

Society of Medical Friends of Wine

SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA

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NEWSLETTER

NOVEMBER 2018

Cheese Tasting: The World of Cheddars, With Janet Fletcher, publisher of Planet Cheese

On Sunday, November 4, 2018, we held our eighth annual Wine and Cheese Event under the expert tutelage of Janet Fletcher, author and publisher of Planet Cheese, a weekly blog filled with fascinating news and tasting notes on cheese. To subscribe, contact Janet at fletcher@foodwriter.com.

This year we learned all about cheddar. Interestingly, Janet mentioned that she has given hundreds of classes on cheese, but this was the first time she dedicated an entire event to cheddar. We learned of the history of this famous cheese in England and how production has spread around the world, including very much so to the United States and Canada. We learned of the difference between hand-made artisan cheddar and mass-produced automated ones. We learned of bandaged and cloth bound cheddar. Of how to encourage a rind or to prevent one. And of course, we learned of how the cheese changes in complexity, composition, and taste with aging.

On the plate in the photo below, starting in the one o'clock position and moving clockwise around the plate, are the seven cheeses that we sampled.

The first is Flory's Truckle, a raw milk cheddar with delicious sweet and salty flavors from the Homestead Creamery in Missouri and Iowa. Next is Flagship Reserve Cheddar from the famous Beecher's Creamery in Seattle, across from the Pike Street Market. Exposed to air to encourage rind formation, this cheese was saltier and creamier with a waxy smell and small protein crystals to add texture. Our third cheese was Fiscalini Bandaged Cheddar, a farmstead cheese from Modesto with lovely sweet and nutty flavors and a mature finish from aging.

Our fourth cheese, in the seven o'clock position, comes from a large cooperative well known on the East Coast, Cabot Creamery in Vermont. It is their premier product, Cabot Clothbound Cheddar, and comes from milk from one of their many farms. Made at Cabot, at five days of age it is transferred to the nearby Jasper Ridge creamery for nurturing and aging. It is a fine cheese, but the group did not find this particular example to be as full-flavored or as complex as the others sampled this day.

I suspect that the benchmark in many of our minds was the next cheese, Keen's Cheddar, as it was a true English cheddar from Keen's of Somerset, England. Produced by a fifth-generation family of cheese makers, it was creamy with lovely protein granules and that tang of cheddar that so distinguishes an artisan cheese that has been nicely aged from a mass produced one.

Speaking of aging, our last two cheeses were magnificent examples of the changes in cheddar with aging. The Old Quebec Vintage 7 -Year Cheddar comes from Agropur, a large dairy cooperative, where their finest of cheese is hand-selected and aged initially in 640-pound blocks, then cut into 40-pound

blocks and aged in bags so that no rind forms. From Wisconsin we had the Hook's 10-Year Cheddar. Our only orange colored cheese, it derives its pumpkin color from the addition of Annato seed, as is so common in many Wisconsin cheeses. Ten years of aging gives this cheddar an incredible earthy scent, yet it retains a creamy texture. Both of these long-aged cheeses were absolutely delicious and fascinating. Production of this style of cheese does come with a price, however, as both of these aged cheddars were in the \$40 to \$50 per pound price range.



Photo by Dr. Jack McElroy

In England, the classical pairing for cheddar would be a claret (red wine from Bordeaux), and ideally an aged one. In consultation with Janet, we decided to follow this lead, but also to expand into other wine types to explore and learn what works and what does not.

White wine can do well with cheese, and we decided on two to try. The first was the 2017 Pascal Janvier "Cuvee Silex" (flint) from Jasnières, a small commune close to Vouvray in the Loire Valley. The wine is produced from Chenin Blanc grapes. On its own it had a lovely honeyed aroma, and I wondered if it could have been touched by some Botrytis, although on the palate it was quite dry, with medium body

and a flinty finish with firm acidity. Quite a nice aperitif-style wine, although with Cheddar not so great. Probably would have been better with some softer, creamier, younger cheese.

For our second white we were attracted by the sweet/acid balance of a German Riesling, and we went with a [2015 Selbach Oster Zeltinger Schlossberg Riesling Spatlese](#) from the Mosel. As is not uncommon in young German sweet wines, a touch of sulfur was present in the aroma initially, but this quickly dissipated, leaving behind a light, tart, beautifully fresh and medium sweet wine. Initially it seemed a bit light to go with the cheese, but as the wine blossomed in the glass, we kept going back to it and finding nice pairings, especially if one were planning on having it as part of an afternoon wine and cheese refreshment.

Red wine and cheese are classic. Old vine Zinfandel is classic. So, who could blame us for seeing how the [2015 Valravyn Zinfandel](#) from Sonoma County worked. With classic Zinfandel briary flavors and a heady but not too strong 14/% alcohol, the pairing found favor with many tasters, again especially if one were planning the wine and cheese tasting as a meal in itself, as opposed to a course at the end of a long dinner.

For claret options, perhaps mirroring our younger and older cheese selections, we went with young and old claret. The 2009 vintage in Bordeaux has received many accolades for plush wines full of fruit and warmth and youthful charm, and the [2009 Chateau L'Arrivau](#) from the Haut Medoc fit this general description well. For fully mature claret, we were very fortunate to have in the Society's cellar three bottles of [1975 Chateau Beychevelle](#) which we gingerly opened and decanted.

Close your eyes and imagine you were in your very own London club, or the guest of the Head Master of an Oxford college, sampling wonderful farmhouse cheddar and an old claret. There we were gazing at a glass of, for its age, still richly colored red with a mushroomy, nutty, cedary bouquet and a palate with near fully resolved tannins and just enough remaining fruit to awaken the aftertaste. Old cheddar and old claret truly make for a fascinating match. The 1975 vintage has always been a controversial one. In its youth the wines were tannic bombs, and the question of when or whether they would mature has been a lingering one. The tannins in this one certainly had lightened, the aromas were complex and interesting, and many tasters appreciated the opportunity and forgave the paucity of fruit. Even those less impressed at what they felt was a wine too old and musty for their likes were polite enough not to complain about the experience.

We then shifted gears and countries for our last two wines. For centuries the Madeira islands, belonging to Portugal, have produced fortified wines of varying dryness and sweetness produced from indigenous grapes and noted for their ability to evolve with age and withstand heat and other climatic challenges (having once travelled the globe in the holds of sailing ships). They were favorites of our forefathers, and one can imagine Washington and Jefferson sipping a glass of Madeira with a favorite cheddar.

If there was one wine of the afternoon that truly caught people's fancy, it was the [Sercial Madeira](#) from the Rare Wine Company. This was truly heartening, since when I polled people as to how many were familiar with Madeira or consumed it often, only a few hands went up. This wine was just off dry, rich and nutty and warm and wonderful with the cheeses, particularly the older ones.

For our last wine, we travelled to Oporto and the Douro River Valley of Portugal for the [Ferreira "Quinta do Porto" 10-year-old tawny port](#). Tawny port is aged in cask and then bottled ready to drink, although

the time spent in cask can vary tremendously. 10 years is not an awfully long time for a tawny, but it was enough to give us the experience of this style of Port and to keep us within a reasonable budget for the evening. Showing toffee and spirits and fruit in the glass, the Port was also well appreciated with the cheddars, both young and old. Port is a classic accompaniment in England to another famous English cheese, the blue veined Stilton. While I enjoyed this wine with the cheddar, I do think a Port and Stilton pairing is unparalleled, and perhaps a future Wine and Cheese seminar can feature blue cheeses of the world.



Photo by Dr. Jack McElroy

The 1975 Beychevelle was a gift from the estate of our former member, Dr. Alan Rider. This is a perfect example of how a donation to the Society can greatly enhance our events and provide wonderful educational and tasting experiences for our members. If you have wine you would like to donate, please contact us to discuss. Since wines donated to the Society are used for our educational mission, they may be tax deductible for you.



Photo by Dr. Jack McElroy



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Our Wine and Cheese seminars have become one of our most popular events, virtually guaranteed to sell out, and based on the comments and smiles from this year's attendees, this one was another success. Thanks so much to Janet Fletcher for her excellent cheese selections, great knowledge, and wonderfully friendly approach to educating us all.



Photo by Dr. Jack McElroy

SOCIETY OF MEDICAL FRIENDS OF WINE 80TH ANNUAL DINNER AND MEETING

Please mark your calendars now and plan on joining us on January 20th, 2019, to celebrate the 80th anniversary of the founding of our Society. Being around for eighty years is a huge accomplishment in this ever-changing world of ours. We have chosen the historic elegance of the Hotel Mark Hopkins in San Francisco for our celebration, and dinner chair Dr. Michael Caplan and wine chair Dr. Dan Bikle have planned a menu and wine selection fitting for the occasion. Look for a formal announcement and call for sign-up in December. Speaker for the evening will be Esther Mobley, the San Francisco Chronicle's excellent wine writer.

HAPPY THANKSGIVING

We are at that time of year where we are inundated with new recipes featuring ways to cook the Thanksgiving turkey. In the medical world, whenever there are multiple options for treating a condition or an illness, it usually means there is not one perfect solution.

As we continue our pursuit of the perfect turkey recipe, the search for the ideal wine accompaniment is no less challenging. Once again multiple opinions abound. The now-a-days oft-maligned Chardonnay

can be a wonderful pairing with turkey, but not necessarily the lean and tart style of Chablis, or the overly oaked and highly alcoholic style of some California and Australian vintners. “Ah” but a Chardonnay with moderate alcohol, good fruit and acidity, and spicy nuances can be “near” perfect.

Alsatian wines can also have that balance of fruit, acidity, dryness, and spice to pair well, but for this most American of all holidays, a domestic wine is often desired and there are only a few domestic Rieslings, Pinot Gris, or Gewurztraminers that can arise to the occasion.

As for reds, the choice of Gamay (as in Beaujolais) is commonly heard. The fresh tartness of this varietal as a foil for turkey is probably somewhat analogous to the pairing of turkey with cranberry sauce. This lighter bodied and very fruity red can be a good choice, although the relative simplicity of this varietal leaves many longing for more complexity.

More tannic reds such as Cabernet and its cousins or Syrah often seem rather heavy for an ideal pairing with a roasted bird, although certainly this is a matter of personal taste preference. The almost uniquely American wine, Zinfandel, also seems rather too alcoholic in many versions for a Thanksgiving libation.

This leads to Pinot Noir, as a wine potentially having the wonderful fruit and then some of Gamay, yet less of the heaviness of Cabernet. A well balanced, i.e. not too alcoholic, Pinot Noir would probably be a favorite choice for me. There are hundreds of California and Oregon Pinots out there, to say nothing of red Burgundies if you wish to cross the pond. Let me know if you find the perfect one.

One of the challenges that many modern style wines present is their elevated alcohol levels and their very intense and rich fruitiness that can leave an impression of sweetness on the palate. To combine these with a rich Thanksgiving dinner, including a turkey loaded with tryptophan, is to ask for premature somnolence.

And that would not be good if you are planning on staying awake so you can finish the evening with a slice of pumpkin or apple pie, perhaps even enhanced with a morsel of cheddar.

May your Thanksgiving be a happy and delicious one, and may you have much to be thankful for.

We at the Society of Medical Friends of Wine are thankful that you are a member and friend of the Society.

Bob Blumberg, M.D.
Society of Medical Friends of Wine
Editor and Cellar Master.