoping to garner a high score. Most muttered unkind thoughts about U.S. wine critics and stayed the course. And then things began to change.

We can't say for sure why this is happening, but we see enough customers to feel that it is. People are beginning to say things like, "not too heavy", "less alcohol", and the like. From our end it's definitely noticeable. We have always had these in the shop, believing that the first duty of wine is to partner with food rather than run roughshod over it. Some foods, of course, can handle bigger flavors, but many of these high alcohol reds on steroids quickly induce palate fatigue. So we thought it might be interesting to showcase some more delicate, balanced reds. We think you'll find them terrific mealtime treats with all but the most highly seasoned foods.

Don Ramon 2007 (SP) . . \$8.99

A blend of 75% Grenache and 25% Tempranillo grapes from central Spain. The red fruits flavors of the Grenache are nicely propped up by the acidity of the Tempranillo. Alcohol – 12.5%.

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

The Minervois region in southern France is a source of many wonderful, well-priced reds. This is one of the best we've tasted recently – finely honed, firm flavors of blackberry and cassis with a light herbal touch. Alcohol – 13%.

Sentinelles de Massiac 2008 (FR) . . \$12.99

Another from Minervois. Presents a near perfect balance between ripe black cherry, mineral, and natural acidity. The flavors are clean, firm, elegant. Alcohol – 12.5%

Vinas de Gain "Orobio" 2006 (SP) . . \$13.99

We had been selling this beauty from Spain's Rioja region for \$16.99 when we spotted an inventory reduction sale and jumped on it. Spain at its elegant best - heady perfume of leather and earth and flavors showing nuance and subtlety. Red cherry, a dusting of earth, minerals, and cola. Firm backbone. Bring on the tapas! Alcohol – 13%.

CALIFORNIA ZINFANDEL

Equal time for the BIG reds. The wine world is full of judgments and we do our best to avoid them. Ultimately, whatever style of wine you enjoy is correct for you. Truth is, we do enjoy big, lusty reds, especially when there's a chill in the air. So it seems fitting to look at the Zinfandel grape. We cannot remember a time when there were more good Zins to choose from. Not all fit the mold of "monster reds". Zinfandel, you may know, came from southern Italy where it is known as Primitivo. The grape ripens well in warmer climates where it achieves naturally high sugars which translate into higher alcohol after fermentation. The key is balance – does the alcohol give a "hot" feel to the wine or is it balanced by the fruit? Here are a few of our current faves.

Painter Bridge 2007 . . \$7.99

Time was, it was easy finding good Zinfandel <\$10. Today it's more difficult. This label is from Hahn Vineyards in Monterey. It shows all the wonderful wild berry fruit of the grape, just without the weight of the big boys.

Gnarley Head 2007 . . \$9.99

The warmer inland area around Lodi is a prime Zinfandel growing region. Plenty of brambly fruit in this lush red.

Five Rivers 2007 . . \$12.99

There's a pretty toasty style here we really like. A touch of smoke and some spice completes the package. Most of these grapes come from around the Paso Robles area.

Joel Gott 2007 . . \$17.99

Gott's style, be it Zin or Cabernet, is fresh and pure. We think this makes the wine a bit more food-friendly. The plum and licorice flavors here really sing.

Seghesio 2008 . . \$24.99

These family-owned vineyards were planted in the 1930's in Sonoma, prime Zinfandel territory. Until the 1980's the grapes were sold to Gallo. Full, rich, seductive flavors showing pepper, wild berry, and spice. A mouthful!

Ridge "Geyserville" 2007 . . \$36.99

Paul Draper, founder of Ridge, is an iconic figure in Zinfandel circles, one of the first to apply expensive vineyard and cellaring techniques to the grape. Draper's Zins are always blended to increase complexity. This blends Carignane, Petite Sirah, and Mataro with Zinfandel to achieve an exotic, full, ripe wine. Dark fruits and licorice in the bouquet, flavors of wild berry sprinkled with black pepper. Long and layered. A beauty.

NEW ARRIVALS

WHITE

Tokay “dry Furmint”, Oremus 2007 (HUN) . . \$5.99

Hungary’s Tokay grape is best known as a sweet dessert white, but here’s a dry version. Was selling for much more but the wholesaler was overstocked and made us an offer. Crisp and dry, we think this is a delightful house white to have around. Quantity limited, so if interested, you may want to check it out soon.

Chardonnay, Ferngrove (AUS) . . \$7.99

Western Australia is known for wines stylistically more in tune with Europe than south Australia, which is where most Aussie wines hail from. Here’s a very, very good buy for you Chard-heads – a drier style than most from California and with a pretty apple-tinged fruit style. Unoaked, crisp finish. Beautifully made for the \$.

Côtes-du-Rhône Blanc “La Chasse” 2008 (FR) . . \$11.99

97% of Côtes-du-Rhône is red. Here’s some of the rest, a blend of 4 grapes from the southern Rhône Valley. The dry, unoaked flavors were an instant hit with us – a hint of toast and vanilla bean with a core of minerals.

RED

Baron d’Arignac 2007 (FR) . . \$6.99

Don’t be put off by the price – this “bistro” red from southern France is a perfect Tuesday night partner to quiche, paté, rognons de veau, or whatever your typical midweek fare might be. It shows perfect balance between its flavors of dark fruits and natural acidity. Dry, firm style & 12.5% alcohol -t an ideal food partner and house red. Grab a case @ -10%.

Barbera, Piazzo 2007 (IT) . . \$9.99

We haven’t seen Barbera this good at this price since we can remember. Often found at Piedmont’s many trattorias as the carafe wine – fresh, full, perfume-y, gulpable. This shows deep color and flavors of black fruits supported (as good Barbera always is) by a backbone of acidity to keep the flavors fresh and alive. Serious value vibes.

Montepulciano d’Abruzzo, Valle Reale 2008 (IT) . . \$11.99

We love this fresh, lively red from Italy’s Adriatic coast, starting with the spicey aromas and following through to the saturated flavors of dark plum. Full but never heavy. There’s a wonderful purity to these flavors.

Domaine Poulvarel 2007 (FR) . . \$17.99

We found this last summer, could get only a few cases, and were quickly sold out once folks tasted. The importer phoned a few days ago to say he had gotten a bit more and did we want any. After ½ second of thought we grabbed all we could (not much). This is a 50/50 blend of Syrah & Grenache from the southern Rhône Valley, but the Syrah dominates the blend with its telltale licorice, tar, black fruits, and earth. Great depth of flavor.

Vina Bosconia Reserva, Lopez de Heredia 2001 (SP) . . \$36.99

What other winery can claim to have worked its family-owned vineyards without interruption since 1877? Lopez de Heredia is Rioja, upholding the traditional style of elegance and complexity while many of its neighbors have moved to fruit-driven reds to chase big scores by the wine press. This is the only winery in the Rioja to make all of its barrels in its own cooperage, using 100% American oak from Appalachian forests. So complete is their commitment to quality that the winery holds each vintage in their cellars, releasing it only when they decide the wine is ready to drink. The 2001 has just been released. A fruit bomb it is not. The emphasis is on finesse, not power. This is the old style Rioja, showing earth, mushroom, plum, spice in the bouquet and palate. Not for everyone, perhaps, but it’s the real deal.

Answer to wine quiz, page 1: a) Chateau Margaux

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