

Notes From The Cellar (NFTC); Winepairings e-letter September 12, 2008 **Napa deal and 2005 Burgundy**

Happy Friday. We have entered a super busy period in the wine business. Over the next few weeks, the calendar is filled with industry tastings -designed to promote orders for the pre -holiday season. I attend these events regularly, trying to discover new gems as well as revisit old favorites, to see how the newly released vintages are showing. Every once in a while I also come across some very special deals. It may be the last few cases of a great wine at a vastly reduced price, or something that just happened to be there un-noticed. Today we feature 2 such wines; both exceptional quality at very special pricing – quantities are very limited so I wanted to get these out right away.

Today's Wine Deal \$\$\$

If you are a regular reader of this newsletter you know we only feature a handful of Napa wines a year. Known for producing some of the finest wines in the US, especially those based on the Cabernet Sauvignon grape, Napa juice can compete favorably with any great region in the globe, (as witnessed in the recently released and highly entertaining new movie Bottle Shock).

The problem is pricing. Often the true great wines from this region are priced at \$150 plus. Yes the quality can be very good, but the relative value is questionable. I am fortunate to taste dozens of the top tier wines from here every year (yes it's a tough job...) yet in my own cellar you will find very few.

Sure you can settle for second and third tier wines, sometimes you will find a nice \$20-30 bottle of Napa Cab but those are never in the same league as the big boys. The true vacuum exists in that \$40 - \$100 range. Most wine in this price is either juice that didn't make the top tier cut, or the “regular” labels from the famous producers - where you will pay for the famous name on the label. Other time it's the same quality wine you will find in the lower price range, but from a smaller producer; limited quantity with fancy packaging or marketing, selling you an average \$30 wine for a \$60 + price tag. No Thanks.

Land and production costs in NAPA are some of the highest in the world, so barriers to entry are high, and new players are few. Avoiding a complex economic discussion, a pet peeve of mine is that more often than not -you will get a newcomer introducing a wine without any track record, and trying to justify a \$100+ price tag based on their costs rather than on the quality in the bottle. In most cases this is just silly. Today we are featuring a wine refreshingly different.

Bourassa Vinyards Harmony, Napa blend 2003 \$33 - (was \$50)

Vic Bourassa, encouraged by Robert Mondavi to pursue his calling as a vintner, opened his own winery in Napa in 2001. Sinking his life savings into his dream, he was 53 at that time. One of his best moves was to hire wine maker Gary Galleron, first as a consultant and later as a full time wine maker. Galleron began his career working with Mike Grgich at Chateau Montelena. He has produced award-winning wines for some of Napa's most sought after labels, including Whitehall Lane, Grace Family, Hartwell, Vineyard 29 and Seavey.

The top wine produced is the Harmony -a Bordeaux style blend.

Rather than offering us another \$ 100 new wine, Harmony was priced at a \$50 level where it can gain a reputation as a solid contender. It offered a very solid choice and quality at that price range.

In 2003 it consists of 56%Cabernet, 23% Merlot and 21% Cab Franc, aged a full 3 years on French oak. The description from the wine maker's notes follow:

“This blend is elaborately crafted, offering full-bodied elegance and opening up beautifully on the palate. Complex, rich and lush, the young and compact black currant and dried cherry flavors are enhanced by scents of caramel, slate and herbal hints. Tastes of plum, chocolate, and oak are evident throughout. The wonderful flavor possesses a veneer of youthful tannins presenting a long finish.”

The deal: This week I got to taste the wine in Denver. With some extra time in the bottle since it's release (in February of 2006), the wine has gained suppleness and complexity. It is showing beautiful balance, purity of expression and elegance that you would expect from a good bottle of wine, but sadly is rather rare in your average \$100 Napa wine now days. As things would have it, the next vintage is ready, and a supplier had a small stash they were ready to move at a price we just could not resist. If you like an excellent Cali Cab for a give away price, this will make you very happy.

Approaching 3 years after the harvest, it is now universally acknowledged that 2005 will be one of the finest vintages of our generation in the most famous wine growing areas in France; Bordeaux and Burgundy. While Bordeaux production is measured in thousands of cases, Burgundy is tiny -with the average producer rarely making more than several hundred cased from a typical holding. Growing international demand and the fame of the vintage has cause prices of 2005 to soar. What makes the 2005 so special is that it was a great success on all levels from village wines to the famous Grand Crus.

Domaine Du Prieure, 2005 Savigny les Beaune 1er cru les lavieres \$32-

Savigny les Beaune is a great area in Burgundy for those seeking excellent value. The best examples from this appellation feature “true to varietal expressions” of Burgundian Pinot Noir . Another characteristic: The wines of SLB are often more approachable than other Burgundy appellations, reaching their peak drinking windows in 2-5 years from the vintage. The 2005 is a perfect vintage to seek wine from small producers, and if you luck out you will find quality that will surpass much more expensive and well known producers in average years.

The Laviere parcel, a hill side plot re-planted in 1951 is one of owner's Jean -Michele Maurice's best vineyards. As with the Harmony Napa -I got to taste this wine last week, and was instantly impressed with the fantastic aromatics leaping from my glass. It is a delicate Pinot, unlike most 2005's which are still years from optimal drinking, it is already entering a nice drinking window. Delicate balance with good acidity make this a very diverse food wine which will pair very well with even lighter dishes like fowl, poultry yet stand up nicely to light game and fish like Salmon. I have been on a look out for a nice Pinot Noir to offer our readers for their Thanksgiving dinner and this one offers it in spades for your Gobbler. If you like the delicate aromatics of currants and flowers with slightly spicy characteristics of Burgundy this will be the perfect ticket. When inquiring as too the price, I was thrilled. This wine was priced below most village wines at the 1er Cru level -We kept the margins as tight as we could: an outstanding value not to be missed. While most 2005 have long disappeared or leaped in price, this wine from a small importer at original pricing is a find. Pinot lovers -do not miss it.

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

Paul David, Chief Fermented Grape Taster.

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