

Jim Hiller's Wine Club

November 2006
Volume 8, Issue 1

Inside this Issue

- 1 Italian Emigrants
- 2 Tasting Notes
- 3 Tasting Notes
- 4 Football and Wine

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

Italian Emigrants

Recently we sampled Bordeaux varietals and Rhone varietals from around the world and found that grapes from those renowned wine growing regions were doing just fine in many a foreign soil. Certainly the best Australian Shiraz compares quite favorably with Syrah from the Rhone as does California Cabernet with red Bordeaux or New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc with white Bordeaux. However, the great wine grapes of Italy don't seem to have traveled to non-Italian dirt quite so seamlessly. You don't see a lot of Vermentino, Trebbiano, Dolcetto, Vernaccia, Corvina, or Nebbiolo on the shelf at your wine store from anywhere but Italy – there are some, but not many.

The exceptions, however, are quite notable. Pinot Grigio is the best traveler among the white varietals, lately seeming to take the place of Chardonnay and other dry whites on wine lists across the nation. In the Alsace region of France the grape is called Pinot Gris or Tokay d'Alsace and made into lovely golden-yellow wines with aromatic, fruity flavors. Pinot Gris/Pinot Grigio also does quite well in the U.S.: plantings in California have increased enormously in recent years as demand has soared for a house pour other than Chardonnay. Particularly fine examples can be found from Oregon and Michigan as well as from the 'we can grow anything and it'll be great' Napa, Sonoma, Mendocino, and Monterey appellations. You may also see Pinot Grigio that hails from Hungary, Germany, Australia, New Zealand, and Argentina. Generally the grape can create crisp, dry wines with good acid 'bite' wherever it is grown in cool climates. Depending on how it is vinified, Pinot Grigio can range from blandly crisp and slightly floral to richly creamy and unctuous with gobs of citrus and/or tropical fruit aromas.

Sangiovese too has emerged as a successful international grape producing light to medium-bodied reds with rich cherry or plum-like aromas and flavors that tend toward the earthy, tart, often complex, and always very food-friendly. As it is in Tuscany, new world Sangiovese is frequently blended with other red grapes (Cabernet, Merlot, Malbec and even Shiraz) to make firmer, more structured wines that still maintain the accessible, friendly appeal of the Sangiovese. Outstanding Sangiovese is starting to appear from the American northwest and from Australia. Of particular note, the Sierra foothills and some of the warmer inland valleys of California are turning out exceptional Sangiovese and Barbera and are beginning to experiment with plots of other Italian varietals as well.

It is odd that Italian immigrants with names like Mondavi, Gallo, Sebastiani, and Martini were the seminal figures in the creation of the American wine industry, yet only recently have the grapes of their homeland found a prominent place here. It is to be hoped that the trend seeking new world interpretations of old world classics will continue. We think you'll agree that this collection of Italian immigrants, are, like their antecedents, friendly, approachable, food-friendly and convivial. What more could you want in your glass?

Tasting Notes

Taster's Table Whites

2005 Tamas Estates Pinot Grigio

Ocean breezes keep Monterey cool during the day and coastal weather keeps grapes warm at night, making this area one of California's best for growing Pinot Grigio. The climate allows for gradual ripening, thereby creating full flavor and well-developed acids. The Tamas has aromas of grapefruit, green apple and lemon. With a crisp, fruity

mouthfeel and an undertone of minerals, it's a lovely wine for sipping or for serving with spicy, crispy appetizers or light entrees.

2005 Chateau Ste Michelle Pinot Gris

CSM's Pinot Gris shows fresh aromas and flavors of ripe honeydew melon and crisp green apple while a touch of Viognier contributes an attractive floral note. The wine has an elegant finish and the characteristically refreshing crispness that makes Pinot Gris so very food friendly. Washington State's Yakima Valley is a sunny days/cool nights microclimate with scant rainfall and well-drained soils that make for gradual grape ripening and full flavor development. These Pinot Gris grapes were picked under cool nighttime skies to preserve the variety's bright, juicy style and fermented for a long four week fermentation in stainless steel tanks. A small part of the juice was fermented in old French oak barrels for a slightly softer, fleshier mouthfeel.

2004 Montevina Nebbiolo Rosato

This is lovely rosé, crisp, refreshing, and slightly off-dry with flavors of pink grapefruit and peach. The bouquet is floral but mainly of tart peaches. The palate shows grapefruit and kiwi. Though slightly sweet, it's not at all flabby; the dominant impression is refreshingly tart without being sour, with a clean citrus-peel finish. Montevina, one of the premier "Cal-Ital" wineries, has been experimenting for some time with Nebbiolo grapes, which are used to make Barola, the famous wines of Italy's Piedmont region. Montevina's efforts to make big reds have been rather disappointing so far, but the success of their rosato has encouraged them to keep trying. With its combination of sweet and tart, this is a perfect pairing for your holiday turkey; it also pairs well with Mediterranean-inspired chicken dishes and light Asian fare.

2005 Columbia Winery Pinot Gris

Columbia Winery was one of Washington's first premium wineries, producing distinctive wines from European vinifera grapes since 1962. Winemaker David Lake, deemed "Dean of Washington Winemakers" by both

Wine Spectator and *Decanter* crafts wines with a superb balance of fruit and acidity to complement any meal or occasion. The pale straw yellow color of this Pinot Gris leads to a bouquet with attractive aromas of spice and grapefruit. The palate is clean, dry and crisp with a round, full texture and sweet fruit flavors.

2004 Foris Vineyards Pinot Blanc

Realizing its full potential when grown in cool climates and on thin soils, Pinot Blanc achieves balanced, rich, and complex flavors over a long growing season of warm days and cool nights in Foris Vineyard's remote Illinois River Valley of southwest Oregon. This exuberant, dry, Alsatian style Pinot Blanc has a lovely balance of fruit and acid wrapped in a velvety mouth-filling texture. Intense aromas of wildflowers dominate the bouquet. Dry and crisp, the palate shows floral notes with hints of melon and talc. The fruit is fresh and exuberant enough to lend a sweet sensation, though the residual sugar level is well below detectable. There was no oak or malolactic fermentation to dull the bright acidity. It finishes long and clean.

2005 Peninsula Cellars Pinot Grigio

A great secret in the world of wine is that Northern Michigan is one of America's best sources of world-class Pinot Grigio. Peninsula Cellar's blend of 90% Pinot Grigio and 10% Pinot Blanc shows a decidedly Alsatian style: dry, rich, and nutty, with a lovely balance between its tangy acidity and its unctuously smooth mouthfeel. Sourced from Old Mission and Antrim County fruit, the bouquet is perfumed and full of pear and citrus. Try this with a variety of fine cheeses: emmentaler, gruyere and raclette would be fine company. Scallops, shrimp or calamari, or salads with fresh fruit and nuts also bring out the lovely flavors.

Taster's Table Reds

2005 Goats Do Roam: The Goatfather

With the rise to prominence of the Goats do Roam family, challengers to their position have emerged on many fronts. Don Goatti, in true Sicilian tradition, fiercely protects the herd, their loyal customers and the winemaking secrets of the family. While few in the family know the final blend, the Goatfather always

includes a selection of Italian varietals. The Goats will roam... Capisce?! The blend is Shiraz, Cabernet and Merlot, as well as the Italian varietals of Barbera and Primitivo. After blending, it was lightly filtered once before bottling. It shows a modern style with aromas of cloves, plums and pepper, with hints of ripe red berries. The palate is richly fruit-laden with cinnamon and spices and good integration of oak, showing subtle hazelnut notes. It balances well the acidity and tannin structure, allowing for a rich mouthfeel and a good, clean, fresh finish.

2002 Amethyst Winery Amigos

We tried this Nebbiolo, Cabernet Sauvignon, and Merlot blend and we loved it. Seeking more information, we called the winery and were sent "the only tech sheet we have," which is here reproduced in full:

Why They Are: Amigos is about friends, three friends who are serious about wine, but who take themselves far less seriously. Their nicknames seem the most appropriate way to introduce them. Chili (AKA Mike Richmond) takes his nom de guerre from his prodigious capacity for capsicum rather than his 30+ years of winemaking. Moon Doggie (AKA Greg Gautier) may have fewer vintages under his collar, but the smooth patter and propensity towards fun i.d. him as a purebred sales hound. Snazz (AKA Larry Brooks) is a mutt of a different breed. This greyhound is always chasing after something – the best wines, the coolest clubs, the kitties. What They Want: These pups, besides just wanting to have some fun, also want to bottle wine in a lighthearted style at an irresistible price. The sort of wine that you don't even have to think twice about whether you want to open that next bottle. One look at the label and you know that they want you to have fun as well. These are all working dogs so they're never going to be making truckloads of the stuff, and they are so damned picky about what they'll bottle even under their nicknames that it pretty much limits the amounts severely. Most of all they want to think they've brought a little happiness into the world as someone somewhere polishes off the last drop of one of their bottles and sighs.

What This Is: This 2002 Napa Valley Red Table Wine is the first bottling from Amigos. It started its life in Chili's two acre vineyard as a Nebbiolo. It hung out in barrels and tanks with some fairly reputable Sangiovese and it has retained its Italian heritage even though its English is perfect. Despite the dubious parentage, this is a genuinely delicious red wine with old fashioned European table manners. It loves steak, but than what dog doesn't?

2003 Montevina Winery Cucina Mista
Cucina Mista ("kitchen mix" in Italian) is a blend of wines produced from a number of Italian grape varieties (Sangiovese, Barbera, Syrah, Aglianico and Refosco) grown in Montevina's experimental vineyard. It is intended to emulate the flavorful, easy-drinking reds of central and southern Italy, the type of wines you encounter there in village cafes. Winemaker Jeff Meyers added a drop of this and a dab of that to create this tasty, uncomplicated vino tavola, which will happily wash down a plate of bruschetta, a bistecca, or pasta bolognese. Rich, spicy, and full bodied, it offers ripe, dark cherry aromas and earthy flavors suggesting blackberries with medium tannins and a warm, long finish.

NV Sacred Stone Master's Red Blend
The name Sacred Stone is inspired by the mineral rich limestone and granite soils found in the vineyard of the Cienga Valley in the eastern foothills of San Benito County, California. A blend of Syrah, Carignan, Grenache, Sangiovese, and Zinfandel, the percentages of each grape vary from year to year, but the wine remains true to a wine-making 'field blend' style born in the villages of Italy. Enjoy with simply prepared foods: grilled meats, steaks, chops, roasts and barbeque. Ripe, juicy, and expressive, the wine features cherry and plum flavors with hints of earth and spice. Sacred Stone is soft and supple with attractive forward fruit and crisp acidity.

2003 Girasole Mendocino Sangiovese
Charlie Barra of Girasole Vineyards says he's "been farming organically for 50 years; the first 30 I didn't know it. There was no organic certification process. Prior to World War II, growing without

commercial chemicals and fertilizers was standard procedure." His 2004 Sangiovese is silky with ripe fruit flavors of blackberry and cassis. The grapes are allowed to have a slight shrivel before picking. This long hang time produces a wine that is bursting with flavor. Tannins are soft and well integrated. Enjoy this wine with any tomato-based food: pasta, cacciatore, or marinated tomato salad.

2003 Cucina Viansa Sangiovese
Viansa was founded by Vicki and Sam Sebastiani in 1989 when they left the Sebastiani Winery in Sonoma to launch this destination winery and Italian marketplace in the Carneros region at the entrance to the Sonoma Valley wine country. The name is a contraction of Vicki and Sam. For years their wines were only available at the winery. However, Vicki and Sam eventually divorced and sold the concern to their seven children, who, in turn, sold the business to the publicly traded 360 Global Wines. The good news is that Cucina Viansa's stunning wines are now available outside California. The 2003 Sangiovese is a California-style version of Sangiovese with abundant ripe berry and cherry fruit, along with typical Sangiovese flavors of eucalyptus and mint. Smooth and soothing as a mother's love, it comes as a shock to discover that this packs a hefty 14.9% alcohol.

Collector's Club Whites

2005 Saddleback Cellars Pinot Grigio
Winemaker Nils Venge's expertise became known worldwide when Robert Parker, Jr. gave his 1985 Groth Vineyards Reserve Cabernet a perfect score of 100. He worked also at Charles Krug, Sterling, and Villa Mt Eden before purchasing the property in Oakville, California that came to be Saddleback Cellars. He is the consulting winemaker for such luminous Napa wineries as Keenan, Plumpjack, Moss Creek, and Bacio Divino. His Pinot Grigio displays honeydew, pear and sweet orange blossom aromas with rich hints of vanilla and meringue. Crisp and aromatic throughout, it finishes long with lush tropical fruit.

2005 MacMurray Pinot Gris
MacMurray Ranch Pinot Gris shows rich aromas of fig, peach, pear, and tropical fruits that evolve into white peach and pear in the front palate. With voluptuous texture and substantial body, this well-ripened and comparatively weighty Pinot Gris is clean and balanced and moves to a smooth, lingering finish. Pair this wine's richness with sautéed scallops, soft-shell crabs, lobster, or highlight its bright acidity and elegance with linguini and fresh clams. Yes, the winery and ranch was founded by that MacMurray.

2005 Panther Creek Melrose Vineyard Pinot Gris

Panther Creek wines "which are Oregon's most beautifully packaged (stylish label, heavy glass bottles), are also among the most concentrated and ageworthy wines now being made in Oregon... Panther Creek has established itself as one of the most consistent, high quality Oregon wineries." - Robert Parker, *The Wine Advocate*. The Melrose Pinot Gris is a wonderful food wine, with great texture and acid supporting its palate. Pale straw in color, the nose shows peaches and honeysuckle, with a hint of Viognier floral spice.

2005 Saddleback Cellars Pinot Blanc
Note the bright, summery, floral and apple aromas of this white wine. Creamy light tropical flavors shine right through with honey dew melon and notes of marmalade and spice to tantalize your senses. "If Pinot Blanc were a red variety, it would be Nils' signature wine...and, as one of the few Pinot Blanc producers in California, his is consistently among the best . . . wonderful balance, with excellent acidity. At mid-palate there's lime peel and on the long finish we have orange zest. It'll age, too." - Alan Goldfarb, Wine Editor, *St. Helena Star*, Napa Valley

2005 Swanson Vineyards Napa Valley Pinot Grigio

Made from 100% Pinot Grigio sourced from Swanson's Oakville Cross Road Vineyard. Whole cluster pressed, fermented 50% in stainless, 50% in barrel (without new wood so as to keep the wood influence minimal). No secondary

malolactic refermentation was allowed in order to maximize the crisp characteristics of the grape. Aged 5 months on the lees. Wonderfully intense bouquet of pears, apples, and honeysuckle, with intricate mineral undertones highlight the bouquet. The aromas echo nicely on a smooth and spicy palate. The finish is classic Pinot Grigio: long, clean and fresh. Enjoy as an aperitif, or with light meats and shellfish.

2004 Kim Crawford Pinot Gris

Kim Crawford introduced an unoaked Chardonnay several years ago that was one of the first top-notch examples of that now hot trend. Here he has done the same with Pinot Gris and succeeded in bringing out of that grape the characteristically Marlborough flair for vibrantly zingy fruit expression on a clean frame of fresh acidity. The aromatics of lemon sherbet, pear, melon and peach move seamlessly into a palate of more melon, apple and honey. Good body and weight in the mouth and a persistent finish gives the wine the seriousness of an aged Alsatian while maintaining the freshness of a young Italian.

Collectors Club Reds

2004 Seghesio Barbera

In California, Barbera has been grown for over a century, but it has only recently enjoyed any great popularity. Barbera's naturally high acidity is well suited to Sonoma's Alexander Valley where the warm climate moderates the acidity while fully promoting the grape's juicy blackberry and wild berry qualities. With less tannin than Sangiovese, Barbera pairs well with beef, lamb and game dishes. Spicy-scented, supple and stylistic, the Seghesio Barbera is laden with cherry and boysenberry fruit and an invigorating acidity. New French oak was used during aging, adding sweet tannins, anise perfume and complexity.

2004 Terra d'Oro Barbera

Montevina Terra d'Oro Barbera takes the varietal beyond clean, bright, and fruity to sophisticated and elegant. Satin sheets of black cherry blanket your tongue and a mild nutmeg spice warms you further. Caramel and toffee flavors brought on by the oak add complexity and deepen the

smooth rich finish. This Barbera is appropriately dressed to accompany any white tablecloth meal or is perfectly comfortable at home cuddled on the couch.

2003 Kestrel Vineyard Sangiovese

What makes this Sangiovese special is right after the grapes were de-stemmed and crushed in the fermenter, 15% of the juice was drawn off. This practice intensifies the color and flavors of the remaining wine by increasing the skin to juice ratio. The resulting wine is darker and richer in body and structure. Note the deep ruby red color and intense aromas of black cherry, sour cherry, and blackberry. On the palate you get an extremely full bodied and well balanced wine with notes of vanilla, cedar and leather, intertwined with the dark cherry and blackberry.

2003 Luna Vineyards Sangiovese

The fruit for the Luna Sangiovese was harvested from three vineyards just north of the winery in Oakville. The nose is redolent with cedar, dark fruit and rich earth to match its deep ruby color. The wine has a long developing entry on the tongue, with a medium body that reveals delicate hints of black cherries. Chalky tannins create a plush mouth feel. The finish is long and persistent, evoking tobacco, tea leaves and figs. This is an elegant, refined wine that would pair nicely aged cheeses and roasted fall vegetables.

2004 Scott Harvey Barbera

According to winemaker Scott Harvey, "Barbera will eventually become known as the best variety for Amador County. Fruit forward, rich full flavors express both the varietal and the Amador terroir. Medium toasted French oak round out and tie in all the complex flavors of bright cherries and hints of blueberry cheesecake."

2003 Ferrari Carano Sienna

Sangiovese and Cabernet Sauvignon are the classic grapes found in the Italian "super-Tuscan" red wine blends. Siena reflects Ferrari-Carano's Italian heritage by blending Sangiovese, with Sonoma County's finest Malbec and Cabernet Sauvignon. Siena has aromas of

strawberry and raspberry from the Sangiovese while the Bordeaux varietals add support to the mouth-feel, body, tannin and color. The wine is aged in older French oak for 16 months to help accentuate the fruit flavor in the Sangiovese. Serve with veal cutlets parmigiana, pasta with flavorful tomato sauces, or pizza.

Football and Wine

With college bowl games coming up (GO BLUE!)

and the Super Bowl soon after, the question arises: is there an alternative to Bud and chips? Yes, there is. Even junk food deserves the right beverage. Some alternatives

Potato Chips and Salty Crunchies

Dom Perignon may not be your everyday snacking wine but bubbles are great for cutting the salt and fat of chips and other salty snacks. If Champagne sounds too frou-frou for your crowd, try Spanish Cava, Italian Prosecco, or any California sparkling wine.

Corn Chips and Salsa

Here's a match made in heaven, Sauvignon Blanc's zingy crispness pairs with the acidity in tomato-based salsa. Serve your salsa with lime-flavored tortilla chips, and look for New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc, which is known for its lime notes and bracing acidity.

Buttered Popcorn

American or Australian Chardonnay is usually low in acidity, with lots of rich, buttery smoothness, just the thing for a big bowl of buttered popcorn.

Cheetos

Spanish reds are typically low in tannin, with fresh berry and plum flavors that pair beautifully with any cheese. They also team up just as well with the cheddar flavor in cheese curls.

Pretzels

Red Côtes du Rhône wine offers ample fruit and a bit of earthiness. Grab a bag of thick, rustic pretzels, and a bottle of this Southern France classic, and get ready for kickoff. Look for basic "Côtes du Rhône" appellation on the label for the best bang for your buck.