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What's new in the Grapevine this week?

- **Quality of life**
- **New wines from Washington State**
- **Madison Valley Ranch**
- **Forgeron tasting and future events**

Good news about your quality of life

This week, not one but two alert readers sent me an article from New York Times writer Eric Asimov concerning everyday wine. In the article, he stresses some of the same points we make every week in the Grapevine. His first point is that you don't have to drink expensive, "trophy" or "unicorn" wines every day to enjoy wine in the ways that add the most to your quality of life. He notes that your everyday choices are more meaningful to quality of life than the rare, occasional, benchmark specimen. This is not to say don't ever drink the rock star wine, it just means not every day is a holiday and it is the "regular" days that make the holidays special. By improving your choices on a "regular" day, you improve your life and enjoyment of wine incrementally. As Asimov notes, "good bottles that are moderately priced and easy to drink in relaxed, casual settings, yet are still interesting enough to inspire wonder and to be deeply pleasurable" should be our mantra.

Even though there are more wines available these days, he notes that with the explosion of wines and the diversity of source, varietal, and style, it is paradoxically confounding to wine consumers. It makes it more difficult to make a choice. Rather than take a chance on the unknown, consumers stick to familiar grapes, goofy labels and "brand name" appellations. His answer to that conundrum did not go unnoticed by our readers.

Asimov makes other common sense observations like "think of wine as food", "commit to diversity", "match the occasion to the wine", "spend just a little more to find better quality", and even "use the right glassware". All of these suggestions fall on his over-arching solution is to **find a good wine store**. He notes that "This greatly increases the odds of finding good bottles, because conscientious merchants have weeded out much of the dreck. Avoid supermarkets and other indifferent outlets. Though you may find the occasional decent bottle, supermarkets and drugstores are full of processed wines and vacuous brands that are the equivalent of empty calories."

He goes on to claim the benefit of relying on a good wine merchant goes beyond the quality of the selections but onward toward getting the exact wine you seek. “Nobody knows the wares better than the merchants who buy them. In good shops, ask for help. Tell them your budget, maybe what you are cooking, or the kinds of foods you like to eat if you are buying more than a bottle or two. This direct approach is far more useful than looking at apps that aggregate scores or purport to discern your taste. Merchants want return business. Forging a good relationship will pay off sooner than you think.” The people at Safeway or Costco don’t know your name, what wines you like nor do they have the personal commitment to know you as a person. They do have plenty of Cupcake, Layer Cake, Ménage a Trois and critter labels like Fish Eye and Yellow Tail to appeal to your sweet tooth, naughty side, or your soft heart. Caveat emptor!

If you commit to diversity and explore new wines with the help of your wine merchant, you will avoid the rut of inexpensive versions of the Big Three (Cabernet, Pinot Noir and Chardonnay). As I have noted in previous rants, these wines are little more than industrial chemistry enhanced by technological stunts and added flavorings meant to imitate expensive wines. Asimov notes that even though solid wines can be found in the \$10 range, the potential for quality and excitement increases exponentially at the \$15-\$20 range. I have yet to find a \$5 (or less) wine that was more inspirational than dog snot on a Subaru window.

If you would like to read about the way to select a wine store, the link is <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/02/dining/wine-store.html>

Thurston Wolfe wines

Last week we tasted through the line-up from Thurston-Wolfe wines out of the Yakima Valley. Without exception, they are delicious wines meant to fulfill Eric Asimov’s edict of great quality in wines priced for every day consumption. We got some great deals at or below the price at the winery and we are excited to show them off.

The **Thurston-Wolfe Pinot-Gris Viognier** is a blend of 65% Pinot Gris and 35% Viognier, creating a rare wine with intense fruit aromas and a rich, crisp finish. Enjoy with chicken recipes, steamed mussels, clam linguini and other seafood dishes or by itself on the patio with good friends. As the weather gets warmer, this will be a staple at our house. **\$14.95**

The **2015 Dr. Wolfe’s Family Red** is a unique blend of Zinfandel (53%), Petite Sirah (28%), and Lemberger (19%) from the Columbia Valley in Washington State. It was carefully aged 22 months in a blend of French and American oak. Soft, fruity and full-bodied, this wine complements a wide range of rich and hardy dishes and is meant for enjoyment now and through 2026. The winery sells this wine at \$18 but we bought a bunch and it is only **\$15 at the Wine Gallery**

The **2013 Thurston-Wolfe Zinfandel** is the 13th vintage from the Zephyr Ridge Vineyard in the Horse Heaven Hills. Harvested in late September, the wine was fermented to dryness on the skins and aged in a mixture of American and French oak

for 25 months before bottling in December 2015. Enjoy with prime rib, rack of lamb or port-glazed pork loin. \$20 at the winery; **\$14.95 at the Wine Gallery.**

Their **2015 Cabernet Sauvignon** is the eighth dedication to Stan Clarke, renowned Washington State viticulturist, teacher and mentor of students of all ages. His favorite wine was Cabernet Sauvignon. This blend is from select vineyards in the Horse Heaven Hills and was aged 26 months in French and American oak before bottling in January 2018. \$25 at the Winery; **\$17.50** at the Wine Gallery

One of the best deals is the **Thurston Wolfe JTW blend**. Half Cabernet and half Zinfandel, this rare blend is full of dark fruit and oak spice aromas and a rich, full-bodied finish. \$16 at the winery, **\$11.95** at the Wine Gallery.

Madison Valley Ranch plans wine dinners

After having experienced the beauty and hospitality of the Madison Valley Ranch last Fall, I was delighted to be presented a chance to offer two more wine dinners at this gorgeous venue on April 6th and April 7th. 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 next month. Choose either night for a great “done with winter” getaway.

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 \$125 lodging 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.

Upcoming Events

This month--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!

Today—Enter the **Best of Bozone** poll and tell the world how much you love the businesses 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. You will get to vote on all sorts of categories but be patient enough to get to the last page because that is where the “Place to Buy Wine” question is. 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.

April 26th-- 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. 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

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