

Winter discoveries

Enjoying finds from Wine Week and beyond

By Fred Matuszewski
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I am always on the hunt for great winter wines, departures from the usual cabernet sauvignons and merlots.

During this year's New Hampshire Wine Week in January, I took advantage of the opportunity to sample a broad spectrum of wines. While it is impossible to survey all 1,800 wines available during the Winter Wine Spectacular, the crown jewel of the week, one can try new varietals or revisit some old favorites not savored for some time.

The first wine I tried, and fell in love with all over again, was an Italian Piedmont blend under the label of **Vietti Barolo Castiglione** **DOCG**. It retails for \$49.99 and is available at many of the New Hampshire Liquor & Wine Outlets. Per the winery's website, this wine is sourced from grapes from small vineyards spread in the Barolo region. The vines are between 8 and 41 years old, planted in a clay and limestone soil. The different crus are aged separately for approximately three years, and then blended before bottling for a steady consistency from year to year. This is a bold wine, earthy, with good tannins, and will cellar well to develop a deep fruity taste. This is a wine to be paired with a hearty winter stew or roasted red meats.

The second wine, another favorite, is from the Rhone River region of France, **Domaine du Grand Montmirail Vacqueyras**. It is also available at many of the New Hampshire Liquor & Wine Outlets, retailing at \$21.49. As its label states it is from the Vacqueyras region, or appellation, in the Southern Rhone Valley. Wines from this region parallel the fine wines of its neighbors, Châteauneuf-du-Pape and Gigondas. It is a blend of 65 percent grenache from 50 year-old vines and 35 percent syrah from 20 year old vines. The blend is aged for two years in underground tanks before bottling and its final maturation. It is strong competition for its pricier neighbors. It should be paired with a winter-hearty meal of cassoulet, with its blend of flavors, game or lamb.

The day before the Spectacular, another recurring annual event took place called Cellar Notes. In years past this event was structured as a panel discussion, with vintners and vineyard owners presenting their stories, how they became engaged in the farming, or management of the business, all coupled with several fleets of their wines. This year the focus was on a married couple, described as an award-winning "powerhouse," who linked three generations of California's Gallo wine-making to a storied French Boisset collection of 25 wineries located in France, California, and Canada. The event took on the complexion of an intimate conversation with this couple, Gina Gallo and Jean-Charles Boisset.



Courtesy photos.

Among the fleets that were poured was a Chablis, **J Moreau & Fils Chablis**. It is available at many New Hampshire Liquor & Wine Outlets, retailing at \$25.99. Chablis is a region that is the northernmost region of Burgundy. Only Champagne, Lorraine and Alsace have a more northerly location. Chablis is actually a chardonnay grape. Grown in this cooler climate the wine has more acidity and less fruit than the chardonnay grown in warmer climates. Compared to the white wines from the rest of Burgundy, Chablis has typically much less influence of oak. In fact, most basic Chablis is unoaked and vinified in stainless steel tanks. Many of the Grand Cru and Premier Cru wines receive some maturation in oak barrels. J Moreau & Fils is one of the many wineries owned by the Boisset family. The wine is produced as a blend from several local vineyards around the village of Chablis by winemaker Luce Depuydt. Grown on limestone, clay and fossilized shells, the wine has a minerality not found in chardonnay grown in warmer climates. This wine has much in common with the chardonnay grown in Champagne, which of course goes into the making of that wonderful wine all love so much.

What can be said about Wine Week and its various events? To a state whose population is barely 1.4 million, Wine Week is a cultural and management wonder. The Winter Wine Spectacular generates not only funds — more than \$180,000, according to Christine Pederson, director of events for Easterseals of New Hampshire — but also exposure and interest in the programs of Easterseals that benefit more than 25,000 children, adults and seniors.

I relished this year's Wine Week. The discovered and rediscovered wines are worth trying, paired and savored with that hearty winter meal.

Fred Matuszewski is a local architect, foodie and wine geek, interested in the cultivation of the multiple strains and varieties of grapes, and the industry of wine production and sales. Chief among his travels is the annual trip to the wine-producing areas of California. 🍷