

SOCIETY OF MEDICAL FRIENDS OF WINE NEWSLETTER NOVEMBER 2016-PART 2

A REPORT ON THE DINNER AT UNCLE YU'S RESTAURANT, OCTOBER 22, 2016 AND SOME MUSINGS ON CHINA AND THE PRICE OF WINE

In 1989 Jean-Luc Thunevin founded Chateau de Valandraud, one of the first of the “garagiste” wineries in Bordeaux. Making wine in a small building (literally a garage) rather than an impressive chateau, M. Thunevin caught the palate and the pen of Robert Parker and rose to fame. His first label now sells for north of \$200 the bottle for the primarily Merlot-based wine.

In the heart of traditional Bordeaux, where reputations and prices are based on centuries of tradition, how could a newcomer rise so quickly? Mr. Parker of course has tremendous influence, but is there also a role for catching the fancy of the Chinese market?

In the fall of 2014 we flew into Bordeaux on the way to a week in Dordogne. We decided to make the first day's drive easier and headed to the charming wine village of St. Emilion. There we stayed in rooms at the Chateau de Valandraud, just outside town.

There was no tasting at the property, but as guests we were offered a complimentary visit to the tasting room in town where an assortment of M. Thunevin's wines are offered. There we were greeted by a very pleasant young Chinese woman fluent in French, Mandarin, and English. Not long after our arrival, several Chinese women tourists arrived and a conversation quickly unfolded in Mandarin about the wines and prices offered. We were told a lot of Chinese visitors came to the tasting room already acquainted with the name Chateau de Valandraud. And apparently they are less deterred by the asking price than we were.

The price of Bordeaux has skyrocketed, particularly for first growth and celebrity second growth properties. Chinese interest in fine wine is often quoted as a reason. But is this durable? Does Chinese cuisine pair with wine, and can a culture not acclimated to wine consumption become so?

Here in the Bay Area a few select Asian restaurants have actively pursued pairing wine with their food, and perhaps none have been at it as long or done it as successfully as Uncle Yu's...thus the reason for our Society's visit for our 275th quarterly dinner.

RECEPTION

Passed Hors d'Oeuvres
Mini crab cake, crispy jumbo prawn, goat cheese wonton
Heimberger Cave de Beblenheim Crement Blanc de Noirs

DINNER

Rainbow Chicken in Lettuce wrap
Domaine Ernest Burn Pinot Blanc 2010

Walnut Prawns
Domaine Ernest Burn Sylvaner 2010

Salt and Pepper Lobster
Domaine Barmes-Buecher Riesling Grand Cru Steingrubler 2007

Quail (half)
Domaine Ernest Burn Muscat Grand Cru Goldert 2007
Special deluxe vegetables
Domaine Barmes-Buecher Gewurztraminer Rosenberg de Wettolshiem 2008

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SPEAKER

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Peking Duck
Domaine Barmes-Buecher Pinot Noir Reserve 2009

Mongolian Filet Mignon
Domaine Barmes-Buecher Pinot Noir VV 2009
Domaine Ernest Burn Pinot Gris Grand Cru Goldert 2011

Dessert Duo
Domaine Ernest Burn Pinot Gris "Dauphine"

The beautifully prepared and presented food was delicious, with a myriad of flavors, textures, and delicate spices. Each course was paired with a wine selected by our wine chair of the night, Dr. Larry Dennen. Dr. Dennen chose to feature the wines of Alsace for their generous acidity, complexity, and subtle nuances that proved so food friendly, especially for this style of cuisine.



Dr. Dennen, discussing the wines

The sparkling wine was light golden in color with a richness on the palate and excellent acidity. The complexity was on a par with Champagne.

The 2010 Domaine Ernest Burn Pinot Blanc had a robe of medium gold color, and on the palate was rich with the silky texture of glycerine, and generous body and acidity. Off dry, the acidity balanced well with the ever so slight sweetness and made for effortless drinking with the delicate chicken.

From the same estate, the 2010 Sylvaner also showed generous regal color and had an aroma of flowers and honeydew melon. Again, this was a rich, luxurious wine with a long finish and crisp acidity to complement the walnuts and prawns. In much of the world Sylvaner is thought of as a lesser varietal. In Alsace, when yield per vine is limited, the wine reaches its pinnacle.

Lobster deserves an even more unctuous and complex wine, and the 2007 Domaine Barmes-Buecher Riesling from Grand Cru vineyard Steingrubler filled the need superbly, and was my favorite wine of the evening. Showing age and complexity in both nose and palate, this wine had a finish that would not quit and demonstrated why Riesling is one of the world's greatest white varietals.

Perhaps only in Alsace does a dry Muscat wine reach noble status. Domaine Ernest Burn Muscat Grand Cru Goldert from the 2007 vintage had a deep golden color, a spicy perfumed aroma, full body, light acidity, and a rich, oily, if just slightly bitter finish that paired well with quail, a dish that one might otherwise think of serving with a light red wine.

Possibly no other wine is more associated with Alsace than Gewurztraminer, and no exploration of the wines of this region would be complete without one. The 2008 Gewurztraminer from Domaine Barmes-Buecher's Rosenberg de Wettolsheim vineyard fulfills its namesake vineyard with a beautiful rose petal aroma which introduces a delicious spicy, rich, and just slightly sweet wine with an oily and ever so slightly bitter finish that helps it blend well with food, including this vegetable selection.

A duo of Pinot Noirs accompanied the Peking Duck and the Mongolian Filet Mignon. Both from the 2009 vintage and both from Domaine Barmes-Buecher, one is labeled Reserve and the second Vieilles Vignes (old vines). Of all the wines of the evening, the two Pinot Noirs were clearly the most controversial. Whether by this point of the evening it was palate fatigue or palates not accustomed to this style of Pinot, some of our members and guests yearned for a richer, riper Pinot in the style of celebrated California vineyards or for the earthy, foresty, and spicy Pinot of Burgundy. It occurs to me that Alsatian Pinots have flavors reminiscent of tart fruits such as rhubarb and cranberry, and are quite a contrast to our more familiar black cherry and cinnamon style wines. That said, I remember the days when Alsatian Pinot Noir was little more than a deep rose, and these wines were much more than that. Who knows—with global warming at hand Alsace may be premium Pinot country in another decade or two.

To complete our selection of noble Alsatian varietals, we finished with two Pinot Gris from Domaine Ernest Burn. The first was the 2011 from the Grand Cru Golbert vineyard, and the second had a bit more bottle age as it was the 2008 "Dauphine". Pinot Gris, known as Pinot Grigio in Italy, can produce anything from a light, innocuous, and sometimes effervescent drink to a rich, oily, and complex wine that can perhaps be as close in texture to a red wine as seen in the world of whites.

For my palate the best come from Oregon for value and drinkability, and the most complex come from Alsace. These wines did not disappoint. They were rich, unctuous, and slightly sweet, with so much acidity that they seemed beautifully balanced and food friendly. The deep bronze gold color showed their age. The palate showed their freshness...wonderful wines.

All of these wines, except for the Riesling, are still available to members and friends of the Society at very attractive prices considering their quality. For more information about the wines or to request pricing and order information, please contact Larry Dennen at larry@encorewineimports.net

So can one pair wine with Chinese food? Absolutely. There are still challenges. Subtly spiced dishes will do better than boldly spiced ones. The practice of serving many plates nearly simultaneously can present difficulties. Yet our experience with the versatility and age worthiness of Alsatian wines,

where wines can remain fresh and yet develop food friendly subtlety and complexity, demonstrate how pleasurable this pairing can be

Will the Chinese market continue to develop and have an outsized effect on the price of fine wine? With more than a billion inhabitants, should only ten percent of the Chinese population develop a taste for fine wine, the effect on the world market will be significant. For me it is still hard to imagine drinking very expensive first or second growth Bordeaux with a dinner like this one. That is, until I remember my experience, in, of all places, St. Emilion.











SPEAKER OF THE EVENING—DR. RICHARD PETERSON



Dr. Richard Peterson, addressing the Society

For our 275th Quarterly Dinner, the Society was very fortunate to have as speaker Dr. Richard Peterson. The wine industry is filled with some lovely people, but none more so than Dick Peterson. I first met Dr. Peterson more than 40 years ago during his tenure at Beaulieu Vineyards, and have been fortunate to have our paths cross a number of times, many of which were at Society Events, as he has been an honorary member of our Society for many years.

In his talk entitled “The Winemaker”, reflecting the title of his recently published book, Dr. Peterson regaled us with tales of his experiences and shared industry secrets in a most informative and memory-provoking way. He guided us along the path as the industry evolved from the years of post Prohibition slumber into the dynamic and world leading position it enjoys today.

I have been thoroughly enjoying his book, **THE WINEMAKER**, Meadowlark Publishing, 2015. The Parts reflect the wineries where he has worked through the years, starting with Gallo in 1958 and in subsequent years, Beaulieu, The Monterey Vineyard, Taylor California Cellars, and Atlas Peak.

The individual chapter titles give insight into the exciting tales they chronicle—"Oak Chip Espionage", "The Times, They Are A-Changing", "Heublein: A Different Language", "Vineyard Surprises", "First Monterey Wines", "The Nose Knows", and a "Vineyard Manager's Nightmare" are but a few examples. For anyone with an interest in grape growing, wine making, wine marketing, and California wine history—which should include all of you reading this newsletter—I highly recommend this very entertaining, well-written, and informative book.

I hope you all had a wonderful Thanksgiving and were able to address that age-old question—which wine goes best with turkey.

For those of you who were at Uncle Yu's, I hope you enjoyed having your memories refreshed with this recounting. For those of you who were unable to attend, I hope reading about our delightful evening will whet your appetites for our next event, the Annual Meeting dinner to be held the evening of Saturday January 21st. Look for more details about this event and other Society activities in our early December newsletter.

To your health!

Bob Blumberg
Cellar Master, Society of Medical Friends of Wine