

Society of Medical Friends of Wine

SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA

A Non Profit 501 C 3 Corporation

www.medicalfriendsofwine.org

AUGUST 2017

SUMMERTIME-CALIFORNIA VERSION

Summertime-and the living is easy. Fish are jumping, and the vines are high.



Roll out those lazy, hazy, crazy days of summer.
Those days of soda and pretzels and wine.



Well it may be summer, but your Society has not been on vacation, with three events scheduled. Two have occurred, and the last, a catered luncheon and visit to Kenefick Ranch, will happen on Saturday August 26.

ANDERSON VALLEY TOUR

On July 15,th an intrepid group of members and guests boarded a bus for a visit to the Anderson Valley in Mendocino County. We knew we were approaching wine country as vines started appearing outside our windows in the Petaluma Gap area, and they increased in number and frequency as we proceeded north through Santa Rosa and Windsor. We crossed over the Russian River to skirt the limits of two famous growing appellations, Dry Creek and Alexander Valley.

As we passed by Asti I was reminded of the historic cellars of Italian Swiss Colony and the description in Dr. Richard Peterson's book, *The Winemaker*, about the competitive battles between his employer Gallo and United Vintners, the cooperative that owned the Asti facilities.

Let me pause to dwell further on the book (*The Winemaker*, by Richard G. Peterson, Meadowlark Publishing, 2015). I cannot recommend this work highly enough to any student of California wine. It is so well written that the prose just flows, and it is packed with vignettes on the modern history of California wine, technical facts and secrets, and the challenges of trying to make fine wine in the corporate world. Dr. Peterson, an honorary member of our Society and guest speaker at our October 2016 dinner, has a fantastic memory and holds nothing back as he tells his story to us.

As we reached Cloverdale, the airconditioned comfort of the bus was appreciated as outside temperatures climbed into the '90's. We passed many acres of vineyards largely planted to Cabernet and Chardonnay, which have replaced many of the field blends of mixed white and red grapes of yesteryear. We climbed and then descended the serpentine path of Highway 128 through the Coast Range, passing heritage orchards of apples, grazing deer, and new olive groves. We traversed the

Yorkville Highlands viticulture area, a warm but elevated microclimate that favors Bordeaux type grapes, although there are small Pinot Noir vineyards tucked into some higher elevation fields.

After about a two-hour drive, we approached our destination, the Anderson Valley, where grapes and redwood trees benefit from the cooling coastal influences, and the vineyards are primarily Pinot Noir and cool loving Alsatian grapes like Riesling, Gewurztraminer, and Pinot Gris. While the inland areas of Sonoma and Mendocino were sweltering this day, with temperatures over 100 degrees, we enjoyed a pleasant 85 and had a further understanding of terroir and microclimates and their effects on wine making.

Our first stop was Pennyroyal Farm in Boonville for a tasting of their award winning cheeses and wines from their Sauvignon Blanc and Pinot Noir vineyards. We first became acquainted with the farms' goats and sheep and then we visited the cheese production facility.

Following a pleasant outdoor cheese tasting, luncheon was served accompanied by glasses of rose of Pinot Noir and Sauvignon Blanc from the adjacent vineyard. Here was another lesson in microclimates for us, as the weather in Boonville is warmer than further west in Philo, and thus Sauvignon Blanc will ripen well in this part of the valley floor.



A very pregnant goat at Pennyroyal Farms



Newly made cheeses resting in the creamery



After a leisurely lunch, we were off venturing further west to Philo and to Navarro Vineyards. Navarro, founded by Ted Bennett and Deborah Cahn, is one of the true pioneers in wine growing in the Anderson Valley.



The Bennetts' interest in Alsatian style white wines, including Riesling, Gewurztraminer, Pinot Gris, and Muscat Blanc, brought them to this location and its climate in 1974. Since then they have become a benchmark for production of this style of wine in California, and their success has included some stunning and luscious late harvest dessert wines. Pinot Noir has also been a focus, particularly from selected higher elevation vineyards. Today these Anderson Valley estate wines are supplemented by other varietals grown in warmer interior Mendocino County vineyards.

We were afforded a walk around the property that included stunning vistas of the hills, valleys, and neighboring vineyards supplying the nearby Roederer Estate. Questions were addressed about grape growing in this area, and we stopped by the fermentation and barrel aging facilities on our way back to the tasting room and the chance to freely partake of any of the Navarro wines.



Vines at Navarro Vineyards



Our guide describes the growing conditions at Navarro



To finish the day's events, we then retraced our path through the Anderson Valley and the Yorkville Highlands, wound our way along the twisty path through the Coast Range, thankful for being able to relax in the good hands of our driver, and descended back into the heat of Cloverdale on our way to dinner at Diavola Restaurant in Geyserville.

Even at 6 p.m. the heat was stifling in Geyserville, yet one more reminder of how variable the climate can be in various areas of Sonoma and Mendocino counties and of how much effect this can have on the wines. While nearby Healdsburg overflows with cutesy charm and au courant celebrated restaurants and exudes wealth from many facades, Geyserville remains in a bit of a time warp, with historic stone buildings, restaurants serving hearty and affordable food, and peaceful memories of small wineries owned by families with deep Italian roots. Dinner in this setting was a pleasant finale to a busy day in the wine country.

The Anderson Valley has long been one of my favorite wine oriented destinations in California. The countryside is beautiful, the properties for the most part are small, and the lack of glitz and traffic make it a nice counterfoil to the most touristic parts of Napa.

There is no doubt that overall wine quality has improved significantly over the past several decades. Its prowess for cool climate white grapes is well acknowledged. Some would consider it a

contender for the premier locale for Pinot Noir table wines in California, while others feel it is at the height of sparkling wine production from properties like Roederer and Scharfenberger.

This leads to one of the ironies of California wine production—the tendency to grow many wine types in close proximity to one another in the hope they will all result in excellent wines. Pinot Noir and Chardonnay are grown in Champagne, and some still wine is made there, but no one would ever claim that the table wine from the Marne is as good as the sparkling wines from the region. The growing requirements to excel at the two types of wine are just too different. Sparkling wines require lower sugar and higher acid levels for their balance and freshness, and acquire this by reaching flavor maturity at low sugar levels after a prolonged growing season. Table wines benefit from a luscious mouth feel, and require more warmth to reach adequate ripeness for the desired fruit and alcohol balance.

Pinot Noir and Chardonnay are also grown in Burgundy. Sparkling wine is made in Burgundy, and it can quite pleasant, but no one would claim it is as excellent as Champagne or as memorable as the great Burgundian table wines. Similarly, Pinot Noir is grown in Alsace, but the fame of the region lies not in its light bodied reds but in its fruity, tart, and flavorful Rieslings and Gewurztraminers.

So how do we understand Sauvignon Blanc growing side by side with Pinot Noir in Boonville, or Pinot Noir vineyards destined for sparkling wine and for table wine just around the corner from each other in Philo? Microclimates and different elevations of vineyards can provide some explanation, but it still seems a bit far-fetched to imagine that the very best Pinot Noir table wines are produced from vineyards in sight of those producing the very best Pinot Noir-based sparkling wine.

Certainly wine for thought, though not meant to deter us from enjoying the beauty, quiet, charm, and hospitality of this special corner of California.

CHEESE AND WINE EVENT

On Sunday August 6th we convened for our 7th annual cheese and wine tasting seminar, led by well renowned cheese expert Janet Fletcher, our good friend and teacher. In past years we have focused on cheese and wine from a single country or region. This year Janet chose the theme “Us versus Them”, a comparison of domestic and European cheeses and accompanying wines. The quality of domestic cheese has skyrocketed, and this was a fun way of seeing if they have become truly competitive with old world favorites. And who among us would miss the challenge of seeing if, in a blind tasting, we can identify a wine as being from California or France?



Prepared plates of the cheeses partnered with complimentary wines.

Janet brought four pairs of cheeses that were much enjoyed by our members and guests. These included: Nancy's Camembert from Old Chatham, New York, and Domaine du Village from Burgundy; Spring Brook Farm Tarentaise from Reading, Vermont, and Alp Blossom from Vorarlberg, Austria; Moses Sleeper from Greensboro, Vermont, and Herve Mons from Normandy; and Rogue Echo Mountain Blue from Central Point, Oregon, and Chriboga Blue from Bad Oberdorf, Germany.



Janet Fletcher with prepared plates of the cheeses



Janet Fletcher addressing the sell-out crowd.

The cheeses were a fascinating array of flavors and styles and succeeded in demonstrating how competitive in quality the domestic versions are.

On the wine side, we also had four pairs of wine. Each was poured ahead of time, so participants did not know if they were tasting a California or a European wine. This led to some speculation and good discussion and well less than 100% accuracy in identification—so this was a successful educational activity.

The wine pairs were 2007 Gloria Ferrer Royal Cuvee and NV Marc Hebrart Cuvee Reserve Champagne; 2012 Varner Chardonnay, Amphitheater Vineyard, Santa Cruz Mountains and 2014 Beaune 1er Cru Pertuisot, Pernot-Belicar; 2012 Mount Eden Vineyards Pinot Noir and 2013 Pommard La Croix Blanche, Anne Parent; and Ficklin Vineyards Port and Fonseca 1966 Vintage Port.

The Ficklin was at least 30 years old and was a gift to the Society from the cellar of our late member, Dr. Marts Beekley. The Fonseca was a generous donation from our member, Dr. Jack McElroy. Both wines paired beautifully with the blue cheeses, and for many tasters they were the highlights of a group of excellent wines.

Wow. Eight cheeses with great comments and teaching pearls from Janet Fletcher. Eight wines to pair with them, including a 50 year-old vintage Port. Not a bad way to spend a Sunday afternoon.



Janet Fletcher addresses attendees; Dr Jack McElroy in foreground.

I hope your summer has been a pleasant one and that your schedule will allow you to attend one of our upcoming events.

As always the support of our older members and the addition of new members to help maintain the vitality and educational mission of the Society are welcomed.

Robert Blumberg, M.D., Editor and Cellar Master

CALENDAR of EVENTS

Kenefick Ranch luncheon	Sat. August 26
279th Dinner	Sun. October 22, Piazza D'Angelo, Mill Valley
79 th . Annual Dinner	Sat. Jan 20 2018, NIKKO SF

SOCIETY OF MEDICAL FRIENDS OF WINE welcomes new members:

Michael Caplan M.D.

Marshal Berol J.D.

Mr. Barry Boothe and Mrs. Joan Boothe

Tom Burns M.D.

Mr. Almon Larsh

Brad Loos M.A.