

Jim Hiller's Wine Club

May 2010
Volume 11, Issue 3

Inside this Issue

- 1 New Guys
- 2 Tasting Notes
- 3 Tasting Notes
- 4 Tasting Notes

Hiller's Markets
24359 Northwestern Hwy
Southfield, MI 48075
www.hillers.com

New Kids on the Block

We are always eager to get feedback on the wines we select for Jim Hiller's Wine Club, but perhaps never more so than for this edition because what we present here is, in a sense, an audition for several wine wholesalers who are new to this market.

Among the many dramatic changes to the landscape of the wine world in the last few years has been an enormous consolidation at the wholesale distribution level of the three tier system. Wine producers can legally sell their wine directly to consumers and retailers in the state in which the wine is made, but to sell in other states, they must sell to licensed wholesalers, who sell to retailers, who sell to consumers - hence the three tiers. This paradigm has been challenged in the courts and the 2005 *Granholm v. Heald* case that was upheld by the Supreme Court appeared to open the door for more direct competition to the wholesaler's oligopoly. What has, in fact, occurred, however, is that the stronger have been gobbling up the weaker and legislation is pending in the Congress that would preclude any further challenge to the wholesaler's grip. Interstate wine purchases via the internet have grown, but that channel is still a drop in the bucket compared to the volume of wine that moves through the three tier system.

As often happens in a market in which the big get bigger, small players emerge to exploit niches that the big guys overlook. That has happened here in Michigan. Several small scale distributors have emerged - one specializes solely in wines from Washington state, another started a few years back specializing in small French producers, another has an emphasis on the Mediterranean and South America, another has an excellent portfolio of German wines, and recently picked up some artisanal California labels.

These distributors carry very distinctive wines, wines that speak of a particular place or style. They are emphatically not wines that taste as if they were conceived by a corporate marketing team that first identified a target audience, then decided on a price point, then brainstormed a catchy story for the label, and finally got around to the wine as an afterthought. But, of course, they are competing for placement against brands with much greater marketing and promotional resources. So here is your chance to stand up for the little guy, to give the new kid on the block a fighting chance. Please let us know your favorites among these. Your enthusiasm may well be their shelf placement. I can be reached at eric.novak@hillers.com or at 248-355-2122 ext 1058.

Tasting Notes

Taster's Table Whites

2008 Mercer Pinot Gris

Mercer Estates is a family-owned Washington State winery that evolved as a partnership of the Mercer and Hogue families representing more than twenty-five years of grape growing and winemaking experience in the Columbia Valley. Fruit for this rich, full-flavored Pinot Gris was sourced from the cooler climate Yakima Valley appellation and from the warmer Wallula growing region. The combination yields a wine of distinctive minerality and well-developed acidity framing its enticing aromas of ripe peaches, melon, and a hint orange peel. An excellent companion for a richly flavored dish such as chili sautéed shrimp.

2008 90 + Cellars Sauvignon Blanc

The economic turmoil of the last two years has hit the wine industry very hard, with particular damage to the sales of higher end wines. Understandably, winemakers are loathe to drastically discount their wines in order to move

inventory after having spent many years establishing the cachet of their brand. Once a brand is identified in the public mind at a certain price point, if it is sold at a drastically lower price, it becomes very, very difficult to regain the former pricing power. Few wineries can afford to sit on inventory but all face the ineluctable truth that another harvest is on the way. Some sell their excess juice on the bulk market, some create second and third labels to move the excess juice at lower prices without cheapening the reputation of the flagship label, some move inventory through fire sale internet sites, others try all these outlets. 90+ Cellars has taken the designer-fashion-with-the-label-removed concept from women's apparel marketing and applied it to wine by selecting wines that have earned 90 point or higher scores from the major reviewers and having the wineries bottle that same wine under the 90+ label, which is then sold at prices typically 50% to 75% below what the original label sells for. The winemaker is guaranteed anonymity to minimize the risk of brand debasement, inventory gets moved, and the savvy wine consumer gets some very fine wine at a significant discount

This comes from a wine maker and winery that has a long history of highly rated and well recognized quality Marlborough Sauvignon Blanc. The nose shows exuberant citrus fruits with ripe melon and guava and some underlying herbal and classic gooseberry notes. Its fresh, sweet fruit and crisp acid gives balance and an elegant structure with a smooth finish – the classic Kiwi profile for this varietal. The original sells at retail in the \$25 range; this would retail at 12 or 13 bucks. Pretty cool, eh?

N.V. Clara C Prosecco Extra Dry

Americans only drink sparkling wines at weddings, graduations, and on New Year's Eve. Sales of French Champagne have been in decline for some years now and sales of domestic sparkling aren't faring much better. Two bright spots in the bubbly world, however, are Cava from Spain and Prosecco from Italy, both of which are selling quite nicely. In general, they have a creamier mouth feel, a tad more sweetness, and a less austere acidity than the classic Champagne

profile. Moreover, very nice examples of quality Cava and quality Prosecco are available at attractive prices. The Clara C may well be the tastiest Prosecco I've run across in the last two years or more. It has an old-fashioned label and kind of a frumpy name, but it is absolutely delicious, with its fine bubbles and intense perfume of acacia flowers and rose petals, it leaves you with a soft sensation of wildflowers. This is a festive wine that can accompany every occasion, ideal as an aperitif and simply perfect during a meal.

2008 Vin du Lac of Chelan Vie!

Named Northwest Winery of the year by *Wine Press Northwest*, Vin du Lac Chelan was launched with the 2002 harvest as the third winery to open in what now is the Lake Chelan American Viticultural Area. Today, there are no fewer than 16 wineries around this largest lake in north central Washington. Larry Lehmecker makes Vie! from 98% Viognier and 2 % Roussanne and he shows a particularly deft touch with these Rhone varietals (He also makes a spectacular Syrah that we are now carrying in most stores). The fruit was fermented in small stainless steel tanks, with moderate lees contact to add body and depth. The resulting wine is dry, delicate, and free of oak influence, yet surprisingly complex. It shows the classic aroma and flavor profile of peach, apricot and fruit tree blossoms, while exhibiting a crispness and mouthfilling richness on the palate. Enjoy this wine as a fine, dry aperitif, or with light meals.

2009 Savini Rondineto Passerina

Passerina is the name of an Italian grape variety that dates back to at least 500 B.C. and is first referenced by Pliny the Elder. In the last ten or fifteen years there has been a surge of interest in re-discovering some of the 'lost' grapes of ancient Italian winemaking. Passerina vines, discovered in the wild, cut and grafted onto root stock are produced by only about a dozen growers, but the grape is becoming more popular in Italy and just beginning to appear in the U.S. The wine is straw yellow, quite rich in color, with light green highlights. It shows very pleasant fruity and floral scents, with delicate spice and mineral

accents. On the palate it is intense and persistent, with good mouth feel, a marked freshness and a long, mineral-rich finish. Serve with appetizers, fish, or pasta dishes.

2009 Savini Collevantano Pecorino

Pecorino is another Italian grape that dates back to Roman times that was literally brought back from the brink of extinction. Revived in the Abruzzi region of Italy and also the neighboring Marche region where there is a specific appellation called Offida Pecorino given to the production of wines from this grape. The origin of the name is that the grape was a favorite snack of the sheep that were driven through vineyard lands on their way to lower pastures. In Italian "Pecora" means sheep. The wine shows a bright straw yellow color with greenish highlights and a bouquet of elegant floral and citrus scents. Full bodied and fresh, it has the complexity to complement rich crustaceans or fish main dishes.

Taster's Table Reds

2008 De Bortoli Vat 10 Pinot Noir

From the Victoria and Riverina regions of New South Wales, the De Bortoli Vat 10 Pinot shows a pretty cherry red color with tinges of light purple. On the nose there are hints of mushroom and forest floor behind the sweet strawberry and cherry fruit aromas. The red fruit carries through cleanly onto a palate that is framed in silky tannin with a nice herbaceous lift in the finish. The wine will show beautifully with duck, rabbit, or a nice rich stew.

2006 Women of the Vine Cellars Central Coast Pinot Noir

Some of the world's most famous and celebrated wine makers are women. Deborah Brenner wrote a well-received book profiling half a dozen of them titled *Women of the Vine*. In the course of that project, she hit upon the idea of creating a winery that would feature hand-crafted, limited production wines from these award winning women winemakers under one brand in order to showcase their individual styles and the nuances of their regions. Alison Crowe, whose resumé boasts stints at Chalone, Byington, Bonny Doon, and Bodegas

Salentein, and who now works as an independent consulting winemaker based in Napa, crafted the introductory level of Women of the Vine Cellars wines from Central Coast and Paso Robles fruit. There is a Cabernet, a Merlot, a Chardonnay, and this smooth and silky Central Coast Pinot Noir in the series.

2006 Bishop's Peak Rock Solid Red

Bishop's Peak is a second label of Talley Vineyards. Farmers in the Arroyo Grande Valley since 1948, the Talley family chose an ancient volcano that towers above the city of San Luis Obispo as the symbol for distinctive wines that reflect the diversity of the Central Coast region. The Rock Solid Red is a multi-variety red wine blend that varies from year to year. The 2006 vintage blends Cabernet, Syrah, Cabernet Franc and Petite Sirah. It is robust and soft with rich, complex flavors and a long lasting finish. Deep maroon in color and medium in body, the wine shows aromas of red cherry, anise, juniper berry and vanillin. Cassis, darker fruits and hints of black pepper join these flavors on the palate. The light tannic structure ensures that this wine will pair well with many of your favorite dishes, from pasta with red sauce to grilled steaks.

2007 Terre Andina Reserva

Carmenere

Terra Andina 'Reserva' Carmenere 2007 earned a "Best of tasting!" rank in *The Wall Street Journal* which said it, "was at once noteworthy and highly drinkable, and seemed so warming that we thought of roast meats and fireplaces." The wine has a lovely deep-violet color, with notes of exotic spices, cherry, raspberry and blackberry fruit and notes of roasted peppers. The palate is gentle, velvety and smooth with sweet tannins in a nicely integrated finish. It pairs great with pasta, barbecue, roasted or grilled red meats, goulash, and spicy Chinese food

2007 Domaine de l'Espigouette Cotes du Rhone Vieille Vignes

This domaine fashions a superb traditional Cotes du Rhone, of which Robert Parker says "for readers looking for fabulous values from the southern Rhone Valley, here is a domaine to take

seriously. The wines of Domaine de l'Espigouette are rustic, peppery, flavorful, robust, mouthfilling, textbook Cotes du Rhone." L'Espigouette Vieilles Vignes is produced from older vines (45 years on average) and sees only stainless steel and cement vats, yielding a sweet, mellow fruit quality. Fragrant, spicy, and perfumed, redolent of black and red berries, fig, orange peel, and flowers, the wine is supple, sexy, and stylish.

2008 Peirano Estate Vineyard The Immortal Zin

The remarkable depth of flavor in this wine starts with a bouquet that shows red and black cherry, mineral, earthy rhubarb and red fruit, with slightly spicy characters. In the mouth, the palate is wrapped in a velvety layered mix of sweet red cherry, strawberry, cocoa and juicy red fruit followed by light toast and smooth, defined tannins, leading to a lengthy, satisfying finish.

Collector's Club Whites

2008 Mellot Sancerre Le Montarlet

The Mellot dynasty was founded in Sancerre almost five centuries ago. So well known was the family that in 1698, Cesar Mellot had the weighty task of advising King Louis XIV on his choice of wines. The Montarlet is 100% Sauvignon Blanc grown in the clay-limestone soils of Sancerre in the Loire Valley. Oak-free fermentation took place at low temperatures in thermo-regulated stainless steel tanks. The wine is pale gold in color with green highlights, beautifully limpid and brilliant. A powerfully fragrant nose of floral aromas (white blossoms) and fruity notes (grapefruit and orange) is followed by a nice balance on the palate with richness and remarkable length. It makes for a delicate companion to seafood, crustaceans, fish, caviar and, most especially, goat cheese.

2008 Gaiherhof Pinot Grigio Trentino

Gaiherhof lies in Rovere della Luna (Oak of the Moon) in the Trentino region of northernmost Italy. The town owes its romantic name to the fact that a majestic oak tree once stood at the center of town and the Adige river runs through the center of the valley making a turn that

looks like a half-moon when seen from the road. The wine owes its distinctly un-Italian sounding name to the proximity of the Austrian border and the region's long history of cross-border wine-making influences. Straw yellow with greenish highlights, this wine presents a very elegant nose suggestive of peach and banana surrounded by jasmine. It is complex and well structured on the palate and filled with lush flavors and a straightforward acidity in the finish. The wine is a beautiful example of clean, crisp, refreshing and classy Pinot Grigio and is a perfect companion to appetizers, poultry, seafood and cheese.

2007 Gilbert Picq Chablis Vieilles Vignes

The Domaine of Gilbert Picq et Ses Fils, located in the village of Chichée, just to the southeast of Chablis proper, makes Chablis in the classic style, with the inimitable expression of minerality that the chardonnay only picks up in these rolling hillside vineyards of the Yonne Valley, coupled to racy acidity and fine depth that comes with low yields, meticulous winemaking and fine parcels of vines growing in the chalky white soil made of decomposed seashells. Fermented and aged only in stainless steel, this lovely example of old vine Chablis earned a 90 point score from Stephen Tanzer's *International Wine Cellar*; "Very ripe aromas of orange zest and pineapple; slight hint of crystallized fruit. Supple and creamy but with strong acidity giving shape to the mandarin orange flavor. Densely packed and concentrated wine" From three plots of vines that are all over 50 years old, the wine is a deep, rock solid and racy example of Chablis, with a mineral-infused personality and great purity of fruit, and a brisk chassis of acidity that would allow it to age gracefully for fifteen to twenty-five years in a top vintage. It is easily the quality equivalent of a top premier cru.

2008 Alexandria Nicole Viognier

From *Seattle Magazine*: "Winemaker Jarrod Boyle creates this lush, aromatic Viognier by gently pressing whole-clusters of the best fruit from the Crawford Vineyard near Prosser, and fermenting in stainless steel tanks to keep

the freshness of the fruit. Judges noted its elegant style with “clover, honey and sweet stone-fruit” aromas, with good acid and fruit, and a nice, clean finish.” We noted aromas of lemon zest, pear, lychee nut, guava, and floral notes accentuating a lush, silky texture that finishes with a hint of sweetness and good acidity.

2007 Perusini Ribolla Gialla

Ribolla Gialla is another vine species native to the Friuli region of northern Italy that has seen a resurrection of interest. The Perusini is deliciously complex with layers of flavors and aromas: lime and yellow grapefruit, green apple and lemon custard. There is a very crisp acidity at the outset and some minerality and an almost salty, roasted nut taste at the finish. Full bodied with a satiny texture.

2008 Syncline Subduction

This delicious white blend consists of 59% Viognier and 41% Chardonnay and shows a clear pale straw color and aromas of pears and apples with honeysuckle and orange blossom notes. Apple and pear skin dominate the palate with minerality. Rich and ripe, with a good jolt of acidity, it has a long persistent finish. By the way, a syncline is a trough of stratified rock in which the beds dip toward each other from either side. A subduction is the process by which collision of the earth's crustal plates results in one plate's being drawn down or overridden by another. Which information hints at the fascinating and dramatically violent geologic history of the Columbia Gorge from which the fruit for this wine hails.

Collector’s Club Reds

2007 Women of the Vine Cellars Paso Robles Cabernet Sauvignon

This is one of the Women of the Vine Cellars Signature Series wines crafted by Signe Zoller, who has held senior winemaking positions at Cambria Winery and Meridian Vineyards in Paso Robles and has been named “Winemaker of the Year” from both the Paso Robles Wine Country Alliance and the Central Coast Winegrowers Association. She currently operates Zoller Wine Styling, creating custom wines. Her Paso Robles Cabernet

Sauvignon shows intensely spicy, black currant fruit and an extraordinarily silky mouth feel with soft, round tannins. It was aged for 18 months in French oak.

2007 Mercer Cabernet Sauvignon

A Bordeaux style blend of 77% Cabernet Sauvignon, 13% Merlot, and 10% Cabernet Franc, this wine opens with ripe blackberry and cherry with scents of oak spice and vanilla in the nose. Flavors of cherry and spice combine with a rich mouth-feel, good structure and a long, supple finish. The Cabernet fruit was sourced from two vineyard blocks in the Horse Heaven Hills and one from the Wahluke Slope. Both of these warmer AVAs are recognized for growing ripe, full-bodied reds with good tannin structure. Merlot provides a nice element of cherry and another layer of fruit complexity. Cabernet Franc, a low tannin variety, adds softness to the wine. Soon after pressing the wines were put through a malolactic fermentation to soften the wine and aged in American and French Oak barrels for 18 months.

2008 Biscardo Valpolicella Superiore Ripasso

The Veneto region in northeastern Italy encompasses the famous cities of Verona and Venice. Home to Valpolicella, Amarone, Prosecco and Soave, Veneto is one of the most important wine regions in Italy in regards to both quality and quantity. ‘Ripasso’ is a very old and traditional process used to give to the Valpolicella wine richness and body. After the Valpolicella is fermented in the usual way, it is placed in casks containing the skins of the Amarone, a highly concentrated wine coming from semi-dried grapes. This process, which last from 2 to 3 weeks, adds color, tannins, and complex flavors. A blend of Corvina, Rondinella, and Molinara fruit, the Biscardo Ripasso shows a ruby-red color with orange highlights. On the nose it is elegant and complex, with ripe berry and floral scents. This is full-bodied and soft with lovely velvety tannins and a long finish. It pairs perfectly with steak, duck, grilled red meats, beef and goat cheese.

2006 Sullivan Napa Valley Red Ink

Red Ink is a Bordeaux style blend of 81% Cabernet and 19% Merlot, the two red grapes that Napa does best and the Rutherford bench does superbly. This wine has a softness that allows it to be good for almost any occasion and yet it will still pair just fine with a ribeye steak or with lamb – a great summertime wine to go with foods from the outdoor grill. Raspberry, plum, blackberry, and cherry aromas and flavors all leap out of the glass. It's a rich, full-bodied wine with firm tannins and good acidity.

2007 Folesano Gidesco Merlot

This stunning and intense 100% merlot hails from the the Colli Bolognese zone of the Emilia-Romagna region of Italy overlooking the valley of the Reno river set between Emilia and Tuscany. In this uncontaminated environment, Folesano's vineyards enjoy excellent exposure and perfect thermal ventilation, thanks to the light winds that descend from the Apennines every night. Carla Cavara and her husband make great sangiovese and merlot based wines in miniscule quantities on a tiny, 1000 year old estate. The Gidesco is their prestige bottling, dense and luxuriously oaked in French barriques. It has the structure to cellar for years of development, but there is plenty to enjoy in it now.

2005 Gérard Bertrand Tautavel 'Grand Terroir'

Tautavel is a sub-appellation of Cotes-du-Roussillon Villages. Grand Terroir wears its southern French roots with pride in this Rhone style blend made of 35% Grenache, 25% Syrah and 35% Carignan. Gérard Bertrand, a former international rugby player, has crafted a superb wine packed with warm, plummy fruit, a firm tannic backbone and judicious oak. The color is opaque with a vivid deep, almost black, red hue, the nose is spicy and warmly herbal with pungent black fruit notes, the palate is soft with supple tannins, rich spice and big blackberry fruit balanced by more subtle coffee and chocolate notes and a hint of licorice on the finish.

How Do I Buy More?

How do you buy more of a Wine Club selection you particularly like if you cannot find it on the shelf at your local Hiller's Market?

Call Eric Novak at 248-355-2122 ext 1058. He will advise you on availability, best time to buy, and any upcoming discounts.