

**SOCIETY OF MEDICAL FRIENDS OF WINE
NEWSLETTER JANUARY 2017**

**78th Annual Dinner Meeting
January 21st, 2017
Trader Vic's Emeryville**



Greeting members and guest at the 78th Annual Meeting Dinner: Dr. Jack McElroy, Secretary, Dr. Dan Bikle, Vice President and wine chair, Dr. Mark Rosenberg, co-President, Dr. Fiona Donald, Treasurer and Membership Chair, Dr. Marion Koerper

Blumberg, past President, Dr. Brenda Shank, co-President, Mr. James Seff, Legal Counsel, . Susan Guerguy, Executive Secretary



President Brenda Shank addresses the audience

At our recent 78th annual dinner meeting at Trader Vic's in Emeryville, our guest speaker was Frances Dinkelspiel, who delighted us with tales from her recent book, "Tangled Vines," highlighting early California wine history dating back to missionary days. The book contains tales of intrigue, murder, and politics as the industry grew and prospered in Southern California. Her own great grandfather, a very successful businessman, became an owner of one of the largest vineyard holdings in Rancho Cucamonga in Southern California, and this led to members of her family still having bottles of 19th century California port style wine.

The wine was stored at a warehouse in Mare Island, the site of a former naval shipyard now turned over to civilian use. The thick, impenetrable concrete building was selected as an ideal storage facility by a number of Napa vintners and private collectors. Unfortunately, another tenant in the building was Mark Anderson, whose criminal story is also well known to our Society.

Mr. Anderson was a high living individual who sustained his taste for the good things in life by stealing and reselling wine from clients who entrusted him to store their wines. When faced with discovery, to cover his larcenous tracks, he set fire to his area in the wine storage warehouse using an accelerant and an acetylene torch. The fire spread rapidly to the entire building, causing the loss of wine libraries and inventories of a number of wineries and collectors, including wine from the cellar of our Society and the precious old bottles dating to Frances's great grandfather.

Demonstrating her background and skill as a reporter, Frances made contact with Mark Anderson and interviewed him a number of times while he was in prison. In her book, and in her talk, she theorizes on the complex yet infuriating criminal mind of Mark Anderson. We enjoyed her fascinating talk, and I can recommend her book as a fascinating read.

While discussing early California wine history, Frances recounted how early vintners, in efforts to expand the market for their product, shipped wines to the east coast. The best wines were often fraudulently labeled as being French in origin by east coast merchants, while the less good bottles were clearly designated as being from California. Perhaps as a legacy of this, to this day and despite all of the golden state's recognition and successes, she senses that some California producers continue to suffer

from insecurity in their marketing vis a vis global competitors.



Frances Dinkelspiel, journalist and author, speaker for the evening

Her comment hit home for me and made me reflect back on the contents of the 2016 Fall Sale publication I had received from Calvert Woodley, a celebrated merchant with a 50- year history in Washington, D.C. The glossy publication was 104 pages long, with slightly less than half devoted to French wines and only about five to California.

Do you remember the famous cover from the New Yorker magazine showing a map of the United States, with about half the space devoted to Manhattan, and California being but a small sliver on the left hand side? I suppose I wouldn't be shocked to see a comparable cover featuring a map of the world of wine, with about half the space devoted to France, and small slivers to other wine producing countries.

But how can this be, especially in this era of globalization and increasing recognition of the quality and value of wines produced in so many countries, especially in our home state? I don't know. Possibly history and tradition are just slow to change. We must also acknowledge, much as in politics, that our opinions here are not necessarily embraced elsewhere.

Some of the bias is pure economics. A lot of wine is made in France, including a lot of expensive bottles that bring profits to merchants. I suspect you can find bottles of Lafite Rothschild at a few hundred merchants and restaurants around the United States. You would be hard pressed to find a bottle of Screaming Eagle or Harlan for sale anywhere.

Much of the celebrity status in California is reserved for very small production wineries where demand outstrips supply, availability is limited to mailing lists, and prices can rise to the stratosphere. Prices aren't cheap for France either, but the larger quantities are such that wines are often more readily available. If you are a wine merchant, what are you going to tout—a wine you can sell, or one limited to a mailing list and unavailable to you? Not surprisingly, Calvert Woodley had 20 pages dedicated to Bordeaux.

So when will the rest of the country and the world start to recognize that California deserves its share of space on the map? What do California producers need to do? What do California proponents need to say? Interesting points to consider while drinking a delicious glass of wine.

And drinking delicious wine is exactly what we did at our annual meeting dinner on January 21st.

We started with the 2011 Murgo Brut Rose from the slopes of Mt. Etna, Sicily, kindly donated for our members' and guests' enjoyment and education by President Brenda Shank. Produced from the indigenous Sicilian varietal Nerello Mascalese, the wine had a brilliant garnet robe and was chock full of luscious fruit. Sicilian wines are enjoying increasing popularity and distribution in California. Their flavor dimensions and concentration reflect the volcanic soil the grapes grow in, and their unique grape varieties offer new taste experiences for our palates. And I must comment that in general California palates are welcoming and receptive to new taste experiences.

Next wine chair Dan Bikle selected a pair of Sauvignon Blancs to accompany the Tuna Poke and the Bongo Bongo (oysters and spinach) soup. The first wine was from New Zealand (geographically as close to Polynesia as Dan could venture), the 2015 Gliesen Sauvignon Blanc from Marlborough. The second wine was from the Loire Valley of France, a 2015 Franck Millet "Insolete" from Sancerre.

This proved to be a great opportunity to experience two different styles of wine from this versatile varietal, and to reflect on Sauvignon Blanc and its various personalities in general. The New Zealand wine had freshness from high acidity along with the distinctive gooseberry flavors sometimes found in Marlborough, while being less grassy than many New Zealand bottlings. It paired very nicely with the raw tuna and Asian spices of the poke. The French wine was more restrained and yet at the same time more complex and multidimensional, retaining freshness while showing considerable minerality. This somewhat richer wine was a better partner to the flavors in the soup.



Hawaiian Tuna Poke

To accompany the wood fired New York strip steak, Dan chose the 2014 Chappellet “Signature” Cabernet Sauvignon. In his role as wine chair, Dan led a spirited discussion of the wine in a fashion we are encouraging in filling our role of being an educational Society. Comments from participants demonstrated some controversy over the style and age-ability of the wine and provoked further memories of prior tasting experiences.



Wine chair Dr Dan Bikle leading the discussion on the wines

Virtually everyone agreed that the wine was amazingly drinkable for a two-year old Cabernet. With lots of forward fruit and soft tannins, it was not hard to drink and enjoy despite its youth. The controversy stemmed from questions of whether or not the wine will improve in the bottle to justify further aging and whether or not it has the complexities of the Cabernet family to cause it to stand out compared to other wines one might consider. Suffice it to say that there were different opinions, and that is fine.

As those of you who have read my musings before know, I am not a big fan of relying exclusively on critics and their scores, but I did seize the opportunity while writing this to review some well known critic comments on this wine. The Wine Advocate and Mr. Parker gave it 94 points and expect it to evolve graciously for another 20 years. Antonio Galloni in *Vinous* calls it a real head turner and a superb value (which at \$60 the bottle, is not an insignificant comment!).

The trip down memory lane consisted of discussion about the early history of the Chappellet winery and its Pritchard Hill location in the mountains east of the Napa Valley. The original vines were planted in the 1960's, and the first commercial release of the Cabernet Sauvignon was the 1969 vintage made by winemaker Philip Togni, who subsequently moved on to found his own winery on Spring Mountain. When released, this wine was also a "real head turner," capturing attention and praise for the property and its location. In its youth the wine was darkly colored and intensely tannic and concentrated. No one would have called it drinkable at two years of age.

I purchased some bottles of the 1969 upon release and also some from the following vintage as well. Through the years I have occasionally opened a bottle to share with fellow California wine historians, the last time being about 5 years ago, and we usually reflect on how youthful the wine still seems. In that way it reflects an era of wine making style also seen in Mayacamas, Ridge Montebello, and the early vintages of Diamond Creek—intensely concentrated, tannic, and dark wines harboring more promise than youthful delight. These are all mountain vineyards, and that may be partly responsible for the style, but clearly it was a style desired by a group of winemakers of that era.

Today, thanks to the internet, one can still find occasional tasting notes of the early Chappellets, and the persistent intensity and tannins of the wine are consistently mentioned, even in recent reviews. One writer calls the 1969 perhaps the most memorable California Cabernet he has ever had.

If you are a proponent of this style, you need patience and most importantly youth on your side before purchasing. Judging by the stark contrast in style between the initial release from this property 45 years ago and the current one we opened at our dinner meeting, I suspect wineries now feel there are not many purchasers with that kind of palate or patience out there, and thus the push is to produce fruit forward wines with soft tannins considered delicious upon release. While possibly benefiting from further time in the bottle, further aging is not an absolute requirement for many modern wines. Ah memory lane—sometimes fun, sometimes dangerous, always easier after a few glasses.

To conclude the wines for the evening, Dan selected a 2001 Chateau Guiraud from Sauternes. The wine is extraordinarily rich, with a deep golden color and a lot of sweet, caramelized brown sugar flavors on the palate. The wine has been highly recognized—it was number 24 on the list of top 100 wines from *Wine Spectator* in 2004, and has garnered a number of scores (here we go again) in the mid 90's. Many critics feel it will age until 2030; for my palate I thought it fully mature now based on color and palate richness. Interestingly, the cepage at Chateau Guiraud has a higher percentage of Sauvignon

Blanc compared with the average Sauternes property, giving us yet another opportunity to reflect on the diversity of this varietal.

In Society tradition it was evening of happiness and good company, highlighted by interesting wines, good discussion, and an excellent speaker. And if wine- and food-induced slumber was a risk, Trader Vic's brought us out of that state with a surprise visit from the Lion Dancers celebrating the upcoming Lunar New Year. We left infused with good food, good wine, and good spirit.

Bob Blumberg
Cellar Master, Society of Medical Friends of Wine



Members and guests enjoying the ambience, food, and wine at the Captain's Room, Trader Vic's



A special visit from the lion dancers in honor of Chinese New Year



Happy New Year

FROM THE MEDICAL RESEARCH WORLD

The French Paradox: Is it all in the gut?

Daniel Bikle, MD, PhD

A recent publication by Ming-liang Chen et al. entitled *Resveratrol attenuates trimethylamine-N-oxide (TMAO)-induced atherosclerosis by regulating TMAO synthesis and bile acid metabolism via remodeling of the gut microbiota* in mBIO 7: e02210-15 puts a new twist on the resveratrol (RSV) story. As is well known, RSV and other polyphenols are in relatively high concentrations in the skins and seeds of grapes, especially red grapes. Red wine contains levels of RSV on the order of 2-8 mg/liter. Drinking red wine is associated with a lower risk of cardiovascular disease, and at least part of this protective effect has been attributed to its RSV content. Although a number of mechanisms have been proposed for this potential beneficial effect of RSV on health in general and cardiovascular disease in particular, no previous study has considered its role on the gut microbiome despite the poor intestinal absorption of RSV and other phenolic phytochemicals. This study directed its attention to the gut microbiome and its production of trimethylamine (TMA), which is converted to TMAO in the liver. TMAO appears to promote the development of atherosclerosis (AS) in part by reducing hepatic bile acid synthesis leading to increased cholesterol levels.

The authors used a mouse model, ApoE^{-/-}, known to be susceptible to the early development of AS. On a chow diet the gut flora of these mice metabolize choline to TMA, which is then metabolized to TMAO in the liver. Feeding these mice choline resulted in a rapid increase in TMAO in the blood, an effect markedly reduced when the diet also contained 0.4% RSV. This was associated with a reduction in cholesterol levels and an increase in bile acid synthesis and fecal excretion, all effects blocked by antibiotics. Moreover, RSV blocked the increase in aortic plaque development following choline administration. That the gut flora were responsible was demonstrated by showing that antibiotics, presumably non absorbable, (not specified in publication) abolished TMAO production. RSV administration altered the gut microbiome most notably by increasing *bacteroidetes* at the expense of *Firmicutes*, although a number of other species were affected as well. This shift was associated with a reduction in the ability of the cecal content from RSV-ingesting mice to metabolize choline to TMA.

So what are we to make of all this. As noted above, red wine contains around 2-8mg/L. The mice were fed a diet containing 0.4% RSV. A mouse eats 3-5gm chow/day, so the RSV ingested was 12-20mg/day, or what the mouse would have consumed drinking 1-2 gallons of red wine per day. So the bottom line is that we should enjoy our red wine in moderation, but not get too concerned that it is having a major effect on our gut microbiome and its ability to produce compounds contributing to atherosclerosis. That said, maybe a moderate amount of red wine would be enough to alter our gut microbiomes toward a profile less likely to produce metabolites that adversely affect cholesterol metabolism, but this will require testing in humans—any volunteers?

