

The Society of Medical Friends of Wine

SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA

www.medicalfriendsofwine.org

NEWSLETTER FEBRUARY, 2020

A Letter from the President

Dear Members

During our 81st Annual Dinner in January, we were joined by two members of the Napa Valley Branch of The International Wine & Food Society, Princess Thi-Nga of Vietnam and her husband Mr. Douglas Gallagher. Princess Thi-Nga was born in Vietnam and raised in Geneva, Switzerland and Paris, France. Her paternal family ruled Vietnam from 1468 until 1945. Douglas Gallagher was the founder of Gallagher Financial Systems, a loan origination software and technology solution for banks in the US and abroad.

With a shared passion for fine wines, Thi-Nga and Doug acquired an estate and vineyards located in the Howell Mountain Appellation in Napa Valley. They named the property Poetic Moon as a tribute to the princess, whose name “Thi-Nga” translates into “Poetic Moon” in English. Housed on the estate is Thi-Nga’s private jade collection with over 100 sculptures from circa 1641-1911.

I’m extremely pleased to announce that we have been offered the opportunity to have a dinner at Poetic Moon on Saturday, July 18. The event will start with a private tour and viewing of Thi-Nga’s jade collection. During the tour, we’ll enjoy Poetic Moon – Imperial Jade 2018 Sauvignon Blanc and hors d’oeuvres. Subsequently, we’ll be served a 7-course dinner, paired with Poetic Moon wines. Poetic Moon will provide to all guests a 20% discount on any wine purchased during the event. Additional details about this special tour and dinner will be provided in subsequent communications.

As per previous notifications, the first dinner of our 82nd year will be held at the highly rated Piperade in San Francisco on Saturday, March 14 starting at 6 PM. We’ll have a 5-course dinner of “West Coast Basque Cuisine” devised especially for us by Chef Gerald Hirigoyen. Wine pairings will include an array of French and Spanish wines from the Basque Country and nearby regions. To reserve your spot, please contact our Executive Secretary, Claire Keiser at claireanswerb@gmail.com.

For a calendar of all events currently planned for this year, please visit our website at <http://www.medicalfriendsofwine.org/2020-21-events.php>

I'll look forward to seeing you during our upcoming events. Please invite your friends to join you and encourage them to become members of the society.

Warm regards,

Elizabeth Kass, MD, President

Basque Country in San Francisco
Dinner at Piperade
March 14, 2020
By Robert Blumberg, M.D.

The homeland of the Basque people lies some 6000 miles away, in the southwestern-most part of France and the northwestern-most part of Spain. But thanks to the travels of this adventurous people starting two hundred years ago, to the American west, Basque culture and cuisine have long had their place in the San Francisco Bay Area. Modest family style inns and restaurants catering to Basque sheep herders transiting the city have given way to gastronomic temples featuring the most creative of Basque- inspired cuisine. No restaurant fits this bill better than Piperade, where chef/owner Gerald Hirigoyen presides. The Society will return for its third visit to Piperade next month, following the most delightful and successful past dinners that included a sherry tasting and a Sauterne-themed evening where Sauternes was served with each carefully selected course.

The Basque country is beautiful, with its backbone being the rugged peaks of the western-most part of the Pyrenees Mountains that run along the French-Spanish border. Four provinces lie within France and three within Spain. Despite being citizens of one of these two countries, the Basque have long been fiercely independent with their unique culture and language. They have lived in their land for thousands of years, but to add to their mystique, no one is certain about their origin, and their unique language cannot be traced to any other tongue.

Throughout much of their existence, the Basques have coexisted with the French and Spanish more or less satisfactorily. Franco and the Spanish Civil War ended that, with widespread repression of the people, their language, and their culture. An infamous battle scene of the Civil War, the bombing of the Basque city of Guernica, has been immortalized in the Picasso painting. The repression led to an independence movement that was quite active and quite bloody for a number of years. Signs of 4 plus 3 equals 1 (4 French provinces and 3 Spanish provinces equals 1 country) popped up everywhere in the countryside. The most violent part of the movement occurred in Spain, again induced by memories of Franco, but fortunately now peace for the most has returned as the Basque continue their independent ways in spirit if not in statehood.

The Basque land extends to the Atlantic coastal areas that include the French cities of Bayonne, Biarritz, and the charming fishing village of St. Jean de Luz. In Spain the Basque coastal cities include San Sebastian, home to several world-famous restaurants, and Bilbao, home to the Guggenheim museum. The Basque have long been fisherman and explorers, and the catch from the sea plays a prominent role in their cuisine. Travels by sea brought fishermen and whalers to eastern Canada where their descendants still live.

The interior hills and valleys are not the richest in soil but do support farming and grazing, particularly of sheep, and this experience as sheep herders willing to work hard and live a lonely existence brought emigrants to the American west as well as to areas of Mexico and South America. In the Basque homeland, sheep milk cheese from the Pyrenees is produced by thousands of small farms and is a wonderful accompaniment to wine.

Speaking of wine, the Basques have cultivated native vines for thousands of years and produce some unique examples. The best known uniquely Basque growing area is Txakoli, along the coast between San Sebastian and Bilbao. Several indigenous grapes are grown, including the white Hondarribi Zuri and the red Ondarribi Beltza. The vast majority of production is a low alcohol, light bodied, tart and fruity white that often has a slight sparkle or fizz—somewhat analogous to the Vinho Verde wines of Portugal. Small amounts of red and rose are also produced.

A small portion of the famous appellation of Rioja is also in Basque Country, known as the Rioja Alavesa. Red grapes here are primarily Tempranillo and Graciano. A small amount of the white Viura may be added to the red Rioja Alavesa, and the Viura is also used to produce a white Rioja.

In close proximity to the Basque Country, near the French city of Pau, is the viticultural area of Jurancon, where Gros and Petit Manseng grapes are used to produce both dry and lusciously sweet white wines. And of course, the vineyards of Bordeaux and the eastern appellations adjacent to Bordeaux, including the wines of Bergerac and Monbazillac, are just a stone's throw away from the Basque country.

You will have a chance to sample many of these wine types at our upcoming dinner at Piperade. Gerald has been a master at pairing food and wine, and you will undoubtedly have the opportunity to taste wines completely new to your palate.

A liqueur also emanates from the Basque Country. It is called Izarra. It is a complex herbal-flavored spirit produced in a yellow and green versions, similar to Chartreuse. Billboards around Bayonne and Biarritz advertise it as being produced from the sun and snow of the Pyrenees. Hemmingway has the protagonist in *The Sun Also Rises* order a glass during his passage through Bayonne on the way to Spain. Alas he describes it rather despairingly as tasting like hair oil. I was going to get a bottle to offer everyone an after dinner *digestif* at Piperade. But it looks like it is no longer imported into the United States. I guess more Americans sided with Hemmingway's palate than mine.

Having spent a year in France so close to the Basque Country, with eight weeks in Pau and the remainder of the academic year in Bordeaux, I have fond memories. These include sipping glasses of chilled Jurancon in a café in Pau on the Boulevard des Pyrenees looking out at the majestic Pyrenees. Sumptuous feasts of Poulet Basque with its piquant tomato sauce. Delicious little cup cake sized pastries filled with Crème Patissiere called Gateaux Basque. Morsels of rich sheep cheese and a glass of red wine. And of course, visits to the small picturesque towns up in the mountains, with rushing streams, immaculate white-washed cottages with red tile roofs, and their courts where exciting games of *pelota*, or jai alai, were played.

I hope my little travelogue and memoir will stimulate you to learn more about the Basque country and culture, and what better way to start than by joining your colleagues on **March 14 at Piperade.**

81st Annual Dinner

Our 81st Annual Dinner Meeting at the Hotel Nikko featured some lovely wine and food combinations, including the 2018 Rochioli Sauvignon Blanc, paired with Charred Hamachi Poke with Ruby Grapefruit, Jalapeno, Cucumber Pickles, Mint oil, and Kefir-Lime Zest Crumble. At first glance, quite a mouthful of a course and one that would seem difficult to pair with wine. Wine Chair Jim Gallagher, Ph.D., selected the Rochioli and we were blown away. In the following article, Jim shares his thoughts on Sauvignon Blanc in general and the Rochioli in particular.



Charred Himachi Poke, Hotel Nikko



Wines from the Annual Dinner Meeting, Hotel Nikko, Rochioli Sauvignon Blanc is second from left

Sauvignon Blanc

by Jim Gallagher, Ph.D.

The name *Sauvignon Blanc* is derived from the robust nature of the vine, and often it is regarded as a “wild vine”, from the French “*sauvage*”. Literature on it can be traced to the 16th century, when its presence in the Loire valley was first noted. Because of the vine’s robust viability, it can be found in many different geographic locals: Australia, Canada, Chile, France, New Zealand, Romania, South Africa, and in the United States (California & Washington).

Two of the characteristics of the vine that contribute to the heartiness are: 1) late bud break, and 2) early ripening. The shorter growing season leads to less vulnerability to weather variants and less challenges during the growing season. Another, attractive characteristic is that it can be grown and harvested to produce a wide range of styles from “dry” to “sweet” wines. Consider the wines of **Chateau Haut Brion** (e.g., Haut Brion Blanc) and other dry white wines of the Graves are grown not many kilometers away from the ultra-sweet wines of Sauterne and Barsac, such as **Chateau d’Yquem**. It should be noted that while both the dry and

the sweet wines of Bordeaux are blends of Sauvignon Blanc and Semillon, the dry ones are mostly Sauvignon Blanc and the sweet ones mostly Semillon.

California

Charles Wetmore is generally cited as the first to introduce Sauvignon Blanc in California. His cuttings were imported from Chateau d'Yquem and successfully planted in the Livermore Valley in the 1870s. In 1881, Gustav Neibaum planted Sauvignon Blanc in his vineyard in the Napa Valley. At that time, the grapes were mostly used in blended white wine.

The reliability of the Sauvignon Blanc crops provided a stable base for the late 19th century and early 20th century wine-grape growers. However, the post-prohibition period was marked by the association of Sauvignon Blanc with cheap white wine, and it lost favor during the early movement begun in the late 1950 toward premium California wine.

A boost to the status or social regard of the wine can be traced to Robert Mondavi's introduction of the term, Fume Blanc (from Pouilly Fume, a district of the Loire Valley known for its Sauvignon Blancs), for the **Mondavi** dry Sauvignon Blanc in the latter part of the 1960s. The turnaround was not immediate, but eventually more and more producers crafted their Sauvignon Blanc as a "Premium Wine". Many have been quite successful: **Eisele, Merry Edwards, Rochioli, Screaming Eagle and Spottswoode** come to mind.

Among the little-known facts about California Sauvignon Blanc is that the most expensive wine in each of the past seven years has been, not the **Screaming Eagle** Cabernet Sauvignon, but their Sauvignon Blanc. Data in the table below compare current average price for both The Screaming Eagle Cabernet Sauvignon and their Sauvignon Blanc and the difference. However, hidden in the details, is an important variable of the difference in production of the two varietals.

Vintage	Cabernet Sauvignon	Sauvignon Blanc	Difference
2016	\$2,900	\$5,500	\$2,600
2015	\$3,100	\$6,478	\$3,378
2014	\$2,500	\$5,741	\$,3241
2013	\$3,136	\$4,900	\$1,764
2012	\$3,200	\$3,701	\$501
2011	\$3,182	\$8,174	\$4,992
2010	\$3,750	\$6,351	\$2,601
Total	21,768	\$40,845	\$19,077
Mean	\$3,109	\$5,835	\$2,726

Rochioli History

In 1934, Joe Rochioli rented a 125-acre farm in the Russian River Valley known as "**Fenton Acres**". In 1950, Rochioli purchased the property. The farm was initially planted mainly to prunes, string beans and hops. Rochioli planted popular blending grapes: French Colombard, Early Burgundy and Napa Gamay. As the trend in varietals caught on, he planted Cabernet Sauvignon, and Sauvignon Blanc beginning in 1959

The Cabernet Sauvignon did not prove to be a successful varietal for Rochioli and was pulled out sometime in the 1970s. The Sauvignon Blanc was used as much for blending as a varietal, yet it remained a source for needed revenue.

In 1968, Joe Rochioli, Jr procured some Pinot Noir Clones from Burgundy and planted the first Pinot Noir on the property. The Pinot planting proved timely, and wine from the Rochioli vineyard was made popular by Burt Williams and Ed Selyem , who first produced wine under the label of **Hacienda Del Rio**. The brand, Hacienda Del Rio was changed to **Williams-Selyem**, after a law suit for trade infringement was settled With Hacienda Cellars. Rochioli has continued it long relationship with Williams Selyem after the sale of the latter to new owners.

The first production of Estate wine from the Rochioli property was branded as “Fenton Acres”. Early success raised the question of branding and identity for the future and in 1983, the farm was renamed, Rochioli, and the first Estate wine under the new brand was the 1985 Rochioli Estate Pinot Noir, which was released in 1987.

Rochioli’s reputation for superb Pinot Noir grew rapidly, and there is a waiting list to obtain their single vineyard Pinot Noir. Recently, their single vineyard Chardonnay and “Old Vine” Sauvignon Blanc have achieved equal scarcity. When Bob and I visited in January, we were moved by the high quality of both their 2018 Estate Pinot Noir and 2018 Estate Sauvignon Blanc, which they were pouring visitors (by appointment only). Thus, the wines were purchased for our Annual dinner held at the Hotel Nikko.

My notes for the 2018 Rochioli Estate Sauvignon Blanc:

.2018 Estate Rochioli Sauvignon Blanc is produced from three blocks from the estate, “Old Vines” planted in 1959; second planted in 1987 and third in 2003. It shows a complex, vibrant bouquet of ripe mangos, melons and mild citrus set within a toasty banana fragrance; medium body, superb fruit with a good acid balance; a rich, lengthy, lively robust finish with little subtlety.

ALCOHOL ABSTINENCE AND ATRIAL FIBRILLATION

Voskoboinik A, Kalman JM, De Silva A, et al

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Article reviewed by Robert Blumberg, M.D.

Atrial fibrillation is the most common cardiac arrhythmia. In this condition the upper heart chambers (the atria) contract so rapidly that they fibrillate, or quiver, rather than rhythmically and effectively contracting to pump blood along. Blood thus passively flows from the upper to the lower chambers (ventricles). The rate of ventricular contraction is governed by the ability of the electrical tissue between the upper and lower chambers to conduct, and thus the ventricles do not beat as fast as the atria and can still effectively pump blood. The heart rate of the ventricles can be elevated and is erratic, rather than regular, reflecting the random way the electrical impulse is conducted from above to below.

Individuals with atrial fibrillation may be asymptomatic or mildly symptomatic and aware of a faster than normal and irregular pulse. Some individuals are very much aware of the arrhythmia and can be symptomatic with palpitations, light headiness, and shortness of breath, particularly with exertion. Those with underlying heart conditions such as cardiomyopathy (weakness of the heart muscle) or heart valve disease may become extremely symptomatic due to atrial fibrillation - induced heart failure.

Atrial fibrillation is often associated with aging changes in the heart, and its incidence is dramatically increasing as our population ages. Other factors associated with the risk of developing atrial fibrillation include genetic ones, high blood pressure, diabetes, smoking, obesity, and sleep apnea. Alcohol intake has been shown in a number of studies to also be associated, with risk increasing as alcohol intake increases.

This study from Australia attempts to examine the question of whether abstinence (or near abstinence) from alcohol can reduce the risk of recurrent episodes of atrial fibrillation and time spent in atrial fibrillation. Given the burden of this arrhythmia on our population, knowing the answer to this question can be helpful to patients and their treating physicians.

The study population was screened from a target population that consumed greater than 10 alcoholic unit drinks per week (approximate equivalent of 850 ml of 14% alcohol wine). The recruited population actually consumed about 17 units per week (nearly 1.5 liters of wine). 140 subjects were recruited and stated willingness to abstain for 6 months, and these were randomized into two groups of 70 each, abstainers and those asked to continue their usual consumption. Interestingly, 70% of potential participants declined because of being unwilling to abstain. Criteria was based on total alcohol consumption, although the comment was made that the majority of participants drank wine and/or beer.

All patients had a history of episodes of atrial fibrillation but were in normal sinus rhythm at the start of the study. Some were on medication to help control the rhythm. Determination of recurrent episodes of atrial fibrillation was made by interrogating implantable devices such as pacemakers and loop recorders that could detect arrhythmia in the third or so of patients with these devices and by the use of twice daily mobile app heart rhythm recorders in those without implantable devices. Seven-day cardiac monitors were also used in those having difficulty with the trans-telephonic transmitters.

As for the results. First it needs to be acknowledged that the abstainers did well in markedly reducing their alcohol intake, but not in totally abstaining. Sixty percent totally abstained, and two or fewer drinks per week were consumed by 76%. Interestingly, the control group, with no advice to do so, decreased their intake about 2 drinks per week.

After 6 months of follow-up, atrial fibrillation recurrences occurred in 53% of the abstainers and 73% of the controls. The time to recurrence was longer in the abstinence group compared to the controls, and the amount of time spent in atrial fibrillation was less, 0.5% in the abstainers and 1.2% in the controls.

This was a well-designed study with good follow-up for arrhythmia detection and the results show a significant difference between the groups. A major limitation of course is the relatively small size of the studied population, and the fact that the myriad of co-factors associated with atrial fibrillation cannot be adequately individualized and assessed in such a small group. Thus, some patients with particular types of atrial fibrillation and particular associated conditions might especially benefit from alcohol abstinence and others not so. The fact that 70% of potential subjects for this study declined to participate demonstrates how hard it would be to recruit thousands as opposed to dozens of patients to address more factors and reach more conclusions.

So, where does this leave the wine lover who has episodes of atrial fibrillation and his or her physician trying to offer the best advice?

First of all, this study addresses the patient with episodes of paroxysmal atrial fibrillation, not the one with chronic and controlled atrial fibrillation. For this latter patient, if the plan is acceptance of atrial fibrillation and control of heart rate with medications, there is probably no need to urge abstinence from alcohol unless there are other reasons to do so. Attention as to whether or not symptoms such as palpitations from an increased heart rate occur after alcohol intake is appropriate. But let us not forget that numerous studies have shown that moderate consumption of alcohol is associated with reduced cardiac mortality overall, and this should influence our guidance.

For the patient with paroxysms of atrial fibrillation where the goal is to reduce or eliminate these occurrences, then attention to all associated factors is appropriate. This includes body weight, control of blood pressure, addressing sleep apnea, smoking cessation, and high alcohol consumption and binge drinking. To these we should add awareness that even moderate alcohol consumption on a regular basis may increase the risk of recurrent episodes. As always, to best individualize advice and to gain the most from studies such as this one, a person's family and personal medical history and quality of life preferences all should be considered as we strive to advise and to obtain the best results.

