

PinotFile

The First Wine Newsletter Exclusively Devoted to Pinot Noir

Wine & Food at New Years

To my mind there is as much fun in fashioning a dinner that matches food and wine as in its consumption. When food and wine meld together and make each other taste better than they do alone, then dining is taken to a higher level. It is that level that wine lovers like myself aspire. With some effort and insight, new heights of wine and food enjoyment are always within reach. Remember that when matching wine with food, you never need the most expensive wine or the most impressive food. All you need are foods and wines willing to help each other out.

This New Year's Eve I invited some couples to my house to eat and drink. The degustation meal was designed around multiple small courses that could be spread out over the evening. Each of the couples prepared their courses and were challenged to choose a wine that matched the food .

Le Menu

Chilled Shrimp with Basil Ponzu Sauce

Belle Soeurs Rose of Pinot Noir Ana Vineyard 2003

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Ginger Lime Beurre Blanc Lobster Salad

Domaine Leflaive Batard-Montrachet 2000

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Cucumber Soup with Seared Ahi Tuna Tartare

Peter Michael l'Apres-Midi 2003

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Fresh Fettucine with Creamy Dungeness Crab Sauce

Kistler Durell Vineyard Chardonnay 1998

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Smoked Duck Salad with Potatoes and Haricots Verts

White Rose Estate Willamette Valley Pinot Noir 2002

**Pinot Noir:
fickle, moody,
sexy, elegant,
absolutely
delicious.**

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“Those who eat and drink together are by this very act tied to one another by a bond of friendship and mutual obligation”

... Jack Goody

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Beef Tenderloin, Horseradish Cheddar Crostini*Chateau Petrus 1947*

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Midnight Toast*Champagne Deutz Millesime 1990*

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Mango Sorbet, Sparkling Mango Syrup, Fresh Chocolate Chip Cookies

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Jaden Pinot Noir Ice Wine Okanagan Valley 2001

The wine and food matches were all quite good but none were perfect. A perfect wine food match is very elusive. In that rare perfect match, the food retains its own character but seems even better, and the wine retains its own character but seems even better. I would say the first course came closest to this ideal. Regardless, enjoyment was had by all. The Petrus was surprisingly good after 56 years.

When planning a dinner party and trying to decide whether to open that special bottle for the occasion, just remember the 5 elements of wine enjoyment:

Who: A great wine is never consumed alone. Preferably three people are present so that one will always side with you about the merits of the wine (if they want to be invited back).

What: The best and mature wine available.

When: Whenever you feel like it, especially a special occasion like New Year's Eve.

Where: Wherever you like but preferably in your own home or a restaurant that understands the service of fine wine.

Why: Memories of fine wines drank in the past are essential for the enjoyment of future wines.

Wine Epiphany

Occasionally I like to print a wine epiphany from a reader because I find the stories fascinating. R.O. writes recently:

I have a couple of buddies that I drink with occasionally and I'm the only one with a Pinot passion. I don't know when it really started, but I do remember one day (probably around 18 or 19 years ago) I went to the wine closet and amid the California Cabs and the Bordeaux only a Pinot Noir would do. If I didn't open a Pinot Noir, I spent the whole night disappointed.

I remember a '70 Aloxe-Corton @4.99 a bottle and a Chambolle-Musigny @\$8.99 a bottle. There was a '76 Gevrey-Chambertin Clos de Beze (Alexis Lichine) at \$12.99 a bottle. That was probably 1979 and that may have been the bottle that did it. Or maybe it was a Musigny with a light transparent rosy color that in my memory blew me away. I was 24 or 25 then and I was trying to learn all I could about wine, especially those cru growth Bordeaux. My wine merchant was about 60 and his passion was Burgundy and even though those Burgundy labels were hard to read, he turned me on to them.

Malvolio Pinot Noir

Proprietor Tadzio Willisze is still another doctor who has gravitated to the wine business. A successful surgeon in Southern California and developer of medical devices, he along with his wife, Nadia, and her father, Selim Zikha, acquired Laetitia, about three years ago. The Arroyo Grande estate includes 432 acres of Pinot Noir, some of it dating back to the original plantings of Maison Deutz in 1983. Maison Deutz made excellent Methode Champenoise sparkling wines for 13 years, but in 1997 Maison Deutz was purchased by vineyard owner Jean-Claude Tardivat and transformed into Laetitia Winery (renamed after his daughter Laetitia). The focus of the winery shifted to Burgundian-style varietals. The following year, the winery was acquired by a partnership including Selim Zikha along with a second property, Barnwood Vineyards in Santa Barbara County. In 2001 Selim became the sole owner. His daughter, Nadia Wellisz and her husband Tadzio, along with Laetitia winemaker Eric Hickey, began making a small quantity of Pinot Noir from selected parcels of vines on the Laetitia estate. The inaugural vintage for these block-specific Pinot Noirs under the Malvolio label was 2001.

The name Malvolio comes from Countess Olivia's sour steward in William Shakespeare's comedy Twelfth Night. Puritanical, joyless, and intolerant of the pleasure of others, Malvolio is a serious wine intended to be a continuation of the practical joke against the pompous steward Malvolio. The Malvolio wines are produced and bottled by Highlands Cellar, Arroyo Grande, California.

The block-select wines of the 2001 vintage include **Block A, Block F, Block I** and **Block K**. The 2002 Pinot Noirs include **Block A, Block F, Block N Clone 115**, and **Block N Clone 667**. In addition, 50 cases of **2002 Clos de Laetitia** were bottled. The grapes for this were sourced from a special section of Block A. Further details about the individual blocks are available on the website, www.highlandscellar.com.

The wines are very limited in production. The only published reviews are by Steve Heimoff in the Oct/Nov issue of *Wine Enthusiast* who called them "heavy hitters". His tasting notes seem to indicate a big, powerful style of Pinot Noir approaching syrah-like in some bottlings. The Vinography blog site has a few postings from Pinot lovers who liked the style very much. The Malvolio Pinot Noirs are available at several restaurants in Los Angeles including A.O.C., Campanile, Jar, and Lucques. They can be purchased through the website: a quartet of 2001 or 2002 block-designated Pinot Noirs is \$192, the 2002 Clos de Laetitia is \$56. Phone: 310-815-2125.



Removing Red Wine Stains after that Big Dinner

Wine stains on tablecloths and napkins are best pre-treated before washing. Soak the fabric in cool water, place the stained area facedown on a clean paper towel or white cloth. Put a small amount of pre-wash stain remover (pre-testing a small area first to be sure the fabric can tolerate the solution), liquid laundry detergent, or a paste of powdered detergent and water on a clean, white cloth. Pat the stain, starting from the outside in so the stain does not spread. Once the spot is removed, launder the fabric in the usual manner.

Food & Wine magazine reports that a solution of equal parts Dawn dishwashing detergent and drugstore hydrogen peroxide is effective. Spray 'n Wash works well on fresh stains. The best commercial product for removing red wine stains was Erado-sol which eliminated all traces of both fresh and old stains (800-525-6262).



John Kapon, President and Auction Director of Acker Merrall & Condit publishes tastings of extraordinary wines (go to www.ackerwines.com to sign up for the e-newsletter). A recent issue described the results of a rare Burgundy tasting in New York. Kapon has a knack for Pinot Speak and his wine-tasting descriptions are flavorful reading. He describes the 1971 Roumier Bonnes Mares: “the nose was exotic, gamy, earthy, and horsy. There was still sweet fruit there, a brown sugar sweetness. There were also nice rose and vitamin aromas, with a pinch of citric tension. The palate had nice richness, meat and a long, fine finish, but was still gamy and horsy. The alcohol held, and the citrus factor crept up the ladder, as did the game. Someone likened it to ‘Macon bacon’.” Another wine, the 1969 Faiveley Musigny “had a sugared nose with oat, hay, nutmeg, and a gingerbread sweet quality to its fruit. There was also a locker room quality to the nose. Both the nose and palate had a lot of character, but the palate was more about the earth, band-aid, tomato and worcestshire.”

More on QPRWines Quality/Price Rating System

The last issue of the PinotFile had a feature on QPRWines (Vol 4, Issue 18). I intended to present QPRWines as a new concept and did not mean to endorse it since it is based on published scores using the 100-point scoring system. I am intrigued by a price/quality concept in principal, but exactly how it could be developed without depending on wine scores is unclear to me. One of my readers responded to this topic with some valid points.

“Wow, I was really sad to see your newsletter promoting QPR. And from a Pinot guy! I have been to retail wine shops in places like Florida that ONLY carry wines that score 90 points or above from Parker or the *Wine Spectator*. Literally, not a wine in the shop that does not have a score on it. What, now they can move to QPR wines so that they never have to taste or recommend wines to their customers? Seems like a slippery slope. I have no doubt that the best resource for a wine drinker is a knowledgeable and skilled local wine retailer who can interact with the customer to find out what the CUSTOMER likes, not what some high-alcohol./fruit bomb-loving wine writer likes. This QPR stuff just abdicates their responsibility and tells the good guys, ‘What should I bother?’ Sorry, but this topic really sticks in my craw.”

I do receive frequent feedback from readers who are interested in good Pinot Noirs that are also good values. They have learned that the market is flooded with expensive Pinot Noirs whose quality does not justify the high prices asked at retail. Maybe all that needs to be said is that the wine is good and priced appropriately without actually quantifying the value. After all, it is the well-intentioned opinion of the experienced taster that is most valuable and should draw the most attention, not the number scores that so commonly carry the most impact.