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- "Old Colorado City Historic City Tour"
1:00 pm Old Colorado City History...
- Leapfrog Tag Geography Relay Event
4:00 pm Barnes & Noble
- CASA 4-1-1 Night
5:30 pm CASA office
- The Dreaming
7:00 pm The Black Sheep

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THE WINE GUY: Great winemakers and fabulous wines converge on Aspen



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July 16, 2012 1:34 PM

By RICH MAURO
The Gazette

For me, one of the best things about the Food & Wine Classic in Aspen is the opportunity it presents to meet winemakers and winery owners and to taste wines from producers whom I seldom or never get a chance to try. And this year, the event's 30th anniversary shined on that score.

For instance, I had a chance to sit down with winemakers for two iconic California wineries.

Saturday morning over breakfast, I met Gina Gallo, the winemaker for Gallo Family Vineyards in Sonoma. Ms. Gallo, who has been a winemaker for the family for more than two decades, was anxious to tell me about (and have me taste) her new portfolio of wines: the Gallo Signature Series.

She explained she wanted to make wines that reflected the best of what California's top growing regions (particularly her family's estate vineyards) have to offer. So, signature has a triple meaning: grapes from signature California wine regions, wines made with special care by Gina Gallo, and labels bearing her signature.

"I'm excited to have Gallo estate wines back in the market and to be back working with these wines full-time after my recent maternity leave (twins!)," Gina said while I sipped the three new wines.

The first was a well-balanced 2010 chardonnay (\$30) from the Laguna Vineyard in Sonoma. Then a full-flavored 2010 pinot noir (\$35) from Olson Ranch in the Santa Lucia Highlands of Monterey. Finally, a bold and structured 2009 cabernet sauvignon (\$40) from the William Hill Estate in Napa (buttressed with fruit from the famed Monte Rosso Vineyard).

I would say the wines reflected the personality of their maker: They were reflective of their origins, but with

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their own expression, welcoming but with depth. I look forward to following the evolution of this portfolio.

That afternoon, I joined Corey Beck, the winemaker for Francis Ford Coppola Winery, for snacks and conversation. Beck began with a little history. In 1975, Francis Ford Coppola and his wife Eleanor purchased portions of the historic Inglenook property and renamed it Niebaum-Coppola to honor Gustav Niebaum, who founded the winery in 1879. They quickly established the property as a respected producer and as a major destination for tourists.

They have now acquired the rest of the property and recently announced that the winery henceforth will again be known as Inglenook.

In 2006, the Coppolas purchased the Souverain property in northern Sonoma. They renamed it Francis Ford Coppola Winery and moved production of most of their portfolio there. They also put Corey in charge of all winemaking operations.

Beck has a lifelong connection to California wine, essentially growing up alongside his grandfather, who was the vineyard manager for Napa Valley's renowned Chateau Montelena and later as their cabernet sauvignon cellar master. Beck joined Coppola in 1998 as the assistant winemaker. He now oversees seven wine brands, including Diamond Collection, Rosso & Bianco, Sofia, FC Reserve, Votre Santé, Director's and Director's Cut.

It also is worth noting that Coppola has turned the winery into a major tourist destination with a gourmet restaurant, a swimming pool, bocce, and a movie gallery.

Circumstances prevented us from tasting any of Beck's wines, but I really enjoyed the conversation and the history. I also have recommended Coppola wines before, and look forward to reporting to you about new releases in the coming months.

I also made numerous discoveries in the Grand Tasting Tent, where producers from all over the world display their wares. This year I ended up on a sort of world tour. I don't have room to list all the wines tasted, but if you are interested in specific recommendations, check out my website at rmpeoplespalate.com.

The journey started at the Wines of Germany table. Wines of Germany has hosted tables here for many years, and I always make a point to stop by to taste samples of Riesling (my favorite white wine) from the country that does it best.

Next, Spain. Wines of Spain for many years has hosted a whole tent as a separate location within the Grand Tasting park, and it is always a great place to hunt for new wines. This year I was especially impressed with the wines at the "Drink Ribera" (that's Ribera del Duero, one of Spain's most important regions).

From there it was a short walk to the Inter-Rhone table to taste through samples of Cote-Rotie and Chateauf-neuf-du-Pape.

Then it was a visit to the tables of the Instituto del Vino-Grand Marchi. This organization brings together 19 of Italy's most important wineries, all family-owned. I was giddy tasting wines from such producers as Antinori, Donnafugata, Pio Cesare, Michele Chiarlo, and Tasca d'Almerita.

I finished my tour in California with the founder of Buena Vista Winery, Count Agoston Haraszthy. Actually, it was actor George Weber playing the role convincingly (Haraszthy is long dead, having founded the winery in 1857). And Buena Vista now is owned by Burgundy-based Boisset Family Estates. But I was happy to have the Count, I mean Weber, taste me through several wines from Buena Vista and other Boisset-owned California properties, including De Loach, and Raymond.

Needless to say, it was another year of discovery at the Food & Wine Classic in Aspen. I already can't wait for next year.

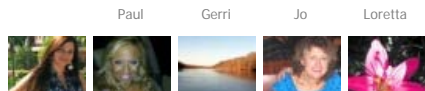
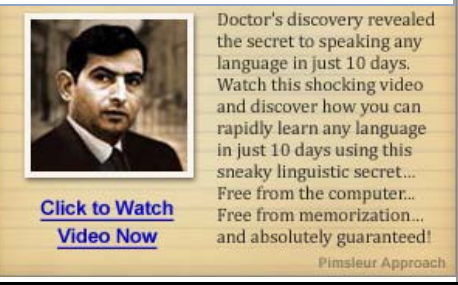
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