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What's new in the Grapevine this week?

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Why aren't we dead from arsenic in wine?

There was a big ballyhoo a few years ago about arsenic in wine. Last week I had a customer tell me his daughter no longer drinks California wine because of the arsenic in those wines. Even though I don't mind seeing Fred Franzia (maker of Two Buck Chuck) take one on the chin, the alarm about arsenic and wine is way overblown (or as we say in contemporary parlance, "fake news").

According to reports, several low cost wine brands were shown to have 2, 3 or up to 4 times the arsenic level allowed for drinking water by Federal law. That Federal limit level is 10 parts per billion. It is interesting to note that it wasn't until after our own Montana Governor Racicot left office in 2001 that there was even a way to detect such a minute concentration. In Canada, the EU, and Japan the maximum allowable arsenic concentration is 100 parts per billion. Why aren't there more dead Canadians, Europeans and Japanese? Must be their efficient, low cost health care programs that keeps the casualties low.

When the U.S. government considers limits for arsenic in food and beverages, they take into account how much of that food or beverage an average person may consume in a day and the age of people who likely consume that food/beverage. Daily intake levels for water are significantly

higher than for wine which should mitigate some of the alarm over arsenic in wine.

So how bad is this 20-40 parts per billion of arsenic in the suspect wines? A dose of arsenic that will cause the first level of arsenic poisoning symptoms is about 2500 parts per billion. Even a math dummy like me knows that is a long way from 20 or even 40 parts per billion. In the rest of the industrialized world, it is still below half of the lower limit for arsenic in drinking water.

Yes, I hear you say, but the effect is cumulative. Arsenic stays in the body, right? Well, yes, some arsenic does stay in the body but most of it is excreted with our waste products. What does remain is bound up in the hair and nails so it isn't circulating around to the organs. I can hear a sigh of relief from most of you right now.

The other bit of confusing information is that there are certain metabolic functions in our bodies that actually require arsenic. I guess it's like a lot of things: a little bit is good, a lot is bad. (Think breeze vs. hurricane, campfire vs. forest fire, glass of water vs. flood on the Mississippi.) We need some arsenic in our systems to function. Too much, however, is deadly and that is what all the ballyhoo is about.

So if we drink wine with arsenic in it, why aren't we dead? Well, it turns out we are exposed to arsenic every day in the water we drink and the food we eat. The City of Bozeman water has to have less than 10 parts per billion in arsenic. However, there are no limits for arsenic for private wells for folks like me who live out in the country. Should I be quaking in my boots because reportedly Montana has a lot of arsenic in its rocks and soil? There isn't much I could do but I seem to have dodged arsenic poisoning so far.

It seems our exposure to arsenic is pretty widespread but thankfully infinitesimal. Other foods have arsenic in them, not just wine. If you have a healthy diet and are loading up on green leafy vegetables, fruit, juice and fatty fish (like salmon), you are loading up on arsenic rich foods. Don't tell your kids this, but a good excuse not to eat kale, Brussels sprouts, cauliflower and cabbage is that in spite of being the healthiest foods available for human consumption, they are high in arsenic. If you load up on your omega-3's by eating salmon, mackerel, or tuna, you will be taking in a bit of arsenic with each bite. Rice, chicken and beer also have detectable levels of arsenic. Apple and pear juice have 5 times the amount of arsenic in them than is allowed in U.S. water systems. You won't see a

mention of that on the labels because there is no real health threat from arsenic in juice.

The answer to the question about why we aren't all dead from arsenic is buried in every article I read to research this piece. They all have some sort of disclaimer that sounds like "the low levels of arsenic in food don't cause immediate health problems for the average person." So I guess moderation in all things is the key to a good life. Don't go out looking for arsenic but know that a healthy diet may include small bits of arsenic. You can include green leafy vegetables, fruit juice, dark meat fish, and wine and live a long healthy life. We're all going to die of something but don't die of worrying too much (especially about wine!).

Forgeron Tasting details for April 26

Marie-Eve Gilla, founder and managing partner of **Forgeron Cellars** in Walla Walla will be here **April 26** to present her current wine releases. Marie-Eve was here a few years ago and gave one of the best winemaker presentations I have ever witnessed. I can't imagine this year's event would be anything less.

Marie-Eve was born and raised in Paris but earned her wine "chops" at the University of Dijon. She received a Double Master's Degree in Viticulture and Oenology which means she not only knows how to cultivate and select the best grapes, she can make them into the best wine when those grapes are harvested. She has earned honors in France and Washington State for her work in the wine industry over the last 25 years working with the world's best sustainable growers. The result is complex age-worthy wines that express Washington's full potential. Her 15 year history of 90+ point ratings speaks to the high quality of her skill and the consistency of her work.

Her blend of the Old World traditions of regular visits to the vineyards to monitor the canopy, water levels and cluster development set the stage for her winemaking. Forgeron wines are made from hand-picked grapes and gentle, natural winemaking techniques. Her modern approach includes small lots and temperature controlled fermentations with extensive quality control practices in each step from crush to bottling.

As for the particulars of the evening—we are going to alter our usual format a bit to accommodate a Thursday night wine function. Our start time will be **6:00 PM** with Marie-Eve doing a short presentation for each of the wines. Since we are at the **Food Studio**, we plan to have a curated

line-up of cheeses, charcuterie and French canapes that will focus the flavors of the wines and highlight pairing possibilities.

The cost for tickets is \$39. You may reserve seats by calling us at 586-8828 or by e-mail at bozemanwinegallery@gmail.com.

Best of the Bozone Poll

I am not here to assign homework but there is another local magazine poll for the Best of Bozeman this month. Many of you filled out the Bozeman Magazine poll in October and now less than six months later, **Bozone Magazine** is offering their version of who does it best in Bozeman.

It takes about 10 minutes to fill out the whole thing and you have to wait for the last page for the question about the “Best Wine Store”. To get there, you have the opportunity to share your opinions about the cultural, entertainment, restaurant and retail entities in Bozeman.

My prejudice is showing but, in my opinion, the combination of price, selection and service should make the Wine Gallery a contender in the “Best Place to Buy Wine” category. It does take your vote to make it happen, however. You can’t complain about the results unless you vote. Please go to: <https://bozone.com/best-of-bozeman-voting-begins-march-1st-2018/> and cast your vote. It really is fun to ponder why we patronize the establishments we love and to let others in our community know to support our local businesses.

Upcoming events

Now--John Macy and Harvest Sweets sale. Come in for free samples of John Macy’s Cheese Crisps and Harvest Sweets Chocolates and get 20% off each box. One taste will seal the deal!

April 26th--Forgeron tasting at the Food Studio. (See above)

May 16th—Annual Extraordinary Wine Tasting. Winemakers, executives and winery owners will be on hand to give up close and personal information on over 50 wines. Bring your notepad and pencil, there will be plenty of great wines at great prices to stock you cellar for summer.

July 14th—The Museum of the Rockies Wine and Culinary Classic will take place at the Museum. Reserved seat tickets are available with a

\$25 discount until April 30th. Sip, savor and support by calling 406-994-1998 or send an email to events@montana.edu to reserve your seats.