

West Side Wine Club

April 2014
Monthly Rant



Scheduled Meetings

January 11, 2014

Annual Gala – Archer Winery

January 15, 2014

Crush Talk / Planning

February 19, 2014

Bordeaux Tasting

March 19, 2014

Speaker: Andrew Beckham;
amphora winemaking

April 16, 2014

2013 Barrel / Carboy
Sample Tasting

April 19, 2014

Tour of Lange Winery;
RSVP to Bill Brown at
bbgoldiequy@gmail.com

May 21, 2014

Speaker: Rob Landsness;
the sommelier's
prospective

June 18, 2014

"Best Practices of Amateur
Winemakers"

July 12 or 13, 2014

Annual Picnic

July 19 or 20, 2014

Tour

August 20, 2014

All Whites Tasting

September 17, 2014

Other Reds Tasting

October 15, 2014

Pinot Noir Tasting

November

No Meeting

December 3, 2014

Planning, Tours, Speakers,
Events, Elections

This coming meeting will focus on barrel samples, a chance to see where our 2013 wines are at and compare notes. I'm excited about the Pinot's and big reds Alice and I have in barrel. The wet weather worked for the big red's by slowing the maturation of the fruit, and against the Pinot's in that it either forced early harvest or diluted the flavors for the grapes that were left on vine until it dried out. Still it wasn't anything like '10 or '11 in the Willamette, and could very well work out to be one of the better vintages.

We should be thankful in light of the fact that the 2013 season in Bordeaux was a disaster. Prices have just been announced for a rash of '13 en primeur Bordeaux's. These are wines that are still in barrel and at least 2 years out, but are being made available as futures by the négociants. The word is demand for them is "dead" and that prices will have to fall 25% or more for any interest to appear. That is not particularly welcome news in a country that has seen a lot of problems in the vineyards for the last few years.

See you at the meeting over a glass or ten of en primeur...Phil



The next meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, April 16 at 7:00 p.m. at Oak Knoll Winery. Member's barrel / carboy samples tasting. If you can part with it, bring a barrel sample for everyone to taste. limit it to one bottle red or white. We would like to taste 10 – 12 samples. The responsible winemaker will introduce his/her own wine. This is not a competitive judging but a simple evaluation with suggestions for your wine. Lets see how our wines are doing so far this year.

- 1.) Snacks: This will be another potluck; bring a small snack to share.
- 2.) Waivers will be present at the meeting. If you have not previously signed a waiver please do so at the meeting. You may also pay your 2014 dues if you have not already done so.
 - Bring two glasses for tasting member wines.
- 3.) The meeting will begin at 7 pm and end by 9 pm. If you can, get there a little early to help set up. Please help put away chairs and tables at the end of the meeting.

WSWC Website: <http://www.westsidewineclub.com/>

Message Board: <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Westsidewineclub/>



March Meeting Minutes

Members Present = 21

- Phil requested that we decide where to hold our picnic in July. We think that Oak knoll will be available again where we have had it many times and Archer Winery has offered to provide their winery tasting room at no charge (where we held the Gala). Barb Stinger mentioned that Archer may not be as kid friendly as on the grass at Oak Knoll. Either way it will be held on Saturday July 12 starting at 1:00 PM.
- A membership roster will be prepared by Barb Thomson and sent to all active members.

Information & Trivia

You can't be a real country unless you have a beer and an airline - it helps if you have some kind of a football team, or some nuclear weapons, but at the very least you need a beer. - Frank Zappa

ERROR 666:
Armageddon detected.
Please restart universe
and try again.

When you do a good deed, get a receipt, in case heaven is like the IRS.

If God had meant for us to be in the Army, we would have been born with green, baggy skin.

Canadians and Americans Drink Different Wines:

The Wine Market Council's recent Canadian Core Wine Drinker Snapshot Poll report provides a glimpse into the difference between Canadian and US wine consumers, including the differences in the consumption of various varietals. Results showed that Canadian survey participants had higher rates of current consumption of Shiraz/ Syrah, Sauvignon Blanc, Rosé and French Champagne than US survey participants. The US wine drinkers, on the other hand, were more likely than the Canadians to drink White Zinfandel. Why am I not surprised by these findings?

4/1/14 - Northwest Vineyards See Bud Break. Oregon growers report spring growth seven to 10 days ahead of schedule.

• Phil described a problem we had this last Fall with a member's grape purchase. The matter was resolved but points out the need for a firm set of grape purchase rules when participating in WSWC group purchases. Phil offered to compose a list of potential specific rules & guidelines to be sent by E-mail to all members for their perusal and suggestions. This will be discussed further and modified then voted on at the April meeting

• Bill Brown is in conversations with Lang Winery for a possible tour in April.

• Phil introduced our speaker, master artist / winemaker Andrew Beckham. Andrew teaches pottery, has a winery & vineyard near Sherwood and is making large volume terracotta amphorae in which he is experimenting with wine fermentation and aging. Andrew's 2013 pinot noir fermented in terracotta compared with pinot fermented in standard "macro" bins indicate that the terracotta brings an earthier, spicier component to the wine, with broader tannins. In 2009 they made their first wine and in 2012 completed the tasting room which also showcases Andrew's artwork. While Mathew was describing his amphorae project we tasted three of his wines. We also tasted four wines from Italy produced using the amphora technique.

#1 – Beckham 2013, skin fermented Pinot Gris. Thirty days on the skins in an unlined terracotta amphora, further aged in acacia wood barrel.

#2 – Beckham 2013 Pinot Noir. Four day cold soak then a 20 day ferment in a terracotta amphora.

#3 – A side by side comparison of (a) another winery's un-filtered / un-fined Pinot Gris and (b) the same wine aged in a bee's wax lined terracotta amphora. The amphora aged sample was more clear, had a stronger floral aroma and had a softer mouth feel.

Member Rob Landsness provided us with 4 samples of wines from Italy. Rob distributed handouts describing the wines, all produced using amphorae fermentation and aging.

#1 – Foradori Nosiola 2011 from Trentino-Alto Adige region. White Nosiola grape fermented with 8 months maceration on the skins in amphora.

#2- Foradori Morei 2011 from Trentino-Alto Adige region. Red Teroldego grape (similar to Sirah) fermented with 8 months maceration on the skins in amphora then 3 months in oak casks.

#3- COS Pithos Bianco 2010 from Sicily. Grecanico grape fermented and aged on the skins for 7 months in 400 liter clay amphora.

#4- COS Pithos Rosso 2010 from Sicily. Nero d'Avola (60%) & Frappato (40%) grapes fermented and aged on the skins for 7 months in 400 liter clay amphora.

How Green Are Wine Bottles?

Local recycling programs bottleneck flow of reusable glass.

Glass cullet must be sorted by color before it can be recycled into other glass products. Photo source: State of Washington Department of Ecology San Rafael, Calif.—The Glass Packaging Institute and its members proudly boast that glass is "endlessly recyclable," and thus eco-positive. How effective this is in practice depends upon local recycling programs that deliver cullet (re-usable glass) to glass plants.



In an article titled "Costly sorting process hinders Oregon glass recycling," the Seattle Post-Intelligencer reported, "Glass placed in recycling containers in Oregon often ends up in landfills, where it is used to aid drainage instead of being used to make new bottles. Oregon's only glass bottle plant, operated by Owens-Illinois, only accepts glass that has been color-sorted, which can be cost-prohibitive. Some companies currently pay to ship glass to California for sorting."

The news is indeed surprising, coming from famously green Oregon. Now Palo Alto, Calif.-based eCullet and Owens-Illinois, the world's largest glass container manufacturer, are planning to open an eCullet plant to sort commingled glass in Portland, Ore.

In March 2013, eCullet announced the formation of Glass to Glass LLC, which would invest in "sophisticated glass-sorting equipment" to make more high-quality recycled glass available for use in O-I plants."

The company explained, "Much of the recycled glass collected in North America comes from single-stream recycling, which mixes paper, metal, plastic and glass. This collection process often results in glass that is too contaminated to be successfully re-introduced into the manufacturing process. Improved sorting techniques will increase the amount of usable glass available."

Editors Note: This issue is the second in a four-part series devoted to the history of wine making. Hopefully, this series will help you better understand your own personal beliefs about wine and winemaking, and how those beliefs have been shaped by historical and cultural circumstances.

As previously discussed our ancestors who lived more than 2000 years ago believed that the gods actually lived in the grapes they harvested and the wines they drank. Drinking wine allowed them to transcend their normal lives and commune with these gods. Yet, as the influence of Christianity grew, the Christian church began restricting the use of sacred wine and making clear distinctions between it and secular wine. Now, instead of sacred wine being used to commune with the gods, it was used to atone for sin, bringing forgiveness rather than transcendence. Also, it was often only the church priest, acting as Christ's representative on earth, who consumed sacred wine during religious services, not the ordinary people in the congregation. Outside of religious services, there was an abundance of secular wine during medieval times. The most important function of secular wine during the early Middle Ages (400-900 A.C.E.) was to provide nourishment to those who drank it, due to its calories and its ability to quench thirst. The alcohol content of this beverage also killed bacteria and made it one of the safest beverages to consume, far safer than ordinary water.



vine pruning & wine making during the early middle ages



The Catholic Church strongly influenced medieval winemaking

The Catholic Church and Winemaking

Benedictine and Cistercian Monks played a prominent role in the development of European viticulture. For example, late in the 12th century, after establishing 120 convents in Portugal, the Cistercians not only became the main keepers of agricultural knowledge, they also provided training to their faithful congregations on how to grow grapevines and make wine. Medieval kings and feudal lords also owned vineyards and made wine, but they gave a great deal of land to the Church, with much of it turned into vineyards. Beyond the clergy and royalty, ordinary people were often very much involved in the winemaking process. With so many people living in the countryside, the Fall grape harvest mobilized everybody – including children – in the picking and processing of grapes.



Medieval grape harvests often involved the combined efforts of all age groups

The Short-Lived Prominence of English Wine

One historical fact that may surprise you is that England was a leader in grape growing and winemaking through much of the Middle Ages. At the end of the 11th century there were perhaps 50 vineyards in the southern half of the country – most associated with the church – that produced wine. These vineyards prospered for more than 300 hundred years, making England an important center of European winemaking. Around the same time, farmers in the English controlled area of Bordeaux France developed a thriving wine industry and exported much of their wine to their English overlords. When the “little ice age” of the middle 1500s sharply reduced the yield of vineyards in England, the French Bordeaux and Burgundy regions along with the German Rhine Valley region emerged as the great centers of grape growing and winemaking that they remain to this day. England never regained its early prominence as a wine region.

The Typical taste of Medieval Wine

How did medieval wine taste? By most accounts, it generally tasted horrible, at least by contemporary standards. As in earlier times, wine in the middle ages was not stored in corked bottles because neither corks or glass wine bottles had been invented. Wine, especially those fermented dry, spoiled quickly due to exposure to air and the absence of sulfites.



Medieval winemakers failure to “top up” their barrels led to a great deal of oxidized and sour-tasting wine

Some historians guess that even the better quality wines made in Europe during this time period were most likely inferior to those made in ancient Rome and Greece, because the latter were often infused with resin and stored in clay vessels, giving them some protection. Although medieval wines may have tasted fine when first put into wooden barrels and casks, winemakers during this time had not yet learned the importance of periodically “topping up” their wine containers as the new wine slowly evaporated. Racking wine off its lees was also not practiced, meaning that most wine contained a fair amount of dead yeasts, making it murky in appearance. Most wine sold for higher prices in the autumn when it still contained the preservative fizz of carbon dioxide and was young and fruity.

While barrel and cask stored wine rapidly deteriorated in taste and aromatic quality, a great deal of medieval wine tasted and smelled much worse. For the lower caste surfs and laborers, they typically drank wine stored in animal hides, which imparted rancid flavors that competed with already existing vinegary taste. Yet even this foul tasting liquid was generally more sanitary than water, so people consumed it, mixed with water, about 3 liters per day. Wine was even consumed at breakfast, often in the soup. A 14th century French author, writing about morality and home management, advised young wives not to drink wine... before 9AM. When people couldn't afford wine to mix with their bacteria laced water, they would mix water with grape pomace – pressed skins, stems, seeds and pulp – and drink this concoction for hydration.



Virtually everyone drank wine during the Middle Ages, often during all hours

Because wine went sour so quickly, various remedies were developed to either preserve it or restore the “life” to the wine. One common technique to preserve wine was to pour a thin film of olive oil over wine to protect it from air. One French remedy to restore the life to wine involved first soaking and then boiling wheat in water, and then tossing this hot wheat into a cask filled with sour wine. If the wheat didn't restore the life – which there is no reason to believe that it would – you were supposed to next toss in a basketful of well washed sand (good luck with that). However, by far the most popular solutions for coping with sour wine were the addition of flavorings, like spices, honey and herbs. Just like the ancient Greeks and Romans, people in the middle ages drank a great deal of this adulterated wine. Then, in the late middle ages (during the

15th century), winemakers on the Iberian peninsula in southwestern Europe began using sulfur to preserve wine. Even though sulfur's chemical composition would not be understood for at least another 200 years, its use in this small area of Europe was an important technological advance that would eventually replace the traditional methods of preserving or “fixing” wine using honey, resin, spices and other flavorings.

Common Daily Intoxication

Although water diluted wine was relatively low in alcohol, the women and men (and children) who consumed it – especially during the hot summer months – were probably at least a bit intoxicated most of the time. Drinking bad tasting wine until one was flat out drunk was not at all unusual, and medieval folklore used animal designations for describing how people behaved when at various stages of intoxication: mild intoxication made one act like a sheep, moderate intoxication caused one to behave like a lion, high intoxication made one act like an ape, and extremely high intoxication resulted in hog like behavior.

Medieval taverns were very popular, but they had a mixed reputation. They were places where people made business deals, hired employees, and socialized, but they were also where drunkenness and rowdy behavior occurred. In 13th century Paris there was a tavern for every 600 inhabitants and in 14th century Avignon there was one for every 150 inhabitants; many adults drank an average of one gallon of wine or beer per day.

Wine receives serious competition

By the late middle ages (1300 – 1500 A.C.E.), the growth on northern Europe's urban population led to an increased demand for commercial wine to be shipped or carted long distances where grapes were not locally available. This wine was still often sour tasting, but it generally tasted better than it's main alcoholic competitor, grain based beer. Although most medieval beer was extremely bitter and spoiled within a week, beer's value soon began to rise when German brewers started using hops, which made the brew less



Taverns were frequented by all levels of society, with wine being the alcoholic beverage most often consumed, at least until the early 1600s

Bitter and longer lasting. As Europe entered the cultural movement of the Renaissance in the 14th century, a period of time known for cultural innovation and creativity, beer became more of a commercial product like wine. And, unlike wine, beer could be produced throughout the year, so it generally was less expensive than all but the worst wines. Now drinking wine was no longer a necessity of daily living but was a choice people made between an ever growing number of beverages. By The early 1600s, a number of Europeans were shunning wine, and instead drank good tasting hoppy beer. Others were drawn to new fashionable nonalcoholic drinks such as tea, coffee and chocolate that became available through international trade, while others started drinking distilled spirits. Up until the 1600s, Europeans generally thought of distillation as being reserved solely for the apothecary craft of producing high alcoholic liquid medicines. Then the Dutch began promoting alcoholic spirits as an alternative to sour tasting wine; they distilled bad wine into brandy and flavored it with flowers, herbs, sweets and spices.



The Renaissance was a time when Europeans drinking preferences began to change, resulting in a decrease in wine popularity



In the 1600s, commercial beer brewers and distillers began challenging commercial winemakers dominance in the marketplace



One of the first stand-alone Cabernet Francs made in Washington came from Red Willow Vineyard in the western Yakima Valley

Known as the “third Bordeaux variety,” Cabernet Franc has been a red grape variety of some importance in Washington for the past 20 years.

In its native Bordeaux, Cabernet Franc is often blended with Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot, and that has often been its role in the New World, too. Now, however, we are seeing many winemakers bottling Cab Franc on its own and producing exciting wines.

Among the first Cabernet Francs bottled as a stand-alone wine came from Columbia Winery in Woodinville, Wash., using grapes from famed Red Willow Vineyard in the Yakima Valley.

Often lighter-bodied than Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc typically shows fascinating flavors of berries and notes of herbs. It can be just as rich as Cabernet Sauvignon but often with milder tannins.

Cabernet Franc is Washington’s fourth-most-important grape variety, after Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Syrah. Last fall, winemakers crushed 3,400 tons of Cabernet Franc.

Cabernet Franc also is renowned for its red wines from the Loire Valley’s Chinon region. These wines often are much different than one might expect from the Bordeaux region, and a few winemakers are starting to emulate this style.



Do Wine Supertasters Exist?

By [Daniel Pambianchi](#)

If you have ever participated in a wine tasting event alongside "expert tasters", you may be left to wonder how these wine jargon-sputtering oenophiles can possibly detect so many aromas and nuances or, perhaps, if your own tasting abilities might be subpar. And if you are of the male type, chances are you may be further disadvantaged. It can be quite daunting when time comes to opine on the wine's attributes.

Do supertasters really have special abilities to discern so many aromas, flavors, and discriminate all the subtle nuances, or are they mere snobs trying to impress the average wine enthusiast?

Although science has not confirmed this, it is believed that the human nose can perceive several tens of thousands of odors; estimates range between ten and fifty thousands. Robert M. Parker, Jr.-unquestionably the most influential modern-day wine critic who popularized the 100-point scoring system known to either make or break wine sales-is believed to be endowed with super tasting abilities, presumably capable of identifying specific producers as well as different vintages of the same wine. Others claim that it's all nonsense, but not according to Parker; he had his nose and palate insured for \$1 million. Interestingly, Avery Gilbert cites an experiment in *What the Nose Knows* where even professionals could not identify more than three odors from a prepared complex mixture, and that "no one could bust the four-odor limit," or what is known as the Laing Limit based on Australian psychologist David Laing's work. This begs the question "How can anyone smell a multitude of odors in wine?" And could Parker be able to bust the Laing Limit under laboratory conditions? Who knows? (Okay, the pun was intended.)

Let's try and make sense of this by first looking at the physiology of tasting-that is, how we perceive and interpret flavors and aromas through our gustatory (mouth) and olfactory (nose) senses, respectively.

Note: The words "aroma," "smell," "odor," "bouquet," and "flavor" are often used interchangeably as synonyms. Here we make no distinction among the first four terms, which we use to refer to odors or what the nose can smell; "bouquet", in wine sensory analysis, is more specific though-it refers to odors resulting from fermentation or wine aging. And the term "flavor" refers to what can be tasted by the palate. In wine appreciation, some will even include tactile sensations, as those delivered by astringent tannins, in the definition of flavor.

Our tongue consists of several types of gustatory receptor cells in taste buds on the tongue's papillae, each sensing or perceiving different flavors. There are approximately a couple of dozen receptor cells in each of the roughly 10,000 taste buds in a normal adult individual. As we taste wine (or any food), taste molecules first dissolve in saliva-necessary for the taste to be detected-and trigger nerve signals that are then delivered to the gustatory cortex in the brain for interpretation.

Taste buds can discern four primary tastes or flavors: sweetness, saltiness, acidity, and bitterness. Until recently, science claimed that these flavors were detected on specific areas of the tongue: sweetness is detected at the tip; saltiness on the sides, towards the front; acidity on the sides, towards the back; and bitterness at the back of the tongue. The science of taste now also defines a fifth taste, umami, a Japanese word meaning "savory," which can be found in high-protein content foods or those containing glutamates (glutamic acid), such as food treated with monosodium glutamate (MSG). Recent research now postulates that these five primary flavors can be detected all over the tongue.

Unless individuals have suffered physiological taste bud damage from, for example, heavy smoking, it can be assumed that we can all discern all five primary tastes and conclude that we can all taste the same flavors in food and beverages. Of course we all have different detection thresholds based on the physiological conditioning of our taste buds since birth. Gustatory acuity also decreases with aging as the number of taste buds greatly decreases-to less than 5,000 by some estimates.

But without an olfactory sense, we might as well eat insipid food and drink neutral beverages. We would not be able to tell apart a glass of Château Le Pew from a fine vintage of Château Latour. It is through the nose, through voluntary and involuntary stimulations, that we get to be able to discern all those attractive odors (and repulsive malodors, better referred to as "wine faults" in winespeak).

In voluntary stimulation in wine tasting, we first swirl the glass of wine to volatilize aromas and then bring it up to our nose to smell the various aromas; the volatilized aromas flow inwards from the nose and up to the olfactory receptors. As we then take a sip, involuntary stimulation is activated through retronasal olfaction at the back of the mouth and aromas flow upwards to the olfactory receptors.

At the molecular level, volatilized aromas from, for example, alcohols, aldehydes, esters, and terpenoids in wine, comprise a plethora of complex molecules, or odorants, which first dissolve on the mucus lining. If odorants cannot dissolve, they cannot be detected. When detected, the odorants then chemically stimulate olfactory receptor cells-some 50 million according to Émile Peynaud in his authoritative book *The Taste of Wine*-in the nasal chamber to trigger nerve signals sent to the olfactory bulb and then to the frontal lobe of the brain. The nostrils and nose chambers serve only as conduits to the olfactory receptor cells located just below the brain, and so, a bigger nose does not necessarily mean superior olfactory abilities.

So we have millions and millions of olfactory receptor cells but cannot identify more than two or three odors in a complex beverage such as wine. Quite the conundrum! So how are supertasters able to differentiate and identify so many odors and nuances?

Medical science states that differentiation and identification of odors actually happens in the brain, which is so conditioned through our development and experience. This is to say that those who were exposed to vast numbers of odors since childhood from, for example, their mother's cooking, would have developed an extensive "registry" in their brain. Specific smells then trigger the individual's cognitive and memory skills and be able to describe the smell using words. If one cannot smell an odor, it might well be that the individual is not able to recognize it, as opposed to not being able to detect it, unless the odor concentration is below the threshold of detection. The same can be said of other senses, namely, sight and sound: Is Vivaldi's Quattro Stagioni music to one's ears or simply a series of incoherent noises? It could well be the latter if one has never experienced music.

Then, with the proper training and development, particularly if initiated early in life, and with experience tasting many, many wines, it is possible for a wine taster to become a supertaster. But given that there is some physiological degradation of olfactory receptors in the nose and of mental acuity with aging, we can then expect olfactory abilities to diminish. Training one's nose with vials of aroma essence, such as Le nez du vin wine aroma kits, can thus only improve one's wine tasting ability so far.

And yes, according to scientific studies, women do have more acute olfactory and gustatory senses than men, but only until menopause.



IS TERROIR DEAD?

It's man vs. Mother Nature in shaping California wines

by Karen MacNeil

It is a small fact, but one that speaks volumes: There is no word for winemaker in French (or in Spanish, Italian or German). The word the French use is vigneron, meaning vine grower.

It points out the deeply ingrained European belief that wine is made by nature, not by man. For most Europeans, the idea of man as winemaker is, at the very least, a bit egotistical (and many would say quintessentially American). Worse, it seems to sweep aside a truth held for centuries in the Old World -- namely, that wine, at least fine wine, is at its core the reflection of a place.

It's 2002, and you're sitting at a wine bar drinking a Cabernet that costs \$15 a glass. You like it -- a lot. Why, you might wonder, is the wine so good? Did it come from a great vineyard in a top appellation? Or did the especially talented winemaker use some razzle-dazzle technique?

Place or person? It's a question that quietly nags at the California wine industry, arguably the most technologically sophisticated (and inclined) in the world, and yet an industry that romantically likes to think of itself as following in the wine steps of the Old World. Lately, the duality sometimes has seemed almost blatant.

On the one hand, a phrase like "our wine is made in the vineyard" has become such standard winery PR-speak that it's close to becoming a cliché; on the other hand, peek inside most California wineries and what do you see? Every high-tech, computer-driven, shiny new gadget and piece of equipment that exists.

So how much is a vineyard responsible for the way a California wine tastes? How much does the classic concept of terroir have meaning here?

"It's the question of the moment -- the enological equivalent of, 'Is God dead?'" says Randall Grahm, proprietor and winemaker of Bonny Doon Vineyards in Santa Cruz.

"Is terroir dead? All of a sudden that is the question. Maybe because we're experiencing the pain of its absence. We're sensing its loss. Without terroir, winemaking is a hollow game, a hall of mirrors.

Some background: Terroir is the French word used to describe the combined effect of soil, slope, and every aspect of geology and topography (orientation to the sun and elevation, to name two examples), plus every nuance of climate (from rainfall and wind to frequency of fog and cumulative hours of sunshine) on a vineyard site and hence on the character and quality of the grapes grown there.

While there is no single-word translation of terroir in English, the French will often use this one word to explain why a wine tastes the way it does.

What makes terroir especially spellbinding is how purely and perfectly it can reveal itself. Taste two Pinot Noirs from the same small Burgundian domain made from the same variety by the same person using the same process and the same minimal equipment, and yet they taste remarkably different. How else can one account for so intriguing a phenomenon except through the mysteries of place, of terroir?

The idea that certain sites give rise to wines with distinctive flavors is not new. But it wasn't until the Middle Ages, when the monks of Burgundy began to delineate and codify the region's vineyards, that terroir became the critical core of viticulture. Plot by plot, they studiously compared vineyards and the wines made from them, recording their impressions over centuries. Burgundy's hierarchical classification of vineyards into Village Cru, Premier Cru and Grand Cru were the result of this massive viticultural experiment.

"The reason you can taste terroir in red Burgundies today," says Paul Draper, CEO and winemaker of Ridge Vineyards in Cupertino, "is that you're tasting wines from expert winegrowers who have a high level of expertise and who follow a tradition that's deeply ingrained. In California, a winemaker has to be very focused on having the place provide the basic character of the wine, rather than on something he does. If terroir is going to be expressed, then he has to let the wine more or less make itself. There are very few California winemakers who are truly that hands-off."

Graham puts it more bluntly. "California wines are generally so tricked-up that if we had terroir, we wouldn't know it. It's almost as if we're the Department of Terroir Prevention."

If it's not terroir that shows through in much of California wine, what does?

"We're giving people what they want," says Graham, "power, intensity, softness, a mouthful of fruit. Everything except soul. Everything except real personality. Our wines are like a person who's so agreeable you want to murder him."

For Draper, California winemakers using a lot of what he calls "tricks of the trade" are not expressing terroir, but rather are following a philosophy and answering a need. "They are trying to give their customers the best wine possible and to do that they'll use every technique possible," he says. "That philosophy gives us good inexpensive drinking wine because the winemaker has stepped in and provided what the site has not."

Does that mean that the Merlot you and I and 2 million other people buy each year for \$12 categorically does not reflect terroir?

"The larger the volume of wine, the more diverse the blend, and the more you blend place out of the picture," says Rosemary Cakebread, winemaker for Spottswoode in the Napa Valley. "It's like a committee -- the more people involved, the more generic the decision has to be. On the other hand, the smaller the vineyard, the more you see the stamp, the real character of a certain piece of ground."

Seeing the character of a given piece of ground is not necessarily every winemaker's goal, however. Ed Sbragia, winemaker for Beringer, points to the winery's Private Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon -- \$80, appellation Napa Valley -- a blend of Cabernet from seven different vineyards in the Napa Valley, which he admits does not show off an individual terroir.

"We're trying to make the best wine possible," he says. "Blending helps you make the wine that's idealized in your mind. In this case, we think the sum of the parts is more than any individual part. And in any case, I've never heard a winemaker complain that a wine is too flavorful, too rich. Private Reserve has a personality that comes from what we winemakers do and from blending, but it's based on top terroirs."

Historically, single-vineyard wines from distinctive terroirs cost more. Chateau Latour, which comes from a single vineyard, costs more than a wine labeled Bordeaux, which is made up of a blend of different wines from all over the region. But scan the shelves of any wine shop and you'll see all kinds of wines, including those with the appellation California, that cost \$100 a bottle.

"When a wine is made with a lot of technique and it costs a lot, it upsets me," says Draper. "Good as that wine may be, it's not deserving of its price because it doesn't represent wine at its essence." Let's take a wine that is the product of a single place or terroir. Are all terroirs equally compelling?

Probably not. Most winemakers agree that the Earth has its own eno-erogenous zones -- places where the wine that emerges is just plain thrilling. And not just once or twice, but thrilling virtually year after year, maybe for centuries. There are also countless vineyards and wine regions that produce good, serviceable but rarely captivating wine -- even in the hands of the most extraordinary winemaker.

"It's like the old adage, 'You can turn filet mignon into hamburger but not hamburger into filet mignon,'" says John Alban, proprietor/winemaker of Alban Vineyards in Arroyo Grande (San Luis Obispo County). "I don't think winemaking ever transforms grapes into a level of quality they inherently don't have."

So how many great sites are there in the world? "It isn't even 1 percent," says Draper.

But Alban wonders. "Maybe it's like a child prodigy. Maybe your son is an incredible opera singer, but if you decide the only thing of merit is athletics, your son may never achieve anything. So if Chardonnay is the only grape that matters, then you may never know you've got one of the great sites for Grenache. There are potentially an enormous number of great terroirs in the world. We've only just scratched the surface."

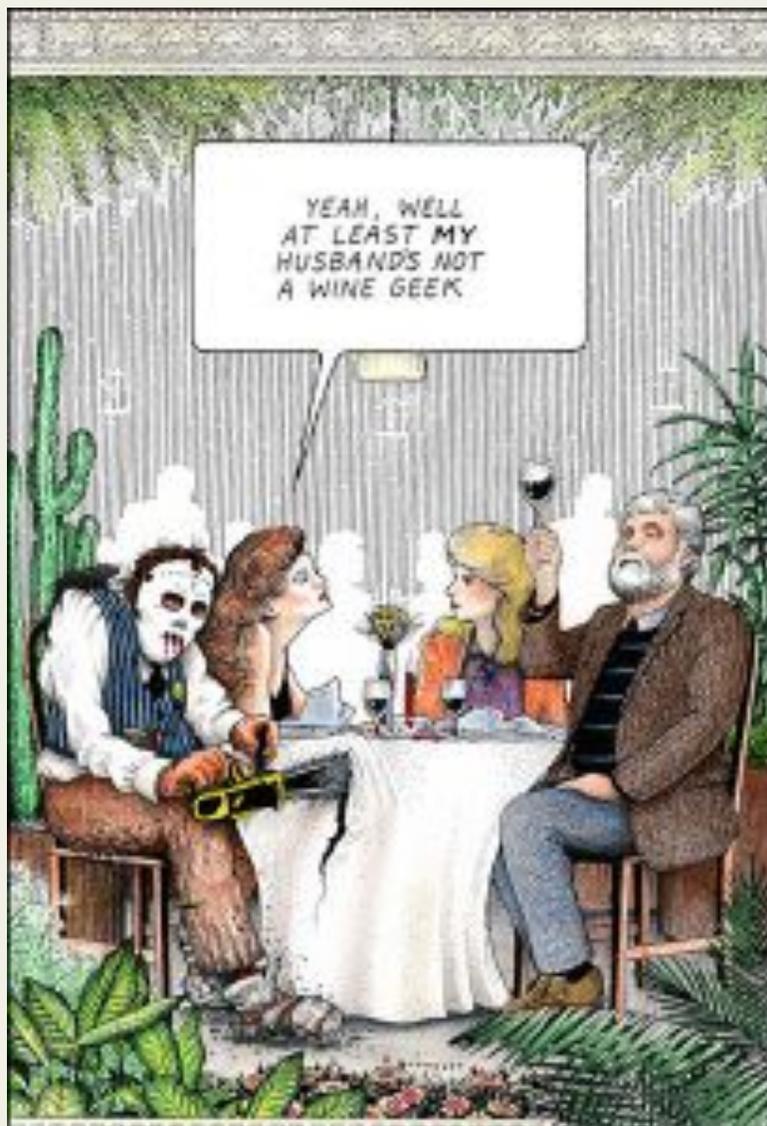
Cakebread agrees that much is dependent on the variety. "All varieties are not equally good for all terroirs," she says. "Worldwide, Sauvignon Blanc is a gypsy. It makes great wine, from Calistoga to South Africa. Cabernet Sauvignon doesn't do that."

One of the places Cabernet Sauvignon does seem to make great wine is the Stags Leap District in the Napa Valley. Recently, for example, Shafer Vineyards was honored by Wine & Spirits magazine (Fall 2002 Special Issue) as one of the world's top 25 vineyards based on the excellence of its Hillside Select Cabernet Sauvignon.

So is it place or do proprietor Doug Shafer and winemaker Elias Fernandez do something special?

Shafer pauses. "Terroir goes beyond soil, beyond climate, beyond location and exposure," he says. "It sounds corny, but I think the land itself has to have a kind of passion. And there has to be passion in the winemaking as well."

"Terroir may be there on its own, but to have it show through in the wine, you have to have passion for and respect for its presence. If you don't respect that idea, don't think about it, don't care about it constantly, terroir is completely lost."



West Side Wine Club Leadership Team - 2014

- President: **Phil Bard** phil@philbard.com
- Set agenda for the year
- Establish leadership team
- Assure that objectives for the year are met
- Set up agenda and run meetings

Treasurer: **Barb Thomson** bt.grapevine@frontier.com

- Collect dues and fees, update membership list with secretary
- Pay bills

Secretary: **Ken and Barb Stinger** kbstinger@frontier.com

- Communicate regularly about club activities and issues
- Monthly newsletter
- Keep updated list of members, name tags and other data

Chair of Education: **Mike Smolak** Mike@NWRetire.com

- Arrange speakers for our meetings

Chair for Tastings: **Ted Johnson**, tedj52@msn.com

- Conduct club tastings
- Review and improve club tasting procedures

Chair of Winery/Vineyard Tours: **Bill Brown** bbgoldieguy@gmail.com

- Select wineries to visit
- Arrange tours
- Cover logistics (food and money)

Chair of Group Purchases: **Jonathan Brown** jonabrown@gmail.com & Jim Ourada
jim.m.ourada@intel.com

Makes the arrangements to purchase, collect, and distribute

- Grape purchases
- Supplies – These should be passed to the President for distribution.

Chair of Competitions: **Don Robinson** don_robinson_pdx@yahoo.com

- Encourage club participation in all amateur competitions available. Make information known through Newsletter, e-mail and Facebook.

Chairs for Social Events: **Marlene Grant** denmargrant@earthlink.net Barbara Stinger & Mindy Bush – Helpers

- Awards Gala / Holliday parties

• Web Content Editor: **Rick Kipper** kips@lycos.com

Webmaster: **David Ladd**