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Musings on the Vine

What's New

We believe in learning something new every day. This is especially true when you live with a 3-year old. To our son, every experience is a new experience and each day is filled with a litany of questions. The constant barrage of questions leads one to a set of revelations inspired by our 3-year old:

Fizzy is fun, and it makes me giggle – There is something magical about sparkling wine. It doesn't have to be Champagne – Spanish Cava will do nicely, thank you. Dry, slightly sweet or unctuous, it doesn't really matter, as that little tickle always brings a smile to one's face.

You can never drink enough of your favorite wine – There are some wines that seemingly never go out of style and remain timeless in their

enjoyment that are sometimes forgotten in the craze-happy world of fine wine. Take for instance, Saint-Émilion. Almost always well-balanced, great companions of food and possessed of many of the traits that make wines great, these Bordelaise gems are often overlooked for more trendy bottles.

Deep down, red wine is what it's all about – As the French would say: Égalité! Yeah, right. White wine is nice, but red wine is better. In classes, we espouse the importance of open-mindedness and a willingness to give all wine a chance, but overwhelmingly, red wine is where our money is at.

Sometimes you just don't have to swirl, sip or spit – Yes, tasting for critical appreciation is important and practicing the

techniques will not only improve your palate, but it will add to your enjoyment of wine. Sometimes, though, just drinking the wine is enough.

It's okay to like Riunite – Anyone who has attended our *History of Italy in Ten Glasses* already knew this to be true. Nothing else needs to be said.

There will always be another vintage, but why wait? – The wine media is a machine that starts hyping vintages before the grapes are in the crusher. For the most part, the hype is useful for establishing excitement about wine and the latest bottles from our favorite producers, but there lurks a danger: buying too much of a good thing. Did we really say that? Yup—and it's true.

You simply cannot argue with a 600 year track record of

Feature: Our Top Ten from 2009



Wine Spectator has their Top 100 Wines, so why not a Musings Top Ten? The following are ten wines that we tasted over the last year that we thought were worth buying more of and putting away, for a little while at least...

2007 Vieux Telegraph, Chateaufort-du-Pape, France

Simply stated – a near perfect wine with at least 25 years of aging potential.

2007 Taylor Fladgate Vintage Port

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Upcoming 2010 Wine Events

- March 13th—Wines of the Rhone
- March 27th—Italy on a Budget
- April 10th—The Essential Wine Cellar
- April 24th—1970 Bordeaux
- May 15th—Wines of Germany & Austria
- June 19th—Summer Sippers
- September 11th—History of Spain in 10 Glasses

Feature: Our Top Ten from 2009, continued

If you don't like Port, then you should, because this wine is a knock-out.

2004 Badia a Coltibuono Chianti Classico Reserva, Italy

With all the great vintages coming out of Europe these days, sometimes special wines get lost in the shuffle. A wonderfully robust Chianti from an absolutely solid producer.

2007 M. Chapoutier Belleruche. Côtes du Rhone, France

There could easily be another ten Côtes du Rhone wines listed here, but of all the stand outs, Chapoutier has really created a something to write about – you may want to sit down when we tell you the price... \$9.99 pre discount.

2005 Chateau Saintayme, Saint-Émilion

Sometimes a wine shows up that reminds you why you fell in love with a certain region so many years ago and the Saintayme is just one of those wines.

2007 Villa Pozzi Nero d'Avola, Sicilia IGT

People should be drinking more Nero d'Avola – the wine is often seductive, without pretense and evokes the rustic beauty of its country of origin – oh, and they're often very reasonably priced.

2007 Charles Smith Winery Boom Boom Syrah, Columbia Valley, Washington State

The wine makers in Washington State get it and the wines they are producing are often times overlooked, but don't pass by this full-throttle Syrah.

2007 Domaine Le Sangs de Cailloux Cuvée Floureto, Vaqueyras, France

The 2007 vintage in the Rhone is set to eclipse the storied 1998 vintage and this offering, like the previously mentioned Vieux Telegrpah and Chapoutier is not to be missed.

2005 La Cova dels Vins Ombra, Montsant, Spain

There would be a few more Spanish wines in this list if it weren't limited to ten, but of all the Spanish lovelies enjoyed last year, the *Ombra* came out on top.

2005 Chateau Teynac, Saint-Julien, France

Like the Saintayme, this Teynac is a reminder of just how wonderful Bordeaux can be and why they sell close to 60 million cases a year.

What's New, continued

success – If one more person asks why New World wines don't take center stage at many of our events, we are going to scream. When California can boast a 600 year track record of fine wine production, borne out by documented sales and quality, then west coast wines will get equal billing on the menu. And so folks don't think we're unkind, California produces some very respectable wines (and yes, we saw Bottle Shock), but longevity is what counts.



Grape growing is about farming the land, not building temples to our vanity – The act of

growing grapes and making wines is an agricultural process, involving dirt, weather and really hard work. Shake the hands of a true wine maker and you will feel the hard, calloused roughness of a farmer. Look into their eyes and you will see passion, surrounded by weather-beaten, sun-burned skin. A wine maker's reward is the smile that bursts on a visitor's face after that very first sip. If you want art, go to a museum.

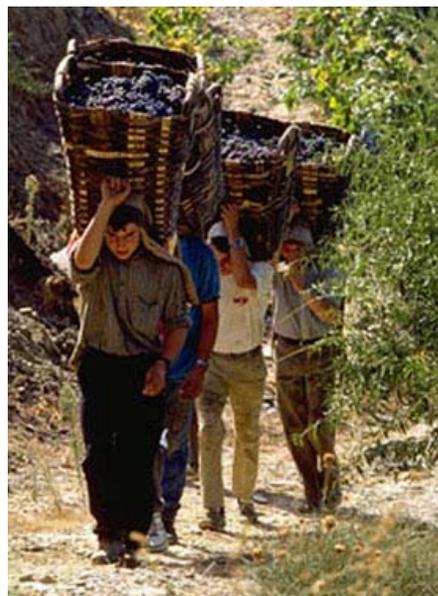
Recessions are good for wine – Financial catastrophes are good for over-priced, bloated markets. Recessions force corrections and that usually means good values for consumers. Some markets have corrected better than others, but the savvy consumer can put a lot of wine in their cellar today for not a lot of dough.

Price is rarely an indicator of enjoyment – With the recession comes a tighter focus on more affordable bottles and the constant reminder that you don't have to spend a lot of money, often no more than \$10 to get a really enjoyable bottle of wine. Notice we didn't use the word "great," largely because the term "great" usually connotes characteristics like elegance, structure, pedigree and age worthiness – certainly some of these elements can

be found in that value-priced quaffer, but more often than not, a truly great wine will have a truly great price.

Cheers!

Paul & Betsy



Notable Potables (Wines from our World Wine Challenge)

2007 Setzer Grüner Veltliner, Austria (\$13.99/1L bottle)

Flinty nose with white pepper and citrus hints. Light-bodied with firm acidity. Good balance – refreshing and crisp. Lemon and lime fruit with wet stone notes. Short, clean finish – drinking well – not for aging.

2005 Corte alla Flora, Vino Nobile di Montepulciano DOCG, Italy (\$19.99/bottle)

Earthy, berry nose with cherry and lilac hints. Medium-bodied with moderate acidity and firm tannin. Good balance. Dark fruit core with sour cherry, cedar and dried herb notes. Moderate length with some complexity. Drinking well now and should hold for 2 – 3 years.

2005 Château des Tours, Côtes du Rhone, France (\$22.99/bottle)

Dried herbs and spice aromas. Medium-bodied with moderate acidity and supple tannin. Good balance. Dark fruit core with loads of black pepper. Moderate length with dried herb and mineral on the aftertaste. Smooth – drinking well and should hold for another 2 – 3 years.

2004 Eponymous MacAllister Vineyard, Sonoma Valley, USA (\$29.99/bottle)

Jammy nose, sweet with pine resin and mint aromas. Full-bodied with moderate acidity and supple tannin. Good balance. Blackberry jam with mint, eucalyptus and pine notes. Moderate length with persistent spice on the aftertaste. Drinking well now and should hold for another 2 – 3 years.

2008 Molly Dooker The Maître D', Cabernet

Sauvignon, South Australia (\$24.99/bottle)

Ripe, fruity nose with dried fruit and vanilla hints. Full-bodied with moderate acidity and supple tannin. Good balance. Juicy, jammy palate with black cherry, blackberry and fresh herb notes. Moderate length with spice and tar on the finish. Drinking well now and should hold for another 2 – 3 years.

2009 Innocent Bystander Moscato, Victoria, Australia (\$12.99/375ml bottle)

Heady, perfumed nose with honeysuckle and apricot hints. Light-bodied with crisp acidity, balanced nicely by a touch of sweetness and smooth, bubbly mousse. Fresh and lively on the palate with apricot and peach notes. Moderate length with a seductive finish. Absolutely fun in a bottle – not for aging.

Regulatory Update: Massachusetts

Outstanding news! The 1st Circuit Court of Appeals has upheld Judge Rya Zobel's ruling that the 2006 Direct-to-Consumer-Wine-Shipping legislation is unconstitutional. The 1st Circuit Court agreed that the restrictive nature of the 2006 legislation perpetuates unfair trade practices and should be vacated immediately. This ruling paves the way for an opportunity to craft more consumer-friendly legislation that meets the needs of fine wine drinkers in Massachusetts. Now more than ever, you should voice your opinion to your local legislators that it is time for Massachusetts to get in step and allow direct purchasing of wine from winemakers across the US. Go to FreeTheGrapes.org or click on the Free the Grapes "Shackles" icon on Musings' home page for more information!



Judgment of Paris, take three

The third of our "Judgment of Paris" *re-enactment* tastings, which serves as a tie-breaker of sorts, seeing that California narrowly edged out France in our April 2007 event. In October 2009, a group of Musings supporters came together and revisited the Bordeaux versus Napa Valley Shootout, tasting the following (the tasting notes are my own):

Wine 1: 1983 Château Kirwan, Margaux, France

Dried fruit with black pepper and cedar aromas. Medium-bodied with moderate acidity and moderate tannin. Allspice, vanilla and a lively cinnamon note. Smooth finish. (Ranked 3rd)

Wine 2: 1987 Dunn Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley

Mocha and black cherry aromas with mineral hints. Medium-bodied with Moderate acidity

and supple tannin. Dried cherry, raisin and cedar notes. Smooth finish. (Ranked 5th)

Wine 3: 1986 Château Margaux, Margaux, France

Earthy, mineral nose with cigar box hints. Medium-to-full-bodied with moderate acidity and firm tannin. Dried cherry with vanilla and menthol notes. Long finish. (Ranked 4th)

Wine 4: 1987 Opus One Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley

Strong aroma of green peppers – odd. Medium-bodied with moderate acidity and moderate tannin. Vegetal on the palate with menthol, eucalyptus and dried cherry notes. Funky. (Ranked 6th)

Wine 5: 1988 Château Cheval Blanc, St. Emilion, France

Closed nose with mineral, black cherry and tobacco hints. Medium-bodied with moderate acidity and supple tannin. Smokey with dried fruit, bittersweet chocolate and black cherry notes. Smooth with moderate length.. (Ranked 2nd)

Wine 6: 1987 Caymus Special Select Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley

Black cherry with mocha and eucalyptus hints. Medium-bodied with moderate acidity and supple tannin. Dried cherry with black currant, tobacco and menthol notes. Smooth with moderate length. (Ranked 1st)

The wines were tasted blind and in no particular order. The wines had been opened and decanted about 45 minutes prior to the actual start of the tasting. The duration of the tasting period was approximately 40 minutes, followed by another 90 minutes of open discussion. The results are in the table below.

By Wine:

Wine	1st (3 points)	2nd (2 points)	3rd (1 point)	Total
1	1	2	1	8 points
2	0	1	0	2 points
3	0	2	0	4 points
4	0	0	0	0 points
5	4	1	0	14 points
6	4	2	0	16 points

By Region:

Napa Valley	18 total points
Bordeaux	22 total points

So, France managed to take back the prize in our latest event and like the last event, the results were not a knock-out punch. Judged individually, the first place wine was from Napa Valley, with second place honors going to France. Do I taste another rematch? I think I do... Best three-out-of-four.



2010 Upcoming Musings Events

The events listed below are held in the Wrentham, MA area. Musings@ events are held in Brookline, through the Brookline Center for Adult Education. See the Musings site for more information on all events and courses.

*Wines of the Rhone—\$50
Saturday, March 13, 2010*

The Rhone Valley in France is one of the most diverse wine making regions in the world with some of the oldest vineyards in France. The area is home to some of the most well-known appellations, like Hermitage, Côte Rôtie, Côtes du Rhone and Chateauneuf du Pape and produces wine in every imaginable style. The area has also been blessed with a near-perfect string of exceptional vintages, starting with 1998 and running through the highly-touted 2007 vintage. At this event we will taste a wide-range of wines from the Rhone Valley in many different styles and colors.

*Italy on a Budget—\$50
Saturday, March 27, 2010*

I have long lamented the fact that Italian wine is no longer the value that it once was, but what I have found is that the values in Italy just come from a different set of unexpected regions. Over the last few decades, the focus of Italian wine makers has been more towards quality, not quantity. This “shift in philosophy” combined with a string of great vintages has slowly driven the cost of well-known Italian wines up. The situation is further exacerbated by the weak dollar. The silver lining, though, is that wines from lesser-known regions have greatly improved in quality, but the price escalation is not as steep. At this event we will taste a number of Italian wines that represent a good value (\$10 - \$15 range), some from lesser known regions and some from the usual players.

*The Essential Wine Cellar—\$50
Saturday, April 10, 2010*

In my classes I am often asked to name the wine list that would be part of any person’s “essential wine cellar.” At first, it seems fairly easy, but when you try to keep budget and space in mind, the exercise gets far more difficult. At this event we will examine a number of wines from around the world in the hopes of pulling together the Essential Wine Cellar.

*1970 Bordeaux—\$100
Saturday, April 24, 2010*

The wines of Bordeaux are largely considered royalty amongst collectors. The region is perhaps one of the most famous regions in the world with a winemaking tradition that goes back more than 700 years. The Bordelaise can boast that their wines are one of only a handful of true wine investments with a robust futures market that has returned double-digit income for nearly 400 years. Great vintages in Bordeaux become landmark events that are remembered and recalled by wine connoisseurs around the globe. Truly exceptional vintages are even more treasured. In the Twentieth Century Bordeaux saw fewer than a dozen truly exceptional vintages, 1970 being among them. At this event we will taste a number of Bordeaux wines from the 1970 vintage. With forty years of bottle age on these wines, this event promises to be an once-in-a-lifetime experience.



*Wines of Germany & Austria—\$50
Saturday, May 15, 2010*

Germany has a centuries-old winemaking tradition that produces magnificent wines that are often misunderstood. Some of the misunderstanding comes from the hard-to-read wine labels and highly-complex wine laws, as well as bad memories of the cloyingly sweet *Liebfraumilch* Blue Nun and Black Tower. Austrian wine has not fared much better, mired in scandal in the mid-1980’s and making a come back with a grape that no one ever heard of (Grüner Veltliner). At this event we will taste a number of German and Austrian wines that represent some of the finest wine produced today and we will (hopefully) clear up some of the confusion and misgivings that shroud these great winemaking regions.

*Summer Sippers—\$50
Saturday, June 19, 2010*

Summer is a time for easy drinking, high-value wines that require very little thought or demand even less contemplation. The wines of summer should be light and refreshing, pairing well with the usually light repasts or foods from the grill. At this event we will examine several wines, both white and red that are light, refreshing and represent good value.

*A History of Spain in Ten Glasses—\$75
Saturday, September 11, 2010*

Spain has a rich and ancient history that has touched or influenced many civilizations around the globe. As a powerful nation, rich in culture, Spain has given much to the world, not the least of which is the gift of wine. In this class we will take a trip through Spanish history, linking each major milestone to wines of particular meaning or significance. We’ll sample ten Spanish wines that help tell the story of the country’s storied past, including reds, whites, sparklers, and sweet dessert wines. A collection of appetizers honoring the diversity and richness that is Spain will accompany our wines.

*Focus on Cheese—\$100
Saturday, September 25, 2010*

Attendees of my classes have heard me quote an old French proverb: Buy on apples, sell on cheese; and most have witnessed first had what the proverb means. Cheese is the natural accompaniment to wine and for that reason, why not spend some time focusing on the synergies created when truly great wine gets together with simply amazing cheese. At this event we will sample a wide range of artisanal/specialty cheeses with a slate of worthy wines.

*I Bet You Never Tasted... —\$50
Saturday, October 09, 2010*

Most of the time when I’m teaching about wine I try to stick with the “representative” wines of a particular country/region. Every so often I’ll mix it up and put an unusual wine in a flight. At this event we will taste nothing but unusual wines, all from regions that folks probably don’t know a whole lot about, but they should...

MUSINGS on the VINE

A Collection of Thoughts, Suggestions and Opinions about Wine.



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Musings on The Vine

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Musings on the Vine was conceived with a few very simple goals:

One, to share my passion and excitement of wine with anyone who cares to listen, and by doing so engender similar excitement in others. Two, to strip away the mysteries surrounding the appreciation of wine, making wine tasting, buying and collecting fun and unassuming. And three, to provide a resource for those people who don't necessarily want to become a Master Sommelier, but instead just want to be able to buy something decent to drink with dinner tonight. I hope that my readers find this newsletter to be informative and enjoyable!

Looking for more information about wine? Find it all at www.MusingsOnTheVine.com!

Register for a free account (all information will remain confidential; we take your privacy seriously) for access to newsletter archives, tasting, collecting and storage advice, Ask the Sommelier Q&A, varietal profiles, links to wineries, wine trails and recommended wine shops, a downloadable wine & food pairing chart, a complete database of tasting notes and wine prices, upcoming Musings courses and events, and much more!

2010 Upcoming Musings Events, continued

Malbec—\$50
Saturday, October 23, 2010

I'm not conducting this event because Argentinean Malbec is this year's Pinot Noir, or Merlot. No, I'm conducting this event because folks should know that Malbec achieved fame a long time ago in its native country of France in the regions of Cahors, the Loire and Bordeaux. At this event we will taste a selection of Malbec-based wines, some from the new world and some from the old, but all delicious.

Art of the Cocktail —\$50
Saturday, November 13, 2010

It is believed that the cocktail was invented in the US sometime early in the 19th century. Largely thought of as the sporting crowd's answer to fruit laden punches of the day, the classic cocktail has little in common with today's Slippery Nipple. The classic cocktail is little more than spirits, bitters, sometimes a mixer and sometimes ice, but in the correct combinations, these elements can yield "a quite serviceable concoction." At this event we will practice the art of mixing the classic cocktail – from the Sidecar to the Old Fashioned.

Champagne—\$100
Saturday, December 11, 2010

Holiday celebrations would somehow be diminished without the inclusion of fine Champagne. In the past, we've looked at the overall category of sparkling wines, all very nice. However, sometimes there is nothing like the real thing to set one's heart aflutter. At this tasting we will sample several wines from Champagne, including many vintage and tête du cuvee bottles.

J's Restaurant at Nashoba Valley Winery—Bolton, MA

Shortly before the Christmas holiday, we travelled up to Nashoba Valley Winery in Bolton, MA to pick up some of the just-released, inaugural single malt whiskey. We had tasted this fine spirit a while back in cask and were quite impressed with the effort. While there, we stopped in for lunch at J's, the restaurant associated with the winery, and we were reminded why we love to dine there. Executive Chef Steve Sprague has put together an absolutely marvelous menu. We began our feast with a complimentary *amuse bouche* of lovely locally-made Hubbardston goat cheese that was infused with wasabi and served with the accompaniments of good sushi: fresh ginger, daikon and pomegranate seeds and paired with Nashoba's Plum Wine. It was outstanding and the Plum Wine made a perfect pairing. We followed with a cup of the Ginger Butternut Bisque that was perfect on a cool December afternoon – rich, creamy and smooth with the perfect balance of spices, which we tried with both the recommended Dried Pear Wine and the Estate-Grown Vignoles – both worked well, although I tended to prefer the Vignoles over the Dried Pear. For lunch entrées we had the daily special Pulled Pork Sandwich and the Smith's Harvarti Fondue. Both were great – the Pulled Pork was tender and richly flavorful and the Fondue was tangy with a sweet, nutty finish. We tried the Renaissance, a blend of Cabernet Franc, Lemberger and Merlot, which paired well with both. For dessert we shared a Persimmon Cheese Cake with a caramel sauce that was stunningly rich and would have been impossible to finish had we ordered one for each. As it was, we left sated and happy, looking forward to our next visit.