

# Society of Medical Friends of Wine



*A Non-Profit 501(c)(3) Corporation*

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## Newsletter January 2020

### **A Letter from Incoming President Elizabeth Kass, M.D.**

Dear Members,

Happy New Year! We'll soon be starting the 82<sup>nd</sup> year of the Society of Medical Friends of Wine. During our Annual Dinner at the Hotel Nikko on January 19, 2020, the incoming Executive Committee will be introduced; information about the committee members can be found at <http://www.medicalfriendsofwine.org/Executive-Committee.php>

The Executive Committee has been busy planning for the January dinner and many great events for 2020-2021, as detailed below. Please mark your calendars and watch for updates on our website at <http://www.medicalfriendsofwine.org/2020-21-events.php>

3/14/20, 289<sup>th</sup> Dinner at Piperade Restaurant, San Francisco – After highly successful events at Piperade in the past, we'll be returning to the restaurant for what Chef Gerald Hirigoyen terms “West Coast Basque Cuisine.” Basque Country stretches across the Pyrenees Mountains into parts of both France and Spain. The dinner will feature an array of French and Spanish wines from the area and nearby regions.

5/17/20, 290<sup>th</sup> Dinner at Piatti, Mill Valley — We'll be having our second joint dinner with Chaîne des Rôtisseurs, which proved to be a convivial group during our 2019 dinner with them. Piatti is a contemporary restaurant overlooking Shelter Bay next to Mt. Tamalpais and features the rustic cuisine of a traditional Italian Trattoria. We'll undoubtedly taste some interesting Italian wines during the dinner.

6/6/20, Wine Tour of Lodi – The society first visited Lodi in 1963, and a lot has changed since then. In recognition of the region's achievements over the last 25 years and the

innovative attitude of Lodi winemakers, it was named by Wine Enthusiast as its 2015 Region of the Year. Lodi was recently praised by the speaker at our 80<sup>th</sup> Annual Dinner, wine critic Esther Mobley of the San Francisco Chronicle. In an article published November 7, 2019, Esther stated, “Discovering the wines of Lodi has truly been one of the great pleasures of my job over the last few years.”

During the Lodi wine tour, we’ll have the opportunity to taste some Old Vine Zinfandels, including some produced in the Lodi Native Project using only native yeast and minimal intervention during the winemaking process. We’ll also try some of the great Iberian-style wines being made in Lodi.

To pique your interest in Lodi wines, we’ll be pairing St. Amant Tawny Port Lot #12 as well as the winery’s 1990 vintage port with dessert at the upcoming dinner at the Hotel Nikko. The vintage port was generously donated by outgoing President Jack McElroy; thanks, Jack! I’m really looking forward to the experience of tasting these two ports and encourage you not to miss the opportunity; be sure to sign up for the January 20 dinner if you haven’t already done so.

September, 2020, 291<sup>st</sup> Dinner at French Club, San Francisco – The consistently popular French Club Dinner will afford another opportunity for us to share some of our favorite French wines.

November, 2020 Wine & Cheese Tasting, Mill Valley Community Center – Janet Fletcher always delivers a fantastic themed cheese tasting paired with equally wonderful wines selected by our Cellar Master, Bob Blumberg.

1/17/21, 82<sup>nd</sup> Annual Dinner at Mark Hopkins Hotel, San Francisco – We’re planning to return to the Room of the Dons at the historical Mark Hopkins to conclude the year and pass the gavel to our next president.

I’ll look forward to seeing you during what should be another enjoyable and educational year with great food and wine. Invite your friends to attend events and encourage them to join us.

Warm regards,

Elizabeth Kass, MD, Incoming President

**In Celebration of Port**  
by Robert Blumberg, M.D.

I remember the days when my friends and I would drink Port. At the end of a lengthy meal, with multiple wines accompanying each course, after dessert and some sweet wine like Sauternes or Auslese, out would come the Port. Perhaps with a slice of Stilton. Usually all on its own. Big, sweet, rich, alcoholic, fruity. Everything you need to cap off the evening and ensure a good night's sleep.

We all put Port in our cellars, but now adays it is hard to find an occasion to open a bottle. They may get stood up in anticipation of need, but when it comes to actually opening and drinking, it is hard to find takers. Our capacity for wine is not what it once was. If anything, we would worry about that glass of Port interfering with sleep. And of course, concern about blood alcohol levels leads to coffee being the last drink of choice of the evening rather than Port.

But if one is going to be inspired to drink Port in Northern California, this is the time of year for it. There's something about cold weather, blowing winds, pounding rain and the desire to be warm, content, and stationary that makes many a wine drinker think of Port. No wonder the primary market for this product of the warm climes of Portugal has been England with its inclement weather (and privileged aristocracy).

To keep memories alive, and to provide us with an occasion to actually open a few bottles, my wine tasting group has traditionally held a December tasting of Port. We vary between recent bottlings if a vintage has been declared and cellar tastings of precious old bottles we bought years ago.

Such was the occasion this past December when we decided to feature 1977 Vintage Port. This was a very celebrated vintage in its youth, garnering much praise from experts like Michael Broadbent. Searching through my cellar and those of other group members, we came across bottles of Fonseca, Taylor, Warre, Dow, and Gould Campbell. I also stumbled across a bottle of 1982 Vintage Port from Quady. Not the same vintage or country, but when you are drinking 40-year-old wines, close enough in age to stimulate comparison of wine development and age-ability. I decided to include it in the tasting.

Port style wine is of course produced in many places around the world, including California, and there is no legal prohibition against labelling the product Port. Although interestingly enough, in sensitivity to the labeling issue, Quady still produces a similar wine today but opts to call it Starboard instead of Port.

Fortified wines like Port, Sherry, and Angelica have been made in California since the earliest days of wine production in the state, and indeed made up the majority of wine production through the mid-portion of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Much of this was bulk style, cheap wines known for their alcohol contents and not their qualities. But a few California producers, including Quady and of course the celebrated Ficklin Vineyards, have been producing small lots of premium Port-style wines for many years now.

So how did the Quady do in this tasting of celebrated Port producers from a stellar vintage? I decided to tell the group what was included rather than throwing in a “ringer” that they did not know about. The Christmas spirit must have influenced my disposition. But as is our custom, the bottles were all placed in unmarked bags so we did not know which wine was which until the unveiling. I expected the Quady to be a nice wine because I have had many lovely wines from this property, but I expected it to be a very different style than the Portuguese Ports.

Overall the 1977's were very nice wines, but I found them to be fully mature and probably not at quite the height of my expectations from previous tastings over the years. For the most part the group embraced the challenge of tasting and identifying the wines, and had no trouble identifying the bottle they felt was from California. The only problem was we were wrong. That's exactly why we do blind tastings.

The Quady placed second in the group in overall consensus. The wine we thought was the Quady was a bit riper and richer than the others. It turned out to be the Gould Campbell.

Now my group are all experienced tasters. But none of us would claim to be Port experts, and a true expert might have been more successful in identifying wines than we were. But the point is that the Quady was a very well-made and fully competitive wine that had aged beautifully. The fact it was made from the same Portuguese grapes that go into Port should be recognized, but I do take my hat off to the quality of wine making and the cultivation of the vineyards, which in this case were planted in the Sierra foothills.

Stimulated by this experience, and anxious to have another excuse to open a bottle of the 1977 Taylor that I felt was showing beautifully and definitely ready to drink, for our New Year's eve dinner I put aside a bottle of the Taylor and a bottle of J.W. Morris Founders Port to compare. The J.W. Morris differed from the Quady in that the grapes used were Cabernet Sauvignon, Zinfandel, and Petite Sirah. The vineyard was on Sonoma Mountain. The wine was made by, at that time, a young man who was a self-trained wine maker with an absolute passion for Port and a profound knowledge of the Portuguese wines. He was also a good friend, Jim Olsen, and Jim had been instrumental in teaching me about Port way back in the 1970's.

This time we knew what the wines were. It just isn't elegant to serve a wine for New Year's Eve in a paper bag. The Taylor was its usual magnificence. The J.W. Morris was amazingly well preserved as well. Though not a vintage port, its providence would have been from just about the same year as the Taylor.

Both wines were nearly equal in color—an amber, tawny color as opposed to the bright ruby of their youth. The Taylor was more complex, with layers of chocolatey spirits and a lengthy mouth-filling finish. The J.W. Morris had a very clean nose reflecting its high proof distillate, and ripe fruit flavors in a somewhat simpler but still very pleasing style.

So thanks for allowing me to reminisce about a wine style that was more part of my youth than it is at present, although I do wish our current life styles would allow a few more opportunities for

an occasional glass of Port. After all, the wine will stay very drinkable after decanting into a carafe for several weeks, allowing for an occasional tipple.

You will have just such an opportunity to taste some Ports at our upcoming annual Dinner Meeting. To conclude the meal, incoming President Elizabeth Kass has chosen a lovely bottle of tawny port from her hometown winery St. Amant. And outgoing President Jack McElroy has donated a large format bottle of 1990 vintage Port from St. Amant to compare. You too can see just what California is capable of in producing small volume, Port style wine.

Come join us to welcome in the new year with these wines. As Elizabeth mentioned in her introductory letter, we hope this experience will get you thinking about wineries in Lodi and excited about our upcoming winery tour when you can learn more about the recent changes in this historic California wine district.

**81<sup>st</sup> Annual Dinner Meeting**  
**Hotel Nikko San Francisco**  
**January 19, 20120**

On December 17 we had our trial dinner at the Nikko Hotel for our upcoming annual dinner meeting. At the trial dinner we try several different options for each course, discuss flavor compatibility and wine pairing, and make our selections for the actual dinner. Trial dinners are great fun. You are always welcome to participate on a dinner committee. Just let Claire Keiser know of your potential interest in doing so.

We selected an exciting menu including Shitake Mushroom Strudel, Charred Hamachi Poke, 72 hours Short rib, and an exquisite chocolate dessert.

Wine chair Jim Gallagher, Ph.D. has put his excellent knowledge and extensive contacts with the wine industry to work, and the result is a selection of very rare and hard to obtain wines from Williams Selyem and Rochioli, along of course with Champagne and the Ports already mentioned in our articles above.

You all should have received the formal notice and RSVP email, and we do hope you will be able to join us as we again celebrate the long history of our Society. If you have any questions or haven't yet made a reservation, please let Claire know, and she can answer questions and be sure you have a spot reserved. A reminder her E mail is [claireanswerb@gmail.com](mailto:claireanswerb@gmail.com)

**New Tariffs Proposed on Imported Wines from the E.U.**

If you follow the news you are aware that trade wars and tariffs have become a common mode of conducting business in today's Washington environment. Trade disputes and calls of favoritism have long been with us and likely will continue. Protecting one's country's self-interest is important, but the magnitude of reactions on the part of our current government are somewhat unprecedented in recent decades.

A recent example involves the disputes between the major aircraft manufactures, Boeing of the United States and Airbus of the European Union. A recent ruling at the World Trade Organization went against Airbus, and in an attempt to extract retaliation and punishment, major tariffs on other E.U. products have been implemented or proposed. I (Bob Blumberg) recently received the following announcement from contacts in the wine industry.

It is not the purpose of this Society to enter lobbying over political issues, but rather to inform and educate our members on issues important to them. This would seem to be an issue of interest to our members, so we are forwarding the message:

*As you may know by now, the United States government, has already implemented tariffs of 25% on the majority of wines from France, Spain, and Germany that are imported into the US. All American importers, including us, are forced to pay these tariffs. Retail prices for these wines will go up. The tariffs will harm American consumers and every American wine importer and distributor.*

*Now, in further retaliation for EU subsidies to Airbus, and to France's 3% Digital Services Tax, the U.S. government has proposed additional new tariffs of "up to" 100% on all wines from the EU, including those not originally covered by the previous tariffs. This is an existential threat to hundreds of American import, wholesale, and retail businesses across the country. If implemented, American companies will fail, American jobs will go away, and American consumers will be stuck with far less choice than ever before, and face skyrocketing prices for the wines that are brought in under these tariffs. Although in reality, it's unreasonable to think that any importer would actually import any wine when being required to pay a 100% tariff.*

*These tariffs will also apply to olive oil, cheeses, cookware and many other consumer products completely unrelated to the aircraft or digital service industries. The American wine industry is simply a pawn in this whole saga. These are disputes involving huge multi-national corporations. The industry that will be destroyed in the collateral damage to such disputes is mostly made up of small American companies.*

At first glance one might think these tariffs would actually help the domestic wine, olive oil, and cheese industries, and in some cases they will. However, many in the domestic industry point out that small producers are reliant on distributors and merchants to sell much of their products. These businesses sell both domestic and imported products, and if their businesses suffer from the tariffs, as they undoubtedly will, many might go out of business leaving domestic producers with fewer outlets and enough loss of revenue to threaten their own existence.

If you feel strongly one way or the other, you are encouraged to contact your congressperson, senator, and the office of the United States Trade Representative. The following link facilitates these contacts. It is provided by a group opposed to the tariffs and includes sample letters reflecting that viewpoint. You may use the samples if you wish, or use the links to facilitate expressing your own views, whatever side they may be on.

<https://nawr.org/nowinetariffs>