

Notes From The Cellar (NFTC); Winepairings e-letter February 11,2009

Real Stimulus: Wine deals on favorites from Bandol and a dessert wine from Spain

As I predicted numerous times last year -the flood gates have opened. I am bombarded with close outs on wine that Importers and Distributors have had in the system as the economy tanked. I have spent many hours sifting through endless offers from the industry as well as retailers -After all I also purchase wine for myself and love a deal as much as anyone. What amazes me is how much junk wine there is in the system. Reducing the price on a mediocre wine does not make it taste any better.

Rather than just throw out big discounts on unrealistic prices, I would rather recommend fewer wines - those I would consider excellent value even at their regular prices -give us close out pricing on the good stuff and those are the wines you will see recommended here. Today I am featuring 2 wines that I have enjoyed and consumed numerous times from previous years. Again these are wines from current excellent vintages. With new inventory arriving and warehouses filling up, these were hidden gems that I picked up from dozens of choices offered.

One quick note -there are certain categories of wines where the selection from different producers is numerous. If you miss on a good deal on an Australian Shiraz or an inexpensive American Chardonnay no big deal. Wines such as we feature today are rather limited (the Spanish dessert wine is so unique that in the 10 years since I started drinking it I haven't found another wine that can compete with it in terms of style or price). I have had several clients that have understandingly been a bit reluctant to order their usual quantities with the idea that there will be better deals later. It was hard to argue with this at the end of last year ,yet the situation is now changing. While I am being as very cautious I am also seeing the distribution channels going through a big retrenchment process. Many of the limited wines are being ordered in much smaller quantities. We are coming to the end of arrivals of wines that were ordered and where in the pipeline as the economy ground to a halt. Tight inventory management will result in many desirable wines not being available at such crazy pricing in the future. Some may just be hard to find period. I urge you to consider your drinking requirements carefully. I am trying to concentrate on wines which will age and improve with time. Stash away some quantity now at these prices, and you will be very happy down the road. Some of these wines will not be seen at these prices in the future.

Today's Wine Deal \$\$\$

GROS NORE Bandol red (from Provance France) 2005 at half sug. price \$21-

Alain Pascal decided to go independent back in the mid 90's. His first vintage was 1997. Up to that point his dad sold grapes to two of the more famous producers in Bandol. Importer Kermit Lynch quickly signed him up. Quite the endorsement from the man who put Bandol on the radar of American wine drinkers over 30 years ago by importing the legendary wines of Domaine Tempier . After all Mr. Lynch has got better connections than anyone in the region that has become famous for it's rustic full flavor Mouvedre dominated wines.

My first purchase was the 1998 vintage and I still have a bottle or 2 in my cellar which continue to improve with age. Pascal only makes 2 wines: a red and a rose -so all the best grapes go into this basic wine, no special expensive luxury cuvees This is key to the quality as his youngest vines are 30 years old and the average age is in the mid 40's. He also prices his wines very reasonably at about 40 % less than his famous neighbors.

Bandols are wines that are big rustic and juicy, they have tons of tannins which give them power and the ability to age for a very long time. They are hard to sip when young so if you are going to consume one early, make sure you have some big roasted meats or game to match them with -the Provençal food, rich in roasted vegetables, herbs and spices, olives strong meats and big Mediterranean sauces is the perfect foil.

Unlike 2004 which produced a sweeter wine, more approachable on release, the 2005 vintage had a twist. At the end of the season the area received some rain and it was very critical to pick the grapes at the right time. Pascal picked before the rains and as such the wine needed extra time to mature in both the cellar and bottles in order to exhibit its true character. To my joy this house remained under the radar with critics up to Neal Martin writing for the Wine Advocate tasting the wine at a very young age in early 2007. He noted some rough edges at the time. But acknowledged: "Very Bandol. Polished, yet underneath some real rustic charm that should become more pronounced with age. Anticipated maturity: 2012-2020"

The more approachable 2004 tasted side by side, at that time also had an additional year in bottle -got a 91 points score. This made the 2004 an instant sell out. The 2005 released later only got a score of 86 points -pretty much a kiss of death in today's score obsessed market place. After all most buyers just look at the score and don't even bother reading the actual description. Never mind actually tasting the wine.

Fast forward almost 2 years. Today the 2005 exhibits a nose full of dark berries and plum. It is Rich and Velvety. It also carries some nice spice and earth aromatics and has resulted in quite the buzz on some of the Internet wine boards. Most consider it to be superior to the 2004. I can't give you my personal opinion as I have not had the 2004, yet the 2005 is a very tasty wine rich and structured perhaps the finest Pascal has produced to date. Interestingly, It is also now widely acknowledged that some better wines were produced from the 2005 vintage than the 2004. But until an official score revision comes along the 2005 Gros Nore will maintain its obscurity -but only with those who don't know better.

When I got a close out offer on this wine I pounced. While the suggested retail price is \$42 this wine can be found at low 30's and I even saw it a couple of times dip below the \$30 level which is a great price that I considered for my own purchase. At \$21 this is the best price in the US! Easily worth considering a several case purchase. All this for a wine that has the quality and stuffing to age and improve for another 15+ years: well draw you own conclusions.

BODEGAS OLIVARES Monastrell Dulce 2004 \$22.50 -this is a 500ml bottle

I owe the discovery of this amazing wine to a review by Robert Parker of the 1998 vintage. In early reviews he wrote "it is a late harvest offering exhibiting notions of prunes, raisins, and moderate levels of residual sugar. It is clearly designed to be drunk with flavorful cheese, or served at the end of the meal as dessert. It is not overly sweet, and is thick, heavy, and overripe. The wine is produced from 128-year old Mourvedre vines!" In another description he wrote "an Amarone-styled, heady, rich cuvee offering loads of black fruits, licorice, tar, and earthy undertones."

For me this fortified wine (a small amount of distilled Spirits is added to stooop fermentation and maintain a little residual sugar just like a port) always reminds me of blueberries. It has actually become the house favorite to serve as dessert with Blueberry cheese cake, or with a big bowl of vanilla ice cream and fresh fruit.

This wine is made in Solera method in small quantities -it was made over the years at the estate: mostly for internal consumption of family and friends. In the late 90's the importer who was smitten with this nectar convinced the family to let him bring in a small quantity. Since the Solera method ensures very consistent quality, this wine has been rated in the 90's in every single recent release (every year they siphon a bit of wine out of the barrel and replace it with some new wine). Overall the 2004 vintage has been excellent in Spain so this is a good opportunity to stock up on this rare bird. If you are a Port lover, or enjoy Recioto Amarones from the Veneto you owe it to yourself to try this wine. The price which is amazing for the quality is generally in the low 30's a bargain at that. Recently some retailers

have sold this as high as \$50 which is shameful. On the other hand I noticed a few discounters selling this in the high 20's as they probably got offered a similar deal to us - so we kept our margins razor thin to help in these crazy times. Enjoy

**Thanks again for all your support and referrals, tell your friends,
Cheers!**

Paul David, Chief Fermented Grape Taster.

WINEPAIRINGS

- Your wine concierge service. Contact us for all your Wine needs.

For more info: www.winpairings.biz

Reach us at: tel 303-331-8008

"Notes From The Cellar " or NFTC in the subject line is our free e-letter sent periodically when items of interest may be available. If you got this e-mail chances are that you or someone you know expressed an interest in being on our list. If you are not interested in receiving additional such e-mails please let us know & we will gladly remove you. Our e-mail list is strictly in house. we do not share it, or sell it what-so-ever. We thank you for your referrals.

All orders are sold and shipped by a licensed Colorado wine retailer. Title passes to you, the buyer, in Colorado.

The buyer is solely responsible for the shipment of wine. We make no representations concerning your legal right to ship or receive wine into any state outside Colorado or any country outside the United States. By placing any wine order with us, you authorize Winepairings to act on your behalf to engage a common carrier to deliver your order to your selected destination.

Please note that **you must be at least 21 years old** to order or receive alcohol from this newsletter. All orders require the signature of a person at least 21 years of age.