

Society of Medical Friends of Wine



NEWSLETTER

AUGUST 2020

A Letter from the President

August 9, 2020

Dear Members,

I hope that you and your families are doing well in these challenging times.

COVID-19 has had significant negative effects on non-profit organizations. Their missions have been impeded, numerous events have had to be canceled, budgets have been curtailed and employees furloughed. Unfortunately, the Society of Medical Friends of Wine has not been immune to the repercussions of the pandemic. We've had to postpone multiple events. Although we had 68 members in 2019, only 43 have rejoined so far this year.

Our membership dues help to cover the costs of the society, which include insurance, taxes, accountant fees, website charges, our Executive Secretary's salary, etc. In addition to dues, we have for many years relied upon donations in order to be able to meet all of our expenses. With a dwindling membership, donations have become more important than ever. I'd like to recognize all those who have made generous contributions to the society in 2020:

\$500 or more

Jim Gallagher

\$250 - \$499

Elizabeth Kass

\$100 - \$249

Anonymous 1

Anonymous 2
Bob & Marion Blumberg
Jack McElroy
David Schwartz
John Traylor

Up to \$99
Robert Dale
James Shapiro

Donations to date have totaled \$1,579 and I'm grateful to all who have contributed. As mentioned in our June newsletter, we secured a forgivable Paycheck Protection Program loan, which has assisted with meeting some of our current expenses. However, additional donations would be most welcome to help with budgetary shortfalls.

Since 1939, the Society of Medical Friends of Wine has pursued its mission of education about the health aspects of moderate consumption of wine. Despite the difficulties posed by COVID-19, we will adapt and persevere. On August 8, we had our first virtual wine tasting of highly rated Dutton-Goldfield wines, which I found very enjoyable and interesting. We expect to hold an outdoor dinner at Poetic Moon on September 29, providing there are no new regulations prohibiting such an event between now and then. The Executive Committee will be making additional event plans; watch for announcements in the near future.

Please stay well and I'll look forward to seeing you when we're able to get together!

Warm regards,

Elizabeth Kass, MD

Report of the Inaugural Society Virtual Wine Tasting by Jim Gallagher Ph.D

Our Executive Board, confronted by the social restrictions imposed as a result of the Covid-19 virus, explored a number of options that would provide interest to our members and sustain us during this period. Almost immediately it was agreed that the virtual avenue could be promising. Our survey seeking input from the membership disclosed the greatest interest in a Virtual event was a wine tasting. We also acknowledged that it would be a great learning experience to produce. Our first virtual interaction was an Executive Board meeting which, thanks greatly to our Executive Secretary, Clair Keiser, was a success. We were able to conduct necessary business as well as to set about to explore how we could put together an attractive event.

Bob Blumberg provided a clear statement of our goals. Our survey indicated that among potential events, there was a preference for a wine tasting. It was agreed upon and we set off to

plan a virtual wine tasting. The immediate concerns for this project included the price of wines and how to access and distribute them.

Wineries are doing “virtual tastings”, selling and shipping from the wineries. In general, this option tended to be very expensive unless only one wine was to be tasted. The venues tended to be one-way, lacking participation of attendees. In other words, you might be able to taste wine, then listen to winery representative(s) discuss the characteristics. Several retail stores were also offering virtual tastings. In this case, somehow, they were offering smaller pours, an interesting option in that the expense for wine was reduced. I’m not sure if attendees could participate in the discussion.

The above venues did provide some guidelines as to how to go about setting up a Virtual Wine Tasting. A survey of vintners with current wines available that were of excellent quality, moderately priced, and reflected sufficient differences among a single varietal and vintage, led to **Dutton-Goldfield’s** current portfolio.

Dutton-Goldfield is a partnership between Steve Dutton (of Dutton Ranch, and vineyardist) and Dan Goldfield (winemaker). Their partnership was formed in 1998 and they have been making excellent wines ever since. We served three Dutton-Goldfield wines at our Poggio Dinner last year. All three, a 2016 Chardonnay from Walker Hill, and two Pinot Noirs, Docker Hill, and McDougall, were well received. I have been attracted to this producer by their reliable quality and their moderate alcohol, with wines usually around 13.5% alcohol. The winery is located on the corner of highway 116 and Graton Road, just north of Sebastopol.

Dutton Ranch Vineyards

Dutton Ranch consists of 80 small vineyards; wine from some of the vineyards are produced as single vineyards by the Dutton-Goldfield vintner partnership. On the label, Dutton-Ranch is used in front of the specific vineyard to indicate both the source of grapes and level of management. Contracts also exist to purchase grapes from other properties. Wine made from properties outside of Dutton Ranch are identified by the vineyard name and the AVA. Dutton-Goldfield sources grapes from at least five different AVAs (see map below).

For our tasting of Pinot Noir, we compared three different AVAs—Marin, Fort Ross-Seaview, and the Russian River Valley (RRV). The Russian River Valley Appellation is the oldest, dating back to 1983. Prior to the granting of the RRV, the appellation was simply “Sonoma

Valley". In 2005, RRV was expanded to its current state and is the largest sub-appellation, marked by a cooler climate resulting mostly from summer fog pattern extending from the Petaluma Gap.



The Fort Ross-Seaview appellation was granted in 2011. The region boasts of a history dating back to 1817 when Russian colonists planted a vineyard near Fort Ross. The area is distinguished by its altitude, which varies from 800-1500 feet above sea level, and its proximity to the sea. The altitude provides greater sunshine exposure during the growing season, being above the typical fog level covering much of the adjacent RRV.

The Marin appellation is the newest of the trio we tasted and has the fewest wine grape vineyards. The AVA was granted in December 2017. The characteristic most consistently used to describe wines grown within this appellation is the “bright fruit” odors and flavors, excellent acid levels, and lower alcohol levels when fully ripened. The “bright fruit” characteristic was noted by several of our participants at Saturday’s (8/8/20) Virtual Tasting.

Below are my notes from the tasting. We first tasted and discussed the Walker Hill Chardonnay:

Dutton-Goldfield Walker Hill Chardonnay 2017. The wine showed a golden hue that reflected a brilliant sheen; and emitted an intense bouquet of green apples, pear, anise, light peach, and

vanilla toast; the body was medium-big, super rich fruit flavors on the palate, having an excellent acid balance; and superb finish: rich, very long, near succulent aftertaste (13.5%alc).

Participants were in general agreement. A question was raised of possible above threshold of residual sugar. At the time, I didn't think it was the case, although the power of the fruit was atypical, hence the question was excellent. Upon subsequent inquiry, the management of Dutton-Goldfield assured me that there was no residual sugar in the wine. When asked the general regard for the wine, most participants offered a strong sentiment for the Walker Hill as an extraordinarily fine Chardonnay.



After the Chardonnay discussion ended, we tasted the three Pinot Noirs together so that they might be compared in terms of quality as well as afford us a study of how the appellation characteristics might delineate a common varietal made by the same winemaker, while at the same time recognizing that there were a number of other variables not controlled, such as clones, harvest dates, vinification variance.

My notes:

Devil's Gulch Pinot Noir (Marin) 2017: The Devil's Gulch showed the lightest color of the three pinots. It had a medium red hue with a lighter purple edge (none of the wines were inky); its bouquet was a rich strawberry, raspberry, (indeed brighter, less saturated). With light earth and

hints of forest floor and baking spices; it showed a medium-light body, with excellent fruit, good acid balance; and an excellent finish with a long, lush, and lingering aftertaste, 13.5% alc.

Freestone Hill Pinot Noir. (Dutton Ranch RRV) 2017: Medium dark hue with a purple edge; the bouquet showed rich strawberry, blackberry, some black tea notes, a light spice, and medium toast; a medium body providing a generous mouth feel, superb fruit, good acid balance indicating a solid structure; superb finish marked by a rich, long, luscious aftertaste, a special Pinot Noir, highly accessible, yet promising a lengthy future. 13.5%alc.

McDougal Pinot Noir.(Fort Ross-Seaview) 2017: Medium red, with a light purple edge; the bouquet showed cherry, strawberry, hints of baking spices and toast underscoring and highlighting those fruit flavors on the palate; good acid balance with a little more tannic structure than the other pinots, excellent finish: rich, long, lush aftertaste, altogether promising a very good future. 13.5%alc.

Editor's note: Much thanks to Jim for all of the work he put into identifying the wines for the tasting and for leading the discussion. Jim obtained from the winery a special 20% discount on the wines for those participating in the event, and we are happy to report this opportunity has been extended to all members until the end of this month. I loved the wines and just ordered more, and received notice they will be delivered the next day!

Below is the link to the Dutton-Goldfield webpage for Pinot Noir. Copy and paste the address into your browser. To order the Chardonnay look to the top of the page and select "Shop", then click the Chardonnay link. You may have to copy/cut and paste the below address.

<https://shop.duttongoldfield.com/Shop/Current-Releases/Single-Vineyard-Pinot-Noir>

When ready to check out, enter the Code MFW for your discount.



FROM THE SCIENTIFIC LITERATURE

A Review by Dan Bikle, M.D., Ph.D.

Resveratrol: better bones?

A review of Wong RHX, Zaw JJT, Xian CJ, Howe PRC. Regular supplementation with resveratrol improves bone mineral density in postmenopausal women: a randomized, placebo-controlled trial. J Bone Min Res June 21, 2020 (in press)

Resveratrol, famed for its alleged cardiovascular protective effects, as in the French paradox, is being touted as beneficial for many other chronic diseases. Animal studies have suggested that in ovariectomized rodents resveratrol helps restore and/or maintain bone, thought to be due to its estrogenic like actions and/or antioxidant properties. To test this possibility in humans, Wong and colleagues took advantage of a study in Australia called Resveratrol and Healthy Aging in Women (RESHAW) in which postmenopausal women were enrolled in a 2 year cross over study in which one group received 75mg resveratrol bid for the first year, then switched to placebo for the second year, whereas the second group did the reverse—placebo for year one, resveratrol for year two. The overall study examined effects on cognition, cerebrovascular function, and cardiometabolic markers in addition to bone health, the subject of this publication.

The subjects ranged in age from 45-85 (mean age 65) and at least 12mo past last menses (mean duration 15 yrs). The groups were evenly divided with 66 in group 1 and 63 in group 2. Compliance was 95%. Bone mineral density (BMD) at the lumbar spine (LS) and hip (total and neck) were assessed at baseline and after each year. At baseline 50 participants were stated to have normal BMD, 72 were osteopenic (T scores between -2.4 and -1), with 6 being osteoporotic (T score <2.4). Four participants were receiving an antiresorptive (denosumab) presumably for osteoporosis throughout the study. Overall the FRAX scores (an assessment of 10 year fracture risk based on age, comorbid conditions, drugs, BMD if available) showed low risk of either major osteoporotic fractures or hip fractures. Most of the participants were not taking either calcium or vitamin D supplements, but 18 were taking vitamin D only, 2 calcium only, and 13 both vitamin D and calcium.

Results: Those on resveratrol showed a small but significant increase in BMD in both LS ($0.016 \pm 0.003 \text{ g/cm}^2$) and hip ($0.005 \pm 0.002 \text{ g/cm}^2$) vs placebo with improvement in their FRAX scores. That said, overall BMD dropped over the 2-year period from baseline in both groups. For whatever reason those who received placebo during the first year then resveratrol for the second year ended up with less bone loss than the group receiving resveratrol during the first year and placebo the second year. Those taking vitamin D and calcium supplements appeared to have a greater response to resveratrol than those who did not, but the numbers are small, and no statistics were provided.

Discussion: This is a small study, and duration of treatment is short. The take home message is resveratrol is not going to replace currently available forms of treatment for osteoporosis. What does this have to do with the interests of our group? Red wine contains from 0.4-2mg/L resveratrol. So, if one wants to take advantage of these results with resveratrol with respect to bone health, even drinking the most resveratrol enriched red wine would require approximately 80 liters a day. This is probably more than even the most enthusiastic wine drinker could handle, and unfortunately the alcohol in the wine would kill the bone forming cells trying to respond to the resveratrol (Bikle et al, 1985 Ann Int Med 103:42-48). So, enjoy the wine, but don't expect your bones to benefit

The Language of Selling Wine

by Robert Blumberg, M.D.

Cellar Master and Editor, Society of Medical Friends of Wine

One positive aspect of the current COVID-19 situation is that people have time to reach out to friends of the past to check in and to reestablish ties. I recently got a call from Bruce Neyers, an old friend from my early days of wine exploration. Many years ago, we tasted and dined together, taught wine classes together, and then ultimately went our separate paths—me into Medicine and Bruce into wine marketing and then vineyard and winery ownership. It was a great trip down memory lane, and Bruce has a wonderful recall of people and events important in the California wine world over the past 40 years. I hope to have him as a guest speaker at one of our dinners when we as a Society are back in the event hosting mode.

Bruce added my name to his periodic newsletter from his winery, and I just received my first copy where he introduces a current release of a Syrah by talking about a memorable dinner in France many years ago with one of the most celebrated vintners from Cote Rote. Tasting these great wines left him with a yearning for and devotion to Rhone style wines. He does not attempt to equate his wine with such a great Rhone, but describes it as an ongoing effort to translate his passion for the style into the best effort he can make to introduce his American clientele to a wine that he loves. No critic points, no multi-adjective description of nose and palate, just a wine introduced by a great story.

Bruce's words made me think of the prose of some wine writer legends who might also have been in the business of selling wine. Names like Gerald Asher, Frank Schoonmaker, Alexis Lichine, Michael Broadbent, and Kermit Lynch come to mind. They usually had delightful tales of travel, adventure, and discovery accompanied by descriptions of wines that could set your palate watering. There were no number scores, no outlandish claims, and no repetitive hyperbole. Just great stories behind great wine.

Fast forward to today, and the language of selling wine seems so different. Technology has made communication easy and cheap, so if you are like me, you are inundated with daily e mails from wine merchants selling their wares, and using quotes and scores--especially scores--from a myriad of wine writers to help them do so. Thousands and thousands of words spilling out daily to entice you to buy wine. This can create a problem. There's a risk of overkill and over sale. There's a great risk of being repetitive and predictable, despite the desire to be unique. This is turn has led to a logarithmic growth in the number of adjectives used to describe wines, all in the hope of finding something no one else has yet come up with.

It occurred to me that a brief guide to understanding today's wine selling language might prove useful, or at least provide a chuckle or two.

I am including quotes from a number of respectable sources, many of whom I have done business with, and will continue to do so. They in turn quote dozens of critics. The cheap cost of communication and advertising helps the bottom line when it comes to trying to earn a profit in a difficult business. Cheapening the quality of the communication is another matter. Most likely it does facilitate sales, otherwise it would not be done so frequently, but it does make me yearn all the more for the wine-writer legends of yore.

These are selected quotes that serve the purpose; I could just as easily have selected from dozens of other sources as well.

OUR BEST WINE EVER

“The best vintage yet of our all-time bestselling wine “

“As great as this wine has been in the past, this 2016 vintage takes it to another level

“Although not yet reviewed, the winery feels their current release is their finest, richest, longest and most complete yet.

“Although 2017 was a difficult year, Chateau X has succeeded brilliantly in an effort that may even surpass their celebrated 2016.”

Translation: **“the wine I have available to sell you today is the best wine ever”**. If I don't have a wine available to sell, it doesn't matter how good it was. And if I play down the wine I have to sell, I'm stuck with it.

RICHER AND RIPER

“A prior iteration earned 98 points and was the top wine in its category in a prestigious wine competition. But this one is even richer and riper.”

“Even bigger, richer, and more impressive than their last Howell Mountain Cabernet.”

Translation: **“Richer and riper sounds better than high alcohol”**. Time after time I read “bigger, richer, riper” to imply that a wine is better than another. The real translation is the grapes came in at a higher sugar level and produced a more alcoholic wine. For some this may be the exact taste and style they like, and thus will agree that the riper and richer the better. But a blanket statement implying higher quality for these attributes ignores overall balance in the wine and the many palates that do not favor this style.

“Fragrances of vanilla, smoke, and violet amplify bold blackberry and plum in this bombastic red wine. It's a rich, densely textured wine with a lingering finish marked by Bourbon and coffee notes. Appealing already for its flash, it should gain elegance from 2021 and improve through 2040.

Translation: **“Let’s find a wider audience for this baby”**. In some ways this is a continuation of our prior theme. At first glance, it is just a portrayal of a huge wine for those who like that style. But by suggesting that a bombastic wine in 2019 is somehow going to become more elegant in 2 years, I can expand the market for it. And the fact it will continue to improve for another 20 years is another way of saying, **“if you don’t like this wine now, you just need to let it age longer until you do like it, or at least until have forgotten where you bought it.”**

A PLETHORA OF ADJECTIVES

“It sashays out of the glass with gregarious scents of Morello cherries, lilacs, chocolate box and potpourri with a core of Black Forest cake, blueberry crumble, fragrant soil, and menthol”.

Translation: **“Boy, I sure can write”**. Your first thoughts may be “this critic must have a super sensitive nose”, and indeed he or she may. All the more likely is he or she has an excellent dictionary to help find words others may not have thought of to include in wine descriptions.

What also gets me is the juxtaposition of smells and tastes that seem unlikely to really occur together.

“Fragrant violets cradled in a cappuccino scented vessel tinged with volcanic ash” would be one example. And sometimes the non-sequiturs go to the description of the wine’s taste.

“The bright acidity conveys an almost weightless mouthfeel to this seamless, rich, extremely concentrated wine.”

Translation: **“Let’s see what prose I can get by with”**. Wow, violets and ash. Weightless and concentrated at the same time. Quite a feat.

NUMBERS, NOTHING BUT NUMBERS

“A 98-point wine”

Translation: **“Buy, Buy, Buy”**

Probably nothing gets me riled up more these days as I read sales pitches for wine than the proliferation of numerical scores. Previously I have written in this newsletter that the development of a 100-point judging scale was a moment of marketing genius. Suddenly one did not have to be an expert to purchase wine; you just needed to look at and compare scores. In as much as this removed intimidation and opened the world of wine to many more people, scoring was a good thing. At the risk of provoking controversy, **I will state it has outlived its validity and its usefulness.**

There are so many critics and publications out there these days that virtually every wine being sold has received at least a 90-point score from someone. I have seen articles in major wine magazines touting “1000’s of bottles rated 90 and better”. And merchants selling wines will quote the highest score they can find in their ads. We’re even seeing scores published for wines still in barrel, more than a year away from final assemblage and bottling. Wines may well be better today than 20 years ago, but the abundance of high scores points more to “point inflation” than just better wines. The 100-point scale is losing its utility with too many wines clustered at the top. No ad said it better than this one, **“Keep in mind, the 1985 Groth Cabernet Reserve was the very first American wine Robert Parker gave a perfect 100-point score...and both the 2015 and 2016 are even better (and higher rated!).** What did they get—105, 106 points???

So why are there so many high scores? Let’s assume that most, though not all, critics are writing honestly and not receiving kickbacks or benefits for their scores. The higher the scores, the more likely a critic will be quoted, both by wineries and merchants, and the more often you have your name quoted, the more visible and important (and successful) you become. No one goes around quoting someone’s 85-point review. A 99-point review is going to get a lot of press. And press is what it is all about.

My biggest gripe over quoting point scores is that it promotes laziness on the part of the merchants and takes them off the hook for responsibility about selling the wine. It is so much easier to sell a wine by its points than it is to write a meaningful comment and description. And when someone says “I didn’t like that wine you sold me” it’s easy to respond, or “I’m sorry, but you know Wine Spectator gave it a 99”.

And do be careful when you are seeing scores that they actually refer to the wine being sold. Without difficulty I came across comments like **“and one of the few to boast a Wine Spectator 100 point score for one of their older vintages”** or **“Vinous and Parker both rate it a 94 point vintage”** should raise the question, why are you commenting on the vintage rather than the wine?

So, if you have been a long-time follower of a particular critic or publication, understand their biases, and have purchased many bottles that you love based on their ratings, by all means continue to do so. But if you’re feeling a bit lost when faced with so many choices of wines, be wary of a number only approach.

BOY THIS WINE IS GOOD

“No other red wine in the world at this price can match the sheer impact and grandeur of this”

“At only \$19.99, surely no other California Pinot can touch it”

Translation: This is a little more difficult. You really must know your merchant. There are some very fine wines out there at very good price. And with the unfortunate consequences of COVID 19 leading to so many restaurant closures, there will be many more. A merchant who

doesn't pronounce every wine the buy of the century may truly have come up with something special for you to consider when he does. A merchant who claims every other day or three times in the same newsletter to have discovered the best wine ever at the lowest price anywhere is probably more into hype than reality.

HURRY, HURRY, HURRY

"Secure yours now before we sell out"

"You will probably wish you had bought more when you had the chance"

Translation: "That psychology class really came in handy. Human nature does not want to miss out!"

Hype like this is not unique to selling wine. I've never understood why a product that is bound to sell out quickly needs so much marketing in the first place. But that just shows I am not a merchant.

Many merchants have great web sites where you can not only check what wines are available, but the number of bottles available as well. I used this as an opportunity to see what happened at one after a major ad promoting highly acclaimed 2016 Bordeaux. Dozens of chateaux were offered, and when I checked back 6 weeks later about 90% of the wines were still available. Some had sold a significant percentage of the supply; others had barely, if at all diminished, the stock.

How about the most prestigious, most highly sought-after wines in the world? One merchant with nationwide presence due to its frequent e mails and web site and excellent prices recently offered a single bottle of Petrus and a couple of bottles each of two wines from Domaine de la Romanée Conti. The wines were "on sale" for thousands of dollars each, but indeed the prices were lower than what the wines often sell for. When I checked back a month later, the Petrus was gone, but all the Romanée Conti was still to be had. A great thing for you to know if you are a Burgundy lover.

OH, THE DUPLICITY OF IT ALL

" But Napa is still replete with rich, lavish, highly extracted Cabernets that sell for \$200 or more. Most are vanity projects. Wealthy outsiders hire star winemakers and vineyard managers who just churn these things out".

Translation: "Every once in a while, it's a relief to say what I truly feel".

This is quite a statement, and one that would could easily lead to meaningful debate if it were part of a philosophical essay from a knowledgeable source. How about if it is from the same merchant that just a week ago was touting those 100 point bottles of huge rich wines produced by boutique entities that "every serious wine collector just has to have" , but now is trying to get your attention about lower priced wines available in enough quantity to bring in some cash.

I remember a few years back one of the Bay Area's finest wine merchants had an editorial like message in one of their newsletters decrying the increasing reliance on point scores, not too dissimilar to thoughts I expressed above. Below this was another article featuring wines with their point scores very prominent. Oh well, the theory versus the reality of marketing!!!

IN CLOSING

So, in closing I do want to acknowledge how difficult a business selling wine can be, and how especially challenging it must be in these times. Many wine merchants and critics do a very good job at searching out fine wines for us and in writing about them. Doing so, they enhance our pleasures and sustain us during these difficult times. I thank them for this and wish them success. For others, prone to generating some of the quotes I have used, if their business is thriving, I suppose there is no reason for them to change or to listen to my ramblings. But if business could use a boost and they are looking for more loyal clientele, perhaps they should consider reading what they are writing.