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## What's new in the Grapevine this week?

- **Vacation wine**
- **New arrivals**
- **Events**

### Vacation Wine

Last week I had one more customer in the store who had been to Italy and came back raving about how good the wines were and how few side effects he felt from indulging. He quite confidently told me the reason the wine was so good and headaches so few is that Europeans don't add sulfites to their wine. He also went on to claim that European wines imported to America have to have added sulfites as dictated by US law. I am 99.99% sure the evaluation of the deliciousness of wines is spot on. However, both claims about the sulfites or lack thereof, are bogus. As result, you will have to sit through another sulfite rant before I get to the real reasons I think European wines taste so good.

I do not know of ANY European wines that do not have added sulfites. While it may be possible for US importers to ask European producers to add an additional miniscule amount of sulfites to protect the wine from temperature variation during shipping, in the Big Picture the average sulfite content for all US and European wines is about 80 parts per million. Further, there are only a few exceptions to the sulfite content in the wine sold in Europe and that same wine sold in the US. In my opinion, sulfite content has nothing to do with how tasty the wines are when touring Europe. I am also certain the sulfite content has nothing to do with headaches.

If there is a difference in European wines abroad or in America, it is that sulfite **warning labels** are required in the US and until very recently, those labels were not required in Europe. I believe I have heard that wines made in Europe will now require the sulfite warning in all nations in the EU as well beginning in 2018(?).

But, let's make something else clear about the sulfite label. The label is on a wine bottle to alert the less than 1% of the population that has a sensitivity to sulfites that sulfites are present. As an avid label reader myself, I regularly see warnings on candy bars that warn that soy, eggs, gluten or nuts are present. There is nothing wrong,

dangerous or harmful with any of those ingredients to the overwhelming majority of our population. However, the presence of any one of those ingredients could be anywhere from uncomfortable to deadly to folks who have allergies or sensitivities to those ingredients. The mere mention of a warning makes sulfites, nuts, eggs, or soy unintentionally appear to be dangerous to everyone. I assure you, for most people, eggs and nuts are part of a healthy diet. Please look at the good side: sulfites are the safest and most expeditious food preservatives ever invented. Here endeth my rant.

OK, so why do wines consumed in Europe taste so good and cause fewer headaches? I have several theories (none of which is scientifically sound) about why they taste so good and hurt less.

1) Many European wines are lower in alcohol than their American counterparts. An Italian white wine at 12% alcohol has 20% less alcohol than 15% alcohol California Chardonnay. Alcohol dilates blood vessels in the brain and that may cause a headache.

2) Small local wineries often grow and process their own grapes in small batches. No matter where in the world you go, these artisanal wines always taste best. This is true of Walla Walla all the way to Burgundy.

3) Because you are drinking local wine, there are no added costs for importers, freight, handling or distribution. More often than not, you are drinking high quality wine for a low price. High quality wines do not rely on Mega-purple and oak dust to taste good. They are not manipulated by additives or chemicals to which you may be sensitive.

4) Many little bistros and restaurants in Italy buy their wines from wine makers that are within a 5 iron of where those same restaurants cook meals for you. Judith Placek, Boston area wine critic and gourmand always says that barrel tasting rewards her with the best flavors and truest expression of the grapes no matter where in the world she is. The wines that are shipped a few hundred yards are the closest you will ever get to barrel tasting. No wonder they taste so good.

5) What time is it? It's vacation time! The best wines and the best times come to you when you are on vacation.

6) When vacationing, you are often eating outside of your typical diet and diet restrictions. One of the best ways to avoid a hangover or a headache is to eat while you drink. Not only that: local wines and local cuisine make each other taste even better.

7) I have often said that the enjoyment of wine is increased by the food on the table and the people surrounding it on the occasion. Maybe that is a way of summarizing why it all seems better. You are away from everyday stress and out for adventure. It is all good!

## **New arrivals**

Rickshaw Wines from California have always been a favorite of mine. My Scottish ancestry turns on the high beams when I approach the intersection of high quality and low cost. Rickshaw wines are produced from sustainably grown grapes with no heavy handed wine making gimmicks. The result is over delivery on all my wine expectations.

For instance, the **Rickshaw Chardonnay** leads off with aromas of white peach and vanilla spice. In the mouth it bursts with notes of lemon, guava, honeysuckle and cream. The flavors are melded together in fine balance and underpinned with a vivacious finish and lingering sense of brightness. All of this is balanced and nuanced in a most delightful way.

The **Rickshaw Pinot Noir** jumps out of the glass with high-toned aromas of red fruit and earthy notes. In the mouth it possesses bright cherry, candied kumquat, and cool evergreen notes. Endlessly energetic, this Pinot is the ultimate versatile wine, working well for an aperitif to pairing with king salmon or skirt steak with chimichurri.

***So now for the icing on the cake: each bottle of either the Chard or the Pinot runs a mere \$14.95!***

Kermit Lynch imports a lot of organically grown and skillfully produced wines. One of his best Italian labels come from Cantine Valpane in northern Italy. My current favorite is the **2014 Cantine Valpane Rosso Pietro Barbera Del Monferrato**. It is a Barbera characteristically light in color and high in acidity. Fermented in cement tanks using native yeasts, the wine is then aged in tank and bottle for an additional 12 to 15 months. Earthy and subtle on the nose, spicy cherry on the palate, with enough tannin to get your attention but not demand it. If you ever needed a wine for spaghetti or pizza, get this one! **(\$15.50)**

Another group of wines that just blows me away is the **Mont Gravet** wines. The **Mont Gravet Rosé** for instance, is a wonderful “anytime” wine and a delicious aperitif. It pairs well with a wide variety of foods, as it’s refreshing, savory and well-balanced. It will beautifully accompany any salad, fish, BBQ or white meat dishes.

The **Mont Gravet White** is 100% Columbard from a region near Toulouse, France. It has a pale, bright yellow color, with a very intense and refreshing nose. It displays aromas of citrus fruit and tropical fruit. The wine has a paradoxically crisp yet creamy texture that adds life to all of the flavors on the plate. The palate is bright and cheerful with touches of pineapple and mango, a faint “green note” reminiscent of kiwi, and a flinty mineral touch that hangs on for a while. It is nicely dry and low in alcohol — 11.5%—a great companion to most any food. Mont Gravet wines will set you back **\$9** each.

One last group to mention is the **Squadra Wines**. The red, the white and the rose’ are all sourced in Sicily and represent great value

We went through 9 bottles of the **Squadra Bianco** (white) at the Art Walk last week with more than one taster remarking on it being a perfect wine for summer. Perfumed aromas of golden apples, just ripe banana and lemon curd ease the nose. The wine has ample concentration yet still maintains freshness, showing a hint of licorice to its salty golden apple and peach flavors. The finish displays good length and juicy fruit. **(\$12.95)**

The **Squadra Rose’** is a playful wine made from Sicily's indigenous Nero d'Avola and makes an emphatic statement declaring what rose’ should be all about. Dry and crisp with the flavors of fresh picked strawberries, watermelon and citrus, it matches almost any fare. **(\$12.95)**

The **Squadra Rosso** (red) is 90% Nero d'Avola. It is a balanced and very attractive red wine with loads of ripe fruit and dark spice presented with equal billing.

This wine is silky and smooth in texture yet it offers abundant fruit notes of black cherry and plum along the way. There's a touch of fennel seed or anise as well that recalls some of the most distinctive flavors of Sicily and Nero d'Avola. (\$12.95)

## Upcoming Events

\*\*If you haven't attended an **American Wine Society** function, embrace your opportunity to get in on the next event. The date will be **Thursday, August 24<sup>th</sup>**. The AWS plan is for a casual summer evening in a private home in the Bon Ton historic district. The agenda includes food, conversation, and a chance to learn about and taste wines that go well with the warm days of summer. I have attended the first three meetings and found the programs to be educational, the wines excellent and the company convivial. If you are a wine lover, this is a chance to expand your horizons, sharpen your palate, and enjoy the company of other like-minded oenophiles. To be added to the email notification list send your request to [awsbozeman@gmail.com](mailto:awsbozeman@gmail.com). (this is a correction from last week)

\*\* It's never too early to put some dates on the calendar especially when it comes to the Wine Gallery's **13<sup>th</sup> Annual Grand Tasting**. Mark the date for **Saturday, November 4<sup>th</sup>** and get friends and family together to attend the best wine tasting of the year. We plan to have nearly sixty wines from all over the world. All will be rated 90 points or higher and priced below \$20.

This is a great chance to buy wine the most efficient way: taste it before you buy it. With so many wines to choose from, you can find the exact wine that fits your palate. If you don't like the first sample, move on to the next and buy the ones you like. This is a great opportunity to fill your wine rack for the upcoming Holidays: get great values, and have fun doing it.

Our venue will be the Hilton Garden Inn and we plan to start at 7 PM. Tickets will go on sale October 1. Stay tuned to the Grapevine for updates.