

The Standard

China's Business Newspaper

Rendezvous with a good time



Nelson Arom

Increasing your knowledge about wine is an ongoing meeting of good food, interesting people and culture, writes Curtis Marsh.

Saturday, April 28, 2007

With ever-increasing wine consumption, there is an equal desire in many to become articulate and confident on the subject. I am frequently asked: "How and where can I learn more about wine?" Typical of Hong Kong's impatient pace, this invariably precludes gradual enlightenment; the expectation is to be instantly conversant and credentialed on the subject. At this point I use the adage: "The more you know about wine, the more you realize how little you know." Wine appreciation should not be treated as an exam, rather as an ongoing cultivation of discovery and enjoyment.

Having an understanding of the basics of wine is certainly invaluable. Not only are you better equipped to grasp the intricacies of wine, it will provide the platform to explore further with more confidence and direction.

I can highly recommend the courses developed by talented wine industry professional Simon Tam at The International Wine Centre (IWC). IWC has offices in Hong Kong and Shanghai offering courses at all levels, from an introductory program through to advanced exploration of the world's wine

Below are my notes on the New Zealand line-up: levels, which are noticeably low in correlation to (RS), indicated also as g/l.

Dry River Craighall Riesling 2005, Martinborough (vines in deep free-draining gravels). Perfume of golden delicious apple among sweet custard, white lime. Creamy powerful, lime-driven palate with mandarin-like juiciness with mouth-watering fresh-ginger warmth. Very long with excellent characters, deceptively drier than the nose suggests. 11.5 percent alcohol, dry (vineyard or British agent Justerini and Brooks www.justerini.com).

Neudorf Riesling 2005, Brightwater, Nelson (exposed, free-draining, stony alluvial soils). First impression of walking in to a florist shop and smelling white limes and a hint of ginger and cinnamon spice. Lively fruit flavors. Finishes relatively dry, aided by a vibrant and gravelly notes. 12.2 percent alcohol (www.boutiquewines.com.hk; www.neudorf.co.nz); Door; www.thecellardoor.com.sg).

regions. There is also a pragmatic wine summary course, including wine protocol in restaurants and food pairing with flexible programs on weekends for the busy professional.

More importantly, the IWC curriculum is focused on tasting wines - rather than a surfeit of theory - and designed to equip you with the necessary skills to forge ahead independently. All the tutors are bilingual, so courses can be conducted in Chinese or English. For more details, www.iwinecentre.com.

Should you already be comfortable with your level of wine appreciation but yearning to discover more, then I suggest attending wine events or symposiums, especially if they are held in vineyard regions.

There is a misconception that such wine events are only befitting wine industry professionals or schooled connoisseurs. To the contrary, one's level of wine knowledge is inconsequential in these largely informal (usually festive) and interactive celebrations. Besides, everyone is there with a common goal, to learn more about the region or varietal theme, and have a good time.

Above all, these type of events amalgamate the supplementary benefits of enjoying wine encompassing travel, culture, history, art and certainly food. Moreover, this decidedly social environment could have you serendipitously seated next to a winemaker or restaurateur who could divulge crucial and timely advice on the best places to eat and visit. On that note, always plan your trip with the wine event at the beginning to allow sufficient free time, supplementary to any prearranged itinerary, to take advantage of contacts and information ascertained.

The aromatics symposium I attended on a long weekend recently in Nelson, New Zealand, is a perfect example of combining festivities with learning an enormous amount about riesling and pinot gris. Between sumptuous feasts of excellent local produce, we tasted through comprehensive line-ups from top producers around the world, including rieslings from Jeffrey Grosset (Clare Valley) Domaine Zind- Humbrect (Alsace) Weingut Hirsch (Austria) Peter Jakob (Rheingau) and Dr Loosen (Mosel).



From the left, riesling producers Hätsch Kalberer (Fromm), Blair Walters (Felton Road), Jeffrey Grosset and Verdi, Hätsch's 1962 Mercedes-Benz.

The opportunity to try such an inspiring line-up of rieslings rarely occurs outside of this type of event. Even more enlightening was the New Zealand riesling contingent, clearly impressing the international participants with the similarities in quality and style to Germany and Austria.

The overall impression of the New Zealand wines was consistently pronounced levels of natural tartaric acid that, while crucial to riesling's



Pegasus Bay Ri

Waipara, North Canter
planted in light, free-draini

Sweet palm-sugar nose, i
and peaches with tropical
limes. Viscous palate entr
syrupiness, counterbalanc
and an intense build-up of
long powerful ginger spic
with cobalt acidity cam
sugar superbly; my person
and equal to top-class la
Rheingau or Wachau. 10.8
(available www.pegasusbay.com).

Felton Road Riesling Block 1, Bannockburn, C
vines planted on a steep slope of loess over fi
gravels). Yeasty, funky nuances amongst zesty :
granny smith apple, mountain stream mineral fres
like, cold-steely acidity. Creamy soft texture
building in concentration, indeed the essence of
and ripe orange juiciness fill the mouth, chased by
(a breathtaking 10.4 g/l) with pickled ginger wa
and excellent phenolic grip; the most idiosyncratic
alcohol, RS 67 g/l (available www.watsonswine.c

In Singapore, The Cellar Door; www.thecellardoo

Fromm La Strada Riesling Auslese 2005, Marlbc
planted in an old river bed with layers of clay
gravel). Perfume of white honey, summer fields o
notes, ripe peaches, freshly torn mint leaves, an ov
similar to Mosel rieslings. Viscous palate entry w
and ripe Anjou pear succumbing to the dominant
white honey, balanced by poignant acidity; a su
benefit from cellaring. 8.5 percent alcohol, RS 91
Fine Wines info@nathanfinewines.com; www.fr

If all of this has you salivating for a glass o
knowledge, there is a riesling seminar being
Washington states Columbia Valley, at Chateau
25-27. Moderated by the highly entertaining riesl
with guest speakers Ernst Loosen, Kathrina Pl
others, Riesling Rendezvous is an excellent oppo
through the world's greatest producers. Visit www

See you there.

makeup, patently requires a degree of residual sugar to balance, even tame the acidity. Measured in grams per liter (g/l), acidities average between eight and 10 g/l. That's similar, if not higher, than the coolest regions of Germany, so the logic of following the Mosel style should prevail.

New Zealand's southern extremity ensures long, cool-dry autumn ripening conditions, well suited to the extra hang-time that late-harvest riesling requires. After climate, the geology of New Zealand is equally suited to riesling with a predominance of alluvial soils, ancient riverbeds and gravelly terraces formed by receding glaciers and seas, providing vital minerals and excellent drainage. There is a common thread of mountain-fresh, wet river pebbles and gravelly qualities in many of the wines.



Matt Donaldson (left), winemaker at Pegasus Bay, and wine writer and commentator Oz Clarke

"Curtis Marsh, a veteran wine importer and sommelier, wine, food and travel."

Hong Kong Standard Weekend Magazine, 4

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