

Society of Medical Friends of Wine

SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA

A Non Profit 501 C 3 Corporation

www.medicalfriendsofwine.org

NEWSLETTER JANUARY 2018

A Message from President Dan Bikle, M.D., PhD.

Dear All,

We kicked off the 2018 year for the SoM FoW in fine style with our annual dinner at Hotel Nikko, with its lovely view of the San Francisco skyline. At that dinner we welcomed a number of new members. We thanked our outgoing Presidents Brenda Shank and Mark Rosenberg for a great year and of course our Executive Secretary Susan Guerguy, whose continued dedication to our Society is so essential for its success. The officers for the coming year are Daniel Bikle, President; Fiona Donald, Vice President; Jack McElroy, Treasurer; Elizabeth Kass, secretary; Robert Blumberg, cellar master; James Seff, legal counsel; and Susan Guerguy, Executive Secretary. We have a full year of events planned. Our next quarterly meeting will be at the Piperade Restaurant, San Francisco, March 24th, for an all Sauternes dinner. This will be a first—a dinner to pair this typical dessert wine with all courses. We leave this to our cellar master to pull it together along with the chef/owner Gerard Hirigoyen at Piperade.

For the June quarterly meeting we are looking at Prima Ristorante in Walnut Creek. The fall quarterly meeting finds us back at our long-time favorite, the French Club in San Francisco, tentatively scheduled for September 21. This will be a BYOB Bordeaux/Burgundy event, which proved so successful 2 years ago. The annual meeting will again be in mid-January. Between the quarterly meetings we are working on the following activities: we are planning our Vintage Tour for into pinot country of the western Russian River Valley, starting at Fort Ross and moving east, with tastings at some of the great wineries along the way as we end up with dinner in Santa Rosa. In August we are exploring a champagne tasting at the Perle Wine Bar in Oakland. Then to close out the year, we will be having our annual wine and cheese tasting with Janet Fletcher, likely in early November.

So, stay tuned for a great year of food and wine. Invite your friends, and get them hooked.

Daniel Bikle, MD, PhD
President, Society of the Medical Friends of Wine

79th Anniversary Dinner and Meeting

The Society convened at the Hotel Nikko in San Francisco for its gala annual dinner meeting on January 20, 2018. A delicious dinner was prepared by Executive Chef Philippe Striffeler and Chef Thuy Tran, and wines were selected by wine chair Fiona Donald, M.D. For the wine theme of the evening, Fiona chose the timely subject of honoring wineries impacted by the recent devastating North Bay fires.

Reception: **Domaine Carneros 2012 Brut**

MENU

Scottish Salmon Tartare

Herb Goat Cheese, Yuzu Gelee, Furikaki Cracker

Stag's Leap "Aveta"

Napa Valley Sauvignon Blanc 2015

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Beet Trio Salad

Popcorn Shoots, Preserved Lemon Vinaigrette

Gundlach Bundschu Sonoma Coast

Dry Gewürtztraminer 2016

*

8oz Espresso Rubbed Filet Mignon of Beef

Petite Vegetables, Fried Mashed Potato Croquettes,

Whiskey Peppercorn Drizzle

Stag's Leap Wine Cellars "Artemis" Napa Valley 2014

Cabernet Sauvignon

Chateau St. Jean 2013 Alexander Valley Cabernet

Sauvignon

*

Dessert

Molten Cake (Fog)

Chantilly Cream, Raspberries Coulis, Cotton Candy

Topaz, Sauternes style, Napa 2004

Freshly Brewed Organic Regula & Decaffeinated Coffee

Traditional, Herbal & Japanese Tea



Members and guests in our Nikko Hotel 25th floor dining room



Wine Chair Fiona

Donald, M.D. discussing the wines

The evening started with a glass of Domaine Carneros 2012 Brut, a lively and elegant sparkling wine that helped tune our taste buds for what lay ahead.

To accompany a creamy and luscious Scottish Salmon Tartare we next enjoyed the 2015 Sauvignon Blanc from Stag's Leap Wine Cellars. The refreshing acidity of the wine paired beautifully with the richness of the salmon and left a complex citrus impression on our palates. This was a beautiful example of how lovely and food friendly a Sauvignon Blanc can be if the grape's natural grassiness is subdued.

Wine with salad, you wonder. In this case, yes, as the earthy flavors of the three colors of baby beets and the gentle lemon vinaigrette went very well with the Gundlach Bundschu Gewürztraminer 2016.

Gewürz is often a love it or leave it varietal, but I must say I heard more praise than critique this evening for this dry perfumed wine. And we had the occasion to try a wine seldom served at our events and from a very historic winery located in the midst of one of the worst of the fires.

Our main course of melt in your mouth Filet Mignon of Beef was accompanied by two different Cabernet Sauvignons, the 2013 Alexander Valley from Chateau St. Jean and the 2014 Artemis Napa

Valley from Stag's Leap Wine Cellars. Both were filled with youthful though forward fruit, but with flavors and styles representative of their respective growing areas. The Chateau St. Jean was smooth and plush and had green tobacco leaf flavors of Alexander Valley, while the Stag's Leap was a bit more herbal and forceful in the finish. They stimulated much discussion about preferences between the two, with both sides well represented, and were very fitting subjects following the evening's talk about whether or not it is necessary to age many modern-day California cabernets.

The food up until now was beautifully presented and with a bounty of flavors. The dessert was nothing short of spectacular—a delicious and mouth filling chocolate cake presented with surrounding fog and accompanied with Chantilly cream and raspberry coulis. And for the dessert wine, Fiona had managed to uncover the last bottles of a very rare, sweet, botryzied Semillon and Sauvignon Blanc blend, the 2004 from Topaz. Burnished gold in color, moderately sweet on the palate, and with complex aromas of orange skin and toasted caramel, this wine sent us off into the San Francisco night, which fortunately was free of fog, feeling full and satisfied.

Thank you to co-presidents Brenda Shank, M.D., PhD. and Mark Rosenberg, M.D. for your leadership this past year and for working with our Executive Secretary, Susan Guerguy, in planning a delightful annual anniversary dinner and meeting, and special thanks to Susan for all of her efforts to make each event special.



Molten Fog Cake with 2004 Topaz

**To Age or not to Age—that is the Question. Some reflections on modern California Cabernet Sauvignon.
79th Anniversary Dinner Meeting Address by Robert Blumberg, M.D.**

I would like to add my welcome to our new members here for the first time this evening, and to the many guests also present. And of course, thank you to all of our loyal members who are here with us this evening. It's great to see you.

As Fiona mentioned, we had hoped to have someone address the society on the scientific effects of fire and smoke on grapes and wine, but that did not work out, so I'm afraid you have me for an impromptu talk. Let's try and do this in a fun and thought stimulating manner. We're going to talk about whether or not today's wines need cellaring, and how changes in wine production have prompted this question. But the chef and your food have priority—so as soon as the steaks are hot and ready to go, if we're still talking we'll bring things to a quick conclusion.

I do want to salute Fiona for choosing the theme for the wine served at tonight's dinner. Most of us sitting in this room enjoying good food and wine cannot truly appreciate the horrible tragedy of recent events on our friends living in the

fire-stricken areas and on the many wineries and their workers. I know what it was like to smell smoke in San Francisco strong enough to make me wonder if it came from my own house. I can't imagine how horrible it must have been to be right in the middle of the intensity of the fires. Our pausing to think about this and in a small way support some of the those impacted wineries is a very fitting gesture.

To set the tone for this evening's talk, let me tell you the story about the husband and wife of a certain vintage—a vintage similar to many of us here tonight.

They were sitting together on the patio and the wife was enjoying a glass of wine. Suddenly the husband heard her say, "I love you so much. I don't know how I could ever live without you." The husband asks, "Is that you or the wine talking?" "It's me, she replies, I'm talking to the wine."

For tonight, let's focus on Cabernet Sauvignon, arguably California's best varietal, and talk about what it takes to come up with a glass of Cabernet so good we feel the need to talk to it. Do we need to buy it, age it, nurture it, be patient, and ultimately pull the cork on a treasure, or can we just pop off to the wine shop and buy it that day? To age or not to age, that is indeed the question.

When my interest in wine first began, it was expected that fine California cabernet or red Bordeaux needed to be aged. Patience of 10 years or so post vintage, or up to 20 to 25 for the finest examples, was considered the norm. Sure, you could purchase non-vintage blends of Cabernet meant for earlier consumption. But many of these had barely the minimum legal requirement of Cabernet grapes in their composition, with lesser varietals making up the difference. These wines were not priced nor meant to compete with finer bottlings.

It is also true that a number of California's best Cabernet wineries produced very nice wines from the time of release. I remember with fondness bottles from wineries like Beaulieu and Inglenook and Charles Krug and Louis Martini that were balanced and tasty when we first sampled them. Still we recognized that they were somewhat monochromatic and with time would develop more bouquet in the nose and the palate would acquire more finesse and more nuances. With time in the bottle they would become better and more complex wines. And many would remain delightful for years to come.

Other noted producers, Mayacamas and Ridge and Diamond Creek and Chappellet come to mind, produced nearly impenetrable wines rich in color, tannins, and acidity, and these were felt to be wines for the ages, with aging prowess comparable to that of classified growth Bordeaux. Painful to drink in their youth, but glorious in their older age.

In the original edition of *The Fine Wines of California*, published in 1971, Hurst Hannum and I wrote "At its best, the Cabernet produces a deep-colored, medium to full bodied wine that can be immensely pleasing to both nose and palate. It is characteristically high in tannin and is one of the wines that benefit most from aging. For this reason, several of California's fine wineries keep either all or part of their harvest for extra years of aging in the wood and in the bottle before releasing it for sale. Unfortunately, adequate aging before the wine reaches the public is the exception rather than the rule, and a considerable amount of Cabernet reaches the market before it is ready to be drunk. A young Cabernet can be a very sharp, rough wine, and is likely to disappoint a beginning wine drinker who has heard tales of its greatness. This is one wine usually worth the extra money necessary to obtain an older vintage. The best method is, of course, to purchase a good Cabernet when it is young and to store it in your own home until ready."

So, with this as background and with memories of the many years I have nurtured fine California Cabernet and Bordeaux in my cellar, I jumped at the opportunity to present a tasting of 1974 California Cabernet to our membership a couple of years ago when the Society received a bequest of a cellar containing these bottles. The tasting was meant to educate our members and hopefully validate the benefits of cellar aging to justify one's investment and patience.

In the end I hope it did accomplish some of this, but if anyone was educated it was probably me, the presenter, about the taste preferences of many of the guests. I must confess I did love many of the wines, as did a few others present. Yes, they had aged and yes, many probably had tasted even better years before, but they maintained, to my palate, a grace and balance and elegance and delicacy—they were the ballet dancers of the wine world.

What did the rest of the attendees say. “They are tired, thin, unfulfilling”. On one wine I commented on the delicate old bouquet reminiscent of old furniture and polish from grandma’s house, or perhaps similar to an old Madeira. Dr. Bill Ellis, with us tonight, answered “Bob, when I want a Madeira, I will buy a Madeira. When I drink a Cabernet, I want it to taste like a Cabernet, not a Madeira”. A profound statement, and one with merit.

Our incoming president, Dr. Dan Bikle, usually quite shy about expressing his opinion, readily chimed in that he was very happy he had drunk or sold his older California Cabs years ago so he could instead buy bigger, fruit forward wines more to his liking.

One of our younger members, Dr. Davina Mah, expressed her gratitude for having the opportunity to taste wines older than she was, but stated her preference for the Cabernets she is buying today over those of yesterday.

So how did this all happen? My graceful ballet dancers pushed aside in favor of what I might term the linebackers of the wine world—those intensely flavored, plush with fruit, high in alcohol wines of today.

I think the watershed year was 1982. And not in California, but in Bordeaux. This was a year of warmth and growing conditions that allowed the production of fruity and drinkable wines from the get go, rather than austere, tart and tannic wines more typical of youthful Bordeaux. Yes, they had tannins, but their forward fruit rendered many of them rather delicious early on. I remember the 1982 Cheval Blanc being just such a wine and I remember thinking, this is so good, how can anyone fortunate enough to afford it resist drinking it up.

And perhaps even more important, the vintage marked the ascendancy of Mr. Robert Parker. He correctly called the quality and character of the vintage, and saw his newsletter swell in popularity and his words gain in power and influence as he described future vintages. His palate preference for and high rankings to big, ripe, alcoholic wines influenced sales and for many properties, stimulated changes in production techniques in pursuit of higher Parker scores. The world has known many excellent and successful wine writers and critics, but one has to acknowledge Mr. Parker as the most commercially successful and the most influential in provoking changes.

Let’s look at a description of a wine he likes, in this case a 2009 Bordeaux. *“The best ever wine from this estate (even better than their sensational 2005), this full-bodied wine offers notes of blueberry, black currant, asphalt and burning charcoal embers in a deep, layered and multi-dimensional style. It is impressively pure and well-built, with far greater concentration and length than I ever remember this wine having in the past.*

Burning charcoal embers and asphalt, great concentration--This is not a wimpy wine. Nor is it a wine with aromas of dill or bell pepper or the herbaceous qualities that are associated with ripe but not overripe, Cabernet, qualities that might be off putting when strong in young wines, but qualities that did often soften and evolve into complex flavors as the wine aged.

How could vintners adjust their production techniques and change wine styles to meet market demands and obtain high scores. There are many ways.

Starting in the vineyard, there is crop and leaf thinning and longer hang time prior to picking. The result is grapes with higher sugar content, less acidity, and less vegetal qualities. Can you remember when adding sugar, called chaptalization, was common in Bordeaux and Burgundy, to beef up the alcohol content of the wines from 11% to 12 to 12.5%? I wouldn’t say it never happens now, but it certainly is not common like it used to be. The grapes are riper. The wines more naturally alcoholic. You don’t get sensations of burning charcoal embers and asphalt from low alcohol wines.

Modern fermentation technologies extract higher phenol levels and softer tannins. Alcohol can be affected with reverse osmosis. And Technology is global, not regional. It has led to a change in wine style, especially for Cabernet based wines, here in California, in Bordeaux, and around the world. In many ways technology has replaced terroir in driving flavors.

The prevalence of new oak has also increased, and a considerable presence in both nose and flavor are now expected. Up front sweet vanilla and spice from oak has replaced the sage and cedar-like tones that only developed in the bouquet with years of aging. Even though oak barrels are expensive, if you can sell your wine for \$100 or more per bottle, the expense is insignificant.

Climate change undoubtedly also play a role in riper grapes. In fact, I think there should be concern that in another 20 years or so Napa will be too warm to produce wines with any remaining balance and character. Climate change certainly has influenced grape plantings. Once minor Bordeaux varietals, such as Petit Verdot and Carmenere, were shunned because they are later ripening grapes, leaving growers with the fear of having to harvest an unripe crop. Now these varietals are seeing a comeback, both here and in Bordeaux, as ripening seems to no longer be an issue. I heard last year that Petit Verdot has become the most expensive grape per ton in California due to its scarcity and desirability for blending with Cabernet.

But the changes in wine style that we have seen have occurred too dramatically and too rapidly to be just climate change induced. The intentional desire to produce riper, more fruit forward, more alcoholic, less acidic, wines appealing in their youth is very evident.

Every day I receive enticing e mails from wine shops like this one:

Plum, cassis, cedar, and exotic spice pour forth and carry well into the wine's long and lasting finish. It's so downright delicious, you'll find it impossible to put the glass down.

This is an offer for the 2015 Chappellet, a two-year-old Cabernet!

The 1970 version of this wine, which I bought upon release, is an excellent wine, though one still with a tough and tannic edge to it. In its own way it has become delicious, but it certainly wasn't delicious in 1973.

Think about it. When was the last time you read an offer like "This wine is impenetrable and tough as nails now, but has a great future and will one day become a beautifully balanced and elegant wine. Every couple with a baby born this year will be eager to lay down a case or two as a gift for their child's 21st birthday-so rush in and buy yours before it has sold out."

I suspect that most wine drinkers today are not into cellaring large quantities. They prefer more immediate gratification, and frankly do not see the need to age their wines for a prolonged period. Did their tastes and habits drive the change in the world of wine? Or did the changes in wine production drive their taste preferences? Good question.

Our parents' generation enjoyed their cocktail or two before (and sometimes with) dinner.

Our kids' generation may be mimicking this. Think about the number of new, popular Bay Area restaurants where the drinks menu is given equal or greater emphasis than the dinner menu. Young people enjoy happy hour and designer martinis. They relax and engage in loud conversation-and when they do sit down to dinner the glasses of 15 to 16 % alcohol wine they consume don't seem overly alcoholic.

So, do you need to age your Cabernet or Bordeaux? If you truly love that fruit rush and warm palate feel and "can't put that glass down", then I guess the answer is no. There's no harm in putting bottles away for a few years—but do you really need to do this to enjoy them?

On the other hand, there are those of us, myself included, who find the modern style predictable if not ponderous after a few sips, who will still yearn for wines of balance and elegance and are not afraid to recommend a youthful wine with

bracing acidity and rough edges, hoping it will ultimately evolve to one day dance a pirouette on our tongue. But our task in finding them is more challenging now than ever.

Is this the way it will always be, or will the pendulum in taste preferences and resultant wine styles ultimately swing back? I don't know. I admit to being bewildered and frustrated by the myriad of wine merchants and sommeliers who cry out for balance and decry excesses in wines, yet continue to quote successful wine critics and their scores when they are selling you wine. It is just too easy for them to sell wine by a very entrenched point system.

So where do you find yourself? Do you hold on to the nostalgia of what we call the elegance and balance and finesse in fine wine, with reward for patience and foresight. Or do you celebrate the boldness and intensity and gratification of the rich and ripe and alcoholic nectars of today?

Who is right and who is wrong. Neither—it is truly a matter for personal preference. An organization like ours needs to experience and discuss both styles, and I trust demonstrate a willingness to understand where the other side is coming from.

We have two young Cabernets coming up with our steaks that have been carefully selected by Fiona and her committee. Enjoy them, think about my thoughts, and in the spirit of our Society, share your own thoughts and preferences.

And may your upcoming year be filled with wines you can talk to, or at least talk about, whether they come out of your cellar or from your wine shop.

Calling All Sauternes Lovers—a Sauternes-Themed Dinner

This spring your Society is planning a first in its 79-year history—a dinner planned around the theme of one wine—Sauternes. This classic sweet wine is usually reserved for dessert, but can be much more versatile. Sweetness in Sauternes varies depending on year, Botrytis levels, and the terroir of the chateau. A young fresh Sauternes is very different from an aged one. Dry wine is made by Sauternes chateaux from the same grape varieties. All of this gives us the opportunity to try Sauternes throughout the meal—from soup to nuts, or in this case, from foie gras to cake.

Many of our members have been fans and collectors of Sauternes for years, although today it is not uncommon for me to hear “I never seem to have the occasion anymore to open a bottle. We just don't do those lengthy dinner parties very often, and if we do one, we don't always want another glass of wine by the time dessert arrives.”

So come explore with us new ways and new opportunities to open and enjoy your Sauternes. And if you do indeed have bottles in your cellar surplus to your needs, consider donating some to the Society. We can make this dinner a special treasure with a treasure from your cellar, and since the wine would be used at our event in an educational manner, it is eligible for a tax donation on your part.

So, if you have questions about the dinner or would like to talk about a potential donation, please let me know.

Robert Blumberg, M.D
Cellar Master, Society of Medical Friends of Wine.

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New Members 2017

The Society welcomes the following new members who joined us in 2017.

Brad Loos
Almon Larsh
Barry and Joan Boothe Ph.D.
Tom Burns M.D.
Marshall Berol J.D.
Michael Caplan M.D.
David Schwartz M.D.
Carol Vergano R.N.
Edward Bloomberg Ph.D.

In Memorium-Don Beerline M.D.

The Society learned with sadness of the passing of our longtime member and past President, Dr. Don Beerline, on November 26, 2017. Don completed his training in Anatomic and Clinical Pathology at Presbyterian Hospital in Denver and for 35 years was a Pathologist at Mt. Diablo Medical Center in Concord. Don was a gourmet chef and knowledgeable wine lover who contributed greatly to the Society over many years. His always smiling face and positive attitude enhanced our functions and will be sorely missed.

Our condolences to Don's wife of 52 years, Joan, and to his three children.

The family has requested that donations in Don's memory may be made to Lafayette-Orinda Presbyterian Church in support of worship and music; to John Muir Health Foundation, 1400 Treat Blvd., Walnut Creek, CA 94547 in support of cancer services, or to the charity of your choice.