

# *Society of Medical Friends of Wine*



NEWSLETTER

JUNE 2020

## A Letter from the President

May 22, 2020

Dear Members,

I hope this communication finds you and yours doing well.

We are living through an uncertain time. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it became necessary to cancel several events for this year that had been planned by members of our Executive Committee:

- the first two quarterly dinners, which were to be held at Piperade in March and Piatti in May; these restaurants are currently only open for pickup orders.
- the Lodi Wine Tour; wineries in Lodi are presently offering pickup service but tastings are suspended. In a recent communication with St. Amant, one of the wineries we had planned to visit on June 6, I was told "We have been closely monitoring the situation as it pertains to reopening the wineries. It appears that once we do have the opportunity to reopen, we will likely be at a very limited capacity and potentially operating under appointment only. I'll definitely let you know when we hear more about reopening for larger groups and are able to accommodate you guys, hopefully that day comes sooner rather than later. "

I remain optimistic that we'll be able to hold at least some of the events we had scheduled for 2020-21 as California gradually reopens in coming months. If there is member interest, we might also consider holding one or more virtual events; I've recently attended a few wine tastings via Zoom and found them enjoyable. In reviewing the list of quarterly dinners since our society was formed in 1939, I find very few years in which the society had no or only one event. Not surprisingly, most of these years occurred during and shortly after World War II, another time of upheaval. For the full list of events that the society has enjoyed over the years and a walk down memory lane, visit our website at <http://www.medicalfriendsofwine.org/resources/SMFW%20Quarterly%20Dinners%201939-2020.pdf>

The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act was passed by Congress with overwhelming, bipartisan support and signed into law by President Trump on March 27th, 2020. Embedded within the CARES Act is the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP), which provides loans to businesses and non-profits with 500 or fewer employees so that they may pay certain staff and operating costs for two months. The loan is administered through the Small Business Administration at a rate of 1% per annum and may be prepaid without penalty at any time. It is also forgivable if the funding is used to pay staff for 8 weeks (or to pay for rent, mortgage interest, or utilities, which don't apply to the Society of Medical Friends of Wine.) Once forgiven, the loan essentially becomes a grant.

Last week, we received the great news that we were able to secure a forgivable PPP loan, which we'll be able to use to cover 8 weeks of Claire's salary. Claire and I have discussed a number of tasks that she can complete during this time period, including preparing a survey to poll members on preferences for the society moving forward – watch for it to arrive in your email box soon. Claire will also be doing outreach to potential new members so that we'll be able to be in a good position to build membership once we can resume holding events. If you have a suggestion for a person or an organization that Claire should contact in order to recruit new members, please let her know at [claireanswerb@gmail.com](mailto:claireanswerb@gmail.com)

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

Warm regards,

Elizabeth Kass, MD



Sign of the Times

## And How Long Should I Age this Wine?

Robert Blumberg, M.D.

Cellar Master and Editor, Society of Medical Friends of Wine

Recently I attended a webinar on the wines of Bordeaux. With no tourism going on now, many tour companies are doing video presentations to keep their clientele interested and hopefully ready to sign up as soon as travel opens up again. This one was sponsored by Tauck, one of the best tour companies offering guided visits to the Bordeaux wine region.

Most webinars feature a question and answer session, as did this one. One question, from a debutante wine aficionado, was “how long should I age my Bordeaux?” The question is equally appropriate for the budding fancier of California Cabernet, Syrah-based wines from the Rhone Valley or Australia, and many other red wines of the world.

As questions go it seems like a simple and straight forward one. Most people who ask such a question are hoping for a comparably simple answer. They really don’t want to listen to conditions, what ifs, suppositions or legalese. How long should I age my red Bordeaux? Five years? Thank you very much.

But is a simple answer really adequate? Wine books and guides are filled with vintage charts and wine descriptions and prognostications that would suggest not. After all, part of the mysticism of wine is trying to figure out how one bottle will change with time compared with another. A discussion on aging of wine could easily go on for pages. If you asked this question of a Bordeaux a few decades ago an expert would need to know name of winery, vineyard composition, winemaking style of vintner, and other such details, and the answer would certainly differ depending on the vintage year.

But maybe the answer needs updating. Maybe science and modern grape growing and wine making have made so many changes that we need to rethink our answers, and make them shorter and simpler. The question was asked honestly and is worth looking at. Perhaps the wines produced today require an answer more appropriate for today.

Simplicity does have its place. Every good teacher knows that to be successful you need to maintain the attention and the interest of your students. You need to tell people what they want to know when they want to know it. Long-winded answers filled with myriads of details and variables may demonstrate your intelligence and scholarliness, but does that matter if your audience is drifting to sleep before you get to the punch line?

Tauck’s teacher did a good job with this and other questions. She answered the question about aging relatively succinctly. With tourism on hold, I am sure she was grateful for the opportunity to pursue her vocation and wanted to convey a lot of information in a short time and please her students.

Even so, I noted she could not resist throwing in a few curveballs to qualify her answer. So would I if I were addressing a comparable format. The question touches on both the mystical and the scientific in the world of wine. The answer(s) should take into account how much has evolved over the past several decades in the technology of the world of wine. The answer should consider how today’s wines are made and marketed.

Most wines are made these days to be attractive when young. They are ripe and fruit-driven and aromatic. They still have tannins, but the tannins are softer and do not require so much time to be approachable. This was not always the case, especially for wines like the young reds of Bordeaux.

Through much of the history of this part of the wine world, wines were either age-worthy or they were not age-worthy. The age-worthy wines came from the best properties and the best vintages. And not only would they age, they needed to age to bring out their drinkability and best qualities. Non age-worthy wines came from lesser vintages, lesser properties, lesser varietals. They served the need for restaurants wanting inexpensive wines with rapid turnover and for home use in a country where

consuming a bottle or two of wine a day was not uncommon. If the wine was not going to benefit from aging it could still be a serviceable wine, but not one thought to be of the highest quality.

Historically, one or two years per decade would produce the most complex, the most flavorful, the most age-worthy of wines. The wines needed age, and rewarded age. And since you could never be sure when another great vintage might come along, the temptation was to stock up to have plenty of bottles available to enjoy over the years as the wine evolved.

Switch to today. Virtually every vintage is touted for its quality. I recently circulated a very favorable review of the 2019 Bordeaux vintage (from wines barely done with fermentation) to members of my tasting group when one member commented “this must be the fifteenth vintage of the decade this decade”. It’s great for everyone if quality has improved that much, but what is the incentive to stock a cellar if you know you will only have to wait until next year for another fine vintage?

That’s not to say growing conditions are always the same, but there are now ways to deal with climatic challenges. Climate change contributes to grape ripening and fewer vintages of unripe wines. Vineyard management techniques, high priced equipment like optical sorters, and fermentation innovations all produce fuller, riper, rounder, fruitier, and technically sounder and more uniform wines. And, very importantly, prosperity allows more and more vintners to invest in the equipment and practices needed to accomplish this, so there is less disparity than ever between first growth and third growth, or between cru classe and cru bourgeois, or between St. Emilion and Fronsac for that matter.

From many a wine critic we will read a description such as “delicious already, but will hold well for decades”. Historically the best of the reds were both age-worthy and age-needy. They were not delicious when young; they were more likely closed-in and firm and tannic and more herbaceous than ripe. They would improve for decades, and they needed to improve for decades to reach their pinnacle of smoothness and drinkability. When I was cutting my teeth on young Bordeaux, I remember being told that, in general, the optimal drinking window for the best of wines from the best of vintages might be 20 to 25 years, and that many would age for decades more. If a wine is “delicious already”, why hold it for decades?

So, if this were a debate, we would be scoring points for the team arguing for that straightforward all-inclusive response, a one size fits all answer to the question of how long to or even whether to age that bottle. If wines are more alike than different these days, why make answers too complex? But does that really mean all Bordeaux should be painted with one brush, or for that matter, all California Cabernet, be it from Napa or the South Coast, from a hillside or a valley vineyard, should be considered identical in aging needs?

I could tell the instructor on my webinar felt uncomfortable answering in too simplistic a way, and she could not resist introducing the concept of *terroir* to help her address the question of aging. Suddenly we’re introducing more nuances and running the risk of complicating the answer, but perhaps some of this is still necessary, even for today’s modern wines.

For centuries it has been recognized that two properties, a kilometer or two apart, might produce wines of strikingly different quality. Same grape varieties, same macroclimate, same wine making techniques, but vastly different results in terms of taste and age-ability. Why is this? The French have a one-word answer, “*terroir*”.

If you put “*terroir*” into Google Translator, French to English, the result is “*terroir*”. If you put “*terroir*” into Merriam Webster’s dictionary, the definition is “the combination of factors, including soil, climate, and sunlight that gives wine grapes their distinctive character”. It takes one word in French to convey 16 words in English, so it is just much easier to adopt that single French word.

For centuries *terroir* has been that “*je ne sais quoi*” used to explain differences in wines and used to justify great differences in price and accolades. Is it still applicable? Much can be done to try and equalize differences in *terroir* and minimize differences in resultant wines. Beginning in the vineyard, the density of planting and the thinning of the crop when green can enhance grape quality. Expensive equipment helps to cull fruit and achieve better berry quality selection, and modern fermentation technologies can enhance ripeness of flavors and softness of tannins. And of course, prosperity allows more producers to employ those practices formerly restricted to only the most affluent of properties.

Yes, much can be done to narrow the gaps in quality and taste from one property to another, but there will always remain those subtle differences that affect the final product. We come back to *terroir*. Without it the world of wine would be more uniform and more predictable, and a whole lot less exciting.

*Terroir*. The slope and exposure of the vineyard, the microclimate, the drainage and composition of the soil, and undoubtedly a few unknown and mystical properties that also play a role. Yes St. Estephe may taste closer to Margaux than ever before, but in general the wines are still more tannic and will benefit from longer aging. Many palates may have difficulty sorting St. Emilion from Pauillac, but in general the former will be riper and fuller and richer and quite possibly less age-worthy, or age-needy, than the latter. Wines from Howell Mountain and the Mayacamas range are quite possibly still more backward than those from the valley floor vineyards near Oakville when at a comparable age.

So perhaps we do need to still consider *terroir* in our answer and accept that some wines will benefit from age more than others.

But to further complicate matters, the question, “how long should I age this wine” must really generate the follow-on question “what are you seeking in this wine”? When you drink it do you want the wine to be bursting with fruit—to taste of ripe black cherries and be introduced by an aroma of blackberries—or are you looking for the more subtle aromas and flavors of cedar and spice and truffles and earth? Do you like the mouth filling warmth of alcohol and robustness of tannins, or do you wish a soft silkiness to the feel of the wine that caresses, rather than explodes, on the palate?

Everyone’s palate is different and everyone’s desires may change depending on the food and the setting when the wine will be drunk. Trying to give a straightforward and simple answer to all is more likely to get one in trouble than to solve the question. I can never forget a Medical Friends of Wine tasting of 1974 California Cabernets that brought out such striking differences in palate preferences. I have mentioned it before and ask for your indulgence as I again refer to it.

Thanks to some generous donations to the Society, we were able to put together a small-group tasting of eight Cabernet Sauvignons from the 1974 vintage when the wines were just past their fortieth birthdays. We tasted the wines “blind”, in that we knew in general what the wines were, but the individual bottle identities were hidden by sacks until completion of the tasting and the rankings and the discussions. The results and opinions were varied, falling largely into two camps. A minority of those present loved the wines, the subtleties, the nuances, and undoubtedly the memories of prior tastings in

our and the wines' younger days. The majority of the group ached for the presence of the forward and ripe fruit that they had grown accustomed to and loved in their Cabernets. One particular comment hit home for me and left such an everlasting imprint that I have quoted it often as an example of how if one wants to do a good job teaching wine appreciation, one must be open minded about the views of others.

Included in the tasting was a bottle of the 1974 Beaulieu Vineyard Georges de la Tour Private Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon. Wines from this property in this era had long been favorites of mine, and I had just finished waxing on eloquently about how, though the wine had changed much from my memories of it decades before, I still prized the nutty old Madeira-like qualities of the wine and loved the ethereal lightness of the finish. To which one of the other attendees commented "Bob, if I wanted to drink Madeira, I would buy a Madeira. When I want to drink a Cabernet, I want it to taste like a Cabernet, not like a Madeira". Point, set, and match---and a humble moment for me.

So, to one palate an older wine may be mahogany hued, nutty and truffled in bouquet, and silky and elegant on the finish, while to another palate the wine is brown, oxidized and mushy, and lacking in life and flavor. To each his own, but knowing what you are ultimately looking for is an important consideration in advising how long to hold on to that last bottle.

So where does this all leave us? How does climate change, technology, modern winemaking, terroir, and personal preferences all fit into the equation? What is the answer—how long should you age your Bordeaux or your California Cabernet?

I really don't know what to say. Five years, I guess.



**Editor's Note:** Aging red wine and having a nice cellar to draw on have long been a goal for most serious wine buffs. The preceding article was meant to raise the question, but not necessarily provide the answer, as to whether or not that is still a worthwhile activity.

Our member Jim Gallagher has five decades of extensive experience in tasting, collecting, and serving wine, and an amazing wine cellar to support his activities. To help ease the stresses of corona virus imposed isolation he shares with you some of his recent tasting experiences. Jim has always been

a proponent in favor of selecting and aging good wine, and I suspect he remains a strong supporter of continuing to do so. Thanks Jim for brightening our day with your notes.

Following Jim's article is another scholarly review of a pertinent medical publication by Dan Bikle, M.D., PhD. We can be heartened that this month's review by Dan is of an article giving evidence that adding modest alcohol consumption to other healthy life style choices adds disease free quantity to our lives. That's something to drink to in times like these

## **Some Older Wines Recently Tasted**

Jim Gallagher, PhD.

One of my early concerns about wine was framed within the question, "What if there was a wine worth One Hundred Dollars (\$100.00) a bottle, would you like to know of it?" At the time, mid 1960s I certainly wasn't looking build a cellar of Hundred-dollar bottles of wine, nor did I anticipate I would see a day when One Hundred dollars would be a near average price for a bottle of Cabernet Sauvignon from Napa Valley. It was more a utopian wine that I had postulated to base my search for exceptional quality. A wine that had universal appeal-a consensus not doubted. After fifty years of tasting and judging wines, particularly withing tasting groups, I confidently observe that there is no such wine, or even a wine that approaches such a vaulted state of supremacy. Probably, this could be said of the status of any other vein of art.

COVID-19 has modified the manner in which I dine, although probably to a lesser degree than most, as I typically dined alone. However, at least once a week, I would entertain and share a few bottles of wine with guests. Which for me, was a wonderful pleasure that I am very anxious to see return.

Dining alone, I rarely open more than one bottle. Let me explain, typically I consume a half a 750ml bottle of wine with my evening meal, so there usually is enough wine remaining for the following eve. If not, I would open a second bottle and have plenty for the following evening. This routine, led to the further realization, that the wine on the second night, more often than not, seemed to be more expressive, that is, richer in flavor and weightier in the aftertaste on the second time around. This was mostly observed with Cabernet Sauvignon and Pinot Noir, occasionally when having Bordeaux or Burgundies, this outcome was similar. Quite surprising for wines with decades of bottle age and certainly speaks to their durability.





Let me share with you one reason why drinking wine in the midst of COVID is useful. One of the more prevalent symptoms of COVID-19, is the sensory loss of smell and taste. So, below is my offering of an early test of illness due to the virus. First, line up a selection of 5 bottles or so like the photo. if you see the selection of the five wines above, you're probably going to feel better. If not, you don't need to go any further, you are sick. Second, if you wish to open all the bottles, then you may have another disease, but it is not COVID-19.

So, the remaining leg is to open at least one bottle. Pour off 60ml into a stemmed glass, determine the color and decide if its red or not. If you decide red, and you haven't opened the Rochioli Chardonnay, you can see, which of course is a good sign because you have accomplished two important things. First, you can follow directions, and second, you have remembered what you were doing.

Now that some screening has been completed, the next steps are critical. You carefully sniff the wine without inhaling its contents. For now the preferred outcome is that you smelled something. Hopefully, it wasn't, as was the case for the 1985 BV 'Private Reserve' Cabernet Sauvignon, something like "wet dog odor" or "damp mildewed gym socks" because that wine was "corked" Hopefully you smell something more like fragrant cherry-mint odors of the Johnson Turnbull, or black cherry, truffle character of the Inglenook Cabernet, because only a minority of COVID-19 positives would have been able to detect those glorious odors.

Cabernet vintages I had been tasting, ranged from the 1970s-1999. The Pinot Noir vintages ranged from the late 1980s through 2011. An early note, all but one of the wines were quite pleasurable. One was corked.



Some of the wines I will mention will not surprise those who know me and have tasted with me. My preferences would not be surprising to anyone that attended my “Wine Seminars”, as these brands were frequently favored within my tastings which were conducted using a “double-blind” procedure.

One familiar name is **Johnson-Turnbull**. I have recently enjoyed several Johnson-Turnbull wines of each of the vintages from 1980

through 1986 the latter two vintages were made by winemaker, Kristen Belair (shown in the above panel). These wines displayed, in varying degrees, a common bouquet of chocolate mint, cherry, light strawberry, and toast; the balance and finish were generally superb, elegant, and long lasting. In its early years I remember the 1985 as being a more backward member of this group, but it has grown to be a star. The 1985 is the only vintage in which the newer (1982) and older (1967) plantings were enjoined to produce one wine. Starting in 1986 the two plantings were bottled separately as 67 or 82. Unfortunately, both planting used AXR#1 root stock and became infested with Phylloxera and were pulled out. The new owner, Peter O’Dell when replanting also removed the Eucalyptus trees which sided the vineyard and were, at least partially, responsible for the minty component of the bouquet. This was ostensibly done because O’Dell did not care for the minty character, but it also provided needed space to plant a greater number of vines.

Another vintner that produce outstanding wines during the early 1980 was **Groth Vineyards**. These wines were made by Nils Venge. Groth Cabernet Sauvignon debuted in 1982 with a big splash, largely because of its greater complexity, both in the bouquet and flavor, and while having excellent structure, notable was the absence of the harsh tannins more typical in many Napa Cabs at the time. The 1984 was one of the best Napa Cabs of the vintage. In 1985, the Groth Cabernet Sauvignon ‘Reserve’ was the first California wine to receive a 100-point score from Robert Parker in his ***Wine Advocate***.

A less well remembered vintner is **Ahlgren Vineyards** located in the Santa Cruz Mountains. Dexter Ahlgren produced some wonderful Cabernet Sauvignon and Zinfandels from purchased grapes. His 1978 Napa Cabernet Sauvignon was one of the better 1978 Cabs, both upon release and presently. 1978 was an outstanding Cabernet vintage. Recently I enjoyed this wine and am pleased to report it continues to be most delightful. It showed a lovely raspberry, cherry, an ever so modest toasty fragrance, and the mouth feel could not have been more luxuriant



1999 Pinot Noir, Williams Selyem 'Rochioli Riverblock'  
 1978 Cabernet Sauvignon, Ahlgren 'Napa'  
 1980 Cabernet Sauvignon, Louis Martini "Monte Rosso Vyd"

Another great 40-year-old wine is the 1980 Cabernet Sauvignon, **Louis Martini** 'Monte Rosso'. This Sonoma vineyard is on Sonoma Mountain, just south of Kenwood, a provenance of some great Cabernet Sauvignon. Many of these were produced by **Kenwood Winery** in



their "Artist Series" and were made by co-owner, Mike Lee. The 1994 was among my favorites. The wine had gained some fame due to the earlier rejection of the 1975 label which was considered "indecent" and "obscene" and rejected by the **Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Fire Arms (ATF)**, the government authority regulating the wine industry including labeling.

In 1994, the label once again was submitted by Kenwood Winery, and this time the label was approved. In any case, it was not likely that the label made the wine taste any better. In fact, by that time the Artist Series wines included some Cabernet Franc which most likely contributed to the attenuation of the early astringency of the 100% Cabernet Sauvignon.

Another close by Cabernet Sauvignon success was produced by vintner, **BR Cohn**. The winemaker at the time, was Helen Turley who guided four consecutive vintages, 1984-87, of excellent Cabernet Sauvignon. Merry Edwards finished the latter vintage. The 1985 BR Cohn is the only one I have tasted in

this year, and is not only a lovely wine, but it can still be found (occasionally) for a reasonable price and is worth looking for if I am enticing you into thinking about trying some older wines.

The 1967 Cabernet Sauvignon, Inglenook 'Cask H11' was another great treat. The wine showed a medium red hue, with an ever so modest brick edge; a bouquet of ripe cherries, some baking spice, truffles, and earth; medium-light body, and a magnificent lengthy aftertaste; rich and succulent.

So far, I have discussed Cabernet Sauvignon which is known for its longevity, and none of those wines mentioned above, has, in my opinion, outlived its interest or vitality. In many cases, they have continued to be attractive. In general, their improvement with time can be described as the emergence of greater complexity and pleasantness in the finish or aftertaste.

. The same could be said for the Pinot Noirs I have recently enjoyed; wines from **Chalone, Hanzell and Williams Selyem**. Among the Pinot Noirs that graced my dinner table was the 1993 **Chalone**. Chalone was one the earliest of California vintners to produce high quality Pinot Noir. The vineyard's inland location near the Pinnacles and the old dry farmed vines contributed character and meant the wines were not marked by the often observed vegetative, unripe character seen in reds from young coastal Monterey vineyards. Instead, Pinots with sweet and sour cherry flavors with mild mushroom overtones were typical. The 1993 Chalone Pinot Noir, though from a not a particularly significant vintage, had a medium-light red hue, with a light purple edge. The modest but well-defined bouquet was of ripe cherry-strawberry character within a toasty frame, medium-light body, excellent balance, and superb finish. A highly enjoyable wine and certainly not a wine that had lost its significance.



year-old Pinot Noir. It had a medium body, excellent strawberry and fig flavor with a mild toasty

From a different evening the 1980 Hanzell Pinot Noir was a major treat. It showed a medium-dark red hue, with a light purple edge—remarkable for a 40-



background; the finish was superb—lengthy and luscious, a treat and treasure.

Lest you think old world was not represented in my recent adventures, somewhere in this section, there should be a picture of a 1985 **Chateaufeuf du Pape**. A splendid wine, at this stage, 35 years since harvest, it showed a medium red hue, with a strawberry bouquet, speckled with spice, and minerals. It had a medium light body with a long luscious finish. Still showing a fine structure and ready to pair with a great range of menu items.

I will end with two Bordeaux wines. 1980 **Chateau Cos d'Estournel**, St. Estephe and 1988 **Chateau LaLagune**, Medoc not only remain attractive, but highly so. 1980 vintage rated poorly by most critics of the time, especially those arguing that the French were greedily inflating their prices. In truth, the wines appeared frail by traditional measures. Namely, you could drink and enjoy them upon arrival—unheard of. When I think back of the prices for even the first growths of 1980, single digit dollars and how well they taste 40 years later, I pause and pat myself on the shoulder, as I can no longer reach my back. The La Lagune from 1988 was the first of three successive fine vintages of Bordeaux, which was a rarity then, not so much



today. It is certainly a bigger, more robust wine than the Cos d'Estournel. I was taken by the depth and range of flavor—cherry, truffle, and wild mushroom in the La Lagune, and the lengthy velvet aftertaste. Think oyster silkiness.

Reading Bob's excellent discussion, the question remains ever present, "how long should I age wine?". Let me first say, as a student of wine, I have found it a very complex issue that continues to thread wine discussions. Yes, there are guidelines, but I have found them generally highly cautious; generally framing the period well within the boundaries of the life span of the wine. I think "critics" do this because consumers vary not only among themselves, but the same person may change over their lifetime in terms of what they expect or desire in a wine.

My cellar grew out of interest and attraction to specific wines, mostly wines I tasted, although in some cases acclaimed wines I read or heard about. Fortunately, the proximity to Napa, Sonoma, and the Santa Cruz Mountains allowed me regular trips to wineries. Often, after a visit, we would come home with more wine than we would consume in the immediate months, so preparations for storage was necessary. At that time, I was living adjacent to the beach in Sharp Park, Pacifica. The building had a subbasement cellar, so I dragged large planks that washed up on the beach to the cellar, obtained some bricks and built some shelving to store the wine in a dark, cool environment.

A carpenter friend helped me frame the area within the cellar, so I could have added security. So, what I'm hinting, is that one reason the collection grew was there was space to fill that dove tailed with my desire to know about wine. For the most part, I didn't buy wine in 1964 to drink at any specific subsequent time. Mostly, I bought what I liked and thought to be a good-to-great wine. With that said, most of the wines I bought were from Bordeaux or California Cabernet Sauvignon. And yes, as Bob pointed out, the prevalent view, was that you bought Bordeaux to drink in ten or more years later.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s there were a few California vintners producing wines that were highly tannic. **1968 Ridge Montebello Cabernet Sauvignon** and **1970 Mayacamas, Cabernet Sauvignon** for me were undrinkable upon release. By the early-to mid-1980s, several new and highly popular Napa producers, **Diamond Creek, Keenan, Dunn Vineyard**, were producing wines that tended to be highly tannic, and frequently an accompanying rationale focused on their future development. Did the wine improve with age? In many cases they have, and I frequently point to the 1970 Mayacamas Cabernet Sauvignon's dramatic development to a superb wine.

What I have discovered over 50+ years is that wine tends to change slowly over many years. In most cases perception of odors and flavors seem less singular and dominant and more apt to appear nuanced and complex. The Johnson-Turnbull and Heitz Cellars, both were marked by a pronounced minty character when young. This remains today but a range of other odors now compete for recognition. And in most cases, the finish has tended toward a velvety texture. The most recognized change for the more robust styled wines, is the softening in the finish.

Those changes can be masked by what is often referred to as "bottle variation". Bottle variation occurs even within the same case. More often provenance and storage accounts for observed differences in the quality of the same wine. Quality control (or lack of) at the time of bottling can be another source. Finally, it may be due to the manner in which the wine is prepared for serving. Older wines often contain near microscopic matter that tends to be bitter and imparts an unpleasant character to the wine. To offset this effect, I stand wines to be drunk for several days, then decant using a fine screen. This seems to remove most off-putting effects.

So, the conclusion I offer, is "know thyself".

## **A little booze contributes to the benefit of a healthy life style on disease free life expectancy**

By Daniel Bikle, MD, PhD

### **A Review of an Article by:**

Li, Y et al. Healthy lifestyle and life expectancy free of cancer, cardiovascular disease, and type 2 diabetes: prospective cohort study. *British Medical Journal* 2020; 368:16669

*Methods:* The authors of this study used data from the Nurses Health Study (NHS) from 1980-2014, n=73168, and the Health Professionals Follow-up Study (HPFS) from 1986-2014, n=38,366 to assess the impact of 5 healthy life style factors on total life expectancy and life expectancy free of cancer, cardiovascular disease, and type 2 diabetes after the age of 50. The lifestyle factors were diet quality assessed by the Alternate Healthy Eating Index score with low risk defined as top 40% of each cohort, physical activity self-reported with low risk score defined as 3.5hr/wk. of moderate to vigorous activity, BMI with healthy range from 18.5-24.9, smoking status by self-report as none ever, past, and current, further categorized as less than 14, 14-25, and >25 cigarettes/day, and alcohol consumption with moderate levels defined as 5-15gm/day for women and 5-30gm/day for men. A 4oz glass of 14% alcohol wine is about 15gm. So, five factors each given one point leading to a total life style score of 0-5. The data came from biannual questionnaires sent to the participants. 1980 was used for the NHS baseline and 1986 for the HPFS. Participants who had any of the 3 diseases (cancer, CVD, DM) at the start were excluded from the analysis. As noted above they were followed for 34 or 28 years, respectively. Response rate was 94% for the NHS and 90% for the HPFS. The National Death Index was highly sensitive and specific in recording deaths. The medical records were used to confirm most cases of cancer, CAD, and stroke. DM ascertainment relied on self-report for the most part. Statistical analyses were extensive.

*Results:* During the follow-up periods 21344 women and 13039 men died. Total life expectancy increased from age 50 with increasing life style score (0 to 4-5). For women the increase was from 31.7yrs to 41.1yrs and men from 31.3yrs to 39.4yrs, most of which was free of cancer, CVD, and DM. In particular, life expectancy free of these diseases increased from 23.7yrs to 34.4yrs for women and 23.5yrs to 31.1yrs for men each with a step wise increase in life expectancy as the risk score increased from 0 to 4-5. The scores 4 and 5 were combined because of the relatively small number of participants with risk scores of 5. When the diseases were examined separately, in women the greatest impact of a risk score of 4-5 vs 0 was on freedom from DM (12.3yrs) followed by CVD (10.0yrs) and cancer (8.3yrs). In men the same pattern was observed but with lesser effect (10.3yrs for DM, 8.6yrs for CVD, 6.0yrs for cancer). Moreover, when patients developed any of these diseases, those who adopted a healthy life style survived significantly longer than those who did not.

**Of greatest interest to our group is that when the impact on life expectancy free of these diseases of those adopting 4 healthy lifestyle factors (compared to none) excluding moderate alcohol**

**consumption was compared to the impact on those enjoying moderate alcohol consumption in their lifestyle along with the other 4 factors, the increase rose from 9.5yrs to 12.5yrs in women and 8.8yrs to 9.6yrs in men. So here's to moderate alcohol consumption along with other healthy life style factors.**

*Discussion:* This study makes a good case for pursuing a healthy life style including moderate alcohol consumption. The type of alcohol is not listed. The generalizability of the data may be limited in that the participants are primarily white and medical professionals. Moreover, most of the data were by self-report. However, the consistency of self-reporting over the long-term follow-up was high. Although the impact of moderate alcohol consumption on life expectancy was less than the other life style factors, it was significant. That said, alcohol consumption greater than 15gm for women or 30gm for men reversed this beneficial effect. So as prudent individuals we can now enjoy the increased quality of life provided by a glass or two of wine with the knowledge that this is likely to increase the quantity as well as the quality of that life.