

January 15, 2010

# The Sommelier Says....

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

## Happy New Year! 2010!!

2010- What is going to happen in the wine world this year

1. Prices will continue to drop across the board, from the priciest of Bordeaux and Burgundy to cult California wines that were once available only by subscription. This goes, too, for those Italian, Spanish and Chilean producers who thought that they could easily get the same kind of money those age-old French estates used to command.
2. More people will buy online. Consumers can go to sites like wine-searcher.com, winebid.com or vinfolio.com and compare prices for the same wine not just around the U.S., where many states now allow cross-state shipping, but in the U.K., Germany, and other countries. The spread can be amazing: a wine costing \$40 in one store may be \$75 in another. Wine stores will stock more inexpensive wines, which account for most of their profits.
3. Wine blogging will increase, mostly among those contending they've found spectacular bottles that will "blow your doors off" for under \$15 a bottle.
4. California, alas, will fail to back away from big, high alcohol, oaky reds and whites, because the producers believe that is the style most Americans prefer over subtlety and complexity. The problem is that cheaper wines of this style are so often dreadful, out of balance and undrinkable after one glass. California wineries talk a good game about finesse, but then they overripen their grapes and stick them in new oak for too long.
5. The tsunami of new wines from South America and Eastern Europe will ebb as the market overflows. Greek, Portuguese, and Brazilian wines have had good press in recent years, but unless they keep prices down, they won't make much headway.
6. New Zealand wineries will be in trouble. The country's recent prodigious harvests have glutted the market for their overly fruity punch-like style, and many fans want to move up in quality.
7. Champagne will be in serious trouble. It's not just that prices have gotten way out of whack, with too many selling above \$100 a bottle, but other sparkling-wine producers have been canny about getting their bubbly well-positioned, well-priced and well-reviewed. Champagne is reducing output and holding back product already bottled to get some balance, but it's going to be a struggle to win

revelers back from Italian prosecco, Californian sparklers and Spanish cavas. There are just too many Champagne labels out there.

8. Fine-dining restaurants will buy nominal numbers of expensive wines after trimmed expense accounts caused them to sit on their previous big capital purchases. They'll wait until guests are telling sommeliers, "Money is no object." Good luck with that. Fewer top-end restaurants will even open, and more modest new eateries will build wine lists with interesting, small labels from around the world and sell them at reasonable mark-ups.

9. More producers will switch to screwtops from cork stoppers in an effort to stem damage to the wines in the bottle from corkiness and oxidation as well as to make wine more accessible to the average consumer. The dirty secret is that most winemakers I talk to say they'd love to switch to screwcaps but fear buyers will think them cheap!

10. Americans will buy more wine at the \$10-and-under level. The best bet for an expanding market is China, which is thirsty for good, inexpensive wine. And, like everything else, they'll soon be producing that themselves.

## **When to open a bottle of wine?**

One question that I have been asked recently is, when is okay to open a newly bottled wine?

While most wineries do not release their wines until they have had some time in the bottle, some release their wines as soon as the bottling process is completed.

While it's tempting to start consuming your wine right after bottling it, and in fact, there are many wines that can be consumed right after bottling and be everything you want them to be. But if you really want to maximize your wine's potential, a little time left alone in the bottle can make the difference.

With age, most red wines which begin life with obvious fruity aromas and some degree of astringency ('bite') will develop softer, gentler, more complex aromas and flavors. The wines become richer, as the fruit mellows and the astringent tannins relax and contribute to the body and character.

Many white wines also benefit with age. Whites intended for aging may display exceedingly high acid levels which will soften over time, uncovering wonderful textures and flavors.

Components of wines differ by variety or blend, and thus react differently to aging. Some wines require longer ageing periods than others.

For example:

More Aging - Reds: Cabernet Sauvignon, Sangiovese, Barbera, Merlot, and Pinot Noir. Whites: Chardonnay, Semillon, Sauvignon Blanc, and Riesling.

As a general rule for California wines, I would wait at least 3 - 6 months after bottling before opening the wine. If you can hold yourself off longer, then do so; you can't hurt the wine as long as it is stored properly.

**Upcoming Events:**

**March 6/7- 32nd annual Barrel Tasting along the Wine Road!** 100+ Wineries! To taste at any of the participating wineries these weekends, you will need to purchase the Barrel Tasting ticket (\$20 available online on January 18). <http://www.wineroad.com/annualevents/3>

My current plans are to fly up, Burbank to Oakland on Southwest airlines on Early Saturday morning the 6<sup>th</sup> of March. I am currently looking into hotels for the evening as well. Depending on how many of you want to join us, we can get a van or limo for the two days. Let me know your thoughts and drop me a note by January 25<sup>th</sup> if you are serious about coming along.

Cheers-

*Tim*

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