

Amherst Wines & Spirits

September 2009

FINAL CALL: WINE DINNER – FLAVORS OF THE SOUTHWEST

When Mark Miller opened his iconic restaurant, Coyote Café, in Albuquerque in the 1980's, the culinary ground in the U.S. shifted. Mr. Miller brought the unique flavors of the southwest to the consciousness of serious foodies from all over. Since then there has been an explosion of restaurants around the country intent on capturing the special flavors and techniques from the land of Kit Carson and Georgia O'Keefe. We will pair these with wines from California, Washington, perhaps even New Mexico. Here's an advance peek at what the food will look like:

- Salmon caribe** with avocado salsa and home made fried tortilla chips (finger food to start)
- Relleno pepper** stuffed with shrimp and corn with golden tomato sauce sautéed and served with with a shallot, red onion, & fresh herb coulis
- Grilled trout** served on a bed of pinto beans (black and tiny white "rice" beans) and sweet peppers
- Lamb "barbacoa"**, slow roasted on a bed of fresh Fall vegetables, served with pasilla chile salsa and warm flour tortillas

As in the past, you can reserve your place by phone (549-0900), email (steve@amherstwines.com) or when next in the shop. All reservations must be paid in advance of the dinner. Details below. Hope to see you there for a fabulous evening of food and wine.

- DATE: September 23 (Wednesday)
- TIME: 6:30
- PLACE: Bistro 63 at The Monkey Bar, 63 North Pleasant Street, Amherst (private room at rear)
- PRICE: \$75 (includes tip)

IS IT SAFE TO COME OUT YET?

We're more than a little pleased to report that the endless project of repaving of North Pleasant Street has ended. Assorted weather delays have taken their toll. What was scheduled to finish in early August looks to be wrapping up. You can actually get to the store now without a parachute.

SATURDAY IN-STORE TASTINGS

Please join us on Saturdays as we pop corks, slice fresh-baked baguettes, and taste a wide range of wines at our user-friendly tastings. Here's where you get to taste a range of things and improve your wine smarts in the process. It's all compliments of the house, so drop by any time between 2:00 – 5:00 and join the fun.

September 5: Working Class Reds

In honor of Labor Day we present a staff selected group of reds we feel offer special value.

September 12: Whites from France's Loire Valley

From bone dry to medium sweet this 100 mile stretch of river is home to a range of whites, from simple café quaffs to thrilling, complex wine experiences.

September 19: Italy's Nero d'Avola Grape

Indigenous to southern Italy, this grape was practically unknown here a few years ago. Wait till you taste our lineup from Sicily and Puglia.

September 26: New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc

Sauvignon Blanc is the #1 wine grape in New Zealand and has propelled this small wine producing country into the top ranks.

FALL WINE FESTIVAL GRAND TASTING

Once again we're gearing up for our big tasting of the year. If you have not experienced this event in prior years, you're in for a treat. This is a very large tasting in which we attempt to explore the wide world of wines in a comprehensive "walk-around" event. The walk-around part is this: you will get a glass and a program when you enter and you are free to walk around at your own pace sampling what you wish. The program tells you what's at each pouring station. These stations are staffed by representatives of the companies which sell the wine so they can answer questions, should you have any. There will be light munchies served but you are strongly encouraged to eat something before coming. In all, we will be showing about 100 different wines from the nooks and crannies of winedom. This will include sparkling wines and Ports in addition to table wines. California, Oregon, France, Spain, Italy, Portugal, South Africa, Chile, Argentina, Australia, New Zealand, Germany – all will be represented. Special discounts will be available for all wines at the event which will be available for later pick-up at the store. There's absolutely no pressure to buy anything – the tasting is a terrific, fun event all by itself. Come with friends so you can compare notes. Here are the details:

Date: October 24 (Saturday)

Time: 7:00 – 9:00

Place: Social Hall, Jewish Community of Amherst
742 Main Street, Amherst (plenty of off-street parking)

Cost: \$40 (the last real bargain)

ITALY'S NERO D'AVOLA

Southern Italy is awash in grapes no one has heard of. Most have been there for eons and are the basis for the yummy reds from Sicily. One such is Nero d'Avola. Historically, it is what you would find in a carafe wine in a local trattoria. While that is still the case, several producers have taken a more serious tack with the grape which has shown itself capable of yielding outstanding quality when planted in better sites and vinified with more care. At the lower price end it is a charming, simple red for a Tuesday night pasta dinner. At higher levels of quality a good Nero shows plum and chocolate notes with good levels of ripe tannins for backbone and a round, fleshy finish.

Palazzo 2007 . . \$6.99

Colosi 2007 . . \$16.99

Firriato "Chiamonte" 2005 . . \$18.99

. . . and some interesting blends . . .

Cielo 2008 . . \$8.99

20% Syrah added to the blend imparts a light earthy touch.

Cusumano "Benuara" 2008 . . \$18.99

30% Pinot Nero (Pinot Noir) adds elegance and lightens up the blend a bit.

CHATEAUNEUF-DU-PAPE ON SALE

We're proud to be able to offer a terrific selection of reds from one of France's most exalted areas at exceptional prices. These are wines which are starting to drink well and will continue to develop in the bottle for the next 3 – 5 years (if you can show some self-restraint). Quantities are limited, so if you see something interesting, don't delay too much.

	<u>Regular Price</u>	<u>Sale Price</u> (net – no further discount)
Roger Perin 2006	\$34.99	\$29.99
<i>Deep garnet color suggests the fullness to follow. The flavors and bouquet show an earthy slant. Roasted meats, black cherry, wild herbs. Oh yeah..</i>		
Chateau Fortia "Tradition" 2006	\$37.99	\$30.99
<i>The richly spicy aromas jump from the glass, along with an herbal/woody note. Really fine intro to the pure fruit flavors with hints of wild herbs and white pepper. A beauty from a grand old estate.</i>		
Mas de Boislauzon 2006	\$39.99	\$32.99
<i>In the mouth this is already showing a silky, rich texture which is just lovely. The perfume of cherry, licorice, and spice is really, really pretty. This is showing excellent evolution now.</i>		
Domaine Usseglio 2005	\$49.99	\$39.99
<i>There's a purity of style here, an elegance which elevates this red and enhances food compatibility. The bouquet of crushed black olive, currant, and a hint of tar is complex and quite wonderful.</i>		
Le Vieux Donjon 2005	\$59.99	\$48.99
<i>The flavors are very deep and still a bit closed. The dark purple color and classic aromas of grilled meats, sweet fruit, and crushed herbs speaks volumes of a glorious future. Young, intense, complex. A young superstar.</i>		

BUT IT WON A GOLD MEDAL . .

A recent survey in the Journal of Wine Economics analyzes the reliability of Gold medals awarded at 13 California wine competitions. The article notes that 47% of all wines entered won Gold medals at three of these events and that almost none of these wines won any medals at all at the rest of the competitions. It goes on to apply statistical analysis to the over 4000 wines entered in various U.S. judgments, concluding that “the probability of a wine winning a Gold medal is greatly influenced by chance alone.” The article lends some professional credence to the well understood (in the trade) idea that these competitions are largely promotional events where almost everyone wins something which they can then put on their label or their ads. Our message? Ignore medal claims on labels and on winery-produced shelf talkers. The best path to enlightenment is dealing with a wine merchant who makes the effort to taste everything he/she stocks and has no agenda other than finding the very best wines at each price range. We have such a place in mind.

SOUTHERN FRENCH WHITES

Here’s a recipe for success: the sun shines when it should, rainfall is adequate but not so much as to require extensive spraying for rot, and inexpensive vineyard land. About 20 years ago many winemakers from the pricier regions to the north were looking for ways to grow their business. The strict regulations controlling quantity of wine produced from these areas put a clamp on growth and so many turned to the south. After years of investment in modern winery equipment and researching the best growing sites this region is the source of some outstanding wines. The tilt is towards reds, but we want to explore some of the wonderful white values today.

La Vieille Ferme 2008 . . \$8.99 (1.5L @ \$16.99)

A blend of 30% Grenache Blanc, 30% Bourboulenc, 30% Ugni Blanc, and 10% Roussanne. If these are unfamiliar to you, don't worry. These folks are great winemakers and the blend is just lovely – dry, mineral, crisp finish.

Chardonnay “St. Martin” 2007 . . \$8.99

Grower cooperatives are a big deal in this area. This is from Val d’Orbieu, a large coop and one of the best. 10% of the wine spends a few months in oak resulting in a light toast nuance. We cannot find CA Chard this good for the \$.

La Poule Blanche 2008 . . \$9.99

Another terrific blend, this time 45% Chardonnay, 29% Sauvignon Blanc, and 26% Viognier. Fresh, clean, unoaked – this has been the largest selling white in the shop this summer. Full bodied and dry, but not sharp.

Viognier, Domaine Gournier 2007 . . \$10.99

The Viognier grape made its name in some very pricey appellations in France’s Rhône Valley. Here’s a fine example of the fragrant grape. It shows a bouquet of wildflowers and honeysuckle along with a fresh, crisp style. Quite dry.

Marsanne Viognier, Verget 2007 . . \$12.99

The Marsanne and Viognier grapes are the basis for separate but quite expensive wines from the Rhône. This blend offers up the firm, dry, full flavors of the Marsanne with the more floral, elegant Viognier. A winning combination.

THE RHONE RANGERS

It began in the 1980’s when a group of California winemakers, mostly from the Santa Barbara area, decided to grow the same varieties of grapes as are found in France’s Rhone Valley, home to Châteauneuf-du-Pâpe, Côtes-du-Rhône, and other appellations. The idea was to make a red blend which mimicked the style of Rhône wines, which were favorites among many California winemakers. The principal varieties involved in this region are Grenache, Syrah, and Mourvèdre. The cooler Santa Barbara climate (cooler than Napa, actually) seemed right and the grapes did well. These wines were immediately dubbed “Rhône Rangers” and have met with wide critical acclaim. Our selection ebbs and flows with vintages and availability. Just now we have only two, but want to introduce the concept as there will be more in the coming weeks. These are hedonistic wines, never inexpensive. But sometimes a person needs a little hedonism.

Beckmen “Cuvée le Bec” 2007 . . \$18.99

A blend of 44% Grenache, 28% Syrah, 20% Mourvèdre, and 8% Counoise. This lush, ripe blend sports a medium-full body with flavors of cherries currant, pepper, and pretty spice notes. Silky texture. Sexy stuff.

Qupe “Los Olivos Cuvée” 2006 . . \$23.99

One of the early Santa Barbara wineries, Qupe has always produced stellar reds based on Rhône varieties. A blend of 40% Syrah, 40% Mourvèdre, and 20% Grenache from vineyards in the Santa Ynez Valley. This full throttle, muscular red shows the earthy, peppery Syrah influence upfront and follows with wild herb/pepper, and black cherry notes.

WEB DELIGHTS

We have been working over the summer to redesign our web site, www.amherstwines.com. While there are still improvements to come, we’re pretty pleased with the progress to date. All special events, including Saturday wine tastings, are posted here even before this newsletter is published. We will feature special wines here once we get fully up to speed, along with other features not found elsewhere. It’s a work in progress. Stay tuned and check it out.

NEW ARRIVALS

WHITE

Pinot Gris, Lurton 2009 (ARG) . . . \$8.99

The grape is known as Pinot Grigio in Italy. Here it's made in Argentina by folks from Bordeaux. Globalism in a bottle. This is a practically perfect "everyday" white, just off-dry. Full flavored, hint of peach, no oak. Definitely worth a shot.

Pinot Grigio, Kim Crawford 2008 (NZ) . . . \$16.99

This winery has been on a roll with its Sauvignon Blanc. The Pinot Grigio is new, smaller production, and absolutely fab. The flavors have both size and purity. Elegant, deep, unoaked. Aromas of the forest after rain, flowers. Dry. Long finish.

Vouvray, Bourillon Dordléans 2007 (FR) . . . \$19.99

This is their "sec" (dry) bottling. We also stock the demi-sec from this small producer in France's Loire Valley. Vouvray can be a bit sweet but this one is not. It shows an astonishing purity and elegance, capturing the fruit flavors of the Chenin Blanc grape perfectly. A touch of pear in the aromas. The trick here – don't serve it too cold. Taste it all.

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

Gruner is Austria's #1 fine wine grape. Taste this and you'll see why. 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 and will continue to age beautifully for another 2-3 years (if you can wait that long). A beauty.

RED

Malbec. Altos las Hormigas 2008 (ARG) . . . \$10.99

The bouquet of smoke and black fruits is just the beginning in this sensational value from Argentina. A group of Italian wine folks founded this winery about a decade ago. This is their entry level Malbec. Supple, ripe style showing mocha and boysenberry. Richly flavored. Good balance and freshness. A winner in our book, especially at this price.

Little James Basket Press (FR) . . . \$12.99

Made by Saint Cosme, superb producer of pricey Rhône reds. Here's a bargain for lovers of reds from this region, a non-vintage blend of 50% 2007, the balance older. The flavors recall black cherry, pepper, crushed herbs with a clean, pure style. The finish is long and full, showing some dusty tannins.

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

If big, overripe, high alcohol reds are just too much sometime, here's a "gotta try" from the Minervois region in southern France. Weighing in at a svelte 12.5% alcohol, there's a purity of style here which is increasingly hard to find in the era of blockbuster reds. You'll find a lovely black cherry flavor with just a hint of smoke. Good stuff

Pinot Noir, Babich 2007 (NZ) . . . \$17.99

Of all the red wine grapes this is the hardest to get right, especially under \$30. Here's a terrific effort from New Zealand. It captures the delicate red fruit flavors – strawberry, raspberry – in a bright, vibrant style, ripe but never heavy. The fresh, clean flavors will match perfectly with salmon, poultry, pasta, etc.

Montes "Alpha" Cabernet Sauvignon 2006 (CH) . . . \$23.99

We think Aurelio Montes is one of the finest winemakers in Chile. Compare this with any CA Cab up to \$30 and see what we mean. 12 months aging in French oak has added a layer of complexity. Lush yet focused flavors, mocha and black fruits. Good size but never "heavy" with a lingering finish. Big league.

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