

Weinberg's Wine Notes #218 – Wine On The Road in Sonoma Part II

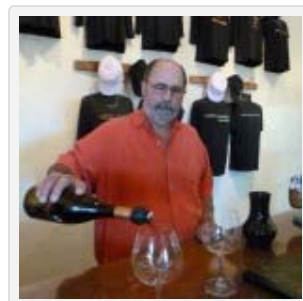


This column is the second half of a series dedicated to my recent time in Sonoma when I was accompanied by Paul David of winepairings.biz, a regular travel companion. Sonoma County, located on the northern coast of the U.S. state of California, is the largest (in area) and northernmost of the nine San Francisco Bay Area counties. It is also the southwestern county and largest producer of California's Wine Country region, which also includes Napa, Mendocino, and Lake counties. Sonoma grape production is incredibly diverse, with 13 approved American Viticultural Areas and over 250 wineries.

After the time previously recounted in Part I, we moved on to Thursday's tour, tasting and lunch with winery owner Ben Papapietro-Perry at Willi's Seafood & Raw Bar in Healdsburg. I was very impressed with the purity of expression Ben manages to coax from his Russian River Valley fruit, especially pinot noir. My favorite this time was the 2009 Pinot Noir Leras Family Vineyard. A reddish-purple hue led to pine needle and black cherry aromas, followed by slate, sous bois and mint on a high-impact finish.

I was additionally captivated by Ben's Zinfandel Elsbree Vineyard, also purple-red in color. This time there were blueberry and black pepper on the nose followed by milk chocolate and a black raspberry Jell-O shot on the palate. Powerful yet refined, this wine will, over time, get even better.

Dinner that night was at Chinois Restaurant in Windsor with John Bugay, whose vineyards are located atop the Mayacamas Mountains on the Sonoma side. I've written about John's wines before and am pleased to report that the current release of the Cabernet Sauvignon The Empress was just as good as any of the others I've had the pleasure to taste. This black-purple behemoth presented aromas of cassis, allspice and blackberry. Refined yet dark and dense, this unfined, five-varietal Bordeaux blend based on 75 percent Cabernet Sauvignon was expansive, savory and opulent with a full-bodied mouthfeel, silky tannins, and sensational concentration.

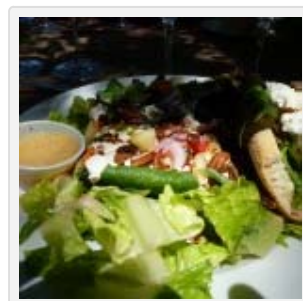


Friday began with a tour and tasting at Lancaster Estate on Chalk Hill Road with Winemaker Jesse Katz, a close friend and one of the outstanding young winemakers in Northern California. We tasted barrel samples of 2010 reds and then moved on to a set of current releases. One that grabbed my attention was the Sauvignon Blanc, a pea-green wine that smelled of lime and star fruit and tasted of basil and green tea. I think this would be a perfect match to many of the lighter foods of summer.

Another Lancaster success was the Cabernet Sauvignon, of which we tried all vintages from 2007 to 2010. The 2009, to be released at the end of September, will be the first that was grown and vinified completely on Jesse's watch. It was terrific, as was the currently available 2008. Both were red-black and smelled of dark plums. On the palate the 2009 emitted pomegranate, red currant, black plum and dark chocolate. The 2008 tended more toward blueberry, cola and cinnamon. Both were of high intensity and long in the mouth.

Lunch at Verité Winery, just down Chalk Hill Road from Lancaster, was with General Manager Monique Seillan and her daughter H el ene. Monique's husband Pierre is the winemaker and she is the manager of one of the finest Bordeaux varietal estates in Northern California. This brilliance is evidenced by the fact that Verit e's three 2008 reds received scores of 100, 100 and 99 points from Robert Parker's Wine Advocate. My favorite was Le D esir, a blend of 61 percent cabernet franc, 31 percent merlot, 4 percent cabernet sauvignon and 4 percent malbec. This was almost black in appearance and my first sniff led me to blueberry and black raspberry. Cassis, black tea and fully ripe strawberry dominated the intense palate and 60-second finish.

The Seillan family's roots are in Bordeaux and I was able to also taste the current release of their Chateau Vignot Saint-Emilion Grand Cru. This appeared blue-red in the glass. Notes of red raspberry and cassis



on the nose led to blueberry, mocha and cola on the intense finish. Another tour-de-force of a wine.

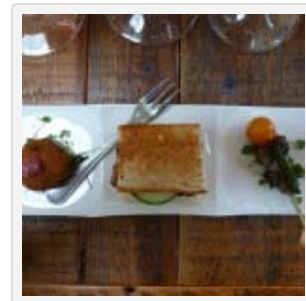


Dinner that night at DeLoach Vineyards was a last-minute affair, arranged by Brian Maloney, the chief winemaker at Jean-Charles Boisset's burgeoning California empire. It was fun to meet and taste with Assistant Winemaker Katie Cochran and, of the wines she poured for us, my favorite was the Pinot Noir Maboroshi Vineyard. Red raspberry and sweet cherry vied with Indian spice and almond extract on nose and palate, leading to a harmonious, satisfying sensory experience. I also liked DeLoach's Zinfandel Von Weidlich Vineyard. Dark red in color and smelling of star anise and red licorice, this tasted of red cherry, mocha and coconut cream.

Saturday, our last full day in California, featured a tasting lunch at the Kendall-Jackson Wine Center. Kendall-Jackson's wines often do well at consumer tastings because the style is generally soft and welcoming. This was certainly true of the Sauvignon Blanc Grand Reserve, served with a course of Délice

de la Vallée cheese with estate fingerling potato salad, purslane and lovage oil. The lemon and sunflower seed elements of the wine worked wonders on the cheese and potato salad, and both wine and food exhibited a light texture and mouth feel.

Sonoma has a lot to offer and those who scoff at the region don't really know what they're talking about. Next week's column will show off the final three days of my western swing, during which I played in the dirt of Walla Walla, Washington, at Merlot Camp.



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A trip is scheduled for October 6 – 14, 2012, led by acclaimed wine educator and Tasting Panel Contributor Stuart George and Contributing Editor Benjamin Weinberg. Planned stops include the terroirs of Maipo, Aconcagua, Cachapoal, Colchagua, Curicó, Maule, Casablanca, San Antonio and the capital city of Santiago itself. Sponsorship is provided by Brandabout, a wine marketing firm based in Santiago with specialized knowledge of Chile, and Wine On The Road, an international provider of wine-country tours.

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Recommended:

White

Lancaster Estate Sauvignon Blanc Estate 2011 (Sonoma County, California) \$30

Kendall-Jackson Sauvignon Blanc Grand Reserve 2009 (Sonoma County, California) \$20

Red

Papapietro-Perry Pinot Noir Leras Family Vineyard Russian River Valley 2009 (Sonoma County, California) \$54

Papapietro-Perry Zinfandel Elsbree Vineyard Russian River Valley 2009 (Sonoma County, California) \$40

Bugay Wines and Vineyards Cabernet Sauvignon The Empress 2009 (Sonoma County, California) \$75

Lancaster Estate Cabernet Sauvignon Estate 2008 (Sonoma County, California) \$75

Lancaster Estate Cabernet Sauvignon Estate 2009 (Sonoma County, California) \$75 (to be released 9/12)

Verité Le Désir 2008 (Sonoma County, California) \$400

Chateau Vignot Saint-Emilion Grand Cru 2009 (Bordeaux France) \$50

DeLoach Vineyards Pinot Noir Maboroshi Vineyard Russian River Valley 2009 (Sonoma County, California) \$45

DeLoach Vineyards Zinfandel Von Weidlich Vineyard Russian River Valley 2009 (Sonoma County, California) \$32

August 9th, 2012 | Tags: [behind](#), [brian maloney](#), [bugay](#), [Cabernet Sauvignon](#), [chalk hill road](#), [chateau vignot](#), [chinois](#), [county](#), [deloach](#), [elsbree vineyard](#), [empress](#), [grand reserve](#), [healdsburg](#), [helene](#), [jean-charles boisset](#), [jesse katz](#), [john](#), [katie cochrane](#), [kendall-jackson](#), [lancaster estate](#), [le desir](#), [leras family vineyard](#), [luxur](#), [maboroshi](#), [mayacamas](#), [monique](#), [mountain](#), [note](#), [papapietro perry](#), [pierre](#), [pinot noir](#), [recommend](#), [russian river](#), [saillan](#), [saint-emilion](#), [sauvignon blanc](#), [scene](#), [sonoma](#), [tast](#), [tour](#), [trip](#), [unfilter](#), [unfin](#), [verite](#), [vineyard](#), [visit](#), [von weidlich](#), [weinberg](#), [willi's seafood bar](#), [windsor](#), [wine](#), [wine center](#), [zinfandel](#) | Category: [Articles and Columns](#), [Ben's Blogs](#), [Weinberg's Wine Notes](#)