

Amherst Wines & Spirits

November 2009

BEAUJOLAIS NOUVEAU? MAIS OUI!!

Once again we kick off the holiday season with a selection of the harvest wine from France. This year, in recognition of the strong early buzz on the vintage, we will be offering two nouveaux - that of Duboeuf, the category icon, and a second from a small producer, Domaine Berrod, an artisanal winemaker who makes his wines using only the natural yeast on the skins of the grapes. The wines are scheduled to arrive in the shop on the Thursday before Thanksgiving, and we'll have some open to taste in lieu of our regular tasting on Saturday, November 21. Nouveau is not a wine to overthink, but rather a joyous seasonal marker, a symbol of the recent harvest, always gracing our Thanksgiving table.

SATURDAY IN-STORE TASTINGS

As we move into the holiday months we try to orient our tastings to wines which we think work best with the foods and moods of the season. We're pretty pumped by the November lineup. In case you haven't been paying attention, we hold forth each Saturday from 2:00 – 5:00, opening a variety of wines clustered around a single theme. We provide special tasting sheets for you to take home, if you wish, and slice fresh baked baguettes to help you taste the best way. All compliments of the house. It's a great way to discover new things and expand your wine smarts. Fun and informal.

November 7: Italy's Dolcetto

While Barolo is the calling card in northwestern Italy's Piedmont region, it's Dolcetto that graces the tables of trattorias and homes in the land of white truffles. We've got some beauties to share with you.

November 14: Pinot Noir

We have worked hard this Fall to stock the shop with wonderful Pinots at all price range and you'll have a chance to taste several at this special tasting. We'll taste from California, France, and New Zealand. This is one not to miss.

November 21: No Tasting, sort of

The Saturday before Thanksgiving is pretty hectic for us and we want to be totally available to help you select the right wines for the holiday. We will, however, have some Beaujolais Nouveau open. Sipping encouraged.

November 28: Austria's Gruner Veltliner

What? You never heard of Gruner? It's Austria's entry to the world of whites. These are fabulous – richly flavored, stylish, dry, loaded with personality. An opportunity to explore something new . . . and terrific.

CALVADOS

Apples seem integral to Thanksgiving and, not missing a beat, we're slipping in a plug for France's legendary apple brandy. We're proud of our selection of artisan-made Calvados from some of Normandy's finest small producers. From Morin we stock three – "Selection" (\$19.99), VSOP (\$27.99), and Hors d'Age 15 year old (\$49.99). Our newest addition is from Domaine Dupont, a very great producer. His "Fine Reserve" is \$45.99 . . . and worth it.

CIDER

Apple cider is part of many Thanksgiving celebrations and so we're reminding you that we stock two goodies. First, **Cidre Doux** (\$12.99), a French cider made by Eric Bordelet, the cider king of France. Just slightly sweet and with a hint of sparkle this is one of the finest ciders you're likely to find. Bordelet uses only hand picked apples, not fallen fruit as with most ciders, ages his ciders in oak barrels, in short, treating his cider the way most premium wineries treat their wine. The alcohol is only 4%. The second cider has become a holiday tradition here – **New England MacIntosh** (\$4.99), a non-alcoholic, bubbly cider from central Massachusetts. Unlike most sparkling ciders this is made from fresh apples, not concentrate. Our kids call it "apple champagne", but you may decide this stuff is too good to be served just to kids.

OLDER VINTAGE TAWNY PORTS

We have been offered access to a library of older vintage Colheita Ports. Colheita is a single vintage tawny Port. Most tawny Ports are blends of wines of different ages which have spent extra time in barrel (ruby Ports get only a little time in wood). Colheitas are unblended Ports of a single vintage which spend their time in barrel until bottling, hard to find but worth the search. Each wine reflects the characteristic of its vintage as well as the elegance and complexity gained from extended barrel aging. **Kopke** is a Port house which specializes in Colheitas and we have been fortunate to be offered some beauties. The list below is a selection from a much larger list – if you are trying to match up a particular year (birthday, etc.), please let us know and we probably can get it. This is an unique opportunity to experience some rather special Ports for yourself or as a dramatic gift. Available in both regular and half-bottles.

	<u>750ml</u>	<u>375ml</u>
Kopke Colheita 1998 . .	\$49.99	\$29.99
Kopke Colheita 1995 . .	\$55.99	\$34.99
Kopke Colheita 1986 . .	\$77.99	\$44.99
Kopke Colheita 1982 . .	\$107.99	\$61.99
Kopke Colheita 1977 . .	\$144.99	-
Kopke Colheita 1974 . .	\$154.99	\$77.99

THE FINE PRINT

** The vintages offered to us go back to 1937! If there's a special year you'd like to get, phone (549-0900) or email (steve@amherstwinest.com) and we'll give you the cost.

** We must receive all orders by November 19 in order to get deliver before Christmas. Phone or email as above.

MARK'S MENU

Mark Antsel, Professor of Culinary Arts at Holyoke Community College, works at the shop every Saturday. Many "foodies" enjoy picking his brain for cooking tips. Here's one Mark prepares for his family each Thanksgiving.

For 8-guests

6 large potatoes (Yukon Gold or all-purpose Chef)
3 cloves garlic, minced
Salt and white pepper to taste
1 pint heavy cream
½ cup grated Gruyère or Parmigiano-Reggiano

1. Peel and thinly slice the potatoes; do not soak or rinse the potato slices;
2. Combine the sliced potatoes with the minced garlic, and season; the raw potatoes should taste a bit salty;
3. Layer potatoes in a lightly buttered casserole or earthenware dish;
4. Add heavy cream to barely cover;
5. Sprinkle with grated cheese (*can be prepared up to 4-hours ahead to this point and held in the fridge*);
6. Bake at 275° for 45-minutes, or until potatoes offer a slight resistance when poked with a knife and the top is golden (*can be held warm for 1-2 hours prior to serving*)

Mark thinks the **Pinot Bianco, Castel Salegg 2008** (\$16.99) from a small producer in Italy's Alto Adige region in the foothills of the Alps would be a perfect accompaniment with this dish.

CALIFORNIA PINOT NOIR RE-EXAMINED

Pinot Noir reaches its highest expression in the stoney soil of France's Burgundy region where it yields reds of incomparable finesse and complexity. Very pricey, however. California's early efforts were hampered by poor vineyard sites (too warm) and the perceived need to make bigger, riper style wines in the mold of the state's Cabs and Zins. Sadly, this is still the case for many wineries. Other grapes, such as Petit Sirah, are often blended in to add weight. The blending also serves to stretch production to satisfy the growing demand for Pinot Noir. Here's our position on all this: if you want big, ripe, muscular reds, we've got lots of 'em. But let's allow Pinot Noir be the way it wants to be – elegant, perfumey, complex, and yes, somewhat delicate. Here are a few which we think capture the essence of this majestic, sexy grape. All would be perfect Thanksgiving treats.

Poppy 2007 . . \$16.99

From Monterey, whose fog-shrouded vineyards are an excellent source for this grape. Lovely touch of earth here.

Martin Ray 2007 . . \$18.99

From Santa Barbara, another cooler area. Notes of Asian spice mingle with delicate, ripe red fruits flavors.

Pellegrini, Olivet Lane Vyd. 2006 . . \$24.99

The flavors of strawberry, raspberry, & currant underscore the earthy flavors in this beauty from Sonoma's Russian River.

J. Wilkes 2007 . . \$37.99

As close to a Burgundy as we've seen from CA. Elegant, supple, a bit drier, with a never-ending finish. This wine has finesse. From Santa Barbara's famous Bien Nacido vineyard.

THANKSGIVING

Whether hosting or guesting, the social environment for this feast holiday is varied and no single list of recommendations fits all. One of the scenarios below may apply to your situation. If not, come on in. We'll talk. Remember, you can mix & match any 12 bottles for a 10% case discount.

SCENARIO #1

There's this recession going on and I need to watch things more carefully. Lots of people for Thanksgiving, but still I want stuff that tastes good. No one needs to know how little I paid for it.

WHITE

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

More than a few folks have been mighty impressed with this. The flavors are pure, precise, dry without making your teeth rattle. Who knew Spain could do Chard like this?

Sauvignon Blanc, Santa Ema 2008 (CH) . . . \$7.99

The flavors of melon, fresh herbs, and lime are beautifully integrated in this Chilean white. There's even an interesting bouquet of grapefruit to play with. Dry, medium-full, unoaked.

RED

Syrah Grenache, Vignerons des Caractere 2007 (FR) . . . \$7.99

A growers' coop in France's Rhône Valley bottles these two grapes, the heart of all Côtes-du-Rhône, from vineyards just outside the official CDR area. Similar to a good CDR, just without the weight (or price) of the big boys.

Cabernet Sauvignon, Lotus 2007 (CA) . . . \$7.99

2007 was a very good Cab year in CA, so it's possible to find good wine for not too much \$. Here's a stellar example, showing all the black fruits of good Cabernet in a ripe, round style. Nothing too complex, but very tasty.

SCENARIO #2

I'm not into taking out a second mortgage, but I love this holiday and want to drink something pretty good. Aunt Louise is bringing her new neighbor who, she says, is a real wine geek. Aunt Louise is great – can't let her down.

WHITE

Côtes-du-Rhône, Chateau du Trignon 2007 (FR) . . . \$14.99

97% of Côtes-du-Rhône is red. In a great year such as 2007 the other 3% can be a real treat. The grape is 100% Viognier and displays the characteristic wildflower bouquet and clean, elegant, vanilla-tinged flavors. It's a beauty.

Pinot Gris, Montinore 2008 (OR) . . . \$13.99

Pinot Gris is, perhaps, Oregon's most successful white grape. Here's a perfect example at a great price featuring vivid fruit flavors upfront framed by mineral notes. Crisp, dry finish. This is striking.

RED

Pinot Noir, Castle Rock 2007 (CA) . . . \$13.99

Our Thanksgiving table would be incomplete without a Pinot Noir. Here's one of our faves from Monterey, a cooler growing area favored by this grape. Wonderful blend of red fruits and Asian spice. Strong value.

Montepulciano d'Abruzzo, Zaccagnini 2006 (IT) . . . \$15.99

Pound for pound the best we've found from Italy's Abruzzo region. The wine shows almost perfect balance and focus. The red & black fruit flavors are vivid and offer a touch of spice. The backbone of natural acidity keeps it fresh.

SCENARIO #3

This is one of my favorite holidays and I don't mind splurging some on the wines. We're sometimes looking for an occasion to drink something special. If not now, when?

WHITE

Gruner Veltliner "Friesenrock", Angerer 2006 (AUS) . . . \$25.99

Gruner is Austria's #1 fine wine grape. Powerfully built, with a creamy sense on the palate. Notice the citrus, plum, and herb notes in the flavors. The rich, unoaked flavors can stand up to hearty foods. Dramatic stuff.

Chardonnay, Neyers 2007 (CA) . . . \$31.99

This silky textured Chard is from California's Carneros region. The aromas of tropical fruit are gorgeous, as are the flavors to follow – lemon, vanilla bean, mandarine. A dollop of French oak adds complexity. Long, complex, and just yummy.

RED

Muga Reserva 2005 (SP) . . . \$31.99

This deeply colored red from Spain's iconic Rioja region was fermented in oak and offers up oodles of earthy, spicy flavors, long and deep. And yet, it also has an elegance and balance. Seriously impressive.

Ridge Geyserville 2007 (CA) . . . \$39.99

Zinfandel (70% of the blend) is the driving force in this beauty. Explosive bouquet of ripe black fruits and licorice. The flavors are concentrated, firm and full, with oh-so-pretty notes of pepper and spice. Oh, yeah. Where's Aunt Louise?

WINESPEAK

We read lots of wine articles and every so often we find a writer so carried away that the prose is a bit over the top.

"Ethereal splendor is always a given in these wines, but it's the poise that takes the breath away here."

Matthew Jukes, *Decanter*, Nov. 2009, gushing about Felton Road Pinot Noir "Calvert" 2007 (we've got it!!)

NEW ARRIVALS

WHITE

Macabeo-Moscatel, Mesta 2007 (SP) . . \$6.99

Fresh, clean, medium-full flavors with perfect balancing acidity. We waited three months after tasting it for this to arrive, and it's finally here. Macabeo is Spain's most widely planted white and this is just a perfect "everyday" quaff.

Versi Bianco 2008 (IT) . . \$8.99

A wonderful example of the state of winemaking in Sicily. The flavors are crisp, quite dry, unoaked. There's a sense of vivid, ripe fruit just bursting forth – lemon rind, mandarine – with just a hint of anise to make things interesting. Lovely!

Sauvignon Blanc, Line 39 2007 (CA) . . \$9.99

Finally, a terrific California SB for \$10. Can't tell you how long we've looked for this. The melon/quince flavors are full, focused, and beautifully balanced and underlined with mineral notes. This is worth more, beautifully made.

Soave, Sant' Antonio 2008 (IT) . . \$11.99

Any unkind thoughts you may harbor about Soave must be checked at the door. This beauty from Verona shows a pretty floral bouquet and brilliant fruit. Dry, fresh, crisp flavors of lemon rind and vanilla. Mouthwateringly good.

Sauvignon Blanc, Mt. Nelson 2008 (NZ) . . \$14.99

This SB from New Zealand showed us everything we'd expect in a \$20 bottle. Dry but not mouth-puckering, showing flavors of grapefruit & kiwi. Elegant and with more complexity than we expected at this price. Worth a shot.

RED

Primitivo, Conti Zecca 2007 (IT) . . \$9.99

Primitivo is the same grape as Zinfandel. Grown in southern Italy it shows a slightly earthier slant. This really knocked us out with its vibrant fruit. Full-bodied but never "heavy", blackberry and cherry, lush and ripe.

Ercavio "Mas Que Vinos" 2007 (SP) . . \$11.99

The Tempranillo grape is one of Spain's glories. This is as good an example of this wonderful grape as you'll find. The bouquet of earth and leather leads into brambly flavors of red cherry, spice. Elegant style, long finish. A beauty.

Le Pigeoulet en Provence 2007 (FR) . . \$14.99

Gorgeous red. We love the wild Provencal herbs permeating the aromas and flavors. Black cherry, lightly earthy with minerals underpinning the clean, firm flavors. Elegant, complex, dry. Classicly French.

Cabernet Sauvignon, Sean Minor 2006 (CA) . . \$17.99

This small production Napa Cab really impressed us with its almost perfect balance – forward bouquet, flavors of black fruits, a light dollop of toasty oak. More complex than you'd expect at this price. Drinking perfectly now.

Pinot Noir, Russian Jack 2007 (NZ) . . \$19.99

When well done, New Zealand Pinots can rival mid-tier Burgundies, and for much less \$. Delicacy, complexity, finesse, balance, bouquet – this is what we look for in good Pinot Noir. We think you'll find it here.

Mas Alta "Els Pics" 2007 (SP) . . \$27.99

A blend of Garnacha, Carinena, and Cabernet Sauvignon from the Priorat wine region in northern Spain. Deeply colored with dense, ripe fruit flavors – plum, boysenberry, crushed herbs. Very full, fat, supple, & ripe. A hedonist's dream.

Barolo, Gagliardo 2004 (IT) . . \$71.99

2004 was one of those classic Barolo years which happens occasionally. It allows us to see the real majesty of these wines, even if they are still a bit young. Here's one which really, really impressed us. The initial flavors of ripe strawberry quickly give way to blackberry jam. Fine grained tannins, long finish. Combines power and elegance. A classic.

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