LABRUSCO

CABERNET

RHONE STAIRCASE

RHONE STAIRCASE

SHERRY

UP THE

PROCESS OR PLACE?

MERITAGE?

BORDEAUX OR
‘This is essential reading. Robinson and Harding, along with their team of contributors, have managed to keep the Oxford Companion fresh.’

Washington Post

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Editor’s Note

Once again weather is in the news as a strong El Niño event is predicted this winter. This could bring drenching rain to the West Coast and milder temps to the upper Midwest. Hopefully, grape growers will be able to adapt to these ever-changing weather conditions.

Up The Rhone Staircase

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Sherry, Process or Place?

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Cabernet Labrusco

In 2015, sitting quietly at home, Jerry Rodrigues celebrated with a glass of ruby-red wine. It had been 20 years in the making and he was toasting the birth of a completely new wine. He was the first in the world to taste it. In his glass was Cabernet labrusco, a new grape variety that he had created.

Test Alcohol With An Ebuliometer

Some things in the wine business are just fun to do; after all we make a product containing alcohol and we do this on purpose.

Bordeaux or Meritage?

Without Bordeaux there would be no Meritage. Quoi voulez-vous dire? (What do you mean?) While Meritage wines are uniquely American, they are an homage/tribute to the red wines of Bordeaux. Make no mistake, the wines are very different and yet share qualities and characteristics wine lovers on both sides of the Atlantic enjoy. We will focus on the red versions of Bordeaux and Meritage.

New or Noteworthy

This fall, Sheldrake Point Winery’s 2014 Wild Ferment Riesling Ice Wine took top honors out of nearly 500 Rieslings from around the world at the Canberra International Riesling Competition, grabbing the “Best of Show” title, earning 98 points on a 100-point scale.

Big Six of Grapes - Part One

There are six grapes that you really need to know about. Riesling, Sauvignon Blanc and Chardonnay are the white grapes. The reds are Pinot Noir, Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon. These grape varietals are known and produced around the world. We’ll learn a bit about each grape, its aromas and flavors, and potential food pairings.

21 Wines to Watch

In her continuing column, Ellen Landis selects 21 wines for you to enjoy with any occasion or celebration.
Once again weather is in the news as a strong El Niño event is predicted this winter. This could bring drenching rain to the West Coast and milder temps to the upper Midwest. Hopefully, grape growers will be able to adapt to these ever-changing weather conditions.

In this issue of the Journal, we go a bit further afield to the European continent, to examine the Bordeaux/Meritage connection, the Rhone Valley “cru” cuts, a Sherry love triangle in Spain and a crash course in the “Big Six” of wine grapes, starting with Riesling.

According to Michael Schafer, CSW, without Bordeaux there would be no Meritage. Find out how “Californication” made America’s own Bordeaux. On the travel front, Eric Miller has recently returned from Spain, where he didn’t find a Sherry he didn’t like from Jerez to Malaga to Rioja to Madrid.

Seyssuel is a small wine village with big ambitions, says Roger Morris. Located on the east bank of the Rhone River, it wants to grow up to be a Rhone cru. And, given time and hard work, it has a reasonable chance.

Working in the wine lab isn’t always fun. But when it comes to testing alcohol, Wayne Stitzer is ebullient when he uses his ebulliometer. Read step-by-step instructions here.

We are proud to present our very popular “21 Wines to Watch” by Ellen Landis, CS, CSW. In this issue, Ellen features mostly California and Michigan wines, with Iowa and Indiana also represented. Bottle prices in this issue’s collection are especially affordable and range from $12 to $65.

Last, but certainly not least, we introduce a new writer and a new wine grape in an article by Peter F. May, an AWS member who lives in England. The grape is Cabernet labrusco, and we may be hearing a great deal about it in the months ahead.

Stay thirsty,

J. Rink
The AWS is the largest consumer based wine education organization in the U.S. A non-profit group, the AWS is devoted to educating people on all aspects of wine. Its members include wine novices, experts, grape growers, amateur and professional winemakers, chefs, wine appreciators, wine educators, restaurateurs and anyone wanting to learn more about wine.

AWS ACTIVITIES

AWS Chapters: Local community groups of AWS members sponsor programs, usually monthly. Activities include: tastings, dinners, lectures, picnics, winery tours, winemaking and cooking demonstrations, viticulture conferences, amateur wine-judging events, and other wine-related social events. Guests are welcome and novices have nothing to fear. Chapters are self-supporting, so expect a nominal charge to attend a tasting, dinner, etc. If a local chapter does not exist in your area, the national office will be glad to assist in forming a chapter. All that is needed are a few interested wine lovers. Meeting can be informal and held in member’ homes or in other settings, such as restaurants and wineries.

AWS Regional Events: Organized by regional vice-presidents, include statewide wine judging, contests, special tastings, regional wine conferences, regional picnics and dinners.

AWS National Conference: Held each fall—a two and one-half day national conference and extravaganza of wine. Attendees become part of a tradition that has drawn wine-lovers, wine novices, experts, grape growers, amateur and professional winemakers, chefs, wine appreciators, wine educators, restaurateurs and anyone wanting to learn more about wine. The annual conference brings professionals, serious connoisseur luncheons and dinners, tastings of hundreds of wines and royal treatment by winemakers and gastronomes together every November for over 45 years. Prominent American and international speakers conduct seminars and lectures on all aspects of wine appreciation, wine production, grape growing and cuisine. Members experience fine food at the finest American hotels and resorts. The annual conference brings professionals, serious amateurs and novices together to discover what is new in wine.

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Seyssuel is a small wine village with big ambitions. Located on the east bank of the Rhone River not far south of Lyon, it wants to grow up to be a Rhone cru. And, given time and hard work, it has a reasonable chance.

UP THE RHONE

In the Rhone Valley, any village can

Such upward mobility – or even the possibility of it – is frowned upon in Bordeaux and Burgundy. A century and a half ago, Medoc decided to rate its estates or châteaux, but not individual vineyards or terroirs per se, and the last significant change it made in those ratings was done 42 years ago when Mouton-Rothschild was moved up to first growth from second. St-Émilion also rates estates, but its attempts to update those ratings from time to time generally become mired in litigation brought by the losers. Pomerol doesn’t bother with ratings at all, letting the markets do that work.

In Burgundy, it is the terroir or vineyard that is rated, and most vineyards have multiple owners with varying philosophies, means and abilities. If someone who has vines in a great vineyard makes crappy wines, then buyer beware. Why change the ratings just because someone abuses the terroir?

The Rhone takes another approach. Instead of rating solo estates or vineyards with many producers, it rates the total production of the village where the wine is made. And it allows each village to attempt to collectively upgrade its appellation if its growers employ better viticulture and cellar work and if they make a compelling scientific case on paper. Seyssuel, then, is just one village that wants to officially become a Côtes du Rhônes village, but its desire to enter the system and move up in it is indicative of the Rhone mobility working at all levels.

There is a consumer benefit in this mobility. Because villages always have incentives to improve their wines, those trying to make the leap to the next level often become great value buys, that is, their wines often deliver higher quality than their classification and price promise. That is one reason that Côtes du Rhone and Côtes du Rhône Villages – red, white or rosé – are so popular with American consumers as everyday, at-home wines and in restaurants as by-the-glass pours and wine list entries whose wholesale price can be multiplied a couple of times and still be affordable.
Most Americans don’t care about wine ratings, except, perhaps, for those spending more than $30 a bottle for wines rated 90 points or more. Additionally, they care little, and know less, about classifications established by France’s official wine body, the INAO. Buyers who can’t make up their own minds tend to be influenced by recommendations from their friends or wine merchants.

But France is more aristocratic. Several French winemakers have told me that no matter what Robert Parker thinks of a wine or of their own reputation as a producer, no Frenchman will pay $50 if the label says “Vin de France,” the title most used for simple table wines.

Which is why the small group of 13 winemakers who have vineyards in Seyssuel has decided to work within the INAO system rather than fight it, even though most own more winemakers who bucked the Chianti system by using unapproved grapes to make wines that became known as “Super Tuscans.” Super-Rhones, anyone?

It is not an easy decision for someone like Stéphane Ogier, whose M&S Ogier Côte-Rotie sells in the U.S. for $100 a bottle. Because of Ogier’s reputation as a winegrower and the reputation of his importer, Robert Kacher, he can sell his Seyssuel syrah, “L’Âme Soeur,” in the U.S. for about $70 a bottle. But, taking the longer view, he is instead working to have Seyssuel become a cru like his Côtie-Rotie just across the river.
There are four steps that Seyssuel, or any other unrecognized village, needs to take to make it to cru status. The first is simply to be permitted to join the list of more than 170 towns who can grow grapes and make wines to be marketed as simple Côtes du Rhone red, rosé or white. Mostly they are red – a whopping 97 per cent.

A red Côtes du Rhone wine must be at least 50 per cent Grenache, which is a somewhat fruitier grape than Syrah, and at least 20 per cent Syrah and/or Mourvèdre combined. A rosé must have similar proportions. Bourboulenc, Grenache Blanc, Marsanne, Roussanne, Clairette and Viognier are the popular grapes that make up white Côtes du Rhone.

Of these 170-plus villages, 95 of them are permitted to be included in the next step up – Côtes de Rhone Villages, a classification created in 1966 to show a higher status than simple Côtes du Rhone, created in 1937.

The third step up is to become a “named village,” one that can have its name added to the CdRV label. There are 18 of these, and include such towns as Laudon, Séguret, Massif d’Uchaux, Plan de Dieu, Saint-Jervais and Chusclan.

The fourth and final level is cru status. There are 16 of them, including such traditional appellations a Châteauneuf-du-Pape, Condrieu and Hermitage, as well as newcomers such as Gigondas (AOC status granted in 1971), Vacqueyras (granted in 1990, the next after Gigondas) and Vinsobres (2006), all once CdRV named villages. Traditionalists argue that 16 crus are too many and worry that other named villages will soon be granted cru status. They argue for a two-tier system of crus.

If Seyssuel is awarded the simple CdeR status, it will be one of the few in the northern Rhone, as most villages are in the south. And it won’t be the only commune asking for village status, although they might be the best known.

Collectively, the “villages” account for 9,631 hectares (about 24,000 acres) of vineyards (about two-thirds from the named villages), producing about 356,347 hectoliters of wine – about 26.7 million bottles or around 2.2 million cases. If all goes as planned, within the next year or two the upwardly mobile Seyssuel will, at its 35 hectares (87 acres) add 100,000 bottles a year to that total.

About The Author
Roger Morris is a Pennsylvania-based writer who contributes article to several publications, including Wine Enthusiast, Town & Country, The Drinks Business, Beverage Media and TheDailyMeal.com. Roger can be reached at londonbritain@msn.com.
CHUCK WAGNER

In recognition of his lifelong dedication to wine, the American Wine Society celebrates the achievements of Chuck Wagner by presenting to him its Award of Merit for 2015.

Chuck’s involvement in wine started in 1971 when he joined his parents, Charlie and Lorna Belle Wagner in creating Caymus Vineyards. From the Wagner’s first vintage in 1972, the focus has been on excellence. They created a wine which has become the signature example of what a Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon should be. Caymus Special Selection is the only wine to be honored by receiving the Wine Spectator “Wine of the Year” award twice, first for the 1984 vintage and again for the 1990 vintage.

Caymus Vineyards has always been about family. Charlie, Lorna Bell and Chuck worked over thirty years building Caymus Cabernet Sauvignon. Today, Chuck’s daughter and two sons have joined the family business and expanded it to create the Wagner Family of Wines.

In appreciation for his lifelong devotion to both wine and family, the American Wine Society honors Chuck Wagner with its highest award.

PAM DAVEY

In recognition of her many years of service, the American Wine Society celebrates the contributions of Pam Davey by presenting her our 2015 Outstanding Member Award.

Her numerous contributions to AWS include:
- AWS member since 1976
- Cleveland AWS Chapter Founder in 1978
- Cleveland Chapter Chairperson for three terms
- Regional Vice President
- 1984 National Conference Co-Chairperson
- 2000 National Conference Wine Procurement Chair
- AWS Secretary, 1999
- AWS Vice-president, 2000
- AWS President 2001
- Founded the AWS National Tasting Project in 1990
- Editor of the AWS News since 2007

Pam Davey’s record of service speaks volumes about her dedication to the American Wine Society as well as her willingness to lead by example.

It is with great honor we present Pam Davey the American Wine Society’s highest membership award.
The first time I travelled to Spain, at the ripe old age of 14, I was on my own with a profound interest in cheap gin and topless girls on the beaches up the coast from Barcelona. The next time I visited Spain, last month with my wife of 36 years, it was a bit more genteel. I was headed to Jerez on the serious business of inoculating myself with Sherry.

Temperatures were cresting at a mighty dry 109°F, cactus and grape vines (Palomino) were looking a little peaked, baking on the white limestone soils a few feet from a huge invasive Ikea shopping plaza next door to the elegant Bodegas Valdespino — which Robert Parker had anointed “the Domaine de Romanee Conti of Jerez.” I was bouncing off the walls with the excitement of understanding better the terroir of Sherry. Jaime Gil, the Area Manager for the José Estévez portfolio (which includes Valdespino) met us, showed us the facility and created the love triangle between Sherry, my wife Lee and me.

This much I knew before arriving:

The name “Sherry” probably represents a British adaptation of the city’s Arabic name, which is pronounced Sherish. No winemaking or drinking under Moorish rule. Dummies.

The beverage apparently originated with the early Phoenician settlement of the Iberian Peninsula, around 600 BC, making it one of the world’s oldest wines. In 1933, the Jerez Denominación de Origen was the first Spanish denominación to be officially recognized and now represents about 27,000 acres of vines.

Jerez de la Frontera is a city, about five miles inland from the Atlantic Ocean in southwest Spain known for flamenco, sherry, horses and the Grand Prix motorcycle race. It is a point on the “Sherry Triangle,” an area in the province of Cádiz between Jerez de la Frontera and the port towns of Sanlúcar de Barrameda, and El Puerto de Santa María.

Inland, bodegas in Jerez are built to permit the in-flow of cooling night air. When we were there the cellular temperatures were comfortably cool. On the coast, wine is aged in the Atlantic’s atmosphere of warmer winter and cooler summer. The area enjoys yearly almost 300 days of sun. Annual rainfall is about 16 inches, mostly between October and May.

THE PLACE

Some people say that Sherry is all about the place – because of its profound soil types and climate and the fact that there is so little variation in cellar practices among winemakers. The area has a Subtropical Mediterra-
nean climate with ocean influences, characterized by mild wet winters and long hot dry summers. The countryside is rolling hills and valleys where coastal vineyards tend to be sandy and inland vineyards have some clay and pale white calcareous/limestone soils, known to form a surface skin sealing in needed moisture.

THE PROCESS
Others say that Sherry is all about the process. Winemakers use only one grape variety (Palomino) for dry sherry and one or two other varieties (Pedro Ximénez and Moscatel) for sweet Sherries. They age the wine in old American oak barrels. Signature flavors occur as a result of one of two processes: oxidative or biological. After initial sugar fermentation then being fortified with brandy (to around 15% alcohol) the wine is allowed to age in barrels. Some styles are oxidized by exposure to oxygen for several years. Some are protected from oxygen by a layer of yeast flor that forms in each barrel during aging. This is considered biological. During aging of a minimum of three years, multiple vintages are blended using the “solera” system. You can “google” that for details.

Here’s what I thought I knew, but better understand now after a few weeks of tasting like mad from Jerez to Malaga to Rioja to Madrid:

**Fino** and **Manzanilla** are terms for dry pale Sherries, biologically aged, with about 15% alcohol. Manzanilla is said to be slightly salty and reflects being aged in cool coastal atmosphere (rather than inland). These are considered to be the most delicate Sherries. My favorites.

**Oloroso** is aged oxidatively and fortified to about 18% alcohol. It is deeper brown and richer in flavor than a Fino or Manzanilla. Legally it is dry. My favorite.

**Amontillado** is dry, fortified to about 15% alcohol, first aged biologically, then aged oxidatively, which makes it darker than Fino and lighter than Oloroso. My favorite.

**Palo Cortado** is a style of Sherry aged like an Amontillado, typically for three or four years, but subsequently develops a character closer to an Oloroso, separated and bottled. My favorite.

**Jerez Dulce** (Sweet or Cream Sherries) are made either by fermenting dried grapes, which produces an intensely sweet dark brown or black wine, or by blending sweeter wines or grape juice with a drier style. My favorite.

I knew going in that Sherry winemakers have great and untiring palates able to taste through hundreds of barrels, selecting for each style of Sherry, but the latest and greatest thing I heard on this trip is the process of *en rama*, explained to me as “unfiltered.” At José Restaurant on Bermondsey Street, London, following my week in Sherry, I noticed the color of en rama Fernando Castilla Fino was darker
than a typical Fino or Manzanilla. The sommelier explained that because it was unfiltered it had not been exposed to carbon, a common treatment that removes some color.

**BACK TO VALDESPINO**

This is what I didn’t know:

Valdespino, part of the larger Grupo Estevez with roots dating back to 1809, brings process and place together by doing individual bottlings from single vineyards with unique soils and climates – and aging in the same area where the grapes are grown. I was fairly vibrating by the time the bottles came out. I just have to mention a couple that blew my mind:

**Inocente** – a Fino from their highest elevation vineyard, hand-picked, biologically aged 10 years. Powerful with firm tannins, slight heat, long lasting flavor of almonds…OMG.

**Don Gonzalo, VOS** – Oloroso, aged 20 years, medium depth mahogany, big nose of orange and caramel, hint of sweetness.

**Cardenal, VORS** – Palo Cortado, 20 years in solera, 20 in bottle with a huge nose of caramel and Middle-East spices, rich, slightly sweet.

**Niños, VORS** – Super sweet Pedro Ximenez, with perfect acidity, very dark, soy, plum, coffee, raisins. 160 half bottles produced last year. I could still smell this rare and wonderful wine on my hand that evening as we walked to dinner in Cádiz.

And, finally, my favorite lesson:

The delicate ceramic bowl of potato chips placed before us as we tasted the Valdespino wines was surprising until I tasted how well that salty oiliness paired with the acidity and nutty minerality of the Sherries. It’s a lazy sod who relies exclusively on the ubiquitous cocktail hour pairing with salted peanuts. It’s an even lazier and happier sloth who discovers how easily dry Sherries pair with an incredible range of fish, poultry, game and pork. And, if for some strange reason sipping Sherry with dessert is not your thing, you can drizzle raisiny Pedro Ximénez, El Candado on vanilla ice cream for a simple heavenly pleasure.

When to drink them? It was universally recommended to us to drink dry Sherries within a few hours or days of opening. And sweeter ones, preserved by their sugar content, within a week or so.

**About The Author**

Eric Miller has been an east coast American winemaker for more than 40 years, first at his family’s Benmarl Vineyards in New York State and then at Chaddsford Winery in Pennsylvania, which he founded and co-owned from 1982 through 2012. He has spent all of his adult life growing, conceiving and producing wines, learning and teaching about wine, traveling to wine regions around the world, and, most importantly, tasting and drinking wine. He can be reached at info@ericmillerwine.com.
In 2015, sitting quietly at home, Jerry Rodrigues celebrated with a glass of ruby-red wine. It had been 20 years in the making and he was toasting the birth of a completely new wine. He was the first in the world to taste it. In his glass was Cabernet labrusco, a new grape variety that he had created.

In 1994, Jerry was a lecturer in Biochemistry, Molecular Biology Techniques and Immunology at the University of Stellenbosch in South Africa. He took pollen from a vine to fertilize the flowers of a Cabernet Sauvignon vine. Both vines grew in his father’s garden in Plumstead, a suburb of Cape Town, where his father harvested their grapes to ferment into home-made wine.

When the resulting bunch of grapes had fully ripened early the following year he gathered the seeds. Jerry planted them in pots in his own garden later that year, in the Southern Hemisphere’s spring of September 1995.

Jerry told me: “I actually planted 44 seeds. This represented all the berries that I obtained from the single bunch of grapes that I manually pollinated.”

The resulting new seedling vines were left to their own devices in plastic pots. As the years progressed, many seedlings died.

“This is how natural selection operates,” says Jerry. “When just 10 were left I personally grafted them onto resistant rootstocks, but 19 years after propagation only two vigorous seedlings survived, that I’d numbered two and seven.”

“Seedling 7 showed leaf characteristics identical to that of the seed parent Cabernet Sauvignon, so it was probably self-pollinated, however it died in the 20th year. Seedling 2 survived as a result of its perfect adaptation to the climate of the Western Cape and its vigor was apparent at an early stage of its propagation.”

One parent was Cabernet Sauvignon, but the other’s name had been lost. Jerry’s father had died in 1998 and his property sold to new owners who pulled up the vines.

Jerry analyzed his new vine’s DNA and found it had a disease-resistant gene also found in Italian Lambrusco as well as in some American Vitis labrusca varieties including...
Catawba and Concord.

But he was no closer to identifying the variety he had taken pollen from. Then he had a breakthrough when browsing in an antiquarian bookshop. “I found a 1960s catalogue from Pickstone’s Nurseries which was in Cape Town,” he says. “I reasoned that my father would have bought his half a dozen or so grapevine varieties, which he planted in his backyard in 1960, from such a well-known nursery. The characteristics of the old grapevine very closely matched the description of the Barbarossa grapevine in that 1960s fruit catalogue.”

But he was still not convinced. Because of similarities with Lambrusco he contacted an Agricultural Institute in Turin, Italy. He says “they agreed to collaborate with me in order to positively identify the pollen parent of my new grapevine offspring by analyzing the DNA of my new vine.

To my surprise the data fit perfectly with the French variety Danugue noir. It was really a stroke of luck, when you realize that there are still literally hundreds of Vitis vinifera cultivars whose DNA details have yet to be uploaded onto databases around the world.”

Another old book, ‘A Treatise on Viticulture,’ written in 1927 by Stellenbosch University Professor Abraham Perold, identified the table grape Barbarossa as being a synonym of Danugue. “Now I knew for sure that my father had actually bought a Barbarossa grapevine, probably from Pickstone’s Nurseries, and that it was the pollen from that grapevine that I had used in my grapevine crossing experiment.”

Jerry registered the new variety under the name Cabernet labrusco in 2013 with South Africa’s Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries.

I asked him about the name, which sits confusingly between Lambrusco, a northern Italian variety cultivated in Emilia-Romagna that enjoys little favor, and the American species Labrusca that enjoys even less favor with wine lovers. Jerry says it’s because the ruby-red wine looks like Lambrusco and it has a disease-resistance gene found in Labrusca.

“I decided to use a similar-sounding, and appealing, name for my new variety—labrusco,” he said. “One of the main reasons why I decided to do the experiment at that time...
was precisely because I knew that my father’s grapevine, which I now know is Danugue, was very old and so it followed that it ought to have had some inherent disease-resistance for it to have survived so long. Another reason was that its grape bunches were very, very large. Since I knew that Cabernet Sauvignon is a shy bearer of grapes in the Western Cape’s climatic conditions and its bunches are very much smaller than they are in Europe, it made some sense to try out a cross-pollination experiment.”

I asked Jerry what type of wine his new variety produces. “What I have tasted in my wine so far, and I am not an expert, is that this deep ruby-red wine is full of red berry flavors,” he says. “My laboratory tests showed a sugar content of 23˚ Brix and a TA (titratable acids) of approximately 8.3 g per liter. The TA is slightly higher than most ordinary wine musts, so it seems that it is a good wine to mature on oak, for a short while, before being used.”

Dr. Jerry Rodrigues retired from the Department of Molecular and Cell Biology in 2013 and now concentrates on learning more about his new variety. He has been experimenting with wood aging using oak chips and found after five months the red berry flavors were slightly more noticeable as acidity declined.

Jerry is hoping his appealing ruby-red wine variety will be adopted by commercial wineries looking for a productive grape with good disease resistance.
Some things in the wine business are just fun to do; after all we make a product containing alcohol and we do this on purpose. Actually it’s the object of the whole process. Since all alcohol comes from fermentation, anyone who has made wine knows that it’s basically simple — we use yeast to convert sugars into alcohol. We know this works because at the end all the sugar is gone, but just how much of the good stuff did we actually make? That’s the question.

Yes, it is possible, and good practice, to calculate the amount of potential alcohol before starting fermentation. To be within federal regulations, wine has to have an alcohol between 7 and 14 percent. So this can be considered a basic target. To know how close you are, take the brix and times it by 0.54. This will give you the approximate potential alcohol your wine will produce. But since we are dealing with the Feds, approximate just won’t do; we have to know for sure.

Why so fussy? Well it has to do with taxes, or as the IRS calls it, revenue. Tax rate is determined by the percent alcohol and the size (production) of the winery. Small wineries (less than 100,000 gallons) get off easy — they get a 90-cent credit and only have to pay 17 cents per gallon for wine between 7-14 percent. If the alcohol is higher than 14 percent then the tax increases by a big jump to 67 cents per gallon (after the small winery credit). And if this is not enough, the wine label has an alcohol declaration on it and the wine actually has to be within that declaration.

Testing for alcohol in wine goes back a long way. The most common device in use today is an ebulliometer, manufactured in France by Dujurdin-Salleron in 1870 and is still in use today. The cool part of this thing is that it has changed very little since first issued.

TIMELESS AND TESTED

Testing for alcohol in wine goes back a long way. The most common device in use today is an ebulliometer, manufactured in France by Dujurdin-Salleron in 1870 and is still in use today. The cool part of this thing is that it has changed very little since first issued.

After using one for thirty years, I believe the reason it is still around is that it is simple to use and very accurate.

It is most accurate when used to test dry wines, so it is best to do tests before wines are back sweetened. If there is some residual sugar the sample can be diluted into equal parts, tested then extrapolated by the division to get the results.
Usually sold as an entire unit, the kit contains a wooden box containing the ebuliometer, (some assembly) a thermometer, a measure, a calculating scale and an alcohol lamp, priced a little high for a hobbyist, but not out of reach for a small winery, at about $800.

The value of having one in house is always knowing the alcohol values of your wines.

It comes in two parts (in the box) and needs to be assembled. There is the boiling chamber (lower part) and the cooling chamber (upper part). Both simply screw together.

Once assembled then you need to set the boiling point of water. The devise works by using the difference in boiling points of water and wine, adjusted for barometric pressure (weather, altitude). Sounds complicated but it’s easy and fun because it’s so neat to use a device so old that still works. Everyone I have taught to use it has had fun; you can pick it up in about fifteen minutes. And I must admit I still get a kick out of it every time I use it even after all these years.

To set the boiling point fill the measure to the line for water (eau in French) and pour it carefully into the boiling chamber. Be sure the pet cock is closed.

Place the thermometer in the opening in the boiling chamber and light and set the alcohol lamp underneath. Wait for the water to boil. Watch for the mercury to raise and wait for it to hold for at least ten seconds at its highest before taking a reading. Once you have the reading for the boiling point of water then take the calculating scale and set the mark to that temp. You are now set to test the wine.

First remove the thermometer, open the pet cock, drain the water and rinse the boiling chamber with a little of the wine to be tested. Be sure the chamber is empty. Now close pet cock, fill the measure to the line marked wine (vin in French) and pour carefully into boiling chamber. Here you will have to do an extra step, fill the cooling chamber (upper part) with cool water to its mark. Replace the thermometer and light and set the alcohol lamp. Wait for the wine to boil. Talk the reading at the highest point of the mercury after it stops moving and mark it down. Extinguish the lamp and take the calculating scale and find the temp for the wine and directly across from that is the % alcohol.

On average, the boiling point of water will be around 95.5°C, the scale of the thermometer is divided in tenths of a degree. The boiling point of wine is usually in the lower nineties or upper eighties. Be sure when taking readings you have the right tenth.

Once the boiling point is set usually you can do tests for hours without retesting the water boiling point, however if it’s a time of bad weather then it may be necessary to do it several time while testing. I once tried to run tests while it was near hurricane conditions outside, not a good idea; had to wait until the next day.

Like any testing if you get an unusual result then test it again. It only takes a few minutes and is worth the peace of mind.

The device does require some light maintenance and is best to use only distilled water in the boiling chamber. Some scale will build up form boiling wine in there through.

The recommended cleaning method is to fill the lower chamber with 50ml of sodium hydroxide (same amount as measured wine) and let it boil for several minutes without a thermometer. Empty and you will see a lot of nasty stuff come out. Let cool and rinse well any you’ll be ready for the next round of testing.

There other ways to test for alcohol, none as much fun. You can send wine out to a lab where more sophisticated methods will be used like Gas Chromatography or Near Infrared Spectroscopy (GC and NIR). It almost sounds scary, certainly not wine like. Whatever you choose to do it’s an answer you will eventually have to have. Why not enjoy doing it?

About The Author

Wayne Stitzer was “Connecticut Wine Person of the Year 2014.” He is a professional member of AWS, a frequent guest speaker and celebrating 30 years in the industry. He can be found at www.winemaking-help.com.
Without Bordeaux there would be no Meritage. Que voulez-vous dire? (What do you mean?) While Meritage wines are uniquely American, they are an homage/tribute to the red wines of Bordeaux. Make no mistake, the wines are very different and yet share qualities and characteristics wine lovers on both sides of the Atlantic enjoy. We will focus on the red versions of Bordeaux and Meritage.

A bit of history is essential in understanding both Bordeaux and Meritage wines. Bordeaux is big, not only in terms of reputation but also in terms of production and acreage. For many wine consumers Bordeaux symbolizes the best and finest wines in the world. For other Francophiles, Burgundy produces the epitome of red wine. Either way, Bordeaux’s reputation is unmatched for making some of the world’s finest and long-lived wines. We will limit our comparison to Bordeaux’s red wines, leaving Sauternes, Bordeaux’s exquisite white dessert wine, for another day. Meritage wines, on the other hand are a very small percentage of wines crafted in California and known mostly to American wine enthusiasts.

Bordeaux History

The Celts settled in Bordeaux and were followed by the Romans who established Aquitaine but lost it to the Vandals (yes, they were a rowdy group). Visigoths, Franks and the Vikings all stopped by for a while. Charlemagne imposed a modicum of order in the region but the wine business really got going when the English got involved. The folks from Britain really do enjoy their wine (they’re also responsible for the Port wine trade as well)! When Eleanor of Aquitaine became engaged to Henry, Duke of Normandy, he quickly became King Henry II of England in 1154. The wine business now began to flourish as Bordeaux and England were now ruled by the same family.

As a result of this marriage Bordeaux wines were imported to London virtually duty-free and in the 1300s approximately a quarter of production went to those thirsty Brits. By the 1700s wine companies would buy wine in the barrel and age it before bottling it. The wineries themselves did little or no bottling themselves. This merchant class is responsible for the reputation of Bordeaux today. Today the wineries age and bottle the wine at their Châteaux.

The Bordeaux Blend

Red Bordeaux wines are made from five grapes. They are Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Cabernet Franc, Petit Verdot, and Malbec. Yes, the very same Malbec grape that’s used
to produce the oh so popular Argentinean wine today! Actually, Malbec is seldom used in modern red Bordeaux.

Usually Cabernet Sauvignon or Merlot is the dominant variety in most modern red Bordeaux wines. Cabernet Franc comes in third, followed by Petite Verdot and infrequently, Malbec.

Bordeaux is virtually always a blend of grapes. The blend itself varies from one producer to another, and from vintage to vintage. Factors affecting the blend are the particular Château’s style, the winemakers preferences, and the growing season of the particular vintage.

Petite Verdot produces intense wine. Dark deep color combined with high tannins are similarities shared with Cabernet Sauvignon. It’s extremely aromatic and contributes flavors of plums, blackberries, and cedar to the blend. A “less is more” approach to using this grape is frequently adopted by winemakers.

Malbec is one of the traditional five varieties allowed in red Bordeaux. However it’s seldom used in France today, seeming more at home in Argentina.

by Michael Schafer, CSW

Meritage History

Meritage is a latecomer to the to the world of wine. Created in 1998 by a group of American vintners, Meritage is an unusual word and wine for a variety of reasons. Let’s clarify the pronunciation of Meritage. It is not, as is frequently heard, pronounced merit azh, softening the last syllable to make it sound French. This invented proprietary word rhymes with heritage. The combination of the two words merit and heritage is a result of a contest sponsored by the Meritage Association, now Meritage Alliance, in 1998. Now that we know how to pronounce this type of wine, let’s investigate it further.

Rules and regulations provide structured framework for wine production on a multiplicity of different levels. Just as some Italian winemakers were frustrated with Italy’s regulations on producing and labeling wines, some Napa Valley winemakers were frustrated with the former US Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF). Don’t you just love that combination of products in one agency! The Italians, frustrated with their regulations, created the category of wine known as super Tuscans to
avoid breaking Italian law. Our California producers wanted to produce high-quality wines in the Bordeaux tradition, blending the best proportions of grapes as they saw fit. In the US, a wine labeled “Cabernet Sauvignon” must be made from a minimum of 75% Cabernet Sauvignon grapes. So these intrepid winemakers created a new category of wine. Voilà – Meritage is born!

Grapes

The red Bordeaux varieties allowed are: Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Cabernet Franc, Malbec, Petit Verdot. The rare and unusual varietals of St. Macaire, Gros Verdot and Carmenère are also permitted, but very seldom used.

Characteristics

To legally use the Meritage name, the wine must be a blend of at least two of the traditional Bordeaux grape varieties. No single grape variety can make up more than 90% of the blended wine. The Meritage Alliance, a non-profit entity must issue a license enabling the winery to use the term Meritage.

Some of the best known producers of Meritage from the Napa Valley are Opus One, Franciscan Magnificat, Quintessa and Joseph Phelps Insignia. Jordan and Lyeth from Sonoma County and Justin Isosceles from Paso Robles are excellent examples as well.

Enjoyment

The beauty of blends is that winemakers can use their skills to create the best wine possible from the grapes available to them. As with proper food and wine pairing, the sum truly is greater than the parts!

Whether you enjoy wines from Bordeaux or Meritage wines or even better, both, like which you drink and drink what you like. Cheers!

About The Author

Michael Schafer Esq. is a sommelier and CSW (Certified Specialist of Wine) based in Michigan. As an instructor at Baker College and Dorsey Schools, he teaches classes about wine, beer and spirits. He also appears at wine festivals and events. For more information, visit Michael on the Web at www.WineCounselor.net, Twitter: @WineCounselor and Facebook: Wine Counselor.

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FINGER LAKES RIESLING “DAZZLES” DOWN UNDER

This fall, Sheldrake Point Winery’s 2014 Wild Ferment Riesling Ice Wine took top honors out of nearly 500 Rieslings from around the world at the Canberra International Riesling Competition, grabbing the “Best of Show” title, earning 98 points on a 100-point scale.

Known as the “Cannes” of Riesling, the competition garnered entries from Australia, the Czech Republic, France, Germany, New Zealand, South Africa, and the United States.

Out of nearly 500 wines in the competition, only 31 came from the United States, including 18 from the Finger Lakes region, which earned nine medals. Other top U.S. winners included Chateau Ste. Michelle 2015 Ethos Reserve Late Harvest Riesling, Horse Heaven Hills (Elite, 96) and 2014 Columbia Valley Cold Creek Vineyard Riesling (Gold, 95) from Washington State; and Black Star Farms 2013 Arcturos Dry Riesling (Elite, 96) and 2014 Horse Heaven Hills (Elite, 96) and 2014 Arcturos Riesling (Gold, 95) from Michigan.

TCM LAUNCHES WINE CLUB

Turner Classic Movies (TCM) recently launched the TCM Wine Club, a new venture which curates originally produced wines inspired by classic films as well as expertly selected varietals from renowned vineyards around the globe – all with the convenience of home delivery. TCM has partnered with Direct Wines, specialists in direct-to-consumer wine partnerships, as well as Wines That Rock, the pop culture wine company behind classic Rock ‘n’ Roll-influenced wines and more, to create an exclusive club for film buffs and wine enthusiasts alike.

As part of the inaugural offer, new members will receive 15 special bottles including the first-ever release of Cafe Zoetrope, a custom-crafted red from the Francis Ford Coppola Winery. Members will also enjoy True Grit Limited Edition Zinfandel along with The Essentials Cabernet Sauvignon – the first in a series of single-varietal wines, specifically curated for TCM Wine Club members, to showcase the world’s great grapes.

Each quarter thereafter, club members will receive 12 bottles encouraging a journey of discovery around the world, which include movie-themed wines handpicked by TCM Wine Club experts. All cases will be accompanied by detailed background notes on each wine and suggested movie pairings.

TCM Wine Club will debut with a special offer of $79.99 (plus $19.99 for shipping) for the first quarter shipment; a savings of over $100. The club is fully customized, with future selections tailored to each member’s personal tastes. There is a 20% savings on all future cases and a 100% guarantee on every bottle shipped, so members only ever pay for wines they love. For more information and to view a wine TCM Wine Club overview with TCM host Ben Mankiewicz, please visit TCMWineClub.com.

WOMEN IN WINE MEET TO DISCUSS INDUSTRY

The fourth annual Women in Wine Leadership Symposium (WWLS) was conducted October 5th at the Helen Mills event space in Manhattan, gathering together leading women in the industry to explore critical issues facing women in wine today. The WWLS, hosted by The Winebow Group, is the first event of its kind with a mission to empower and educate women in the wine industry through a series of provocative panel discussions and wine tastings.

Over 100 women wine professionals participated in the half-day symposium: winemakers from around the world, sommeliers, retailers, educators, and journalists. Panels addressed topics such as “Taking Intelligent Career Risks” and “Fostering Diversity through Inclusive Leadership.” Women winemakers and winery owners led a guided tasting and wove personal histories and career insights into their comments.

Moderator Madeline Triffon is recognized as a guiding light and mentor in the industry. As the WWLS moderator for three years running, Triffon shared her thoughts, “I’m personally inspired and encouraged every year I participate in this symposium. The panelists collectively display courage in sharing their stories and assessing lessons learned in a whole-hearted manner not often seen.” She continued, “Women at all stages of their lives and careers benefit from attending.”

2015 — A GREAT YEAR FOR BORDEAUX

The first results for the 2015 vintage are in and it’s confirmed: 2015 will be a great vintage. Bordeaux and Bordeaux Superieur AOC vineyards benefited from this year’s ideal weather conditions. The months of June and July – dry, hot, and sunny – permitted a very homogeneous flowering and veraison. The months of August and September had perfect temperatures for ripening the grapes that consisted of dry yet not excessively hot days, and cool nights. Fine weather during the harvest allowed each parcel to obtain optimal maturity in perfect health.

“2015 is going to be magnificent and the winemakers of Bordeaux and Bordeaux Superieure are very proud and happy,” said Herve Grandeur, President of the Bordeaux & Bordeaux Superieure AOC Winemakers’ Association. “This level of quality acknowledgments and rewards the hard work and investments made throughout the year.”

The harvest for Bordeaux Blanc and Cremant began at the end of August and promises great quality with classic typicity and intense aromas. For Bordeaux Rosé, picking began the first week of September, and shows excellent quality with beautiful color, freshness, and luscious aromas.

In mid-September the harvest for reds kicked off with the Merlots, followed by the Cabernets a week later. Thanks to excellent weather conditions, pristine grapes were picked at ideal maturity. The reds have notes of ripe fruit. Good color extraction and the significant presence of quality tannins suggest wines with intense color and full-bodied on the palate. 2015 promises to be exceptional for red Bordeaux and Bordeaux Superieur red.

The volume of the harvest for the Planet Bordeaux appellations is estimated at 3.2 million hectoliters (426.5 million bottles).
The Riesling grape is an extremely flexible varietal. While Riesling does produce some of the world’s finest dessert wines, it is not merely a semi-sweet wine reserved only for novice wine drinkers. Many wines produced from this great grape are bone-dry. The range of Rieslings is wide and deep.

Originally from Germany, this chameleon of a grape reflects the terroir of its origins even more than most other varietals. Mouth-watering Rieslings are produced in most of Germany, Alsace, Austria and in California, Washington, Australia, New York and Michigan. Aficionados argue that the best wines come from the Mosel-Saar-Ruwer area of Germany. Grown on hillsides along steep river banks, grapes from this region give wines of magnificent depth and longevity.

This white grape prefers to be bottled by itself rather than blended with other grapes. As with many wines, there are two “styles” of Riesling, the German style and the French style. If only partially fermented, the residual sugar left in the wine creates varying levels of sweetness. These levels range from medium dry to unctuously sweet in the Ger-

There are six grapes that you really need to know about. Riesling, Sauvignon Blanc and Chardonnay are the white grapes. The reds are Pinot Noir, Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon. These grape varietals are known and produced around the world. We’ll learn a bit about each grape, its aromas and flavors, and potential food pairings.
man style. The French style fully ferments the grapes to produce a dry wine. A rule of thumb (with exceptions of course) is: the lower the alcohol the sweeter the wine and, correspondingly, the higher the alcohol, the dryer the wine.

Some of the most famous Rieslings are dessert wines. They range from late harvest to rot wine (not what you think) to ice wine. These can be rather expensive but are some of the best dessert wines available.

This varietal makes one of the most aromatic wines available. Tree fruits, such as apricots, peaches are frequently associated with Riesling. Lemons, limes and raisins are other enticing aromas found in your glass. Some wines have a bouquet of flint, petroleum and almost steely-like scents. The terroir or sense of place has a huge impact on the aroma of the wine.

Tropical fruit flavors along with apples, peaches and pears are all part of the Riesling flavor profile. Honey and golden raisins may make an appearance! The body/weight of the wine depends upon the sugar/alcohol levels mentioned earlier. The sweeter, lower alcohol wines are fuller, richer and heavier than the drier, higher alcohol Rieslings.

This wine is one of the easiest to pair with food. Lighter fish dishes, whether poached or sautéed work well with drier versions of Riesling. Sushi pairs very well with French style Rieslings. The intense aromas and flavors of middle-weight Rieslings work well with salty, spicy, fatty foods. Pork and poultry with béchamel, cream-based and hollandaise sauces all pair well with this flexible grape. Spicy Asian and even some Mexican dishes are complimented using the German style of wine. Fruit-focused desserts are complimented by late harvest wines produced from this versatile varietal. Items like fruit tarts, cobblers, pies and pineapple upside down cake are enhanced by sweeter, heavier Rieslings.

About The Author

Michael Schafer Esq. is a sommelier and CSW (Certified Specialist of Wine) based in Michigan. As an instructor at Baker College and Dorsey Schools, he teaches classes about wine, beer and spirits. He also appears at wine festivals and events. For more information, visit Michael on the Web at www.WineCounselor.net, Twitter: @WineCounselor and Facebook: Wine Counselor.
21 Wines to Watch

Ellen Landis, CS, CSW

Bremgman Brothers | 2013 Rosé | Leelanau Peninsula, Michigan

This vivacious Rosé, made of 100% Cabernet Franc, boasts an eye catching red fleshy watermelon hue. Tantalizing the nose and mouth are shimmering aromas and flavors of sweet wild cherry, pomegranate, and fresh cranberry sauce that entwine melodiously with spice and floral notes. The wine exhibits precise balance with a racy level of acidity and great tension throughout; stunning.

Food pairing: Linguine with shrimp scampi | SRP: $24.95 | www.bremgmanbrothers.com

LaMontagne Winery | 2012 Kessler-Haak Vineyard “Theron” Pinot Noir | Sta. Rita Hills, California

Aromatically alluring, this fully flavored Pinot Noir aged in new and seasoned French oak shines with depth and elegance. Spicy, forest floor elements accentuate red raspberry and black cherry fruit while the underlying oak and refined tannins contribute perfect supporting roles. The beautiful composition transports the wine to a memorable finish.

Food pairing: Savory charcuterie | SRP: $65 | www.lamontagnewinery.com

Soldier Creek Winery | 2014 Brianna | Iowa

Imagine arranging a fragrant bouquet of white flowers and enjoying a tasty bite while sipping a succulent white wine on a sun speckled front porch. Refreshing and vivid with loads of juicy tropical fruit at the core, this sweet (5.5% RS) Brianna with delicate floral notes and a buoyant disposition is a lovely choice for a dreamy, palate pleasing afternoon.

Food pairing: Goat cheese/dried fig lavosh roll ups | SRP: $20 | www.lamontagnewinery.com

Villa Mari Vineyards | 2012 Praefectus | Old Mission Peninsula, Michigan

Enticingly aromatic with floral and spice on the nose, this blend of Cabernet Franc and Cabernet Sauvignon is mesmeric. Nicely structured with a velvety mouth feel and firm tannins, it displays luscious flavors of cassis and wild berry, graphite, savoy spice, and subdued oak melding in harmony on the palate. A distinctive wine that finishes with persistence.

Food pairing: Moroccan spiced lamb | SRP: $35 | www.lamontagnewinery.com

Morgan Vineyards | 2013 Double L Vineyard Syrah | Santa Lucia Highlands, California

Just try to resist the expressive aromas of sizzling bacon! The meatiness carries through the palate, entwining with black currant, graphite, boysenberry and black raspberry flavors heightened by sage and savory spice notes. A multifaceted, smoothly textured Syrah with pristine balance that is approachable now, and promises age-worthiness, too.

Food pairing: Bacon wrapped filet mignon | SRP: $42 | www.morganwinery.com

Shady Lane Cellars | 2013 Coop de Blanc | Leelanau Peninsula, Michigan

This delightfully sweet (5.0% RS) white wine, composed of 100% Vignoles, is well balanced with generous fruit and good acidity. Not at all cloying, it is very energetic and clean on the palate. Grapefruit, dried pineapple and tangy mango fruits showcased at the core are highlighted by pretty tingles of honey and toasted sesame seeds.

Food pairing: Chicken and white bean stew | SRP: $12.95 | www.shadylaneellswells.com

Testarossa Winery | 2013 Pinot Noir | Santa Lucia Highlands, California

Decant this beauty to unveil an intensely aromatic, terroir driven Pinot Noir. Purity and depth shine here with well-defined layers of red and black cherry, ollallieberry, pomegranate seed, spiced oak, whispers of fresh herbs and star anise enlivening the palate. It is meticulous in balance, with fine-grained tannins and lively acids supporting the beautiful fruit.

Food pairing: Roasted duck with hoisin glaze | SRP: $45 | www.testarossa.com

Easley Winery | 2014 Traminette | American AWA, grown and produced in Indiana

Gloriously expressive on the nose, the floral and spice notes entrance you before the wine graces your lips. Guava, pineapple, orange zest and honeyuckle link with spicy components that titillate the palate and continue to captivate through the lifted finish. A bright, breezy and delectable semi-dry Traminette.

Food pairing: Caramelized onion and spinach pizza | SRP: $15 | www.easleywinery.com

Cakebread Cellars | 2012 Apple Barn Vineyard Pinot Noir | Anderson Valley, California

At first provocative whiff there is no question what awaits you in the glass; it is an exquisite Pinot Noir. Floral and forest floor notes harmonize with layers of bright red cherries, pomegranate, hints of cola, well integrated French oak and exotic tea spices all wrapped around silky tannins. The balance is finely tuned, the wine finely structured, and the finish is mighty long.

Food pairing: Seared ahi tuna | SRP: $55 | www.cakebread.com

Bel Lago Vineyards and Winery | 2013 Pinot Grigio | Leelanau Peninsula, Michigan

This enchanting Pinot Grigio is one of (if not the!) most expressive and aromatic examples of Pinot Grigio I have tasted. It spills over with gorgeous vibrancy and personality. Juicy grapefruit at the core is joined by complementary flavors of green apple, fresh chopped herbs and a dash of minerality. Snappy acidity keeps it lifted through the thirst-quenching finish; brilliant.

Food pairing: Zucchini Gruyere tart | SRP: $17 | www.belago.com
**Engracia Wines | 2013 Silva Vineyard Chardonnay | Sonoma Coast, California**

Burgundian in style, this elegant Chardonnay opens with seductive scents of fresh pear and toasted coconut. Sleek and streamlined as layers of baked pear, citrus, spiced apple sauce and mineral notes unwind scumptuously onto the palate. The balance is clear-cut, and appealing oak spice from neutral French oak barrel aging adds further dimension.

Food pairing: Mt Tam triple cream cheese | SRP: $30 | www.engraciawines.com

**Manzoni Vineyards | 2012 Home Vineyard Syrah | Santa Lucia Highlands, California**

At first whiff, violets and black fruits entice you into the glass. This fleshy, firmly structured Syrah fills the mouth with juicy black plums, blackberries, braised meat nuances, hints of oak and savory spice. The dense fruit is reined in by lively acidity, the tannins are supple, and the aftertaste is striking and persistent.

Food pairing: Slow cooked venison | SRP: $32 | www.manzioniwines.com

**Chateau Fontaine | 2013 Woodland White | Leelanau Peninsula, Michigan**

Captivating tree fruit and herb aromas beckon you into a glass of this lively dry white wine, crafted of 100% Auxerrois. Delicious flavors of Granny Smith apple and roasted pear chutney at the core are highlighted by crushed herb notes and a bright splash of citrus. Well balanced with a delightful savory aftertaste.

Food pairing: Gravlax with fresh dill | SRP: $17 | www.chateaufontaine.com

**Schug Carneros Estate Winery | 2012 “Schug Estate” Pinot Noir | Carneros (Sonoma), California**

A perfumed bouquet starts the juices flowing with this elegantly crafted wine. Filling the palate are mouth-watering flavors of spiced berry compote and Bing cherry, mingling with forest floor and herbaceous notes. Toasted oak elements (from 16 month aging in new and seasoned French oak) sit ideally in the background, a superbly balanced Pinot Noir.

Food pairing: Roasted filet of salmon | SRP: $45 | www.schugwinery.com

**Contessa Wine Cellars | 2013 Merlot | Lake Michigan Shore, Michigan**

Fragrant fresh picked berry and cocoa aromas greet the nose. Sprinkling onto the palate are layers of juicy boysenberry, chocolate covered blueberry and marionberry with spice box accents. Here is a Merlot that is well composed and radiant all the way through, finishing with gusto and plenty of length.

Food pairing: Swedish meatballs | SRP: $24.99 | www.contessawinecellars.com

**Karma Vista Vineyards | 2014 Devil’s Head Red | Lake Michigan Shore, Michigan**

Here is a yummy semi-dry blend of 80% Noiret and 20% Marquette that hits the mark and is a great value, too. Spicy black pepper and dark fruit scents pave the way to a mouth full of dense blackberry, raspberry, plum preserves and a sprinkle of freshly ground black peppercorns. Rustic, jammy and easy to quaff.

Food pairing: Spicy sausage and Pecorino penne | SRP: $12 | www.karmavista.com

**Talbott Vineyards | 2013 Sarah Case Chardonnay | Santa Lucia Highlands, California**

From the widely acclaimed Sleepy Hollow Vineyard, this Chardonnay is well delineated with gorgeous concentration of fruit. Layers of grilled pears, sliced nectarines and crisp Granny Smith apples weave on the palate with baking spice, minerality and toasty oak nuances from new French oak aging. Immaculately balanced and pure, with a creamy texture and a finish that extends forever, a cellarworthy Chardonnay.

Food pairing: Garlic roasted chicken | SRP: $52 | www.talbottvineyards.com

**Blustone Vineyards | 2013 Winemaker’s Red | Leelanau Peninsula and Lake Michigan Shore, Michigan**

Complex and fleshy is this invitingly aromatic blend of Cabernet Franc, Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Syrah. Lip-smacking black cherry, blueberry, blackberry, fresh tobacco, herbs and shades of well integrated oak fan out onto the palate. Rich and well balanced with a finish that offers an elegant impression.

Food pairing: Sirloin steak with rhubarb/sweet onion glaze | SRP: $42 | www.blustonevineyards.com

**Boathouse Vineyard and Winery | 2013 Geisenheim | American AVA, grown and produced in Iowa**

This highly aromatic wine, crafted from the white hybrid grape Geisenheim (a cross of Riesling and Chardonnay), unveils a satisfying dose of sweetness with nice offsetting acidity. Lovely floral scents lead to tangerine, apple and stone fruit laced with fresh squeezed Meyer lemon and a sprinkling of herbs; delicious.

Food pairing: Savory mascarpone crostini | SRP: $16 | www.calicoskieswine.com

**About The Author**

Ellen Landis, CS, CSW, is a published wine writer, certified sommelier, wine educator and professional wine judge. She spent four years as a sommelier at the Rita Carlton and sixteen years as Wine Director/Sommelier at the award winning boutique hotel she and her husband built and operated in Half Moon Bay, CA. They recently sold the hotel to devote more time to the world of wine. Ellen is a moderator for highly acclaimed wine events, judges numerous regional, national and international wine competitions each year, and creates and executes wine seminars for individuals and corporations. She has traveled extensively to wine regions around the globe. Contact Ellen at ellen@ellonenwine.com

**Hahn Family Wines | 2013 Lucienne Lone Oak Vineyard Pinot Noir | Santa Lucia Highlands, California**

Alluring floral, earthy components rise from the glass with this ethereal and complex Pinot Noir. Flavors of black cherry, black raspberry and wild mushrooms interlace with a touch of forest floor, cardamom and cinnamon spice, and subtle oak undertones. A nice backbone of acidity holds through the elevated finish; enjoy now or cellar for future enjoyment.

Food pairing: Herb butter basted turkey | SRP: $50 | www.hahnwines.com

**American AVA, grown and produced in Iowa**

Alluring floral, earthy components rise from the glass with this ethereal and complex Pinot Noir. Flavors of black cherry, black raspberry and wild mushrooms interlace with a touch of forest floor, cardamom and cinnamon spice, and subtle oak undertones. A nice backbone of acidity holds through the elevated finish; enjoy now or cellar for future enjoyment.

Food pairing: Open faced crab melt | SRP: $20 | www.boathousevineyards.com
A Madeira Diary

Regular contributor Roger Morris spent three days on this iconic island and sampled some of its famous fortified wines. Let’s just say he was not disappointed.

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