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What's new in the Grapevine this week?

- **Choosing a sparkler for mimosas**
- **Great legs!**
- **Does smoke affect wine?**
- **Free tickets to "Pirates of Penzance"**

Choosing a sparkler for mimosas

We often get asked about what bubbly is best for mimosas. Is it Champagne? Is it Cava? Is it Prosecco? To me, because we dilute the sparkler with citrus juice, there is no requirement to use the most expensive Champagne or high quality California sparklers. The only personal preference I have is that the wine is "brut". Brut sparklers are dry and provide balance to the sweetness of the orange juice. Cava and Prosecco are good values and almost always run under $20.

That said; the best mimosas to me are when the juice is fresh or fresh squeezed. Spend a little more on the orange juice and less on the bubbly and I think you will be pleased with the outcome.

To serve, I pull out my Champagne flutes or white wineglasses and pour the bubbly first. Preferred ratios can vary from 2:1 bubbly to juice to 1:1 to 1:2, depending on your taste. Add the juice slowly because the bubbly will fizz up as you do. Since both juice and bubbly are chilled there is no need to stir your mimosa or add ice. If you want to be fancy (and give your mimosa a little more kick), you can add a splash of orange-flavored liqueur like triple sec or Grand Marnier, which rounds out the flavors.

Great Legs!

I was out to dinner a week or so ago and I heard the comment “nice legs”. They weren’t referring to Jeanie’s legs (although she does have rather attractive gams) but rather the “legs” or “tears” that form on the side of the wine glass after it is swirled. What do “legs” tell you about wine? Brace yourself because “legs” really don’t mean anything in terms of quality of the wine. They are caused by the evaporation of alcohol after swirling, which affects the surface tension of the wine clinging to the glass. In theory, higher alcohol wines might display more streaks, and the viscosity of sweeter wines can slow the streaks down but you can’t really tell how much alcohol or residual sugar is in the wine by looking. If you want to know the wine’s alcohol percentage, check out its label.

Commenting on a wine’s “legs” is kind of like saying a wine is liquid. Any pretentious discussion of “legs” harkens up visions of wine snobbery gone wild. Really, there is no secret language, ritual handshake or wine terms that can relate “legs” and the quality of the wine. In fact, I have never encountered anyone who could correctly “read” the legs and come close to guessing the alcohol level printed on the bottle. Likewise, no one can tell the price of the wine by the legs because “legs” on expensive wine look no different than the legs on Yellow Tail.

Wine legs mainly occur due to what is known as the Gibbs-Marangoni Effect, a phenomenon caused by the evaporation of alcohol affecting the surface tension of a liquid. In theory, wine with a higher alcohol content will have more legs, due to the fact that more alcohol will evaporate as the wine is swirled in the glass. The alcohol evaporates from the thin film of liquid which coats the side of the glass, releasing the wine aromas into the air, and the remaining mixture of water and wine then runs back down the inside of the glass, giving you the “tears” effect. The evaporating alcohol carries the dissolved phenols and esters that give wine its smell up to your nose. The process is the same for perfume. The alcohol evaporates, taking the esters in the perfume with it.

Your will notice that legs continue to form even without swirling. Alcohol evaporates from the film leaving behind liquid with a higher surface tension (more water, less alcohol). This region with a lower concentration of alcohol (greater surface tension) pulls on the surrounding fluid more strongly than the regions with a higher alcohol concentration (lower in the glass). The result is the liquid is pulled up until its own weight exceeds the force of the effect, and the liquid drips back down the vessel's walls. This can also be easily demonstrated by spreading a thin film of

water on a smooth surface and then allowing a drop of alcohol to fall on the center of the film. The liquid will rush out of the region where the drop of alcohol fell. If you swirl your wine in a closed bottle, you'll notice that no legs occur – this is due to the fact that the bottle is airtight, and no evaporation can take place. Alternatively, if you place your hand over the top of the glass, the "legs" will soon stop forming.

Smoke Taint

Last week, Washington winemaker, John Bookwalter, was here to visit. During the course of tasting some of his great wines, the subject of our smoky summer came up and with it the speculation about smoke taint in California and Washington wines in the 2018 vintage. As its name may tell you, smoke taint happens when grapes are exposed to smoke. The hard part is that it is more than just residue sitting on the grapes that cause these unpleasant flavors—and you can't just rinse it off.

When wood burns, it releases aroma compounds called volatile phenols. In the vineyard, these compounds can permeate the grape skins and rapidly bond with the sugars inside to form molecules called glycosides. This process, called glycosylation, renders the phenols no longer volatile, meaning their smokiness cannot be detected by smell or taste. (Note: volatile phenols of smoke tainted grapes are located in the skin and do not penetrate to the pulp.) The glycoside bond makes the phenols non-volatile, meaning unpleasant aromas associated with smoke are not detectable. However, the issue winemakers have is that once grapes go through maceration and fermentation, acidity breaks apart the glycosides, releasing the sugar-phenol bond and making phenols volatile again. This typically happens during fermentation, but can continue to occur after the wine has been bottled. It can even happen right as you take a sip: The enzymes in your mouth are able to break down any glycosides that remain, and the undesirable aromas can be vaporized as you taste—a wine might smell fine but taste off.

Obviously, you won't see smoke taint in white wines nearly as much as you would in reds, since the compounds are concentrated in the skins, and whites don't typically sit on their skins during fermentation like reds do.

Are different red grape varieties more susceptible to taint? That question has yet to be decided. Some have claimed that varieties with thicker skins are more resistant (which would be better news for California's thick-skinned late ripening Cabernets), while others have pooh-

poohed that idea. Currently, Bookwalter has sent samples of grapes and juice to research institutions or private companies, where they were tested for volatile phenols such as guaiacol and 4-methylguaiacol, two of the most common markers of smoke taint. Low levels of these compounds (typically lower than 5 micrograms per liter) naturally exist in wines; oak-aged, non-tainted wines can have even more.

Though we know high levels of these compounds will indicate smoke taint, there is no threshold level that will definitely signal that. Bookwalter used results of these tests to reject a section of wine grapes from a grower contract. However, tests can be good indicators that smoke taint may be present, but they are not a guarantee it's not. John Bookwalter put it this way: "You don't know until you know."

Free Tickets to "Pirates of Penzance"

In a few weeks, Intermountain Opera will present Gilbert & Sullivan's **"The Pirates of Penzance"** First of all, let's be clear where Penzance is. Penzance is on the far western tip of Great Britain's "foot" where the Cornwall Peninsula juts into the Celtic Sea. Why is that important? Well, the most often heard objection I hear about attending the opera is that it is sung in a foreign language. Good news: "The Pirates of Penzance" is sung entirely in English. Not only that, it is more comedy than tragedy, there is no heavy drama, and no one dies at the end.

Now, I don't know about you, but I always marvel at Bob Dylan rhyming "contagious" and "outrageous" or rappers' ability to build rhymes out of anything. All I can say is they must have learned it from Gilbert & Sullivan's brisk and comic "patter" songs that appear in this opera . In one "patter" song, the Major General sings,

"I understand equations, both the simple and quadratical
About binomial theorem I am teeming with a lot o' news
With many cheerful facts about the square of the hypotenuse"

The rest of the story is funny and each tune is one you will be able to whistle the next day. If you have never attended an Intermountain Opera production, this one will be a great start. If you just want to be tickled and entertained, you can't beat Gilbert & Sullivan. Even if you don't win the free tickets, it would be well worth your while to take in this performance.

Oh yeah, speaking of the free ticket deal… Because the Wine Gallery is an advertiser in the Intermountain Opera Bozeman performance program,

IOB has graciously given us a $150 voucher for tickets. Jeanie and I are already season subscribers so you have a chance to win this voucher. The winner will get at least two prime seats if you can tell me in 25 words or less why you should have the voucher. Performances are scheduled for Friday, October 12th at 7:00 PM and Sunday, October 14 at 3:00PM so plan accordingly and book tickets soon.

Extra credit will be given to rhyming entries. Just send your entry to doug@bozemanwinegallery.com. Please include a daytime phone number with your entry. The contest winner will be announced in the October 3rd Grapevine.