

Society of Medical Friends of Wine

SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA

A Non Profit 501 C 3 Corporation

www.medicalfriendsofwine.org

NEWSLETTER

JUNE 2018

NEW WEBSITE ONLINE

If you haven't already done so, please check out our updated and revitalized web site at www.medicalfriendsofwine.org.

Many thanks to Society Secretary Elizabeth Kass M.D. for all of her work at accomplishing this web site improvement. This is a great place to see photos of recent events, such as the 282nd Quarterly Dinner at Prima Restaurant. You can see our calendar of upcoming events, learn about the history of the Society, and download membership applications. And of course, gain access to past issues of this newsletter.

REVIEW OF SCIENTIFIC ARTICLE

One of the purposes of the Society of Medical Friends of Wine is to review and distribute information from the medical literature about the health aspects of wine drinking. This month's article, reviewed by our Scientific Chair, Dan Bikle, M.D., PhD., is a bit of a different tack, but is indeed very scientific.

Are you born a potential wine expert, or is this ability something you can acquire? Dr. Bikle will guide you through a complex study comparing brain function and anatomy of master sommeliers versus individuals with limited wine drinking experience.

See what is found—and speculate on what this means for brain development if we set our heart on accomplishing certain tasks as well.

Master Sommeliers: Born or Made

A study of the structural and functional MRI differences in the brains of master sommeliers

Banks SJ et al. *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience* 10:1-12, 2016

In this study Banks et al. studied 13 master sommeliers compared to 13 controls who in pretesting had limited experience with wine (scored below 70% on a test of wine knowledge, range 20-70%). Two in each group were female. Prior to the MRI studies, the participants underwent a series of olfactory and visual tests. Each of these tests was conducted multiple times for each subject to obtain consistent results. Two olfactory tests were used. In the first test the subjects were blind folded, then asked to determine by smelling whether the fluid in a glass jar was wine or not wine (a variety of mixes of vodka, cognac, grape juice, fruit essences, water soaked oak chips). In the second test the subjects were asked to determine whether the wine was red or white (four each). For the visual test the subjects were asked to rapidly characterize whether a computer-generated image was in a zebra pattern or a fingerprint. Accuracy in the olfactory tests varied between 58-100% in the first task and 21-91% in the second. Accuracy in the visual task ranged from 93-100%. General olfactory ability

was evaluated by the University of Pennsylvania Smell Identification Test (UPSIT), basically scratch and sniff tests.

MRI was used to obtain structural properties of the brain as well as functional analyses when the subjects were smelling one of eight fluids (2 red wines, 2 white wines, 3 non-wines, and 1 empty bottle) delivered while in the MRI via polyurethane tubes connected to an oxygen face mask. The structural images were acquired by a 3- Tesla scanner using a T1-weighted gradient-echo MP-RAGE sequence. The functional data were acquired using a gradient-echo T2-weighted echoplanar imaging. The structural scans were processed by voxel-based morphometry, first of large regions of the brain, then focusing on regions of differences between controls and sommeliers. The fMRI data were analyzed by SPM12 and regressed on the accuracy of responses to the wine/non-wine, red/white wine, and fingerprint/zebra tasks.

Results: To no great surprise, the sommeliers scored significantly higher on the wine quiz and the UPSIT. However, accuracy in distinguishing wine from no wine or red vs white wine was not significantly different between groups, at least during the fMRI studies. Moreover, there was no statistical difference between the sommeliers and the controls with respect to the visual tests (fingerprints/zebra patterns), although both groups scored highly, so this test was hardly robust. The major findings of this study related to the MRI evaluations. At the structural level, the sommeliers had significantly greater brain volumes in the right insula, right and left entorhinal regions, and the left hippocampus extending into the entorhinal region. The thickness of the right entorhinal cortex correlated with years of experience as a master sommelier, but this correlation was not found for the other regions of the brain. Areas involved with the visual cortex did not differ between groups. When the activation of the brain induced by olfactory stimuli was assessed, numerous regions were activated in both groups, but activation was stronger in those regions associated with olfaction in the sommeliers, but not the regions associated with visual activity, even though there was little difference in the ability of the two groups to distinguish between wine and no wine or red vs white wine.

Significance: The regions showing structural differences between sommeliers and controls have been shown in earlier studies to be involved with olfaction, memory of olfaction stimuli, and integration of olfaction with other sensory data including taste. The authors conclude that because the thickness of the entorhinal cortex is correlated with experience as a master sommelier, the development of this region occurs with the development of expertise in the olfactory skills of a sommelier. Maybe. But if so, we can all get better at smelling and tasting wine if we work at it, and isn't that what we want to do as members of the SMFW?

Dan Bikle, M.D., Ph.D.

WINE OF THE MONTH

Bob Blumberg MD, Cellar Master



The aperitivo portion of our recent dinner at Prima Ristorante, Walnut Creek, featured a unique and fascinating wine experience. Pio Cesare has resurrected an ancient family recipe for vermouth that includes a mixture of 26 aromatic herbs (including absinth). These are blended with white wines, including Moscato d'Asti, macerated, and then aged in oak casks. Burned sugar is added prior to bottling. The result is a vermouth far different than what went into your father's martini.

Thick, rich, unctuous, complex with a multitude of herbal smells and flavors, the wine is meant to be chilled and served as an appetite stimulating aperitif. I do not think I am exaggerating when I say that our audience was blown away by what for almost everyone was a first-time wine experience. Thank you so much to Treasurer Dr. Jack McElroy for discovering this wine and donating it to the Society for our members' education and enjoyment.

WINE NOTES FROM THE PRIMA DINNER

The Vermouth introduced a flight of well chosen Italian wines to accompany our Prima meal. The Timbale of Wild and Domestic Mushrooms with La Tur Fonduta was served alongside a 2016 Arneis from Vietti Roero in the Piemonte. This was a crisp, minerally, anise-scented dry white wine with a refreshing finish.

The pasta and meat courses gave us the opportunity to compare and contrast two Sangiovese-based wines, emanating from different Tuscan terroir and different clones. The 2015 Chianti Classico Roccaa di Montegrassi was just what the label said—a classic Chianti whose red fruit flavors and haunting acidity accomplished the amazing challenge of pairing well and enhancing both the cheese and the tomato components of the Tortelli sauces.

Although the Brunello di Montalcino 2011 from Livio Sasseti shares some flavor components with the Chianti, the added aging and climate and soil differences produce a more complex and flavorful wine that just lingered on the palate providing layer upon layer of tasting pleasure. Showing its versatility, depending on one's choice of meat course, it paired nicely with lamb rib chops, with roasted chicken, and with halibut, although some of our guests who choose the latter probably also snuck in a taste of the Arneis.

Finally, the Semifreddo al Limone con Fragole was accompanied by a Moscato d'Asti. I do not know of a wine that is easier and more fun to drink than a chilled, low alcohol, slightly sparkling Moscato from Asti, and this one sent us all home happy.

MEMBERS' TASTING NOTES

With this issue of the Newsletter I would like to introduce a section devoted to notes about wine tastings and events and would like to invite and encourage members of the Society to submit their notes and thoughts on recent wine tastings and events to share with other members. While taste is a very individual matter, sharing one's experiences is an integral part of the enjoyment of and education about wine. The views and opinions expressed here are those of an individual and should not be construed as an opinion of the Society itself, but rather the desire of the Society to stimulate discussion as part of our educational mission.

Along these lines, I would like to share with you a review of a recent tasting by our member Dr. Jim Gallagher. I found his comments quite stimulating and refreshing, particularly when compared with the legions of well-written but commercialized hyperbole I receive daily from wine merchants and wine critics whose goal is to sell wine or newsletter subscriptions.

Wine Tasting at Golden Gate Wine Cellars

May 19, 2018

Jim Gallagher PhD

I feel compelled to provide a preface to my notes of the wines below, in order to put in context a likelihood of a negative bias. The tasting was held in a small specialty Wine Shop that does a successful “on-line” business with a supportive but marginal “walk-in” clientele.

Okay, so what’s the deal? Namely, the manner in which such tastings were conducted. First, it was an open tasting where the wine is poured from clearly marked labeled bottles. Regard for a label influences perceptual “set”. Knowing what wines would be tasted is a good idea for anyone concerned about the cost of tastings. In this case, a major part of the attraction was to taste the wine of the highly acclaimed winemaker, **Thomas Rivers Brown**.

So, I was not overly concerned that we would be tasting the wines without an attempt at anonymity, or the fact that there were mixed varietals and vintages. Additionally, the matter of meager pours was of little concern. Finally, I was even accepting of the “serial” order in which we would be tasting the wines. This would be regarded as an experience of quality of wine associated with a famous winemaker. The \$35.00 price of the tasting was truly a bargain and would still be so if only the **Schrader** CCS To Kalon had been offered.

The proprietor, Frank Melis, had emailed notice that the tasting would begin promptly at one pm to ensure that everyone would be able to taste all the wines. His plea read, “please be here at that time”. After more than 35 years of conducting weekly wine tastings, I am quite sensitive to the difficulty of conducting wine tastings in a timely manner. In this case, where the event was a serial tasting, that requirement was of far greater importance.

At one pm, five of the 20+ “sign-ups” were present. Frank began with a lengthy narrative ranging through related to moderately far-ranging topics including travel, fire damage in wine country, girls’ basketball {his daughter’s team’s recent victory in the league play-offs), and the omission of Thomas Rivers Brown’s Pinot Noir. As an appeasement gesture to the waiting prompt arrivals, a bottle of Alsatian sparkling wine was opened (which, although declined by me, was highly appreciated by others).

More conversation followed, and I began to sense that the wait would be my second most painful experience of 2018. Second only to a Byzantine funeral I attended in April for a grammar school age-mate wherein for 90 minutes a repeated petition for forgiveness was sought. Fortunately, as I paused from such a reflection, a couple entered, shortly followed by a threesome, which doubled our attendance.

We began with the 2016 **Rivers-Marie**, Sonoma Coast, Chardonnay. This was clearly an excellent wine. The vanilla bouquet was prominent-to-dominant with underlying fruits of banana and peach. It was attractive, despite lacking the more sought after and traditional apple-pear character of North Coast Chardonnay. The retail price was \$33.00, so it is also an excellent value. This was a much unexpected positive result.

Our first Cabernet Sauvignon was the 2015 **Post Parade**, Napa Valley. Frank noted the background of the brand name. The inspiration was derived from the tradition of marching the highly decorated competing horses of the Kentucky Derby past the grandstand prior to the beginning of the famous race. The investors, highly associated with the Derby, sought out Thomas Rivers Brown to produce their wine.

The 2015 Post Parade Cabernet Sauvignon possesses contemporary Napa Valley Cabernet Character of Black cherry and dark chocolate embedded in a toast cloud with faint overtones of earthy scent. The palate feel was pleasant and generous, while the acid-tannin balance declared its youthful astringent boldness. Definitely a wine of interest for the young'uns with a present economic status. The wine is available for \$100.00.



Our second Cabernet was the 2014 **Revana** “Terroir”. The Revana Estate vineyard is located in the northern region of the St. Helena appellation. It was planted in 1998 by Jim Barbour, one of several noted Napa Vineyardists. It was originally comprised of about nine acres of the Estates property. Thomas Rivers Brown followed Heidi Barrett as the winemaker for **Revana** in 2014. My only comparative tasting of the two formidable winemakers did not suggest a radical change, although some replanting and varietal strategies are in place.

The present “Terroir” showed bright cherry-raspberry flavors within a warm toasty backdrop, but a far too tannic finish for a wine not expected to benefit from twenty plus years of bottle age.

The 2014 **Stone The Crows** Cabernet Sauvignon “Napa Valley” (\$110.00) had an attractive, not overwhelming bouquet of cherry, chocolate and light earthy overtones with a palate of astringency masking a possible hedonistic experience if not also paralyzing most of my papillae. Unfortunately, my reaction was much like the reflexive reaction when fingertips contact very hot material. Hence this Galloni 95-point wine will not be on my Christmas wish list.



vintner.

The 2015 **Pulido Walker** “Panek Vineyard” showed a rich bouquet of black cherry, hints of blackberry and mocha well contained within a toast fragrance; a medium body within a bath of tannic presence, a long, yet unresolved dominance of tannic structure, again a wine for the future, with considerable promise for optimistic, under forty, home owners preferring wine speculation to horse racing—at \$ 195.00.

2015 **Schrader** “CCS” To Kalon, Cabernet Sauvignon. (\$397.00). Certainly, one of the more sought-after wines of the vintage. It is one among the many Parker 100-point wines awarded to the Thomas Rivers Brown-produced Schrader wines.

My notes are less flattering in that I was put off by the heavy oaked bouquet. The fruit is rich, promising, and well disguised. In the mouth, clear layers of flavor are suggested. Anticipation of their development does require speculation with a favoring probability due to the history of the vineyard, winemaker and



HERITAGE VINEYARDS TASTING

Robert Blumberg MD

For the final installment of this month's tasting notes, I would like to share with you my impressions of an interesting collection of wines from historic California vineyards. The wines were selected by our members Colin Reed M.D. and our Vice President Fiona Donald M.D. for our once-a-month Friday tasting group .

Through the foresight of a few grape growers and vintners, California is still blessed with a number of historic vineyards capable of producing amazing wines. Some were planted over a hundred years ago, and many are mixed varietals, or field blends, containing vines rarely see in California today. A taste of each is a visit to California history.

One of the mystiques or hallmarks of the wine world is that old vines produce the best wines. Esther Mosley, the excellent wine writer for the San Francisco Chronicle, published an article about this, and I encourage you to follow this link to read her thoughts. Right click on the link, and then click on open:

https://www.sfchronicle.com/wine/article/Do-old-vines-really-produce-better-wine-6824260.php?utm_source=email&utm_medium=email&utm_content=newsletter_b&utm_campaign=sfc_esther

2013 Wines from Heritage Vineyards A Tasting on May 11, 2018

Bedrock Wine Company Pagani Ranch: The oldest vines from this vineyard date to the 1880's. In addition to Zinfandel, vines planted in this vineyard include Mourvedre, Alicante Bouschet, and Muscadelle. Medium dark granite purple. Lovely nose of red and black fruits with vanilla. Lots of fruit and ripeness on the palate; intense layers of flavor. Medium full body, acidity, tannins. Tons of fruit in the finish. 14.5% alcohol. Should age 10 years.

Bedrock Wine Company Evangelho Vineyard Heritage: 120-year-old head- pruned vines planted on their original root stock in Contra Costa County. The soil is sandy, and apparently Phyloxera will not survive here. Medium garnet purple. Fresh raspberry jello nose with cumin coming out with airing. Delicious, sweet, raspberry fruit. Medium plus body, medium acidity, medium plus tannins. A nice, fresh, juicy finish. Should age 5 years.

Bedrock Wine Company Monte Rosso Vineyard: Original plantings date from 1880. Louis Martini purchased the vineyard in 1938 and made the vineyard famous with Zinfandel and Cabernet Sauvignon wines. Some of the original plantings of Zinfandel remain and contribute to this bottling. Medium dark garnet. Brawny, briary, tart blackberry nose. Big and ripe, yet tart and juicy. Full body, medium to full tannin, medium plus acidity. 14.3% alcohol.

Improves with airing over 48 hours, acquiring roundness and balance. Should age nicely 5-10 years.

Bedrock Wine Company Papera Ranch Russian River Valley: Planted in 1934, most of the fruit from this vineyard is Zinfandel, but there are smatterings of Carignane, Petite Sirah, Valdigue, Cabernet, Trousseau Gris and even a few Mission vines. Medium garnet. Musty and closed nose with some blackberries. Alcoholic and ripe, though with good fruit. Full in body, medium acidity, medium plus tannins. Big finish. 14.5% alcohol. Improves with 48 hours in glass, suggesting it will improve with time in bottle.

Bedrock Wine Company Nervo Ranch: Some of us remember the historic Nervo Winery and its jugs of “California Burgundy”. The vines are more than a hundred years old and are as much of a field blend as one could ever expect to find: Zinfandel, Petite Sirah, Negrette (formerly called Pinot St. George), Trousseau Noir, Valdigue, Early Burgundy, Semillon, Burger, Chenin Blanc, and Sauvignon Blanc. Medium reddish cranberry color. Dusty fruit compote nose. Tinny with a bitter finish upon first taste. Less fruit than others. Medium full body, medium acidity, medium full tannins. After 48 hours in glass it has blossomed nicely; no longer off-putting, with better roundness and balance. Needs 5-10 years aging, during which hopefully the tinny quality and bitterness will mellow out. 14.5% alcohol.

Bedrock Wine Company Bedrock Heritage Sonoma Valley: Originally planted in the 1850's and replanted in the late 1880's following Phyloxera, this Sonoma Valley property is one of California's most historic. Those of you who remember Nervo probably also remember the Valley of Moon Winery, which produced wines from these grapes. Today the vines are preserved and carefully tended by the Bedrock Wine Company. Medium garnet, with violet edge. Heady, spirity nose. Deep, dark, syrupy. Black cherry syrup flavors. Full body, light medium acidity, medium tannins. Too big for my liking. Doesn't improve with 48 hours airing in open bottle. 14.6% alcohol.

River Run Cienega Valley Zinfandel Wirz Vineyard: From a lesser known area of California history south of Hollister, this vineyard in the Cienega Valley is dry farmed and head pruned and farmed organically. Santa Clara County once had many vineyards liked this one, but almost all now are home to houses and not vines. Medium garnet tinged with violet edge. Strong cranberry nose with vanilla. Very tart, indeed almost green tasting and finish. Medium body, medium full acidity, medium tannins. With two days in open bottle it becomes even more cranberry juice like. 13.9% alcohol.

Turley Zinfandel The Kirschenmann Vineyard Lodi: In recent years there has been increased recognition of the viticultural attributes of the Lodi region. Today, heavily planted in premium varieties like Cabernet Sauvignon and Chardonnay, which are used to produce lower cost

premium wines, fortunately some historic vineyards of Zinfandel, such as this one dating to 1915, have been preserved. Light medium red with orange rim. Smoky, rubber tire nose. Big, rubbery, alcoholic. Full body, light medium acidity, medium tannins. 15.2 % alcohol.

Please feel free to share your own tasting notes and thoughts on wine with your fellow members. Everyone has their own opinion, and it is our hopes that sharing yours will stimulate thought and discussion among your colleagues and contribute to our overall education. Please email your notes to me at blumberg@sbcglobal.net for inclusion in the next Newsletter.

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

CALENDAR OF UPCOMING EVENTS

As mentioned at the beginning of this newsletter, please use our updated website www.medicalfriendsofwine.org to keep abreast of our schedule of upcoming events.

But since you are still with us this far, we cannot help but remind you of the next three exciting events for the Society:

Saturday July 21, 2018: **Napa Valley Vintage Tour**

Sunday August 19, 2018 **Champagne Event**

Perle Wine Bar
2058 Mountain Blvd, Oakland

Friday September 21, 2018

Dinner featuring members sharing French Wines from their cellars

The French Club
414 Mason Street
San Francisco