

The Society of Medical Friends of Wine

SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA

www.medicalfriendsofwine.org

NEWSLETTER

APRIL, 2020

I usually get inspired to start a newsletter after a particularly wonderful event that deserves reporting, or after an interesting tasting with a group of friends and colleagues. Needless to say, I hadn't been feeling inspired lately and had not given thought to the next newsletter when I received a message from Dan Bikle that he had come across an interesting and potentially controversial medical article that he could review. Thank you, Dan, for bringing me back into focus and for providing us with another scholarly article about wine and health.

These are truly extraordinary and challenging times. And times that have changed so quickly. It was not very long ago when several of your officers were trying to decide if we could proceed with our dinner at Piperade. We desperately wanted to. The menu was outstanding. The wines carefully chosen. We felt we all could use some camaraderie and good cheer, and after all restaurants were still open and the size of our gathering was under the then permitted limit. But logical and cooler heads prevailed and the event was postponed. Our membership is largely in the "most at risk" demographic, some would take public transportation, and even modest "social distancing" was not feasible given our crowd filled the private room to capacity. Only a few days later with the city and the region going into lockdown and restaurants closing, the decision was fortuitous and, in retrospect, we wondered how we could have even thought about proceeding.

Our dinner at Piatti has likewise been postponed. Our winery tour to Lodi in June is still in limbo, as we await further evolution of the Corona virus situation. We know we will come back; we just don't yet know when.

When the country opens again, will \$350 pre fixe multi micro-course dinners accompanied by \$200 wine pairings still be popular? Who knows? But I suspect simpler gatherings of good friends over good food and with good wine will be all the more special, and all the more appreciated. Your Society will be here to fill that need.

Speaking of filling a need, it is times like this when the health care professions rise to the occasion, and it is heartening to see the general population recognize and acknowledge this. My son and daughter-in-law are hospitalists on the front lines confronting the pandemic. I worry for them, but I would never ask them to stop doing what they are doing. It is what we do. It is in our DNA, and all of us in our careers have faced many physical and psychologically threatening challenges. To those of you still active in practice and dealing with today's issues, thank you!

Thank you also to Jim Gallagher Ph.D. and Elizabeth Kass, M.D., for contributing articles to this month's newsletter. Jim will give you historical background on the St. Helena appellation and provide tasting notes from this year's tasting. Elizabeth will take you to a fine Edinburgh

restaurant for tasty food and an introduction to the wines of South Africa. Both of these articles will help you prepare for when we can travel, tour, taste, and congregate again.

These are truly extraordinary and challenging times. Be well and stay well. And may we all hear the pop of a cork and enjoy the scent and taste of a fine wine together. Again. Soon.

Bob Blumberg, M.D.

Editor and Cellar Master, Society of Medical Friends of Wine

Scientific Article Review

By **Daniel Bikle, MD, PhD**

When it comes to thyroid cancer, smoking and drinking might be good for you

A review of Yeo Y et al. Smoking, alcohol consumption, and the risk of thyroid cancer: a population-based Korean cohort study of 23 million people. *Thyroid* (in press) DOI: 10.1089,2019

Background: Thyroid cancer is common in Korea. Over 99% are papillary carcinomas. In a number of studies, smaller than this one, reduced thyroid cancer risk has been associated with current smoking and alcohol consumption, although the latter association has been less consistent. The authors wanted to test these associations using a very large data base, the Korean National Health Insurance database (KNHI). They wanted to determine not only whether there was a negative correlation between smoking or alcohol and thyroid cancer, but whether there was an interaction between the two. Moreover, the KNHI data base includes information on age, sex, income, region, exercise, BMI, medical history including diabetes mellitus and lipid disorders that could be modeled into the results.

Methods: 22,809,391 individuals over 20 years old selected from the KNHI data base over the period of 2009-2012 were enrolled and followed for a mean of 5.36 years. Their smoking history and alcohol consumption were self-reported. Smoking was recorded as never, past, or current, and duration as less than 10yrs, 10-20yrs, and over 20yrs. Alcohol intake was rated as never, mild (<15gr/day), moderate (15-30gr/day), heavy (over 30gr/day). 15gr is equivalent to about 4oz wine by my calculation. The association between smoking or alcohol consumption was adjusted using three different modes: 1) age and sex, 2) age, sex, exercise, income, BMI, alcohol consumption for analysis of smoking, or smoking for analysis of alcohol consumption, 3) as per model 2 with addition of diabetes mellitus and dyslipidemia. The type of beverage was not recorded (nor was the brand of cigarettes). My guess, this being Korea, that Napa Valley Cabernet was not high on the list, but I could be wrong.

Results: In the follow-up period 174,247 cases of thyroid cancer were recorded in 174,247 subjects or 0.76% of the population studied. The hazard ratio for current smokers and thyroid cancer was 0.74 (.72-.76) vs non-smokers, with little difference among models. Past smokers did not show a significant reduction in HR relative to non-smokers. There was not a consistent trend with respect to amount of smoking or duration of smoking, although there did seem to be a trend with greater HR reduction in those smoking less than 10 years (data not adjusted). For alcohol consumption as per smokers the level of HR reduction did not change much with respect to which model was used. However, mild drinkers showed only a HR reduction to 0.92 (.90-.93) with a risk reduction to 0.86 (.82-.89) in moderate and heavy drinkers. Current smokers who were also heavy drinkers had the greatest risk reduction, HR 0.62 (.59-.66). Of interest is that women seemed to benefit more by heavy drinking than men, as did older subjects (>65years old), but income level was not a significant factor.

Discussion: What are we to make of this? This is an association study done retrospectively but using a very large and well documented data base covering an entire country. Can we assume these data can be generalized to different countries and different cultures? Hard to say, but at least the relationship of smoking to thyroid cancer has been seen in a number of studies from different countries. This is less true for alcohol consumption. The next question is: does the relationship of smoking and/or alcohol consumption make sense with respect to mechanism. Here we are on shakier ground. The only hypothesis mentioned by the authors is the possibility that smoking/alcohol somehow interferes or desensitizes the pituitary/thyroid axis such that TSH levels are reduced. However, no data regarding either TSH or thyroid hormone levels were recorded. Should we recommend that our patients at risk for thyroid cancer start smoking or drinking? Probably not, but wouldn't this be a nice recruiting tool to encourage such individuals to join our Society?

16th Annual Appellation St. Helena Trade Tasting

February 20, 2020

Jim Gallagher, Ph.D.



The annual **Appellation St. Helena Trade (ASH)** Tasting was held at the **Charles Krug Winery's carriage house** (see above). The winery is located on highway #29 just north of the town of St. Helena. The ASH tasting is held in conjunction with **Premiere Napa Valley**, which is a four-day winter gala attracting tourists and trade representatives from all over the world.

Currently there are 70 members listed on the ASH website, mostly wineries and wine grape growers. The history of the appellation is relatively recent (1995), however the roots date back to the 19th century when **Charles Krug, Dr. George Crane, Henry Pellet** and **David Fulton** began an association to provide Napa Valley wines to primarily the east coast, but also to Europe. This common interest of gaining additional respect for Napa Valley wines led to collaboration between growers and vintners ultimately to improve the marketing of their product.

Wine grapes had been grown in Napa Valley prior to 1848, while under Mexican rule. However, the commercial wine business for Californians emerged in the latter part of the 19th century. An earlier significant event was in 1840, when **Edward Bale** received a land grant from General Vallejo as an anniversary present. Bale promptly planted Mission grapes on the property which is located just north of St. Helena. **David Fulton** planted the land adjacent to his Saddlery in St. Helena in 1858. At the same time **Dr. Crane** planted his vineyard. Three years later, **Charles Krug** founded his vineyard. In 1860 Fulton purchased additional land and planted an 18-acre vineyard on a parcel on the north side of St. Helena. He later constructed a winery on the property on what is now Fulton Lane. In 1863 Henry Pellet planted his vineyard next to Dr. Crane's vineyard on the southwest side of St. Helena. The original grapes planted on all four of the above properties were Mission grapes, which were ultimately targeted as being most responsible for the



quality issues that made it difficult to expand the California wine market to the east. The Mission grapes tended to produce wines that probably had a higher level of residual sugar which resulted in sweeter flavors, much different than their European counterparts desired by Easterners who were buying premium wine from Europe.

Today two of these properties, Dr. Crane and Bale are owned and farmed by **Andy Beckstoffer**, the former still reflects Dr. Crane's identity as **Beckstoffer Dr. Crane Vineyard**, whereas the Bale property is **Beckstoffer Las Piedras Vineyard**. The grapes from these vineyards are sold at some of the highest prices per ton, with an added tax of a percent above the original price per bottle at the time the contract was negotiated.

The Charles Krug property was sold to Cesar Mondavi in 1943, and the Mondavi family continues to own and operate the Winery. Only the David Fulton property remains within the original family ownership. David Fulton's great-grandson, Fulton Mather with wife, Dink, still own and operate the property and continue to produce a very high-quality Petite Sirah.

St Helena Viticultural Club

In 1873 Charles Krug and Henry Pellet partnered in a marketing venture that produced wine to be shipped to the east. The wine sent east was made from Mission grapes grown on their properties. For reason alluded to above, the style and quality of the wine was not well received. After the failed venture, Charles Krug once again traveled east and met with similar resistance. As a result, there was an excess of wine accumulating in California during a period of a national recession. At the same time, imported wines remained more attractive to the premium wine drinking community.

The realization that the grapes planted were a significant contributor to the inability to successfully market Napa Valley wine was further augmented by a report provided by the **State Agricultural Society**. Charles Krug, Henry Pellet, and Seneca Ewer, and a few other growers, set about to organize and to address their common problem. The date, December 18th, 1875. These growers met and formed what was to be known as the **St. Helena Viticultural Club**, with the common goal to unite and elevate the status of wine produced in the Napa Valley, particularly by improving the grapes grown in vineyards surrounding St. Helena.

The trio proceeded by inviting and urging fellow vintners and business leaders to join and to commit to working together to improve the quality of the region's grapes and elevate the perception of the wines. **Fulton Mather, the current proprietor of the David Fulton Winery**

and historian of the Napa Valley wine growers, stated, "It was Charles Krug who urged at the very first meeting of the club, that in order to win the respect of wine connoisseurs on the east coast, it was not enough just to declare that we own possibly the best soil and climate on earth for growing grapes. We must harvest and produce wines made from the world's best varieties from this appellation. The direction for St. Helena was forever set at that meeting."

ASH boundaries are from the south, Zinfandel Lane and Bale Lane on the north, and on the east at the intersections of Howell Mountain and



Conn Valley Road and at the 400-foot elevation in the Mayacamas mountains on the west (see above map).

The present-day Appellation St. Helena (ASH) was granted in 1995, twenty-five years ago, and presently contains 6,000 acres of planted vineyards. Below are some photographs of those presenting wines at the tasting as well as a few of the notes taken. The notes are presented in order of the alphabetical organization provided in the ASH brochure.

Tasting Notes

AXR 2017 Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley	Dark red, purple edge; Bouquet of rich cherry, chocolate and modest earthy notes; medium light body, excellent fruit bathed in an abundance of forward but seeming measured tannins; excellent finish: lengthy and dry, recommended after 7+ years.
---	---

	
<p>Corison 2016 Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley</p>	<p>Dark red, purple edge; bouquet of cherry, spice, some earthy notes, and toast; medium light body, excellent fruit, good acid-tannin balance; excellent finish: rich, long, lush aftertaste, 2-3 years of bottle age would gain some additional stature.</p>
<p>Crocker & Starr 2016 Cabernet Sauvignon “RLC” Estate</p>	<p>Dark red, purple edge; bouquet of cherry, some hints of blackberry, spice, and earthy notes; medium body, showing an abundance of tannin, robust style with great depth for the hearty.8-12 years.</p>
<p>Corley 2016 Cabernet Sauvignon Yewell Vineyard</p>	<p>Dark Red, purple edge; bouquet of rich sweet oak, cherry, and light milk chocolate; medium body, superb fruit, good acid-tannin balance; excellent finish, long, lush aftertaste, will benefit from a few more years of bottle age.</p>



Steve is one of three brothers who are the principles behind their father's dream. Steve handles the marketing of Monticello Vineyards.

Pellet Estate 2015 Cabernet Sauvignon Pellet Vineyard	Dark red, deep purple edge; bouquet sweet plums, with anise notes, spice, hints of cinnamon and vanilla; medium body, excellent fruit, robust but balanced, excellent finish: rich, long, lush aftertaste, will benefit from 4-6 years of additional aging.
Robert Biale 2018 Zinfandel Old Kraft Vineyard	Very dark red, edge of purple ink; bouquet of sweet raspberry, rich blackberry, with some briary notes—compelling!!; excellent finish, rich, long, luscious with some thunder. Pulling the trigger on this wine will always be enjoyable.
Spottswoode 2017 Cabernet Sauvignon Estate	Dark red, brilliant hue, purple edge; bouquet of cherry, blackberry, spice and some earthy notes couched within a toasty background—boasting of its complexity; medium body, superb fruit, balanced, superb finish: rich, long, luscious aftertaste. Elegance and power presented is stately style. Simply, a grand wine.



Editor's Note: Jim's telling of the story of Mission grapes reminded me of a few bottles I have sampled over the years. As Jim mentioned, the grapes high sugar and low acidity tended to produce undistinguished table wine. As the source of a dessert wine the grape had more success. While any remaining Mission vines in Napa or Sonoma would be museum pieces, a few vineyards, some more than a century old, do persist in the Sierra foothills and Lodi regions, and there has been enough historical curiosity about the vine that a few acres have been planted in the South Coast as well. When you do come across Mission these days it is often in the form of Angelica, a wine produced by adding brandy to unfermented or barely fermented grape juice. The picture below is of a bottle I found in my cellar that was bottled more than 40 years ago by a winery in Lodi.



Royal Host Cellars Angelica Antigua. The 1773 refers to the year Mission grapes were first brought to California from Spain

A Celebration of South African Wines and Scottish Produce

September 25, 2019

Wedgwood the Restaurant, Edinburgh Scotland

Elizabeth M. Kass, MD

Wine has been made in South Africa for 350 years; the first bottle was reportedly produced in Cape Town by its founder Jan van Riebeeck. During apartheid, wine was neither imported to nor exported from the country. Once apartheid ended in the early 1990s, the country had access to international markets and new investment in the South African wine market resulted. In addition, South African winemakers were able to interact with peers around the world, helping to lead to improvement in the quality of wine produced.

Today, most South African wine production is located in the southwestern part of the country near Cape Town, Western Cape Province. Major vineyards and production centers are located in Constantia, Paarl, Stellenbosch and Worcester. Thanks to topographical variations and the effects of surrounding ocean currents, many distinct micro-and macroclimates are found in the Western Cape. Cool ocean breezes in the area help local wines retain bright acidity.

The highly acclaimed Wedgwood the Restaurant, Edinburgh, Scotland was opened in 2007 by Chef Paul Wedgwood and his wife Lisa. They are passionate about finding “intriguing and exciting” wines to complement their menu featuring foraged and wild food. Last September, my husband Lloyd, our adult son Chris and I participated in a special event at the restaurant. We enjoyed a 5-course dinner paired with South African wines produced in Western Cape Province:

1st Course:

Langoustine and avocado tartare, seaweed oatcake

House of Krone, Borealis, 2018 – A chardonnay and pinot noir blend, this sparkling wine is produced at Twee Jonge Gezellen Wine Estate. The estate is located in Tulbagh, a wine-producing district to the north of Paarl. South African sparkling wines made in the traditional French method, methode champenoise, are referred to as Methode Cap Classiques. Krone is a vintage-only MCC.

Information from the winery’s website about this wine:

“Vintage Conditions: The 2018 growing season was dominated by blue skies and parched earth, with the prevailing drought of the last five years across the Western Cape reaching its apex. The extreme conditions were evident in the small 2018 harvest. The grapes and vines were very healthy, which resulted in clean fermentations with pure fruit expressions of the base wines. The grapes for MCC are harvested early in January, and while the December summer month prior is traditionally hot, in this growing season it proved mild and temperate, which resulted in high stable acids as well as low pHs, which are the prerequisites for making superlative MCC.

Tasting Notes: Elegant, iridescent gold. Bursts of elderflower and apple blossom intermingle with orange peel and crushed oyster shell. There’s a citrusy-tingle of baobab pods on palate entry, edged in that salinity so characteristic of the 2018 vintage. Taut, lean and fresh; kumquat and naartjie (ed. note-also called Satsuma mandarin) come to the fore evolving into salted

caramel. The mousse is fine-beaded and toned, with a graceful trajectory into a tensile finish that promises to become more biscuity as it ages.”

This wine is available online at getwineonline.com for \$15.69 + tax, a great value.

2nd Course:

Cured salmon, pickled cucumber

Reyneke, Chenin Blanc, 2018 – This 100% Chenin Blanc wine was produced at Reyneke, a small production organic farm in Stellenbosch. Twenty-five miles east of Cape Town, Stellenbosch has granite and sandstone soils. Their high clay content confers excellent water-retention properties. Although the climate in the area is relatively hot and dry, cooling maritime breezes blow through the vineyards in the afternoon. Compared to red-wine varietals, white-wine grapes are often planted closer to the ocean to optimize this effect.

Chenin Blanc is the most widely planted grape variety in South Africa, where it is also known as Steen. The grape has traditionally been considered the “workhorse” grape for South Africa and there are registered vineyards that are more than 100 years old. In the 1920s and ‘30s, it was planted for use in brandy production. Its use has been revitalized in recent years and the variety is now used to produce high-quality wines.

Information from the winery’s website about this wine:

“Winemaker’s notes: The 2018 Chenin Blanc is a combination of grapes sourced from two adjacent vineyards. These vineyards are part of the Old Vine Project and hail from the early 1970’s and are farmed according to biodynamic principles. There is a minimum interventionist approach to making this wine. The grapes are whole bunch pressed and lightly settled before natural fermentation occurs. We use a combination of 300l second-fill French oak barrels and 2500l foudre. The wine was matured on the lees for 10 months before bottling.

Tasting notes: Upfront floral and white peach notes, with hints of pear and grapefruit on the nose. Notes of honey and melon start to become more apparent later on, in the glass. The palate is fresh and vibrant, with an almost saline feel on the tongue. The finish is long, well balanced and rounded.”

This wine is not currently available on the US market.

3rd Course:

Confit pork belly, scallops, biltong, squash

Leeuwenkuil, Marsanne, 2016 – The Leeuwenkuil Family Vineyard is located in Swartland Region. Its name means “Lion’s Lair” and is a tribute to the ferocious Cape lion that once roamed the local farmlands preying on cattle. Leeuwenkuil mainly focuses on producing Shiraz and Chenin Blanc.

We were fortunate to be able to taste the 2016 Marsanne since Leeuwenkuil subsequently discontinued using this white wine grape variety from the Rhône Valley. The wine has a crunchy acidity and nicely complemented the food course.

Although sold in the UK, this wine is not currently available on the US market.

4th Course:

Venison, cocoa roast carrot, haggis (which was excellent!), leek, mushroom

Boekenhoutskloof, Franschhoek Syrah, 2016 – This highly rated Syrah blend was the star of the evening. The wine is produced by Boekenhoutskloof Winery, Franschhoek.

According to the winery's website, "Boekenhoutskloof was established in 1776. Located in the furthest corner of the beautiful Franschhoek Valley, the farm's name means "ravine of the Boekenhout" (pronounced Book-n-Howed). Boekenhout is an indigenous Cape Beech tree greatly prized for furniture making. In 1993, the farm and homestead were bought and restored and a new vineyard planting programme was established that now includes Syrah, Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Grenache, Semillon and Viognier."

This luxurious, spicy, tannic full-bodied Syrah is available for worldwide delivery from Wein & Co., Niederosterreich, Austria for \$48.98.

Dessert Course:

Lemon polenta and almond cake, meringue

Boekenhoutskloof Noble Late Harvest Semillon, 2016 – Another highly rated wine from Boekenhoutskloof, only two barrels are made each year. It's not available in the US market and only two cases are exported to the United Kingdom annually. The Semillon grapes are harvested mid-April after having been infested by botrytis, "noble rot." The wine was the perfect cap to an enjoyable evening.

As I write, Wedgwood the Restaurant is closed due to COVID-19. It is offering "takeaway service" from Thursday – Sunday. Food can be collected at the restaurant or delivered ready to heat at home. I hope to be able to return to the restaurant someday and try some of the other South African wines in their cellar. I've also been inspired to take a trip to visit the wineries of the Western Cape in order to discover more about wines from this beautiful part of the world, once it's safe to travel.