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What's new in the Grapevine this week?

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Second Hand Grapes

I got a question today about wines that were made with “second hand grapes”. I wasn't really sure how that expression got into common parlance but I do have a couple of ideas about how that may have come about.

Many wineries grow their own grapes and produce wines from those grapes at their own facilities. These bottlings are referred to as “estate” wines. Many wineries not only grow their own grapes but they contract with other grape growers for grapes that can be used in the winery's own blends or bottlings. Purchased grapes allow winemakers the freedom to choose smaller lots of grapes for blending purposes but also grapes that may reflect different clones, different terroir or different degrees of ripeness at harvest. Purchased grapes are not inferior to estate grapes but add complexity to the wines produced by the winery.

Another origin for that “second hand grapes” remark may have come from wineries that produce more than one label under their brand. Making wine is tough because there are so many variables in the process. Even though grapes came from the same vineyard, grapes harvested in the cool morning air react differently than those harvested in the heat of the day. Grape harvest can also take place over several days and the grapes harvested at the end of the cycle may be riper or even over-ripe when compared to the grapes harvested on the first day. In the winery, different batches from the same vintage will have slightly different characteristics due to the initial ripeness but also from the ambient air temperature and the variation in the wood in the barrels used for aging. It is therefore up to the winemaker to select the barrels of wine that make the best showing for the premium brand and use the wine from the remaining barrels to bottle as the “second label”. Just to be clear on this, most of us would have a difficult time doing that barrel tasting and deciding which barrels to use for the premium label and those to use for the “second” label. I often find “second

label” wines almost indistinguishable from “first” labels and on many occasions I have found “second” labels more approachable when they are young.

A third possibility to which they may be referring to is bulk wine, which is actually a pretty big part of the wine business. As I mentioned above, while most people think of wineries making wine from grapes they grew themselves, there are plenty of wineries that don’t own land and instead purchase grapes. But grapes can be pretty fragile, and when they’re ready to be picked they have to be turned into wine rather quickly. So there is this other part of the wine business where grapes are turned into wine, but then sold to another party. The party who buys this wine might blend it with other wines, or age it in a barrel, or just package it and sell it. So much wine is made this way, it’s really not fair to think of it as “second-hand” grapes. There’s even a French term for someone who does this professionally: *négociant*.

Wines from Louis Jadot and Joseph Drouhin in Burgundy are often *négociant* bottlings. A few years ago Cameron Hughes built a remarkable brand in this country by buying bulk wine from premier producers at rock bottom prices and bottling it under his own lot numbers.

One last possibility for the “second hand” grapes question lies in the fact that wine grapes are very much an agricultural endeavor. As with any crop, climatic conditions influence the harvest and that can mean that in some years the crop may not provide the quality the winery contractor requires. If the grapes are not ripe enough, too ripe, swelled with water from harvest time rain storms, or damaged by rot, the winemaker has the option to refuse to honor the contract. After all, the mantra of most winemakers is that good wine is made in the vineyard. No winemaker can make great wine from bad grapes. (Although there are some winemakers who have managed to make bad wine from great grapes.) Those grapes that do not measure up can be then sold on the open market at a reduced price to jug wine producers albeit for lesser quality wines.

One off deals on O-S Wines

O-S Wines (formerly known as Owen-Sullivan) have been produced in Washington State for at least 20 years. Our O-S distributor has some “last of the vintage” wines available at great prices so we swooped in and bought the last case of each.

The **2012 O-S BSH Cab** starts with bright cherry and strawberry which then morph into darker fruits of blackberry, Bing cherry, and blackcurrant all layered on top of dark chocolate notes. Beautiful dark ruby color, with dark cherry and blackberry assail the nose aided by a hint of earthy coffee. The tannins and acid are perfectly balanced and give it structure to last. A cozy fire or nice steak dinner will suit this wine just fine. Enjoy now, next year or 15+ years from now. This is a great cabernet to last for many happy occasions. Was \$32, **now \$16** while it lasts.

The **2012 SONAS CABERNET SAUVIGNON** has the intensity, structure and elegance that is inherent in the 2012 vintage from Washington. With a rich earthy nose the wine has a smooth and silky mouth-feel with a full mid palate of layers with

strawberry on blackberry with hints of dark cherry. The tannins are soft yet carry through the long dark cherry finish. Was \$24.95, now \$14 while it lasts.

New Point of Sale

After using our legacy Point of Sale Software for over 10 years, we are upgrading to a more efficient and integrated software. We should see some reductions in time spent maintaining inventory as well as some enhanced integration of each transaction. In the meantime, I am on an accelerated learning curve, but the processes are rather intuitive albeit still new. We will all be in “shake-down cruise” mode for a week or so and then things should be roaring along.

Events

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 a mere \$39. You may reserve seats by calling us at 586-8828 or by e-mail at bozemanwinegallery@gmail.com.

April 27th—The Bozeman Noon Rotary will be presenting a wine and craft beer tasting at the Holiday Inn on Friday, April 27th. Hors d'oeuvres, a “cork pull” and an Instant Wine Cellar Raffle will highlight the evening. To get tickets go to <http://bozemannoonrotary.org/event/7th-annual-wine---beer-tasting-fundraiser/>. The tickets are \$30 each or 4 for \$100.

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.

Win a trip to New York City

Intermountain Opera Bozeman will be celebrating its 40th season this year. To kick it off the celebration IOB will present Verdi's *Falstaff* on May 11th and 13th at the Willson. This opera completes the trifecta of great music, intriguing characters and lots of laughs. In order to promote the 40th season, the IOB will hold a raffle. First prize is a trip to New York City and a performance at the Metropolitan Opera. (For a sneak peek

at what the Met is like, watch the movie *Moonstruck*). Second prize is two VIP passes to the inaugural Bozeman Film Celebration this summer. Third prize is what I'd wish for: the bronze is the vinyl record collection of the late Elise Donahue and a set of superb wines selected by the Wine Gallery.

Raffle tickets are \$25 each or 4 tickets for \$100. The Wine Gallery is the only place that has expanded the number of winners from three places to five. To sweeten your chances and make it a win for everyone, each raffle ticket purchased from the Wine Gallery will also be entered in a Wine Gallery pool for two sets of free tickets to *Falstaff*. One winner will receive a \$150.00 voucher for tickets to the May 11th performance. Use the voucher for any combination of seats or as a super discount for multiple seats. Jeanie and I will be in France during the Sunday performance so the other lucky winner will get our seats for Sunday afternoon. Our seats are in the center of the 6th row so if you win the Sunday tickets, you will be on the operatic equivalent of the 50 yard line. Buy as many raffle tickets as you want; you could win multiple prizes!

If you have never been to the opera or think it just isn't for you, this would be a great opportunity to give opera a try. *Falstaff* is Verdi's last opera and the music, the plot and the hilarity are legend. Even if you don't win the tickets, attending a performance is a great way to experience live music and the only professional opera company in our region. In a recent letter sent to the IOB by the Gilhousen Family Foundation, the underwriters noted that "It is...the community that makes up and surrounds the Intermountain Opera that has been creating a track record of staging successful, quality productions for many years. That 40 year tradition of staging high level opera performances in a relatively rural area is no small feat, and the dedication and hard work of those involved shines through, drawing audiences from the breadth of the Mountain West. This is a true community venture."

I echo that sentiment. Bozeman has a lifestyle economy driven by big city culture and amenities in a scenic, small city environment. Your support of the performing arts makes our community a much better place to live. Please buy some raffle tickets the next time you are in the Wine Gallery. If you aren't able to get in, give us a call at 586-8828 or send an e-mail to bozemanwinegallery@gmail.com and we will try to sell you the winning ticket(s).