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What's new in the Grapevine this week?

- **Natural wine**
- **Additional Wine Dinner**
- **Free Tickets to “Camelot”**

Natural Wine

*Tiffany forwarded an article to me about **natural wine** from the “Wine Folly” website. She sent it to me because there is a lot of confusion about what “natural” wine is. The first few paragraphs below will get you started on a working definition (there is no legal definition) before the ranting begins.*

“If you’re even slightly into wine, you’ve probably heard about natural wine. Natural wine is the unfiltered, untamed, un-photoshopped version of what we know to be wine. In most cases, natural wine doesn’t look or taste like a typical wine. In fact, some natural wines taste more like a sour beer or kombucha! According to latest edition of *The Oxford Companion to Wine*:

- Grapes are typically grown by small-scale, independent producers.
- Grapes are hand-picked from sustainable, organic, or biodynamic vineyards.
- Wine is fermented with no added yeast (i.e. native yeasts).
- No additives are included in fermentation (yeast nutrients, etc.).
- Little or no sulfites are added.

Think of it as wine unplugged. Natural wines are known for their funkier, gamier, yeastier characteristics and a cloudy appearance. They are often much less fruity and much more yeasty in their aroma profile than a typical wine, smelling almost like yoghurt or German Hefeweizen. Of course, some natural

wines are quite clean and fruity indeed. But if you taste a few, you'll discover most lean towards the sour, yeasty end of the spectrum." (***Wine Folly***)

The article was thought provoking and stimulated more than a little bit of esthetic musing. If you are looking for a champion of the "natural" wine movement, I am not your guy. I think the natural wine movement is aimed at wine geeks. Much as abstract art and atonal music have a narrow following and really only appeal to people who have a looser definition of form and function, the natural wine movement disdains form and function. By crushing grapes and letting nature take its course, proponents rejoice as though whatever the result, it is the way nature intended delicious wine to be. "Natural" wine makers often call themselves artisans but to what end? If wine making is truly artisanal, there has to be intervention and artistry. Michelangelo's "David" was a hunk of natural marble until Michelangelo intervened and liberated the sculpture with artistic chisel strokes and hours of polishing. Raw chicken is natural food for foxes. For humans, there has to be intervention to make chicken safe and palatable in the form of a recipe that includes high temperature. Wine making is all about intervention—from trellising and canopy management to choosing when to harvest to barrel selection and type of sealing closure.

"Natural" winemaking idealizes non-intervention in the wine making process. However, if a "natural" winemaker doesn't intervene with temperature controlled fermentation and judicious use of sulfites, all sorts of secondary fermentations and chemical reactions can result. In spite of the uncertain outcome, the "natural" winemakers extol the moral superiority of "nature" having taken its course.

I understand that overly processed commodities and refined foods often deprive us of valuable nutrients, vitamins, minerals and fiber. That said, I would never eat an olive fresh off the tree, an unroasted cashew, or drink unpasteurized milk. All of them require some processing steps (intervention) to make them edible and safe.

Recipes are interventions. Art is intervention. To me the *reducto ad absurdum* nature of the "natural" wine movement is like having a "natural" dental hygiene plan that forbids brushing your teeth.

I guess from a totally pragmatic view I fail to see why it is morally superior to make wine that tastes like oxidized mouse pee. What is the matter with choosing the right yeast? What is wrong with using education and skill to make delicious wine? Why not enhance the recipe with the spice of oak? Just as atonal music appeals to a small minority of music lovers, wine without melody, harmony and rhythm is just not memorable or soul stirring. In my opinion, wine makers should be aiming for high quality end products not some ideological paradigm.

Quality requires disciplined manufacturing processes not haphazard outcomes. If we are happy with random outcomes and undrinkable wine, why do we send winemakers to college to learn chemistry, biology and soil science? There should be no praise or reward for making a dreadful wine.

If wine makers make wine that is inconsistent, odd, overly acidic, oxidized, or just weird, economic natural selection will turn the “natural” movement into a dinosaur. Retailers and sommeliers are going to have a hell of a time if they don’t have some confidence that what they are recommending is actually good enough for repeat sales to the consuming public. Blathering on about how “natural” wine is superior when the customer finds it just the opposite will result in those same consumers going elsewhere for advice on wine. On a transactional basis, consumers will go where they find the best advice and value. For retailers like me, not knowing what you are supplying or supplying dreadful products does not build consumer confidence or repeat sales.

From a practical standpoint, it might be fun to do a blind tasting that includes conventionally made wines and “natural” wines. I freely admit I may be wrong and I can always learn something new. For right now, let the buyer beware.

Madison Valley Ranch additional wine dinner

I heard from our hosts for the February 9th wine dinner at the Madison Valley Ranch. It was a bit disappointing to hear that they could not accept more reservations for Saturday. I was immediately cheered though when they announced they would be adding an additional offering on the eve of the scheduled event. So, if you couldn’t make Saturday or missed your chance to reserve a spot, the Madison Valley Ranch will present an identical dinner on Friday, February 8. In my opinion, it is close enough to Valentine’s Day to still get romance points.

Our dinner will be prepared by Chef Matt Pease who stoked his creative energies to come up with a menu that includes locally sourced ingredients for a warm salad starter and courses that include lobster ravioli, juniper crusted venison, stuffed saddle of rabbit and a dessert reminiscent of a cheese plate. I came up with some delicious wines to pair and I would say, in all false modesty, it will be 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.

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. 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.

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, you saw how fast the first evening sold out.

Win free tickets to “Camelot”!!

Want to win free seats to see the Intermountain Opera Production of “Camelot”? The Wine Gallery is a program sponsor for the Intermountain Opera and in exchange for our ad, we receive a \$100 voucher for tickets to current productions. Since Jeanie and I are also season ticket holders, we traditionally put the voucher out for a free raffle.

We are all excited for this production because it will run for six showings over two weekends at the Ellen Theatre. The showings are February 8,9,10 and February 15, 16, and 17. The Sunday performances are 3 PM matinees.

Lerner and Loewe also wrote “Brigadoon”, “Paint Your Wagon” and “My Fair Lady” so get ready for good tunes. As a kid, we had a recording of the original “Camelot” production that starred Richard Burton as King Arthur, Canadian heart throb Robert Goulet as Sir Lancelot and Julie Andrews as Guinevere. The record got a lot of air time at the Badenoch abode and I'm pretty sure I know the words to all the songs. Jeanie and I went to see it at our same Ellen movie theater in 1968. (Yikes!—that's 50 years ago!!)

Anyway, Camelot is a Broadway classic with lots of great music, a good plot and memorable characters. If you win the raffle, you will get a \$100 voucher for any available seats. Since the highest priced seats are \$50, you would have a nice pair for the evening. However, you can use the voucher to buy any other seats as well or use it as a supplement for multiple purchases.

The rules are pretty easy: Send an e-mail to me at bozemanwinegallery@gmail.com stating why you should receive the voucher. The most creative entry will be the winner. We will announce the winner in the January 30th edition of the Grapevine.