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What's new in the Grapevine this week?

- **FitVine or FakeVine?**
- **Health update**
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- **International Grenache Day**

FitVine or FakeVine?

Last week I got another call from a customer looking for FitVine wines. These wines claim to be healthier due to lower sugar levels, fewer calories, higher antioxidants, lower sulfites, higher acid and no GMO's. By drinking their wines, you can expect to improve your workout results and get as skinny and lithe as a ballerina. Really? Do they really make wines “so clean they crush calories, carbs and sulfites” and have higher antioxidant levels than any other wine?

We all concur that wine consumed in moderation is part of a healthy lifestyle. Whether it is the higher level of antioxidants or the euphoria and tranquility we get from the enjoyment of wine that leads to a healthier life has been debated for some time. That isn't to say there aren't a slew of studies that include one or both of those factors lend weight to the argument that wine is good for you. Moderate wine consumption does appear to make for a healthier lifestyle no matter which side you take.

Drinking wine in excess, however, will lead to lethal consequences for the liver, kidneys, pancreas, brain, body shape and your criminal driving record. It really doesn't matter how sugar free a wine is. Alcohol is the active ingredient and FitVine totally ignores that 800 pound gorilla.

The claim that FitVine rules because it has “zero residual sugar,” implies or outright claims it contains fewer carbs and calories. The fact is that 95% of the wines we sell at the Wine Gallery contain under 1/10th of one percent residual sugar. Unless you are drinking, Apothic Red, M nage a Trois, White Zinfandel or a dessert wine, you are essentially drinking wine with no residual sugar.

The real sticking point comes from the claim on their website that a 150 milliliter (5 ounce) glass of FitVine Sauvignon Blanc only contains 90 calories. The alcohol percentage for their Sauvignon Blanc is listed at 13.5% which means it contains at least

145 calories. One gram (or milliliter) of alcohol has 7 calories. If you multiply 150 ml. by .135 you would find there are over 20 grams of alcohol in that glass. Twenty plus grams times seven calories per gram is over 140 calories. FitVine claims 90. One other wine that is listed at 13.9% alcohol claims to contain only 95 calories per 150 ml. glass. The real calculation for that wine shows it to have at least 145 calories. Either FitVine is 1) misrepresenting the alcohol percentage (a Federal crime) 2) they are horrible at math or 3) they are flat out misleading consumers about how many calories are in a glass.

FitVine also claims that its high altitude vineyards produce grapes higher in antioxidants and that is a health benefit. It is true but statistically irrelevant. Wines from the Horse Heaven Hills in Washington, Alto Adige in Italy, Howell Mountain in California or Mendoza, Argentina are higher altitude but none of them claims superior wine because of a very minor increase in antioxidant content.

Well, what about the sulfite content? Doesn't fewer sulfites make FitVine healthier? No. Sulfites have no effect on health unless you are one of the less than 1% of the population with sulfite sensitivity. The difference in 80 parts per million in a regular wine and FitVine's 35 parts per million means .0045 percent fewer sulfites by volume per glass (that's four zeros followed by 45 for you doing the math at home.) To hang your hat on "healthy" by disparaging the most efficacious and safest preservative ever invented is really stretching it. What facts are there that this minute difference in the amount of sulfite is either a) bad for you or b) will enhance your overall fitness?

FitVine also claims its wines are low pH and that makes them "cleaner". All wines are acidic (low pH) and I have never seen a wine that was alkaline. It is useful to remember that the lower the pH of a solution, the more acidic it is. FitVine claims that a secondary fermentation called malo-lactic fermentation is how they bio-hack their wines into this super low pH state of cleanliness. Here's the rub: malo-lactic fermentation actually **raises** the pH thereby making the wine LESS acidic. Further, in all the years of my wine experience, I have never come across a red wine that did NOT undergo malo-lactic fermentation. So let's just agree that this is a bogus claim. There are wines no different than any other and there is no evidence to support the claim that higher acid is better or worse for you or FitVine is something chemically distant from what you already drink.

Likewise for the claim that FitVine cold stabilizes and strains their wines through diatomaceous earth filters which somehow makes their wines cleaner. Diatomaceous earth is one of the most common fining agents in the wine business. Similarly, cold stabilization is used to crystallize tartrates to filter them out of white wines. Tartrates have no impact on flavor, they just show up as white crystals when you chill a white wine. In the crystalline form, the tartrates are easy to filter and after filtration leave white wines without a hint of cloudiness. The upshot? Since cold stabilization and filtration are common practice in the wine industry, there is nothing that makes FitVine wines better or cleaner. I am surprised they make no claims about FitVine being fat free, gluten free, lactose free and ultra-low in sodium.

FitVine makes no claim to biodynamic or organic certification so I can't see them polishing their halo in that regard. Does it taste any better? In my opinion, it is quaffable, inoffensive and clean tasting. If non-weird is your benchmark for wine,

FitVine is still OK. However, for \$15 to \$18 a bottle, we have a store full of wines that surpass FitVine in quality and value.

FitVine is not the most fascinating wine on earth, and I remain unconvinced that it will push you to the front of the Bridger Ridge run, enable you to drive a golf ball 300 yards, or enhance your ability to do algebra in Chinese, because *it is just wine*. It is nothing special. Enjoy it in moderation but don't expect to be Popeye on spinach.

Health update

A little after 4 AM Sunday morning, Tosca woke me up to let her outside. When I got out of bed, I had a dull ache in both shoulders which I attributed to sleeping at an odd angle. By the time Tosca had finished her business, the shoulder ache intensified and I started to sweat like a redneck at a spelling bee.

About 30 seconds later, I realized that I was having a heart attack. I woke up Jeanie and she immediately threw on street clothes and rushed me to the hospital. As you know, Jeanie is a nurse and luckily she also has a lead foot so we got to the ER in record time. I was in the Cath lab right away where they removed a tiny clot that was fully blocking one of the blood vessels that supplies blood to the front wall of my heart.

Ok, a heart attack is not good news but the post-op evaluation was that Jeanie's quick action and the speed and skill of the Cath lab team mitigated any long-term effects of the incident. I was released Tuesday afternoon with an assessment that I was better off than 99% of heart attack victims because I received treatment so quickly. Indeed, the doctors' only limitations post release had to do with the site where they inserted the tools for my new stent.

I did confirm with my cardiologist that how good I feel right now has nothing to do with denial. I will have to watch myself for a few months until rehab is complete but most folks won't know it ever happened. I will get used to a diet of chicken breast, broccoli and Lipitor for the rest of my life, but that life is good. I intend to enjoy a lot more of it.

Madison Valley Ranch plans wine dinners

After having experienced the beauty and hospitality of the Madison Valley Ranch over Easter weekend, I was delighted to be presented a chance to offer two more wine dinners at this gorgeous venue on November 10th and November 11th. The Madison Valley Ranch sold out every seat for our last dinner and they would love to have another congenial group come by for a great evening in November.

The Madison Valley Ranch is located across the Madison River from Ennis in Jeffers, Montana. This beautiful setting won the Lodge of the Year from Orvis in 2015 and I can see why. There is a pond and a creek where you can practice your fly casting and it is a short walk through the Channels to the Madison if you prefer to river fish. At dusk we watched ring neck pheasants, sand hill cranes and osprey fly by serenaded by meadowlarks. In the adjacent field a moose family made daily appearances last summer and we were lucky enough to see a herd of deer foraging as we ate.

Our dinner was prepared by Chef Matt Pease who stoked his creative energies to bring out dishes made with a variety of locally sourced victuals including smoked trout, Wagyu beef, spring lamb as well as beets, parsnips and cheeses. I came up with some delicious wines to pair and I would say, in all false modesty, it was one of the best dining experiences in Madison County.

Jeanie and I as well as some other folks from Bozeman employed a strategy of staying at the lodge overnight instead travelling back in the dark. Believe me, the accommodations are first rate. The good news is the Madison Valley Ranch has a special deal for those who stay over (just mention the Wine Gallery dinner). It really can't be beat for a fun night away from the city. As a bonus, in the morning, we were served a delicious breakfast with some of the best coffee I've had in years.

If you just want a ticket for dinner, it is \$89 including everything. Call us for the wine dinner only option at 586-8828 and we will get you a seat. If you wish to book the dinner and lodging package, I would suggest a call to the Madison Valley ranch directly at 800-891-6158. Call soon, the last event sold out quickly.

International Grenache Day

Grenache is one of the most widely planted grapes in the world. Not only is it delicious, it is famous for protecting the large elderly population in Sardinia, where Grenache is known as Cannonau. Taking place on **September 15th, International Grenache Day** will see events ranging from tastings to promotions and menu-pairings. The diversity of Grenache will be on display as restaurants, wine merchants and producers celebrate the virtues of the world's most widely planted red grape.

The best way to celebrate International Grenache Day is to spread the gospel of Grenache. Host an event on Grenache Day, get friends together and share some of your favorite Grenache vintages, or just order a glass at your local restaurant. There's never a bad time or place to help let people know about this amazing grape and all the wines produced from it.

To promote International Grenache day, the Wine Gallery will be participating with a special 10% off sale on:

Little James Basket Press Red, (France, \$15)

Tres Picos Garnacha (Spain, \$17.50)

Cotes du Cailloux Cote du Rhone (France, \$24.50)

Borsao Garnacha (Spain, \$10.95)

Renegade Grenache (Washington State \$16.95)

Writer's Block Grenache (California \$16.95)

Stella & Mosca Cannonau (Sardinia \$16.95)

Send an e-mail to bozemanwinegallery@gmail.com or call me at 586-8828 or to order any of these wines for pickup on September 15th.