

Indulgence

NWC&G's Wine Club—The Notes!

February 2020

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Value Wines

These wines are selected for their character and value. They are intended to enjoy now, and mostly are “food wines,” which means they will improve with the pairing of foods, though that is not necessary to enjoy them. In terms of character, what I seek is a wine that is true to its origins, so it is good representation of the character of varietal grown in a particular place. In that way, you can begin to build a wheelhouse of knowledge regarding what you like, or how a specific wine pairs with certain foods. This month, I focused on the season menu. We are eating more full-flavored meals with spice for warmth and richness for satisfaction, so these wines reflect the need for a wine that will rise to those foods.

2018 Sacha Lichine ‘La Poule Blanche’, this delicious Sauvignon has a weightier expression of this varietal probably due to the warmth of the Southern Rhone. It is smooth, and a softer acidity, which makes it a nice winter time white. Still refreshing with notes of tropical and stone fruits balanced by citrus and clean minerality, the wine is simply delicious and fruity. Sacha Lichine has remained largely true to his family traditions in wine making, but is not afraid of a new world style of forward fruit that makes this a very compelling wine. I like this with roasted chicken and a shaved brussel’s salad, throw some raisins in there and toasted hazelnuts and a bright Dijon vinaigrette....and then tell me what time to come to dinner 😊

2018 Domaine Felines Picpoul, while this is typically a summer time wine, on the lighter side, it also is a great aperitif that offers a palate cleanser before a meal all year round. Picpoul literally translates as “lip stinger,” but I think a better expression is to pucker up. It is crisp, tart, citrus with sharp minerality. It is a great wine for oysters (and will be featured at our Oyster Shucking Demo & Wine Tasting Friday February 7th with Fearless Fish Market) or salads, or on its own as a refreshing white that is simple but not uninteresting. The combination of citrus and green apple, herbs and a light salinity makes for a great wine. It is particularly good with fried calamari.

NV Underwood Rosé Bubbles, this is a vineyard that is increasing in size, but working hard to maintain their quality. These are fun bubbles for sipping on without food, but with its mix of watermelon and berries, with just a hint of tart cherry, this rosé would be great with some fried foods or even spicy Thai.

2017 DeMartino Sauvignon Blanc, Chilean Sauvignon Blanc is becoming more and more popular because of its playful style and ease of drinking, not to mention its friendly price point. This wine has all the character of SB with a little additional weight on the palate that makes it a nice white for winter time. All that abundant Chilean sunshine makes for a richer

style. This would be great with Asian foods with a little spice or without, sushi, salads, and lighter fare.

2016 Huber Zweigelt Rosé. Rosé is not just for summer. Sometimes we need a splash of something cold, crisp, and refreshing, even in the colder months, and this is just what the doctor ordered. Anyway, since Phil says early spring, we may as well start drinking rosé. 100% Zweigelt, which is just fun to say, a grape that is well known in Austrian wine making, and also makes a delicious rosé. There is a lot of honey suckle and berry on the nose, and berries onto the palate, with as oft supple texture from the lees on which the juice is fermented. For the price, this is a deal. The wine has layers of complex flavors, the berry is followed by citrus and herbs, with a touch of salinity. I want some Joes Jalapeño Chips, keeping it simple, but it can handle a meal, and would pair well with some roasted winter vegetables and a pan seared salmon.

2017 Flaco Tempranillo, This value red has a lot to offer that exceeds its price point. Flaco means “dude” in English. In the words of The Savvy Lush, Flaco “is the best goof-proof, budget-friendly wine out there. Spain is the largest producer of Tempranillo. These thick-skinned grapes are grown in regions that have hot days followed by cool evenings. This creates a concentrated, yet balanced flavor.” It is produced by Vinos Atlántico in the Denominación de Origen (DO) of Vinos de Madrid. Flaco shows the complexity of a serious wine for the price of a song! The luscious fruit and soft texture make it a perfect wine for everyday drinking. It is bright ruby red to the eye, and have floral and perfumed berry notes, with just a touch of fennel and white pepper. Plush, seamless and gently sweet, offering raspberry and cherry compote flavors that become more emphatic and spiced on the back half. The finish is supple but not without tannins, just enough to give it structure. Ideal with roasted fish, pork tenderloins, mushroom dishes, great with a big chunk of Manchego and some Serano Ham thinly sliced and smear of fig spread—classic!

2017 Vina Zorzal Graciano Navarra This is a favorite around here and not just because of its friendly price point. It is a delicious medium bodied red with a lot of character and a little spice. The grape is Graciano which is often blended in small amounts with Tempranillo in Rioja, but here it stands alone and produces a delicious fruit forward red with a lovely floral nose and bright acidity. Enjoy this with a risotto, or a pizza, or a paella if you are feeling ambitious...or just grab some mahon at our cheese counter.

2018 Sacha Lichine ‘Le Coq Rouge’ You read about Sasha above. He makes these terrific inexpensive and delicious wines, and this red will wow you with its flavor and character for the surprisingly low price point. I am going to say, this one is down right cheap! The wine has soft herbal aromatics on the nose, and a gentle though fruit forward style on the palate with Syrah and grenache it gives us strawberries and cherries with a little blueberry tartness on the finish along with a soft grapefruit pithe associated with the acidity. Have it with a simple French meal—roasted chicken, french fried potatoes and a salad.

2017 Passionate Wines Del Mono Tinto This Syrah Malbec blend from Tupangato is likely the most full bodied wine in the box and ideal for richer foods and winter meals. It approaches you from the glass with intense dark fruit aromatics, figgy and blackberry notes that translate for me

onto the palate. It has a lush full mouth feel and finishes with chocolate notes and a little tobacco. I like the fullness of it because it is balanced by structure. It fermented in concrete, so no oak, but still supple tannins from the skins. I would suggest steak with this one, or a burger, or a mushroom stew. In a pinch a chunk of gouda and a stick of salami.

2017 Legado del Moncayo Garnacha, this old vines 100% Garnacha (Grenache) from Campo de Borja, Spain, and area considered the Empire of Garnacha, and rightfully so. The high altitude, stony soils, and continental climate (characterized by extremes of conditions). The wine is naturally intense. It has a lot of minerality/wet stone on the nose, for me, along with red fruit aromas that translate onto the front palate. It is fruit driven, and very smooth, and there is a lovely full fruit feel and flavor on the midpalate, that is followed by dusty earth flavors that is accompanied by soft tannin texture. Pair this one with a vegetable stew, chili, or something spicy. It is full flavored and can handle a lot of flavor, but it would be great with a hunk of gouda and some salami with a smear of fig jam or a caramelized onion spread.

Select Wines

The Select Wines are chosen for their quality, integrity, and age worthy character. These are wines that retail between \$20-\$45. I am still focused on wines that will be true to the character of their origin, as that is a pervasive aspect of my approach to wine. I enjoy when a wine surprises me, but I respect a wine that is true to its origins, traditions, and varietal character. That said, I celebrate innovation, too. It is this complexity that is available at this level of quality. The wines are drinkable now, but can, particularly the reds, lay down for a time and will reward your patience. Because of this, 12 packs include two bottles of each wine, so you can see how they evolve as they age.

For February, I focused on the Loire, so that in addition to honing your skills in identifying your own wine preferences, you can get a sense of the Loire more generally. I find the wines powerful in flavor, delicate and elegant in style with a certain gentle modest refinement that is welcoming. They are some of the very best values in the market, and some of my favorite go to wines, that rarely disappoint me.

I have learned so much from Ed and Barbara Addis, the owners of Wine Traditions, who import exclusively organic French wines—that never disappoint. Here are their notes on the Loire:

A journey of a thousand miles always begins with a single step. - Lao Tzu

The Loire River runs a course of 1,000 kilometers. This grandest of French rivers rises in the volcanic Auvergne mountains at 1551 meters in the village of Mont Gerbier de Jonc. It takes its course flowing north through the center of France and then westward to the city of Nantes, where it empties into the Atlantic Ocean. Along its way, the Loire River passes through thirteen departments and together with its tributaries, provides the setting for seventy-three different appellations. These seventy-three appellations fall within five viticultural regions: Auvergne, Centre-Loire, Touraine, Anjou-Saumur and Nantais.

The most concentrated areas of wine production are found in these last three regions all situated on the upper half of the river and centered around the towns of Tours, Angers and Nantes.

The Auvergne mountains give birth to the Loire and present a rugged landscape quite different from the bucolic countryside of the upper Loire between Blois and Angers. The Auvergne vineyards divide into four appellations : Côtes du Forez, Côtes Roannaise, Côtes d'Auvergne and Saint Pourçain. Today they are little known beyond their borders but wine has been made there for over a thousand years and historically they enjoyed widespread recognition. The vineyards of Saint Pourçain were among the most favored in the Middle Ages, rivaling those of Beaune and Chablis and gracing the tables of the Royal Court and the Papacy at Avignon. The overall area under vine is much smaller today than it was centuries ago. Côtes Roannaise is the smallest with 170 hectares of vines and Saint Pourçain is the largest with 600. All four taken together would be half the size of the Sancerre vineyards.

The Auvergne mountains are challenging to the viticulteur from the standpoint of topography and climate. The few vineyards that exist today are planted in the most favorable micro-climates. When the wines are well made they are extremely expressive and flavorful and give the impression of being rich in minerals and restorative, much like some of the "eaux de source" from the region.

The vineyards of Centre-Loire include the appellations of Sancerre, Pouilly-Fumé, Pouilly-sur-Loire, Coteaux du Giennois, Menetou Salon, Quincy, Reuilly and Chateaumeillant. This is the land of Sauvignon Blanc; only the appellation of Pouilly sur Loire produces wine from a different white grape, Chasselas. The Centre-Loire has the city of Bourges at its center. Historically it is a mercantile city, and from where originates the word "bourgeois."

The vineyards of the Touraine extend in all directions from the town of Tours and are organized into thirteen appellations. Additionally, to the north of Tours is the Vignoble du Loir where the appellations of Jasnières, Coteaux du Loir and Coteaux du Vendomois straddle the Loir River (what's an "e" among rivers?).

The vineyards are spread along the Loire's many small tributaries such as the Cher, Indre and Vienne on the south side and the Cisse and Brenne on the north. These smaller river valleys render landscapes of human scale and infinite variety, perfectly mirrored by the wines. Wines labeled as *Touraine* can be produced from a long list of grape types. The authorized white grapes include Chenin Blanc, Sauvignon Blanc, Chardonnay, Romorantin and Arbois; the red grapes include Cabernet Franc, Cabernet Sauvignon, Gamay, Cot (Malbec), Pinot Noir, and Pinot Meunier. Four sub-appellations of Touraine, each spread about a particular village and named for that village, such as Touraine-Amboise, produce wines with a stricter set of mandates from the I.N.A.O. The wines of Touraine bring to mind the old Arlo Guthrie tune, "You can get anything you want at Alice's Restaurant...."

The Touraine is followed down river by the wine regions of Saumur and Anjou. The vineyards here extend for many kilometers and are found primarily on the southern side of the river. Saumur is well known for its sparkling wine made primarily from Chenin Blanc. The natural and manmade chalk caves are like those in Champagne and provide the perfect repository for the

maturing of the sparkling wine bottles. The separate appellation of Saumur-Champigny produces Cabernet Franc along the lines of Chinon and Bourgueil.

The Pays Nantais has its viticultural roots in the Roman era during which its proximity to the Atlantic Ocean provided commercial advantage to the region. However, invasions and political instability during the middle ages hindered the vineyards from flourishing. Not until the 17th century did the vineyards begin to prosper and expand thanks to the Dutch who used Nantais white wine to make Eau de Vie. The main grape of the area is the white wine grape Melon de Bourgogne, called locally Muscadet. Muscadet was widely planted in the early 18th century after the severe frost of 1709 wiped out most of the Nantais vineyards and showed Muscadet to be one of the only varieties to withstand the cold. Sharing the same viticultural zone as Muscadet in the Pays Nantais is the VDQS appellation Gros Plant which produces wine from the grape type, Folle Blanche.

Here are Ed & Barbara's wine notes for their wines...I added some pairing suggestions.

NV Pas Saint Martin 'La Vie en Rose' Methode Ancestrale. La Vie en Rose is produced in the "Methode Ancestrale". This method pre-dates the "Methode Champenoise" and employs one interrupted fermentation rather than an induced second fermentation. Centuries ago fermentation would stop naturally or at least retard due to the cooling temperatures in the late fall and winter. The warmer temperatures of spring would reenergize and recommence the fermentation. The "Methode Ancestrale" takes advantage of this natural cycle by taking the partially fermented juice and bottling it in the spring where it finishes its fermentation. Laurent Charrier makes this sparkling wine from Grolleau Noir that is grown in his Anjou vineyard. Grolleau Noir is a centuries old grape type native to the Loire and one that is used primarily in Rosé d'Anjou.

2018 Bel Air Pouilly Fumé. The appellation Pouilly Fumé takes its name from both the main village of the area, Pouilly Sur Loire, and the main grape variety, Blanc Fumé, the local name for Sauvignon Blanc. It is called Blanc Fumé because in these vineyards the Sauvignon Blanc forms a grey or smokey colored bloom on the grape skin at maturity. Additionally the Sauvignon Blanc in Pouilly Fumé often exhibits an aroma of gunflint (pierre à fusil).

The Domaine de Bel Air in Pouilly Fumé is a family estate that dates back to the 19th century. It is now run by Gérard Mauroy and his two children, the eighth generation to oversee the domaine. Together they farm 12 hectares according to the principles of "lutte raisonnée or minimal intervention. Grass is planted between the rows and grape bunches are thinned during the growing season in order to temper the vigor of the Sauvignon Blanc. Their vineyards are well situated on hillsides that overlook the Loire and have good exposure to the sun. The soil types found in their different parcels correspond well with the three main types found in Pouilly Fumé, namely marnes kimmeridgiennes, argilo-calcaire called locally caillotes and sables calcaires. Vinification is carried out in temperature controlled stainless steel tanks after the grapes have been very gently pressed. The wine rests "sur lie" until bottling in April. In this way, the domaine retains the freshness and typicity of their Blanc Fumé. While continuing healthish, I enjoyed this most recently with a salad compiled of arugula, romaine, french endive,

raisons, marcona almonds and pan seared cod. Get on the Fearless Fish Market's coop & make this...the combination was fantastic.

2017 Christophe Thorigny Vouvray Sec. The appellation of Vouvray is found on the right bank of the Loire River, just upstream from the city of Tours. The vineyards trace back their history to the year 372 when Saint Martin, Bishop of Tours, planted vines on the right bank of the river at the monastery of Marmoutier. The appellation's only sanctioned grape is Chenin Blanc, known locally as the Pineau de la Loire. Vouvray wines show the remarkable versatility of this grape with wines that can be still or sparkling and range from dry to sweet.

Christophe Thorigny farms 10.5 hectares in the village of Parçay-Meslay, one of the eight villages included in the Vouvray appellation. His family has owned vineyards in the village for four generations and the domaine reached its present size in 1997. Christophe has followed the previous generations by selling the largest part of his production to local negociants while slowly building a client base for his estate bottled wine. Despite this fact, his grandfather dug a spacious cave into the limestone hillside next to their domaine where they mature their sparkling wine. Christophe farms according to the principle of "lutte raisonnée" or minimal intervention and keeps his yields low by severe pruning throughout the growing season. The vineyard is on a plateau with soils of chalky clay and flinty clay covering a thick layer of limestone known as "tuffeau". Vinification is carried out in temperature controlled stainless steel tanks with different parcels being vinified separately. I like this wine with a wide variety of dishes which is the best part of Chenin Blanc, its flexibility with food, but most recently I had it at the pop up noodle bar, Yagi, and the combination was perfect!

2018 Pas Saint Martin Saumur Rouge The Saumur Rouge "Pierres Frites" is produced from Cabernet Franc that is grown in siliceous-limestone soils. The grapes are de-stemmed and then fermented in stainless steel vats. The maceration lasts about ten days and the fermentation temperature is controlled. The objective is to produce an expressive wine not burdened by harsh tannins. Enjoy this with a salad of shaved brussels and diced apples with hazelnuts and roasted chicken thighs with lots of thyme and salt and pepper.

2017 Grosbot Barbara Saint Pourçain Rouge The appellation of Saint-Pourçain is situated in the center of France, in the Allier department and is considered part of the Centre-Loire. This region is better known to wine professionals for its forests of prized oak trees used in barrel production than for its wines. The appellation, ranging approximately 5 kilometers in width and 30 kilometers in length, spreads throughout 19 communes with vineyards planted on a series of hillsides to the west of the Allier River. The history of vineyards in this area dates back to before the Romans, when the Phoenicians settled here and planted vines. In fact, they claimed to have civilized the barbarians with wine. During the 13th and 14th centuries the wines of Saint-Pourçain were highly esteemed. They traveled up to Paris via the Allier and Loire rivers and were favored by Popes, royalty and the aristocracy alike. By the end of the 18th century the vineyards of Saint-Pourçain covered more than 8,000 hectares. Today the vineyards total 600 hectares. The appellation received AOC status in 2009.

Denis Barbara farms several separate parcels of land totaling 8 hectares. Two thirds of his production is in red wine. He works alone except for the harvest and does much of the vineyard

work by hand. He keeps his yields very low by bud pruning “ebourgeonnage” in the spring and green harvesting in the summer after “veraison”. He cultivates grasses between all the rows and does not use insecticides, pesticides or chemical fertilizer in his vineyards. All of his wines are fermented with indigenous yeasts.

The cuvée “Chambre D’Edouard” is produced from two parcels, both located just south of the village of Saint Pourçain; “Montord”, which has a very chalky soil, and “La Burelle” which has a richer clay/limestone soil. Denis harvests as late as possible, sometimes a month after his neighbors. After harvest, the Pinot Noir grapes are destemmed and rest in a chilled tank for up to 8 days. This type of pre-fermentation maceration is often seen in the production of white wines and allows Denis to have a slow start to the fermentation. Once the tanks warm up and fermentation begins, the maceration continues for about thirty days with very gentle methods of extraction being employed daily. The prolonged maceration enriches the wine and creates a somewhat reductive state. M. Barbara is employing techniques designed to bring out in his wine the fresh fruit characteristics of his grapes. This is an elegant beautiful wine that would be fine on its own, but loves food, so pair it with lighter meats, like pan seared pork chops!

2018 Hautes Noelles Gamay This is one wine that does not come from Wine Traditions, alas, with small producers, we are at times forced to make other decisions. I wanted you to be able to try all the main varietals that compile this wonderful region, and so I included this beautiful Gamay. It is a particularly interesting one, as it is quite different for me by comparison to its Beaujolais cousins. There is a different nose, one that is more earthy and herbal and less fruity and banana aromas. It has all that lush fruit on the mid palate, just like a Beaujolais, but it is a little richer. And the long finish leaves a soft note of herbs and salt that makes me want to bite into a delicious piece of my caramelized leek quiche (conveniently available for purchase at the shop!).

Collector Wines

These wines are selected also for quality, integrity, and age worthiness, but also for their particularly special characteristics, both in terms of their taste and their intrinsic value that is a result of craftsmanship, innovation, artistry, and availability. The wines retail for \$40-\$75. You need not be a collector, per se, to enjoy this level of quality; and, yes, I know your question about whether or not one can really tell the difference between the price points that separate these levels of wine. My response to this concern is complicated, but yes, is my short answer. I work hard to select wines that will indeed reflect a quality to value relation that will suggest that the difference is there. We can enjoy wines at all price points, as is appropriate to the moment, but these wines are truly remarkable and worth splurging on when life allows. In particular, this is a good choice for those of you who imbibe less frequently, you should really enjoy when you do! (Also, feel free to move between the levels, happy to be flexible)

2014 Tyler Dierberg Pinot Noir “Proprietor and winemaker Justin Willett worked as an assistant to Joe Davis at Arcadian after attending University of Pacific on a golf scholarship. In

2005, he started his own label specializing in Pinot Noir and Chardonnay sourced from vineyards in Santa Barbara County.

Justin's inspiration has come from local winemakers and European producers such as Roulot, Bonneau du Martray, Dujac, Bachelet and Rousseau. He only works with vineyards that allow him to play an active role in the vineyard. One example is old vine Pinot Noir and Chardonnay from Sanford & Benedict Vineyard.

The Tyler wines are vinified from grapes that tend to be picked earlier than most with the aim of achieving bright aromatics and fresh flavors. A modest level of oak is used. He prefers wines with minerality, bright acidity, and food-friendliness. A second label, Lieu Dit, features wines produced with no oak.” (Pinotfile.com)

“Few of California’s young winemakers possess the regional mastery that is illustrated by the work of Justin Willett, of Tyler winery. A son of Santa Barbara, Justin began Tyler in 2005 with eight barrels tucked away in the corner of Arcadian Winery, where he honed his approach to Chardonnay and Pinot Noir as assistant winemaker. Justin – a champion of old vines – has since engaged the famed historic vineyards of Santa Barbara, including the region-defining Sanford & Benedict, in the Sta. Rita Hills, and more recently, Bien Nacido, in the Santa Maria Valley. He is looking forward, too: just last year, Justin began planting a Sta. Rita Hills estate vineyard – a forty-five acre property, with some twenty-six acres of Chardonnay and Pinot Noir.

Here, in a winegrowing region defined by its transverse ranges and valleys, where hills glitter with marine sediment and harbor the ocean’s winds, Justin makes wines of clarity and poise. His wines lead with structure and persistence; they evoke confidence, focus, and vibrancy. Justin is the first to tell you that these are virtues of terroir: they are not created in the cellar, but delicately drawn forth.

All grapes – both Pinot Noir and Chardonnay – are handpicked at night, before being further sorted by hand at the winery. Pinot Noir is evaluated for stem-inclusion, and then the cold fruit is soaked for three to five days, until a native yeast fermentation begins. Both punch-downs and pump-overs are implemented; maceration often lasts some two weeks before the wine is pressed to tank and then barrel for élevage. The use of new oak varies by vineyard, vine age, and vintage, however most barrels used are neutral. After a year in barrel, the wine is racked, blended, and returned to barrel before being bottled unfiltered and unfiltered.” Skurnik

I love Justin’s wine because the pinots are elegant and understated with gentle nuanced flavors of dark cherry, fennel, and a little mushroom. He is truly talented. I suggest pairing this one with a roasted duck breast with an au poivre sauce and some slow roasted potatoes...and prepare to swoon.

2017 Keenan Spring Mountain Chardonnay

TASTING NOTES from the Wine Maker

Keenan's 2017 Chardonnay was hand harvested, de-stemmed, then gently pressed. The juice was fermented and aged in French and American oak barrels. The wine was left on the lees and the barrels were stirred weekly. No secondary, or malolactic fermentation was carried out, leading to the crisp, citrus character of this wine. The wine was bottled after approximately seven months of aging in the cellar.

The finished wine shows citrus, ripe pear and green apple in the nose. Hints of lush white peach are noticed as the wine opens up. The sur-lie aging has added richness and complexity, and a touch of toasty oak returns on the finish. Like all of Keenan's wines, this Chardonnay is a food worthy wine whose crisp acidity and medium body will accompany a wide variety of food cuisine.

REVIEWS

Robert M. Parker, Jr.'s, *The Wine Advocate*, January, 2019

91 Points: "The 2017 Chardonnay gives fragrant jasmine, honeysuckle, white peaches and clotted cream on the nose with an almond croissant and beeswax undercurrent. The palate is medium-bodied, elegant, fresh and satiny textured with a long and fragrant finish."