

December 05, 2008

# The Sommelier Says....

Hello and welcome to the newsletter for <http://www.wine-sommelier.com/>

## **The "Nose"**

Wine doesn't have eyes, ears or teeth, but some say it has a "nose."

Experienced wine drinkers make a distinction in the terms used such as a wine's "aroma," referring to the natural smell it takes from the fruit, and its "bouquet," the complex overtones it may develop with age in the bottle.

Smell is important to the wine taster. Much of what we think is taste really comes through our noses. If you don't believe it, try to enjoy a wine - or a meal - the next time you have a bad head cold.

When it comes to smelling, we take a distant second place to dogs and cats. Still, we humans can train our sense of smell, and you don't have to be an expert wine taster to learn to sniff out the differences among wines.

The aroma of Cabernet Sauvignon and the closely related Merlot grape, for example, often reminds me of cedar wood and pine needles mingled with a good fruit smell reminiscent of currants.

Some add hints that wine tasters call "vegetal:" green olives, green peppers, tobacco leaves or grass.

Aging the wine in oak may add touches of vanilla, cinnamon, cloves and almonds. Extended bottle aging may lend a toasty quality and impart earthy scents as variable as mushrooms, old leather, roses and wildflowers.

Other grapes have their own trademark aromas: Zinfandel often evokes berries. Pinot Noir, the fine grape of Burgundy, may recall violets and spice. The pungently floral quality of freshly ground black pepper signals Syrah, the French Rhone grape.

Among whites, Chardonnay recalls crisp, ripe apples and may add notes of butter, coconut, figs and other tropical fruits, particularly if it's aged in oak.

Riesling, the queen of German grapes, may evoke apples, too, and sometimes-citrus fruit, cantaloupe and pine.

Sauvignon Blanc often shows a grassy smell and sometimes grapefruit.

Chenin Blanc reminds me of melons and, occasionally, orange blossoms. A smell of peaches identifies Muscat and Gewurztraminer; the latter may add elusive spice.

Before you bring that glass of wine to your mouth, stick your nose in and enjoy the aromas constructed by the wine maker, it is part of the fun of drinking wine!

## **Sonoma Barrel Tasting Weekend**

Mark March 7/8 on your calendars... it will be time for the annual Sonoma Barrel Tasting weekend! I will be going back up that weekend for my 5<sup>th</sup> straight year. This will be the 31st year of Barrel Tasting! Over 100 wineries in the Alexander, Dry Creek and Russian River Valleys throw open their cellar doors for you to sample wine from the barrel, purchase futures, meet winemakers and sample current release wines. Must be 21 years of age or older to attend event; kindly leave pets and underage children at home. All details available at <http://www.wineroad.com/>

My plans are flying up to Oakland Saturday morning, driving to Sonoma and having a hotel in the area for the weekend. We come home on Sunday night. Last year we went to about 10 wineries a day.... you have the chance at some wonderful deals on futures as well. I do not go to many wine events, but this one I never miss. I will have additional details on this weekend's trip in coming issues.

## **The Strange Wine News**

California Central Coast winemaker Stillman Brown is one warped Elvis fan. "If [Elvis] drank wine instead of popping pills," Brown says, "he'd still be alive, and playing Vegas this week." Brown won the annual Syrah Shootout at the Hospice du Rhône in Paso Robles earlier this year with his **Elvis Presley**-themed wine La Mort du Roi.

The label was surprisingly approved by the Alcohol and Tobacco Tax and Trade Bureau despite its depiction of an absurdist painting titled *Elvis Died for Your Sins*, which features Presley in a prescription pill-strewn Graceland bathroom. "I don't think they were looking too closely at the artwork," Brown surmises. Brown only made a few cases of the 2005 La Mort du Roi, which have already sold out, so try not to be hound dog if you were hoping to cash in on the next Marilyn Merlot.

## **Some interesting wine facts**

\* American wine drinkers consume more wine on Thanksgiving than any other day of the year.

\* Dom Perignon (1638-1715), the Benedictine Abbey (at Hautvillers) cellar master who is generally credited with "inventing" the Champagne making process, was blind.

\* In the year 2000, Americans spent \$20 billion on wine. 72% of that was spent on California wines.

\* To prevent a sparkling wine from foaming out of the glass, pour an ounce, which will settle quickly. Pouring the remainder of the serving into this starter will not foam as much.

\* In describing wine, the term “hot” refers to a high level of alcohol, leaving a hot, sometimes burning sensation.

\* Zinfandel first appeared in the United States in the 1820s when Long Island nursery owner George Gibbs imported several grape vines from the Imperial collection in Vienna. One of the vines was Zinfandel. (The current thinking is that Zinfandel originated in Croatia where it is called Plavac Mali.) In the 1850s, Zinfandel made its way to California.

\* Putting ice and kosher salt in a bucket will chill white wine or Champagne faster.

\* Wine Consumption in the U.S. reached a high of 2.68 gallons per resident in 2003. ***(I have to wonder with the people reading this newsletter, “Is that per month?”)***

Cheers-

Tim

**If you would like to be removed from this list, please reply to me at [tim@wine-sommelier.com](mailto:tim@wine-sommelier.com) and request removal from this list.**