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The Pleasures of Pinot

Retailer's Shelf

Chiaretto

**Double Gold Tasting Notes from the
2018 Consumers' Wine Judging**

Ask Tasters Guild

The Pleasures of Pinot

By Michael Schafer

While attending a party recently I overheard two different guests exclaim, “Oh, I love Pinot!” Both were enthusiastic about their fondness for two very different wines. The lady really enjoys Pinot Grigio and the gentleman is intrigued by Pinot Noir.

Just what is Pinot? There are many variations of this fascinating and diverse grape. All of the varieties of Pinot are widely available as single varietal wines with the exception of Pinot Meunier. Your journey of the pleasures of Pinot will begin and end with Pinot Noir. The word pinot is French and describes the characteristic pine cone-shaped clusters of grapes on the vines.

All Pinot’s are offspring of the Pinot Noir grape. As the grapes have evolved genetic changes have created the variations of Pinot Noir. Just a single mutation of the outer cell layer of the grape causes the differences between members of the Pinot family: Pinot Noir, Pinot Gris/Grigio, Pinot Meunier, and Pinot Blanc. If this single layer is removed, grapes grown from the altered descendants would be genetically identical to their Pinot Noir forefather

Pinot Blanc

Pinot Blanc is a white Pinot mutation sharing genetics with Pinot Noir, Pinot Gris and “other” Pinots. It’s a genetic clone of Pinot Gris probably originating in Burgundy, France. Physiologically it resembles Chardonnay. With high acidity it’s frequently used in Italian sparkling wines, notably Franciacorta. In Alsace, France it’s called Klevner, and makes Crémant d’Alsace, a delicious sparkling wine. In Germany Pinot Blanc is known as Weissburgunder or Weisser Burgunder. With floral and fruity aromas, it is usually a dry wine but also is available in sweeter versions such as Vin Santo.

Pinot Blanc is complemented by light dishes such as simple poultry or fish entrees. Mild cheeses are enhanced by Pinot Blanc. A few specific pairings are: melon with prosciutto, Tarte flambee’, and the classic croque-monsieur sandwich.

Pinot Gris/Grigio

Pinot Gris/Grigio is the gray Pinot mutation. Gris is French for gray and Grigio is Italian for gray. This grape varies widely in both color and appearance. One might even say it

comes in “fifty shades” of gray.

Virtually indistinguishable from Pinot Noir in the vineyard right up until veraison, (when the grapes change color on the vine) it’s almost always fermented and stored in stainless-steel tanks, not oak.

Known in Alsace, France as Tokay and in Germany as Ruländer, this crowd pleaser is widely enjoyed in a range of styles from crisp and refreshing to sweet, unctuous dessert wines. Aromas and flavors of minerality is a hallmark of quality Pinot Gris/Grigio.

Pinot Gris/Grigio pairs well with a wide variety of dishes. Grilled foods such as vegetables and light fish like halibut taste even better with a glass of this flexible wine. Simple salads and shrimp or asparagus risotto are delectable with this “gray” wine.

Pinot Meunier

Meunier is French for “miller”, one who grinds grain. When the grapes are ripe the leaves take on a dusty look, as if they’ve been dipped in flour. The Champagne region has a very large number of vineyards that are planted to Pinot Meunier. Seventy percent of the vineyards in the Marne Valley in Champagne are planted with Pinot Meunier!

This Rodney Dangerfield of grapes buds later and ripens earlier than Pinot Noir and is almost always blended to make sparkling wine. It’s also known as known as simply Meunier, Gris Meunier, Müllerrebe (millergrape) or Schwarzriesling. Whew-lots of names for the same virtually unknown grape!

Insofar as Pinot Meunier is seldom made into a single varietal wine, just pair sparkling wines with your favorite foods!

Pinot Noir

The “daddy” of all the other Pinots. This “heartbreak grape” is, to be frank, a real pain. A pain to grow, to harvest, to ferment and to age. With its very thin skin and proclivity for early ripening, prone to every grape disease known and notoriously low yielding, why do growers torture themselves with this grape? When it’s good it’s perhaps the most interesting wine in the world!

Gentle pressing, proper fermentation and deft use of oak are mandatory for producing beverages of elegance and finesse. If the proper balance isn’t achieved, thin, watery,



acidic wine is the unpleasant result.

This finicky grape is grown all over the planet but truly excels in very few locations. Burgundy, France is the home of Pinot Noir. *Pinot noir* means “pine black” in French, describing the tightly clustered dark purple clusters of fruit shaped a bit like pine cones. A thirty-mile long, two mile wide path of gently rolling hills named the *Cote d’Or* (“Slope of Gold”) is the mother lode for this fabulous wine. Elegant, complex and exquisite are but a few descriptors of this pricey product. The Burgundian style is the benchmark for all Pinot Noir.

Oregon produces superb examples of wines that are stylistically between Burgundy and California. Fruiter, riper, with bit more alcohol than their Burgundian cousins, Oregonian Pinot Noirs are popular with folks seeking complexity on a budget. Prices for many wines from California’s northern neighbor are much gentler than from Burgundy.

California Pinot Noirs are fruitier, spicier and higher in alcohol than their Burgundian brethren. Shhh, don’t tell anyone but some producers even sneak in some Syrah to boost the color and flavor of their wines! Golden state Pinot Noirs are usually available at lower prices than wines from Burgundy or Oregon.

New Zealand and Michigan are two other venues where Pinot Noir is grown and made into delectable wine. While New Zealand has already established an excellent reputation for these wines, Michigan is building upon it’s relatively short history of producing Pinot Noir.

The Holy Grail of wines gives us an incredible range of fragrances and flavors. Old World style wines offer scents and tastes of earth, mushrooms, dried cherries, dried raspberries, clove, and nutmeg. New World wines provide aromas and flavors of cherries, wet leaves, vanilla, and anise. For many wine enthusiasts, the enticing, subtle and complex “nose” of these wines is the pinnacle of wine enjoyment.

Light to medium in body, with low tannins and medium to high acidity, light in color, wines made from Pinot Noir are very, very flexible with a wide variety of your culinary creations. These food-friendly wines are the “Gumbies” of red wines!

As a result of their acidity, Pinot Noir pairs well with many foods. Old World styles enhance chicken (roasted or *Coq au Vin*), game birds and duck. Beef *Bourguignon* and beef

stroganoff are wonderful partners for these wines.

Wild fatty fish such as salmon, tuna and swordfish are complemented by New World Pinot Noirs. Dishes featuring mushrooms benefit from pairing with Pinot Noir wines.

Ahh, the pleasures of Pinot. Enjoy all of them!

Michael Schafer Esq., The Wine Counselor®, is the charismatic wine educator, speaker, Sommelier, C.S.W., writer and consultant who entertains while educating. His humorous and fun approach to wine is reflected in his trademark phrase, “I taste bad wine so you don’t have to”®



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The Retailers Shelf

By Dick Scheer, Village Corner

Ann Arbor, Michigan

Loosen Bros. Deutscher Riesling Sekt Dr. L., Germany \$13

When I first met Ernie Loosen at his family's Mittel Mosel estate back in the 1970s, he was something of an 'enfant terrible.' Well, that early restlessness led him on to build quite a wine empire, including vineyards in the Pfalz and collaborations with Chateau Ste. Michelle in Washington. The German term for sparkling wine, *Sekt*, is actually Shakespearian in origin. Loosen's *Sekt* is a hallmark effort, offering abundant melon, peach, and flowers aromas of Riesling, a pleasing measure of biscuity bottle bouquet, very fine 'spritz,' and perfect harmony of light sweetness and vibrant acidity. Surprisingly delightful with fried chicken.

Ca Furlan Cuvee Beatrice Prosecco, Italy \$11

Alessandro Furlan has branched out from making wine merely at his family's estate in Friuli to creating a Prosecco from the Glera grape variety grown in neighboring Veneto. Prosecco is extremely popular these days because it's casual, versatile, and, price worthy. Furlan's, named after a family member, is finished 'Extra Dry,' i.e. sweeter than Brut. It's brimful of Glera's appley aroma, offering also 'cobbler' bottle bouquet, and a very creamy mousse. It makes a beautiful foundation for brunch-time Bellinis and Mimosas.

Mont Gravet 2017 Cotes De Gascogne, France \$9

Mont Gravet is the brainchild of Melvin Master, distinguished author (*Wines of the Rhone Valley*) with a genius for developing wildly successful wine bars and restaurants. The flagship wines of his Mont Gravet series are an old vines Carignan from Mediterranean France and this all-Colombard from France's Armagnac region. 'French' Colombard was once one of the most widely planted white grape varieties in California, the basis of jug wines named 'Chablis.' It exudes 'green' aromas like Granny Smith apple, lime, and undergrowth. Liven up a Caesar salad.

Hay Maker 2017 Marlborough Sauvignon Blanc, New Zealand \$10

Hay Maker is the second label of Mud House winery, established in 1996 by a couple that set sail around the world in search of the ideal spot to lay down roots and discovered on New Zealand's South Island. They proceeded to plant grapevines and to build an earthen house. Redolent of sweet citrus

and passion fruit, Hay Maker boasts that come hither appeal that has made Marlborough's Sauvignon Blancs such big sellers. Excellent with a goat cheese *soufflé*.

Lone Birch 2016 Yakima Valley Chardonnay Unwooded, Washington \$11

Long Birch is the second label of Airfield Estates. During World War II, the Miller family leased part of its Yakima Valley property to a company that developed a flight school for hundreds of Army Air Corps recruits. Following the war, the land reverted to agricultural pursuits that, beginning in 1967, included winegrowing. Like France's Chablis wines, Washington's Chardonnays are very crisp, which lends well to unwooded presentations, which prove more versatile at the table than oaky renditions. Try with a crabmeat salad.

Farmhouse 2017 California White \$11

Farmhouse is a newly developed brand of Cline Family Cellars. Though the winery and estate is soundly based in Sonoma County's Carneros district, it was founded in 1982 at Oakley, East Bay, where Fred Cline began to specialize in Mediterranean grape varieties grown for generations in this part of California. He returns to his roots with this fetching cuvee of Palomino, Marsanne, Roussanne, Viognier, and Muscat. Palomino is the foundation variety of Spain's Sherry zone; the rest are grown in Mediterranean France. This is a fresh, crisp, dry wine of subtle, intricate aromatics. Delicious with a warm potato salad.



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Chapoutier 2016 Cotes Du Roussillon Blanc Les Vignes De Bila Haut, France \$15

The Northern Rhone Valley sector of France's vineyards offers limited opportunity for its winegrowers to extend their plantings, so many of the leading estates have looked to the south for expansion. In 1999, Michel Chapoutier, whose family owns choice sites in top Northern Rhone appellations, bought a large tract of old vines in the high Agly Valley of the Midi's Roussillon zone, a property known as Bila Haut. This wine incorporates its white grape varieties Grenache Blanc, Roussanne, Macabeu, and Marsanne. It features aromas of peach, almond, and herbs, and an intriguing texture pitting richness against acidity. Match with white bean soup sprinkled with crumbled bacon.

Georges Duboeuf 2016 Beaujolais Villages, France \$13

Through countless hours of hard work, Georges Duboeuf built a Beaujolais empire. During harvest, he toiled virtually round the clock. Today, he can take a little time off and leave the management of the company to his son, Franck. Duboeuf Beaujolais wines are as reliable as ever, the Villages cuvee offering an extra measure of granite-borne spiciness to Gamay's bounty of cherry, raspberry, and flowers. Serve with a western omelette.

The Pinot Project 2017 California Pinot Noir, California \$13

Released in 2004, the movie Sideways ignited an explosion of interest in California Pinot Noir. In 2009, amidst grape supply shortages and rising prices, New York wine importer Michael Skurnik undertook an endeavor to produce an unpretentious Pinot Noir for early release and enjoyment, and easy on the budget. This newly released 2017 comes from California's cool coastal origins. Its red cherry and tea aromas and cool, crunchy cherry taste reflect the same. 20% was aged for 5 months in French oak, which adds savor. Tannins are virtually absent, so this invites service with grilled salmon steaks.

Root: 1 2016 Maipo Valley Cabernet Sauvignon, Chile \$11

This brand of the Vina Ventisquero estate references Chile's unique, ungrafted grapevines. Thanks to geography and quarantine, the dreaded phylloxera, which feeds on *vinifera* rootstocks, is absent in Chile's vineyards. The combination of Maipo Valley's *terroir* and native rootstocks brings out to the max Cabernet Sauvignon expressions of blackberry and black currant. Add a dash of oak seasoning, and you couldn't ask for more. I've liked this with pasta marinara.

Canoe Ridge 2016 Horse Heaven Hills Cabernet Sauvignon The Expedition, Washington \$16

Canoe Ridge sits on the north bank, high above the broad Columbia River in a region known as Horse Heaven Hills. In 1989, a collection of Washington's finest winemakers invested in a winegrowing venture there, a year later backed

by California's Chalone group. Developed of late, its Expedition series wines have won many honors. Little wonder. This one's multi-dimensional, featuring a complex of fruit and oak aromatics, great texture, and tremendous depth. This will enhance a thick, grilled ribeye steak.

The Gatekeeper 2015 McLaren Vale Shiraz, Australia \$13

Chester County PA attorney Peter Weygandt turned a wine hobby into a business when he began importing wines in 1987. In the beginning, he specialized in Australian wines, later switching emphasis to Europe as the trips to Australia were too time-consuming. A handful of Aussie originals remain in his portfolio, including this buxom, ample, abundant, spicy-oaky Shiraz from the McLaren Vale vineyards of Simon Hackett. I suggest rare roast beef garnished with an assortment of cracked peppercorns.

Sao Miguel Do Sul 2016 Alentejano, Portugal \$10

Southeast Portugal's Alentejo is the country's warmest winegrowing region. This representative, from the vineyards of Alexandre Relvas, consists of Aragonez (Tempranillo), Alicante Bouschet, and Trincadeira, plus an international dash of Cabernet Sauvignon. Despite balmy growing conditions, this wine comes across very fresh and bright, with nary a hint of overripe or dried fruit. Enjoy with a 'loaded' beef burrito.

Bodegas Atalaya 2016 Almansa Laya, Spain \$9

Dynamic and enterprising Juan Gil created Bodegas Atalaya in southeast Spain's *Almansa denominacion*, where the Castilla plateau's flank tumbles down to the Mediterranean Sea. Here he grows Garnacha Tintorera (Alicante Bouschet) and Monastrell (Mourvedre) at 800 meters' elevation. Oh, boy, is this ever a generous red wine, generous in alcohol, generous in fruit sweetness that tempers its power. Serve with a pork shoulder roast.

Masseria Altemura 2016 Salento Primitivo Sasseo, Italy \$13

Zinfandel's cousin, Primitivo thrives in the vineyards of Puglia, Italy's heel. This one's from an estate that began as a fortified farmhouse constructed in the 4th century B.C. The wine's nickname, 'Sasseo,' refers to the rocky limestone soil of the vineyard. Redolent of black raspberry, peppercorns, and other spices, it has a rich and round savor edged with acid and fine tannin. Definitely a choice for Carolina-style BBQ spare ribs.

Chiaretto, The Italian Dry Rosé

By Ron Kapon

Chiaretto? I must admit I knew very little about the wine before being invited by the *Consorzio Tutelavino Bardolino DOC* for a 6-day press trip. My host was Irene Graziotto, the international press officer for Studio Associato in Verona. www.studiocru.com

Chiaretto (key-ar-et-toh) derives from the Italian term *chiaro* meaning light or pale, a pale pink wine made primarily from the red grape Corvina (plus Rondinella and a bit of Sangiovese), which is also found in Amarone, Valpolicella, and Bardolino. With only a small amount of skin contact, the juice retains this pale pink color that gave it its name.

The grapes are grown near the largest lake in Italy, Lake Garda, located in the northern part of Italy, a 30-minute drive from Verona. Its fragrances range from flowers to herbaceous tones; from citrus fruits to apricots and wild berries; all accompanied by hints of spice, like cinnamon, cloves or vanilla. On the palate, Chiaretto offers youthful, mouth-watering freshness. It is made from red wine grapes using white winemaking practices. Rosé is a type of wine that incorporates some of the color from red grape skins but is not colored enough to be called a red wine. An additional feature of rosés is that they tend to be low in tannins. In 1968 Bardolino Chiaretto was amongst the first appellations in Italy to be awarded the DOC (Denominazione di origine controllata).

There are around 100 producers of Chiaretto and Bardolino and 6,700 acres of vineyards. In 2007 less than 375,000 cases were produced. The whole appellation (including both Bardolino and Chiaretto) used to be around 2,500,000 cases, 330,000 cases of these were Bardolino. Nowadays



total production is 26 million bottles (yields per hectare has been reduced) which means 2,160,000 cases. 1,000,000 of these cases will be Chiaretto.

Chiaretto goes with everything: It is perfect as an aperitif, for informal lunches or barbecues as well as for elegant dinners. Chiaretto pairs wonderfully with appetizers and finger food. It also goes perfectly with Italian pasta or rice dishes, ravioli and pizza. It is excellent with saltwater and freshwater fish that is grilled, baked, cooked in salt, boiled or even raw. It's a fantastic wine for Asian

food (even the spiciest) and is superb with sushi. It retails in the \$12-18 range making it affordable.

Rosé is the fastest growing wine category in the US. In 2017, the consumption of rosé wines in the US grew by roughly 50%. By comparison, the overall consumption of wine grew by 4%. The rate of growth for rosé consumption is even more pronounced during the summer months—a period where rosé consumption typically peaks. Four countries produce more than 75% of the world's rosé. France with 30%, (think Provence, Languedoc-Roussillon, Rose d Anjou, Tavel, Champagne Rose). Spain (20%), the US, with lots of white Zinfandel (15%) and Italy (10%). I grew up with Lancer & Mateus Rose from Portugal.

On the eastern, Veneto, side of the lake rosé is known



as *Chiaretto di Bardolino*. These are light, refreshing wines with very little color. *Chiaretto di Bardolino* is typically made from a blend of Rondinella and Corvina grapes. These wines feature notes of fresh citrus, grapefruit pith, orange and tangerine, along with red fruit notes of raspberry and strawberry as well as flavors of apple and pear. They feature well-rounded acidity with a creamy quality and a refreshing, slightly bitter note on the finish.

Chiaretto can be produced in any one of 16 villages along the eastern shore of Lake Garda. The soils here are primarily glacial moraines of sand and gravel. The western side of Lake Garda is in Lombardy and was historically known as the *Valtènesi*. The rosé wines from this area are also called Chiaretto. Since 2015, a specific DOC for Chiaretto has been designated: *Riviera del Garda Classico Chiaretto*. There are 10 villages in this DOC that can produce Chiaretto. Many producers use both the *Valtènesi* and *Riviera del Garda* names on their labels to avoid confusion. The rosé wines from this area are made with Gropello grapes or with blends of Gropello, Marzemino, Barbera or Sangiovese. Gropello must be at least 30% of any blend. Small quantities of Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Carmenere, and Merlot can also be used. This region is less known than its Veneto cousins across the lake.

2018 Consumer Judging Double Gold Notes

Under \$10.00

St. James Winery NV Blackberry/Blueberry, Missouri

A perfect combination of these two ripe fruits from one of the leading fruit wine producers in the country. You'll enjoy this wonderfully blended wine with grilled pork loin or chicken wings. Add a little lemon to the wine and reduce it down to a tasty topping sauce.

St. James Winery NV Cranberry, Missouri

The winery promotes this delightful fruit wine as a seasonal beverage. Perfect for the holidays, heated with the addition of a cinnamon stick and added to a party selection of cheeses and nuts. Or, add an ounce to three ounces of sparkling wine for a holiday cheer of *Kir Royale*.

St. James Winery NV Country Red, Missouri

A fun, sweet wine without being overly sweet and cloying. Enjoy with a group of friends and plenty of pizza or chili on football Saturday or Sunday.

St. James NV Strawberry, Missouri

100% ripe, vivacious strawberries right from the first smell and to the final luxury, lovely taste. A delicious companion after dinner with a generous slice of homemade pound cake.

St. James Winery NV Blueberry, Missouri

Do you get the impression that this winery dominates the domestic fruit wine category? Smooth, fragrant and perfectly crafted without overpowering sweetness. Sip on a glass while you create a blueberry wine sauce for grilled or pan fried pork chops.

St James Winery NV Pink Catawba, Missouri

Although 8% residual sugar, it is perfectly balanced between sweet and tart. Pleasant and fragrant aroma with fruit that is not over powering. Here's an excellent beverage for a backyard barbeque party.

\$10.01 to \$15.00

Langetwins Family Winery, 2015 Cabernet Sauvignon, California

Wild Strawberries, brown sugar and spice and a memory of fresh baked "snickerdoodles." A most incredible finish that powers on "forever." Soft tannins for current drinkability. Ideal for a red wine risotto or Spanish Paella with hints of saffron and chorizo.

Carmenet, 2015 Cabernet Sauvignon, California

Blackberry, dark cherry and blueberry with a light spice permeate the aroma and flavor. Smooth, light tannins would compliment a medium-rare beef filet.

Victorianbourg Wine Estate, NV Chocolate Obsession, New York

Chocolate lovers rejoice! Red wine and chocolate – who says they don't go together? Add this unique wine combination to your repertoire and serve it with chocolate truffles or New York style cheesecake. What a way to go!

Sand Point Family Vineyards, 2016 Cabernet Sauvignon, California

Just linger over the aromas and flavors in the glass of dark cherry, blackberry, white pepper and ending with a smooth tannin finish for a pleasant treat. Excellent value and will do well on the dinning table with beef stroganoff.

\$15.01 to \$20.00

Wakefield/Taylors, 2017 Shiraz, Australia

Ripe berries and plum flavors that engulf the mouth with ecstasy. Using American oak this wine exudes mocha and vanilla character to an enjoyable full aftertaste. Another excellent valued premium wine to accompany grilled meat.

Grande River Vineyards, 2016 Red Meritage, Colorado

A compelling nose is followed by appealing Bordeaux grape varieties of the Meritage association. Strong tannins indicate some aging would be beneficial for your ultimate pleasure with an entrée incorporating wild game.

Cooper Vyds/Fifty Third Winery, 2017 Traminette, Virginia

An excellent example of a quality "cold hardy" grape variety that is a cousin of Gewurztraminer. Mild "gewurst" aromatic nose and flavor that begins fruity and finishes clean and crisp. A welcomed companion to *charcuterie*.

Spero Winery/Vino é Buono, 2015 Cabernet Franc, Colorado

A subtle aroma introduces the pleasures to come in the glass and once the wine hits your tongue it is party time! Rich, characteristic Cab. Franc flavors with smooth tannins to the end of a long finish. While beef would be a normal pairing, it would also be great with lasagna.

St. James River Cellars, 2017 Chardonnay, Virginia

Soft, unoaked varietal bouquet that carries into an inviting and expressive clean, crisp palate that will be enjoyed with planked salmon or an impressive offering with cocktail hour appetizers.



\$20.01 to \$27.00

J. Pedroncelli Winery, 2016 Buchnell Vineyards Zinfandel, California

A joy from beginning to end. A delightful plum flavor stands out while tempting the palate with a jammy blackberry undertone. Firm tannins. A classic pairing for BBQ ribs with your best “kick it up” sauce recipe.

Cooper Vyds/Fifty Third Winery, 2015 Shannon Hill Red, Virginia

A classy red wine with full raspberry and cherry fruit flavors and expertly blended with oak that lingers on the palate to the immense pleasure of the consumer. Would be an outstanding and satisfying companion for a roasted leg of lamb.

Mettler Family Winery, 2015 Petite Sirah, California

Deep burgundy color. A powerful nose of fruit and spice. The many legs on the side of the glass pay tribute to the 15% alcohol. Smooth tannins join with the fruit on the tongue for a delightful experience. A great wine with a full flavored meal or just as a “quafer” for a relaxing beverage after a long day.

Chateau Le Thou, 2015 Syrah/Grenache, France

From the Languedoc with 70% Syrah and 30% Grenache expertly blended for a delicate, soft, and elegant flavor to mesmerize the palate and linger on with the culinary pleasure of a special *cog au vin* dinner.

Golden Rule Vineyards, 2016 Syrah, Arizona

From the high-desert climate of Arizona comes this spicy, dark fruit Syrah with smooth tannins. This family operated winery also produces outstanding pistachios which would be fun to crush and encased chicken thighs, pan fry and offer with this fulfilling wine.

Taylors, 2017 “Jaraman” Shiraz, Australia

What else would you expect from a premium Australian winery than a superb Shiraz? Well, here it is! Everything from enticing aroma to marvelous varietal flavors that plead for prime beef or lamb chops off a charcoal “barbie.”

Mettler Family Vineyards, 2015 Cabernet Sauvignon, California

Prominent fruit signatures of dark cherries, plum, and blackberry with a light spice finish that engulfs the mouth with a delightful aftertaste. Smooth tannins. Would be fun to match with Italian red sauce meatballs smothered with Asiago cheese.

Cooper Vyds/Fifty Third Winery, 2017 Viognier, Virginia

More kudos to Virginia and Cooper Vineyards. Here is a clean, crisp, and extremely enjoyable wine with just a touch of oak. Wonderful fruit aromas that beg the drinker to introduce the wine to the dining table. A perfect pairing for pan-fried freshwater fish or chicken with a side of pasta *Alfredo*.

Fenn Valley, NV 42 Ice Wine, Michigan

Naturally frozen grapes from the 42nd parallel. Enthralling nose and rich flavors of peaches, apples and a touch of honey. Wonderful mouthfeel and lovely aftertaste. I would like this by itself after dinner, with a few walnuts to add to the culinary sensation.

Golden Rule Vineyards, 2016 Sangiovese Reserve, Arizona

Witness the aromatic fruit aroma and intense flavor of this Italian grape variety. You wouldn’t expect to find this Tuscan superpower variety in Arizona, but evidently the high-elevation climate and alluvial soils of the region create the perfect *terroir* for this charming wine. Bring it out with a red sauce pasta course.

\$40.01 to \$50.00

Taylors, 2016 “St. Andrews” Cabernet Sauvignon, Australia

Lovely hints of nutmeg, spice and mint. Silky, elegant and a luscious, iniquitous mouth-feel that is almost delicate in a very seductive way. A welcome companion for roasted lamb or pork with an apple cider sauce.

Sagebrush Annies, 2016 Cabernet Sauvignon, California

An aroma that delivers a lingering expression of ripe berry fruit and a bit of lavender and herbs from the garden after a summer rain. Five minutes later my glass is empty and visions of its loveliness is still rolling around my palate. Tamarind glazed kebobs.

Taylors, 2016 Shiraz, Australia

Enticing aromas and flavor of ripe cherry with hints of mint. Firm tannins and a lingering finish of spice. Made for meat off the “barbie,” but for something different, match this amiable wine with your special gourmet taco creations.

\$50.01 to \$65.00

Langetwins Winery, 2011 “Centennial” Zinfandel, California

A complex, spicy aroma with flavors of ripe raspberry and vanilla combine with subtle tannins to promise a long life of enjoyment. An elegant addition to a special dinner or even with “extra special” gourmet burgers.

Ask Tasters Guild

By Joe Borrello

Q. We visited a number of wineries in Virginia who said they used a fermenting practice called “delastage.” What is “delastage?”

A. *Delastage* is a process used during fermentation of the grape juice and is sometimes called “rack and return.” The juice is removed (racked) from under the “must” cap, or the floating layer of grape skins on fermenting juice and held out for a few hours to aerate while the skins are allowed to apply pressure onto themselves releasing color and extract. The juice is then slowly pumped back over the “must” layer in the tank and is allowed to seep through the cap picking up the color and flavor as it makes its way through the skins. This bottom-to-top mixing process helps produce a darker and fuller bodied style of red wine which also has a tendency to soften the tannins in the wine, as well.

Q. I bought what I thought was a bottle of Champagne, but it says cremant on the bottle. What do I have?

A. *Cremant* is a French term, literally translated to “creaming,” applied to wines that are lightly sparkling. Some connoisseurs prefer a superior *cremant* to Champagne because of the subtle sparkle in the wine. Don’t confuse *cremant* for Cramant, an important wine-producing village in the Champagne region of France.

Q. How do I go about shopping for good wine values?

A. Wine is no different than anything else you shop for. Look for “specials” and featured wines that are not as well-known as the more popular and expensive alternatives. This is also an excellent opportunity to taste different types of wines inexpensively. Once you have found a few favorites, you will usually save 10 to 20 percent buying by the case. Most stores will give you a discount for mixed and multiple case purchases. Sometimes it is to your advantage to recruit a few friends and buy your wines together. It’s a rather competitive industry and volume discounts, as well as individual bottle markdowns, are quite commonplace.

Q. In reading various wine materials I have come across the term “varietal.” Does varietal refer to the grape or the wine?

A. “Varietal” refers to the wine that is made from at least 75% of one particular grape variety. Some typical examples of varietal wines are: Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Chardonnay, Pinot Noir, Riesling and many more. The tendency of late is to blend a mixture of compatible

varieties in order to give the winemaker an opportunity to use the best grapes available and exercise some creative winemaking to produce the best possible product and value. These are called “proprietary” wines because they are a blend of wines developed by the proprietor and given creative label names that do not necessarily refer to the grape involved to make the wine. The premium “Meritage” and “Rhone-style” wines are popular segments of proprietary wines that use classic French grape varieties in their blends.

Q. What determines when the wine process is complete at the winery and the finished product is ready to be released to the public?

A. Making wine is not just an art. It is also a science requiring precise procedures and controls, combined with personal judgment and assessment based on hundreds of sensory experiences and evaluations. Whether or not a wine is “ready” for bottling or release to the public is a matter of judgment. Scientific procedures and equipment can assist the vintner in making the wine and aging it properly, but the day comes when the winemaker must rely on the basic senses of sight, taste and smell. Drawing on his knowledge and years of experience, the vintner pronounces the wine ready to leave the winery and be welcomed, opened and enjoyed on the tables of wine drinkers everywhere.

Q. Doesn’t the Napa Valley appellation on a label virtually guarantee one of the best quality wines made in California?

A. Appellations are government designated viticultural regions that possess unique growing conditions and elements. The only “guarantee” you have is that at least 85% of the grapes used to make the wine are from that specific area. There is no guarantee of quality, although some appellations have a reputation for better performance than do others. Napa Valley certainly fits into that category.

Q: Is there any special type of wine to use for cooking?

A: Not the one that is labeled “Cooking Wine.” Rule Number One: “If it isn’t good enough to drink, it isn’t good enough to cook with.” So-called “Cooking Wine” usually has a lot of sodium and other additives. This does not mean, however, that you should use your best wine. A well-made and inexpensive jug wine is just fine for adding that special touch of flavor to your personal recipe.