

Amherst Wines & Spirits

November 2011

SATURDAY IN-STORE TASTINGS

Last time we checked it was summer. Now the holidays are upon us. We've got some seasonally appropriate tastings planned for the month and hope you can join us for a few. Each Saturday from 2:00 – 5:00 we slice fresh baked baguettes, set out some tasting sheets with information on the wines we're opening, and have some fun. It's a great way to learn and taste stuff you might otherwise have missed. Compliments of the house.

November 5: Central Italy's Little-Known Reds

Without the luster of Tuscany, reds from Umbria, Abbruzzi, Emilia-Romagna, and The Marches offer up tremendous quality for sensible prices. Blends of Sangiovese, Cabernet, Montepulciano.

November 12: U.S. Pinot Noir

If there's a better red to grace the Thanksgiving table, we haven't found it. We will taste a fabulous array of Pinots from California and Oregon. This is one not to miss.

November 19: No tasting

We're focused today on helping you with your Thanksgiving needs.

November 26: California's Chardonnay

We've been on the hunt this Fall for some new Chards from California and we're very proud of our discoveries. These whites are better than ever. Prepare to be impressed.

ARMAGNAC – THE OTHER GREAT BRANDY

Although it predates Cognac by 200 years, Armagnac is a much smaller area and has never achieved the fame and snob appeal of Cognac, its more famous neighbor to the north. Armagnac is made in southwestern France, a product of several local grapes – Ugni Blanc, Folle Blanche, and Bacco. It differs from Cognac in several ways. Cognac is distilled twice, Armagnac only once at relatively low temperatures which helps foster robust flavors. Cognac is aged in white oak, Armagnac in black oak which results in more pronounced tannins. Good Armagnac (avoid the mass market brands) is racier, rounder, fruitier, earthier, and with a more pungent aroma than Cognac. It is a wonderful after dinner "digestif", a superb alternative to Cognac. We urge you to get acquainted with this classic brandy.

Chateau Tariquet "Classique" . . \$31.99
Labiette Castille . . \$33.99
Chateau de Laubade VSOP . . \$42.99
Cerbois VSOP . . \$45.99
Chateau Tariquet VSOP . . \$49.99
Chateau de Laubade XO . . \$67.99
Chateau du Busca XO . . \$89.99

How to Enjoy your Armagnac

Riedel, world famous stemware designer, has introduced a beautiful Cognac/Armagnac stem. It's the way to go. Come fondle it in the shop.

1 stem . . \$11.95, set of 2 . . \$21.95

NEW WINTER BREWS

Our selection of small batch beers is keeping pace with the changing seasons. Here are some of our latest.

Left Hand Milk Stout – a dark, lightly sweet, richly flavored stout, 6% alcohol. From Colorado . . **\$10.20/6 pack**

Breckenridge Vanilla Porter – also from Colorado, really interesting stuff, deeply colored and flavored (chocolate & vanilla bean from New Guinea & Madagascar) . . **\$10.20/6 pack**

Green Flash IPA – four different hops are used to brew this full-flavored IPA. 7.2% alcohol. Citrus flavors, pungent and full, from San Diego. Stellar brew, for hop-heads only. **\$11.20/4 pack**

THANKSGIVING

The rules of the wine road are pretty subjective when it comes to a holiday such as Thanksgiving. What it ultimately comes down to with most folks is price and style. With this in mind, we have put together a list of wines we would be proud to have on our Thanksgiving table. It amounts to an "all star" list we consider top values. There are others, of course. Mix & match price and style to suit your needs.

WHITE

Pinot Grigio Stella 2009 (IT) . . \$7.99

Crisp, delicate, & dry. A terrific aperitif wine for the hangin' out time before as well as with the meal.

Les Rials 2010 (FR) . . \$8.99

This white from southwestern France was one of our largest selling wines this past summer. Dry, with lovely herbal notes.

Cuvée de Pena rosé 2010 (FR) . . \$8.99

Rosés are just perfect with turkey and trimmings. Dry, and with bigger flavors than most whites.

Chardonnay, Fortant 2009 (FR) . . \$7.99

Crisp and dry, classic French Chardonnay from the south. Clean, unoaked, way better than the price would suggest.

Sauvignon Blanc, Santa Ema 2010 (CH) . . \$8.99

Medium-full, dry, with a lovely vanilla bean caste to the flavors. A rush of dried herbs, crisp, terrific stuff for the \$

Fumé Blanc, Chateau St. Jean 2009 (CA) . . \$12.99

Full-bodied, lush flavors of melon and fresh herbs, silky texture. The flavors are forward, ripe & full.

Wehlener Sonnenuhr Kabinett, Kerpen 2009 (GERM) . . \$17.99

Classic Mosel showing flavors of peach & green apple, with mineral slant. Finishes dry. Complex and perfect with turkey.

Poggio al Tessoro "Solosole" 2010 (IT) . . \$19.99

A huge hit at our recent Tuscan wine dinner. The Vermentino grape from Tuscany – lemon peel, green apple, & spice.

Pouilly-Fuissé, Bouchard Père & Fils 2009 (FR) . . \$22.99

Classic white Burgundy with flavors which are ripe, complex, beautifully balanced, dry, and with a long, crisp, finish.

Chardonnay "Sleepy Hollow Vineyard", Talbott 2009 (CA) . . \$32.99

Full-bodied, French oak, citrus/apple/pineapple flavors, concentrated & ripe with balancing acidity to keep it fresh. Wow!

RED

Cabernet Sauvignon, Eguren 2007 (SP) . . \$7.99

Cabernet Sauvignon from Spain?? You bet, and you'll be surprised by how good it is.

Merlot, Red Diamond 2009 (WA) . . \$10.99

Washington Merlots are a bit drier than those from CA. This is clearly the best we've tasted at the price.

Pinot Noir, Le Grand 2010 (FR) . . \$10.99

French Pinots are more delicate. If it doesn't need to be a heavyweight, enjoy the purity and elegance of this one.

Malbec, Bousquet 2010 (ARG) . . \$10.99

Organically farmed Malbec. The flavors are full, & supple with ripe blackberry jam. Juicy stuff, a real crowd-pleaser.

Beaujolais, Château Pizay 2009 (FR) . . \$11.99

The natural acidity in good Beaujolais, surrounded by ripe red fruit flavors, plays well against the full flavors of the meal.

Stephen Vincent "Crimson" 2009 (CA) . . \$12.99

This blend of Syrah & Cabernet shows a wonderful purity to its flavors of black fruits with a dusting of earth. Just lovely.

Pinot Noir, Picket Fence 2009 (CA) . . \$15.99

Classic California Pinot from Sonoma's Russian River. Ripe, spice and raspberry, more weight than most.

Syrah, Fess Parker 2008 (CA) . . \$18.99

Soft, round, full with flavors of herbs, pepper, spice with an earthy slant. Bouquet of grilled meats. This is a big boy.

Zinfandel, Giarrussa 2008 (CA) . . \$19.99

Juicy Zin from Sonoma's Dry Creek region, ground zero for Zinfandel. Wild berry & spice, mouthfilling, delicious.

Chateauneuf-du-Pape, Domaine Monpertuis 2007 . . \$51.99

If not at Thanksgiving, then when? The red currant & raspberry flavors are accented by mineral & earth notes, not as "fat" as some which makes it a perfect match for this meal. Complex, long finish, big league.

RED VALUE CORNER – SOUTH AMERICA SHINES

As true now as for past 5-10 years, the quality of what we're seeing from Chile and Argentina is hard to touch at these prices. A few of our current faves:

Malbec, Terra de Luna, Lurton 2009 . . \$8.99

In Argentina it's all about Malbec. The flavors are medium-full and quite fresh with hints of anise and blackberry.

Cabernet Sauvignon "120", Santa Rita 2010 . . \$8.99

If there's a better \$9 Cab, we'd like to know about it. What makes it special, in our book, is the clean flavors and backbone of natural acidity. Never flabby or palate tiring, plenty of concentration.

Merlot, Montes 2009 . . \$10.99

Another red which marries New World ripe fruit flavors with structure to balance the wine. Here the black plum flavors, also showing coffee and blackberry notes. This is delicious!

PINOT NOIR – U.S. STYLE

The prices of U.S. Pinot Noirs have leveled, even come down in some cases, and the quality has never been better. Is this a formula for fun? You bet. No matter what you're eating this Thanksgiving, these will make it better. Here are a few of our latest finds. We have lots more. Come in. We'll talk.

Hahn 2010 . . \$11.99

The cooler Monterey climate favors Pinot Noir. We were more than a bit surprised to see the essential "prettiness" of the grape captured so well at this price. Silky texture, ripe without being overdone. Pinot without the (\$\$) pain.

Heron 2009 . . \$14.99

From prime vineyards in Sonoma and a real find at this price. The style is a bit more firm than others, with pretty flavors of cola and red fruits. Impressive concentration here, long finish.

Acacia "A" 2010 . . \$15.99

Here's a California Pinot which we almost mistook for French. Its drier style and firm backbone are unlike many from the U.S. The operative idea here is elegance.

Pellegrini 2009 . . \$19.99

This wine captures the earthy, elegance sense of the grape better than almost any other California Pinot in its price class. If you enjoy delicacy and finesse in your reds, try this earthy Pinot. Restraint is the idea here.

"J" Vineyards 2009 . . \$24.99

A bit more forward fruit than J but this still captures the elegance of the grape. There's a lovely earthy style here and impressive length. The finish goes on and on.

Lange 2009 . . \$29.99

Oregon Pinots, if they're well made, display a finesse and elegance which separates them from the pack, closer to French Burgundy in style. Here's a beauty which balances soft black cherry flavors against a mineral frame. Just lovely.

Cristom, Eileen Vyd. 2008 . . \$49.99

Small production, single vineyard bottling Pinot from one of Oregon's most exalted growing areas and one of our favorite producers. Bouquet of earth, dark fruits, & spice leaps from the glass. Tremendous concentration of flavors, silky texture, layered flavors. Will continue to evolve for several years but quite sexy right now. Classic stuff.

IRISH WHISKEY

In the 7th century missionary monks arrived in Ireland and began distilling aqua vitae ("water of life"), primarily for making medical compounds. These may have been grape or fruit based, rather than grain. Barley-based whiskey first appears in the historical record in the mid-1500's. Queen Elizabeth I was so fond of it she had it shipped to London in casks for her enjoyment. In the late 19th century over 400 brands were being exported to the United States! The rise of Scotch whiskeys during Prohibition, the Great Depression, and various wars all cut into this market dramatically. Today, Irish whiskeys are staging a small comeback. We have tasted several at various wine tastings over the years and we think the better ones are a natural complement to single malt scotches and fine bourbons for lovers of premium whiskeys.

Irish whiskeys are distilled three times, Scotch whiskeys twice. The malt is not exposed to smoke during the roasting so they do not show the smoky aromatics and taste of many Scotches. Peat is only rarely used in Irish whiskeys, resulting in a less earthy style. There are a few different types of Irish whiskeys – Single Malt, Pure Pot Still, and Blended. Single Malt is made from 100% malted barley distilled in a pot still. Pure Pot Still is made from 100% barley either malted or unmalted. The unmalted barley gives this whiskey a spicy quality. Blended whiskey is a mix of both malt and grain whiskeys distilled in both pot stills and column stills. The column still process yields a lighter, smoother whiskey.

Knappogue Castle 12 year . . \$45.99

A single malt whiskey distilled in 1992 and taken from cask in 1999. As a single malt, it was triple distilled in traditional copper pot stills and aged in used bourbon casks. Creamy upfront with citrus notes. Wood kicks in at end. Excellent!

Connemara . . \$46.99

Here's a peated single malt, a notable exception to the "no peat" norm. Malted barley is kilned over peat fires adding lovely notes of peat to the flavors. Really smooth with hints of toasty vanilla bean marrying with the peat.

Jameson 12 . . \$47.99

Jameson is one of the icons of Irish whiskey. This is a blended whiskey and one level up the quality range in the Jameson line in that it gets extra time in oak - 12 years. Extra smooth with pretty spice notes.

Redbreast . . \$57.99

A 12 year old Pure Pot Still whiskey, a blend of both malted and unmalted barley. Awarded "Irish Whiskey of the Year" in 2010 by Jim Murray, world expert on Irish & Scotch whiskey. Rich, lightly sweet, spicy. This is special.

NEW ARRIVALS

WHITE

Chardonnay, Crème de Lys 2010 (CA) . . \$12.99

The flavors of ripe pineapple and tangerine are balanced by the grape's natural acidity, so you get the pretty fruit flavors without the wine seeming sweet. Hard to imagine, maybe. Let's put it another way – it's delicious and the best we've tasted in a long while at this price.

Albariño, Eidosella 2010 (SP) . . \$17.99

The Albariño grape from the province of Galicia in northwestern Spain. May be the best we've ever tried. The bouquet explodes with Spring flowers and minerals while the flavors are packed with peach & lemon peel. Crisp, dry, elegant. Fresh, never heavy. This is a perfect seafood wine.

Chardonnay, Stuhlmuller 2009 (CA) . . \$22.99

Powerfully built, classicly styled California Chard from prime vineyards in the Alexander Valley subsection of Sonoma. The wine was fermented in French oak using only the wild yeast on the grape skins and spent 8 additional months in barrel prior to bottling. This is classic California Chard, showing impressive purity along with flavors of Anjou pear, peach, a hint of clove, and underlined by a subtle touch of oak. Did we forget the velvety texture? It's a beauty.

Maculan "Dindarello" 2009 (IT) . . \$21.99 (375ml)

This is a sweet dessert wine produced from the Moscato grape in vineyards rich in volcanic soil between Verona and Venice in northeastern Italy. The grapes are partially dried for one month before pressing. The flavors of pear, honey, and mandarine are bright, intense, and remarkably fresh. A long finish ices the cake. Gotta be tried.

RED

Petit, Ken Forrester 2010 (S. AF) . . \$9.99

A blend of 68% Cabernet Sauvignon and 32% Merlot, a "Bordeaux blend" if you will. Beautifully done, especially at this price. Clean, dry, not at all heavy (like Bordeaux). Fab food companion.

Milou Rouge (FR) . . . \$12.99

A quality conscious growers' coop in southern France bottles this "Rhône" blend of 50% Grenache & 50% Syrah. We love it. The flavors are clean and dry, showing lovely raspberry (Grenache) and smoke (Syrah) notes, with a refreshing acidity which imparts a sense of liveliness and purity. Only the French would do it this way.

Terraldigo, Lechthaler 2009 (IT) . . \$13.99

The Terraldigo grape from the foothills of the Alps. These high altitude vineyards yield grapes which are fresh, perfumey, and on the delicate side. This is a perfect match for omelettes, seafood, and lighter fare in general. Floral bouquet, dark cherry/mineral etched flavors. What we call a "pretty" wine with a real sense of place.

Beaujolais, Chermette 2010 (FR) . . \$17.99

Pierre-Marie Chermette does it the old way. He refuses to add sugar during fermentation (common practice) and uses only the wild yeast on the skins of the grapes. His traditionalist approach pays off in the style of Beaujolais most have never tasted – pure, clean, balanced, flavors of pomegranate & red currant, crisp without any sharpness. Classic Beauj.

K Syrah "The Deal", Charles Smith Vintners 2009 (WA) . . 26.99

100% Syrah from one of the top Syrah specialists in Washington, fast becoming the Syrah capital of the New World. This is a powerful red, intensely flavored and complex, offering layers of black fruits flavors, including black olive, blackberry, grilled meats, and smoke. The texture is soft and plush. Still young and with a great future if you can stay away.

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