

September 10, 2009

The Sommelier Says....

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

Sulfites- the good, the bad, the truth!

First, let's get one thing perfectly clear about sulfites in wine: This is a natural process that's been used by winemakers for a couple of thousand years, with the benign purpose of keeping your wine from spoiling before you can drink it.

With the limited exception of sulfite-sensitive asthmatics, who must avoid sausages, pickles and many other good things in addition to wine, most of us needn't worry about it. If you get a headache or a stuffy nose after drinking wine, you may be allergic to something - very likely the histamines in some red wines, or in the case of hangovers, simple over-indulgence, or drinking cheaper wines...
✍. But it's not the sulfites.

But the scary warning label, added to wine by the government as recently as the 1990s, prompts reactions that range from wary to hysterical among some wine consumers. So at least a few producers, not loath to latch on to a concept that sells, produce wines with no *added* sulfites.

Note that word "added": Wine with *zero* sulfites is an unlikely thing, because they are a natural product of fermentation, naturally created when the wine is made. Accordingly, under new regulations for organic-wine labeling - wine may be labeled "no sulfites" if the winery provides federal regulators an analysis from a certified laboratory showing "none detectable" at the parts per million level. The feds also must approve specific label art and wording in an effort to ensure that consumers aren't misled.

Those regs now limit the unmodified word "organic" to wine made from organically grown grapes *and* containing no added sulfites.

I've been concerned about un-sulfited wines because of the apparent risk of bacterial contamination in wines intentionally made without preservatives.

"Hey Tim, I thought Organic Wines had no sulfites? What's up with that?"

An Organic wine is first and foremost a wine made out of organically grown grapes. Organic wines are produced using organically grown grapes. No pesticides, herbicides, fungicides, chemical fertilizers, or synthetic chemicals of any kind are allowed on the vines or in the soil. Strict rules govern the winemaking process and storage conditions of all imported and domestic wines that acquire certification. Moreover, organic winemakers often avoid many of the chemical substances used to stabilize conventional wines.

Horizontal and Vertical Tasting, what does this mean?

Horizontal Tasting - A Horizontal Tasting involves wines that all come from the same vintage. You decide the vintage and you determine if you are going to place any other limitations on the wines involved. You might decide to have only red wines, or wines from a single grape variety or just "Bordeaux First Growths"; but, the wines will all be from a single vintage. A horizontal tasting is a good way to see which winery was most successful within a given year. You can also begin to detect styles for which a given winery may be known. For instance, if you had a horizontal tasting of wines that all came from the 1997 vintage and were only Cabernet Sauvignons from the Napa Valley, you would find that some of the wines were 'bigger' and had more aging potential. Others might express more forward bouquet at an early age. This type of tasting tells you more about the producers than about the vintage since you are really comparing multiple wineries instead of different years.

Vertical Tasting - A vertical tasting involves wines from different vintages but all the wines will come from the same winery. If the winery produces more than one type of wine, you would select a single wine from that winery and taste multiple vintages of that wine. For instance, you might have 5 vintages of Chateau Mouton Rothschild. When you hold a Vertical tasting, you are learning more about the differences between different vintages rather than the differences in wineries.

What wine is this?

(Last issue- French Beaujolais- no correct answer submitted)

Sight: Clear, day bright, medium-minus concentration. Straw color with green reflections. Medium viscosity.

Nose: Medium-plus intensity. Grapefruit pith, green apple, and green plum. White pepper, lentils and slight honey. Wet stones. No new oak.

Palate: Dry, but not bone dry. Medium body, medium-plus to high acidity, medium alcohol. Lemon, grapefruit, green apple and under-ripe white peach. Spicy and vegetal. Pepper, tarragon and radish. Touch of honey. Strong minerality. No new oak. Bitterness on the finish.

If you think you know, drop me a note- the first correct response wins a bottle of wine from my personal wine cellar!

Looking ahead

***- October 30- Nov 1- Wine tour to Willamette Valley Oregon (Date change)
(Airline- Alaska \$300 pp, Hotel Best Western Woodburn \$90 night-
Approx cost per couple \$1000- plus wine purchases and tasting fees) If you
are interested, please contact me ASAP and I will send you the details.**

Cheers-

Tim

**If you would like to be removed from this list, please reply to me at tim@wine-sommelier.com and request removal from this list.
If you know someone that wants this list, please have him or her send me an email requesting to be included too!**