



Musings on the Vine

A Collection of Thoughts, Suggestions and Opinions about Wine

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The world bade farewell to an American cooking icon recently, revered chef Julia Child. The woman who single-handedly redefined American cuisine and brought us out of the cooking dark ages bid us "Bon Appétit" one last time. I had the pleasure of meeting Julia at a Smoked Salmon seminar back in the early nineties hosted by the AIWF at her home in Cambridge. What a delightful and charming woman! Down to earth and unassuming with an infectious passion for cooking, Julia was a true culinary emissary. For me, Julia's most important lesson was that fine cuisine didn't require a stiff chef's toque or a Cordon Bleu degree to be great, but that great food comes from the soul and is born out of the enjoyment that it brings to loved ones and friends. Julia also taught us the value of including wine with our meals. Central to great cuisine is the matching of fine food with fine wine. Through four decades of teaching Julia passed her wisdom to generations of chefs across the globe. Farewell, Julia, and may you finally be reunited with the love of your life, your dear husband Paul, wherever you both may be.

*Cheers!
Paul & Betsy*

Featured Region: New Zealand



Like their Aussie neighbors, New Zealanders are passionate about their wine, although it wasn't always that way. New Zealand has had a long-standing wine producing industry, which dates back to the early 1800's. Most are unfamiliar with this history and for good reason: until the late 1960's most of New Zealand's wine was highly undistinguished, primarily fortified wines made from hybrid grapes. Recently, however, New Zealand is experiencing quite a bit of notoriety given the quality of many of its modern, vinifera-based wines (especially Sauvignon Blanc).

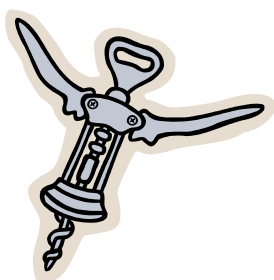
New Zealand is the most southern latitude where grapes are grown. Like South Africa, grapes grow and fully ripen due to certain geographic characteristics of the land (shielding mountains) and the presence of moderating ocean currents. New Zealand is actually two islands, North and South, with grape growing regions present on both. North Island is home to the majority of vineyards centered in the best-known regions of Wellington, Hawkes Bay, Poverty Bay and Auckland. South Island has fewer vineyards, but the positive reputations of Marlborough, Nelson, and the Waipara Valley are growing considerably.

Because the climate tends to be cooler in New Zealand, it's not surprising that white grapes are prevalent and enjoy the most success. Roughly two-thirds of all grape production is in white varieties with Chardonnay carrying a slight edge over Sauvignon Blanc. Red grapes are grown on New Zealand, with the best example being Pinot Noir, a grape that likes cooler growing climates. Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot are grown on New Zealand, but unlike most new world regions that grow this dynamic duo, the wines produced lack the characteristic over-ripe and intense fruit, instead tending towards a more restrained, elegant style. As you might expect, sparkling wines work well given the less ripe, more acidic Chardonnay and Pinot Noir fruit.

Most New Zealand wines are still fairly priced with a number of wines providing significant value. Recent vintages have proven to be very good quality, especially 1998, 1999, 2001, 2002, and 2003. One note, there is a

system of wine laws in New Zealand, called the Certified Origin (CO) system, but I have yet to actually see any domestically available bottles labeled as such. That said, I'm sure as their nascent fine wine industry matures, New Zealanders will need to employ their CO system more regularly. For the moment, though, the overall quality and value of wine coming out of New Zealand is excellent.

The following are a few wines from New Zealand that I thought were worth mentioning:



“Here's to the corkscrew - a useful key to unlock the storehouse of wit, the treasury of laughter, the front door of fellowship, and the gate of pleasant folly.”

- W.E.P. French

2003 Seresin Sauvignon Blanc, Marlborough, New Zealand (\$22.99/bottle)

Lovely, floral nose with hints of tropical fruit, kiwi and peach. Medium-bodied with high acidity. Well balanced, although the acid is searing at the outset. With time in the glass the acid calms down and the wine becomes much more harmonious. Grapefruit, apple and guava flavors on the palate - very clean and refreshing. Moderate length with a crisp, palate cleansing aftertaste. Excellent example of an Auckland Sauvignon Blanc. Drinking well now, should improve over the next 2 to 3 years. Expensive, but very high quality.

2003 Spy Valley Riesling, Marlborough, New Zealand (\$13.99/bottle)

Soft, floral nose with lemon, honey and apricot aromas. Slight hint of petrol and flint, reminiscent of German Riesling. Light-bodied with moderate acidity. Good balance, tart with citrus flavors in force. The tartness is little out of balance at first, but it does calm down with some time in glass. Short finish with a crisp, clean aftertaste. Drinking well now, will not improve. Good value.

2000 Coopers Creek “Bay Swamp Reserve” Chardonnay, Hawkes Bay, New Zealand (\$18.49/bottle)

Restrained nose with oak and vanilla aromas and slight green apple hints. Medium-bodied with moderate acidity. Good balance with predominant oak flavors and some apple and pear fruit. Moderate length with a pleasant butterscotch aftertaste. Drink now.

2003 Coopers Creek “Reserve” Sauvignon Blanc, Marlborough, New Zealand (\$13.50/bottle)

Lively tropical nose with intense kiwi, guava, and papaya nose – pretty and fresh. Medium-bodied with moderate acidity. Well balanced with lemony, grassy flavors – less tropical than the nose would indicate. Moderate length with a tart, almost salty aftertaste. Drinking now. Great value.

2000 Alpha Domus “The Navigator”, Hawkes Bay, New Zealand (\$13.50/bottle)

58% Merlot, 26% Cabernet Sauvignon, 11% Cabernet Franc, 5% Malbec

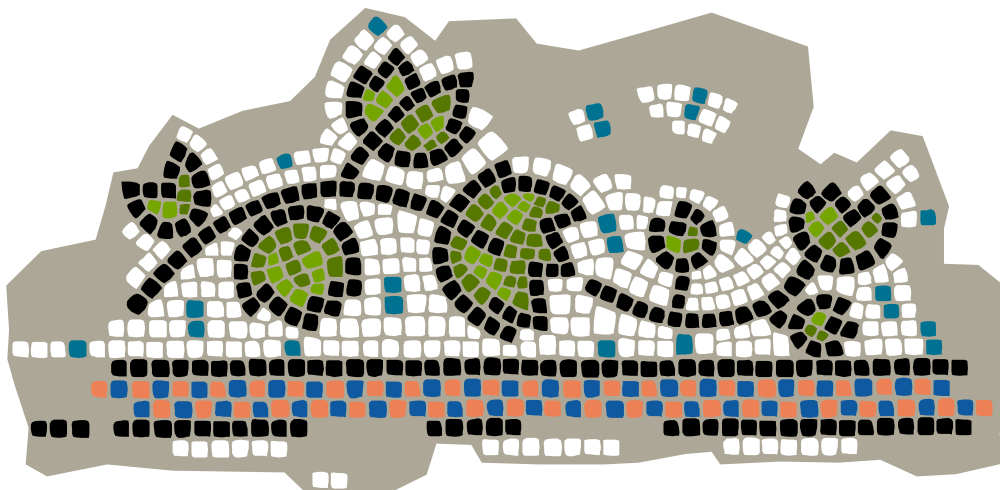
Jammy nose with eucalyptus, mint, cocoa and black currant aromas - lush. Full-bodied with moderate acidity and moderate tannin. Good balance with a dark fruit core, tart with chocolate, cedar and olive hints - rich. Long finish with cherries and tobacco leaf on the aftertaste. Tight, needs time, may improve over the next 2 to 3 years. Good value.

2002 Hyperion “Kronos” Cabernet Sauvignon, Matakana, New Zealand (\$19.50/bottle)

Lively, spicy and peppery nose with eucalyptus, black currant and plum hints. Medium-bodied with moderate, firm acidity and soft tannin. Good balance with sour cherry and dark fruit flavors. Cool climate greenness. Moderate length with persistent cherry aftertaste. Drink now.

“You have only so many bottles in your life, never drink a bad one.”

- Len Evans



“Wine should be stored in a cool, dry place. The glove compartment of a Jaguar or an abandoned washing machine are my personal favorites. Good French wine should carry the phrase: ‘Mise en bouteilles au chateau.’ This assures you that only the owner of the vineyard has had a chance to tamper with the wine.”

- Richard Smith, "A Gentleman's Guide" to understanding fine wines



2002 Hyperion “The Titan” Cabernet Sauvignon, Matakana, New Zealand (\$26.00/bottle)

Ripe nose with mineral, wet stone and some black cherry notes. Medium-bodied with moderate acidity and firm tannin. Well balanced with a dark fruit core and loads of cocoa, black cherry and briarwood. Very attractive. Moderate length with vanilla, cedar and floral aftertaste. Drinking well but should improve over the next 2 to 3 years.

2002 Oyster Bay Pinot Noir, Marlborough, New Zealand (\$15.99/bottle)

Pale ruby red in colour, showing a very youthful pink tinge to the wine. Very ripe and aromatic with dollops of fresh raspberry and cherry on the nose. Hints of wild flowers, very pretty. Medium-bodied with tangy, crisp acidity and soft tannins. Ripe fruit, bright, with more cherry on the palate. Showing some nice earthy complexity with nice mushroom/truffle notes. More Californian than Burgundian with bursting fruit, although the racier acidity does tame the ripeness somewhat. Over time the balance really improves nicely, turning this into a really attractive wine. Good length, lingering aftertaste. Has plenty of fruit with enough tannin and acidity to hold for a while. Great value in Pinot Noir.

Notable Potables: The Reds

2000 Water Wheel “Bendigo” Shiraz, Australia (\$12.99/bottle)

Spicy, rich nose filled with black cherry fruit aromas. Full-bodied with moderate-to-high acid and moderate, firm tannins. Good balance and structure with a dense, tightly-wound core of fruit, dark with hints of baker's chocolate and blackberry jam. Very attractive without any over-the-top oakiness. Moderate length with a spicy, black pepper aftertaste. Drinking well now, should hold for another 2 to 3 years, tops. Excellent value from down under.



2002 Thorn-Clark “Terra Barossa Cuvee”, Australia (\$11.99/bottle)

51% Shiraz, 25% Cabernet Franc, 24% Cabernet Sauvignon

Dense, dark nose with loads of cherry, black pepper and mint. Full-bodied with low acidity and moderate tannin. Ripe, dense palate with black cherry and black currant flavors. Chewy and quite quaffable. Moderate length with a juicy, jammy aftertaste – more black pepper and sour cherry. Drinking well now, should hold for another 2-3 years – will not age. Good value.

The following wines are a few “notable potables” that I’ve tried over the last few months. They’re from different countries, some are red and some are white, but they all left a distinct, favorable impression on me.

2002 Bodegas Agribergidum Pieros (Consensus Label) “Tinto” Mencia, Bierzo, Spain (\$9.99/bottle)

Ripe, youthful nose with fresh cherry and banana chip notes. Medium-bodied with moderate acidity and moderate tannin. Good balance, although very young and a little rough. Cherry, blackberry and currant flavors with some tar and black pepper. Moderate length with a simple, rustic aftertaste. Drinking well, should hold for another 2-3 years – not for aging. Good value.

2000 Changala Syrah, Indian Valley, Central Coast, California (\$14.99/bottle)

85% Syrah, 10% Viognier, 5% Grenache

Rich, spicy nose with black pepper, vanilla, black cherry and mint aromas. Full-bodied with moderate acidity and moderate tannin. Well balanced, smooth with juicy, chewy fruit flavors and soft floral and herbal hints. Moderate length, pretty with soft berry aftertaste. Drinking nicely now, should hold for another 2 to 3 years. Excellent value.



Notable Potables: The Whites

***“What though youth
gave love and roses,
age still leaves us
friends and wine.”***

- Thomas Moore

2002 Changala Viognier, Zaca Mesa Vineyard, Santa Barbara County, California (\$14.99/bottle)

Pretty floral nose with hints of melon, papaya and guava aromas – very attractive. Medium-bodied with moderate acidity. Well balanced with good structure – crisp and refreshing citrus fruits with hints of mineral and wet limestone. The wine is exotic, but not overdone like some new world Viognier. Long finish with persistent melon, peach and papaya on the aftertaste. Drinking well now, should hold for another 1 to 2 years. Excellent value.

2002 Francis Tannahill “Dragon Fly” Gewurztraminer, Oregon (\$21.99/bottle)

(168 Cases Made)

Bright, spicy nose filled with rose water and lychee scents. Pretty floral aromas with hints of mineral and wet stone. Medium-bodied with moderate acidity – crisp and elegant. Well balanced with a hint of apricot, orange blossom and ginger on the palate. Dry, but with a hint of fruity sweetness. Long finish with persistent exotic flavors on the aftertaste. Lovely – drinking well now. Good value.



2003 Hogue Gewurztraminer, Columbia Valley, Washington (\$8.99/bottle)

Soft, floral nose with faint honeysuckle hints. Light-bodied with moderate acidity. Good balance with slightly tart apple notes. Peach and melon on the palate, soft with just a trace of fruity sweetness (this wine is not bone dry, nor is it exceptionally sweet.) Short finish with lemony, citrus aftertaste. Not for aging - drink now. Great value in a simple domestic white.

“I have enjoyed great health at a great age because everyday since I can remember I have consumed a bottle of wine except when I have not felt well. Then I have consumed two bottles.”

- Bishop of Seville

2002 McManis Chardonnay, River Junction, California (\$11.99/bottle)

Light, floral nose with soft citrus aromas. Medium-bodied with low acidity, but the wine is not flabby. Good balance and structure. Honeyed, vanilla flavors with pretty, peach fruit - slightly grassy with forward oak. Moderate length with a buttery aftertaste. Drinking well, will not improve with age. Excellent value, but you'd better like a wine with oak.

“Let your boat of life be light, packed with only what you need - a homely home and simple pleasures, one or two friends, worth the name, someone to love and someone to love you, a cat, a dog, and a pipe or two, enough to eat and enough to wear, and a little more than enough to drink; for thirst is a dangerous thing.”

- Jerome K. Jerome in “Three Men in a Boat”

Desert Island Selections:

2000 Abacela Vineyards “Reserve – South East Block” Tempranillo, Umpqua Valley, Oregon (\$43.99/bottle)

Ripe, spicy nose with wonderful black cherry and allspice aromas. Full-bodied with moderate acidity and moderate, tough tannin. Well balanced with superb structure, built for the long haul. Dense, tightly wound core of cherry fruit with cedar, tar and spice notes. Long finish with a muted but complex aftertaste. Needs time, should improve in another 7 to 10 years. Well worth the price.

1999 Changala Zinfandel, Dante Dusi Vineyard, Paso Robles, California (\$14.99/bottle)

60 Year Old Dry Farmed Vines

Ripe, spicy nose with herbal, strawberry and black pepper hints. Full-bodied with moderate acidity and moderate, but firm tannin. Well balanced and wildly juicy with a deep, well-concentrated core of black fruit. Cherry with traces of allspice, anise, mint and baker’s chocolate. Long finish with a nicely complex fruit and spice aftertaste. A little tight, needs time. Should continue to improve over the next 2 to 3 years. Excellent value.

2002 Francis Tannahill “The Hermit” Pinot Noir, Willamette Valley, Oregon (\$36.99/bottle)

Shea & Momtazi Vineyards, (69) Cases Made

Ripe nose with subtle earthy notes – restrained cherry and raspberry aromas. Full-bodied with firm acidity and firm tannin. Well balanced but tight with raspberry and black cherry flavors. Long finished, but closed – needs time. Should blossom over the next 7 to 10 years. This is a wonderful wine with great potential.

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You know the game where you pretend that you are stranded alone on a desert island for the rest of your life and you only get to take along a few certain things? Well, the following are what I’m calling my “desert island” selections. Wines that I just couldn’t (or rather wouldn’t) live without.

