

Vineyard trip yields ideas

By Bill Garlough Special to The Beacon News

In my initial column, I outlined that I will offer two sections in each monthly column; a general wine information section entitled "Wine Speak" and one entitled "Food and Wine Pairings". Here goes:

Wine Speak

I just returned from a 10-day west coast trip with my family, and visited several key wine regions. In Oregon, we visited the pinot noir and pinot gris) and in northern California we visited Anderson Valley in Mendocino and the Napa and Sonoma Valleys. As it was during the annual harvest of the grapes, nicknamed the "crush" (when grapes are picked, sorted for quality and pressed into grape juice), I was interested in the quality of this year's crop.



Almost every winery reported that the 2006 vintage will be above average, not only in quality but also quantity. Both the Willamette Valley and Anderson Valley reported ideal growing conditions with warm days and cool nights. However, Napa and Sonoma experienced record heat in July, which challenged the growers' pruning skills. The leaf canopy protects the grapes. If you prune too much of the leaf canopy, you risk over exposing the grapes to the high temperatures, and they actually can get sunburned. A dense leaf canopy in a wet climate will promote mold and mildew on the grapes.

To ensure an optimal crop, what quality wineries practice is skilled cultivation throughout the growing season. This includes pruning the leaf canopy, pruning some clusters of grapes (to promote concentrated flavor in the remaining clusters), irrigation when needed and harvesting the grapes when they reach the desired sugar level. Based on this report, we can all anticipate plenty of delightful white wines in approximately nine months and delicious red wines in approximately eighteen months, from the west coast.

Food and Wine Pairings

To help you easily find my recommended wines, I am developing a network of local shops to act as a resource for the column. I will discuss my ideas for food and wine pairings with these neighborhood wine shop owners, and find wines they stock that accomplish the goal. The wines included will be generally available and will be priced around the \$10.00 range and also the \$25.00 and up range. Hopefully, this offers something for everybody.

It is November and, for many of us, that means Thanksgiving. This meal not only represents an American tradition, it is a time when the entire family gathers around the table and reconnects. This puts some stress on the meal planner and preparer, so some wine suggestions may be appreciated.

The center of the Thanksgiving dinner is, of course, turkey. Turkey as a meat tends to be neutral in flavor, which can open the door for interesting wines. However, the balance of the meal can offer complex flavors, with side dishes of savory dressing, tart cranberry relish and spicy pumpkin pie. With this in mind, I recommend:

White Wines

A more complex style of wine with good acidity and balance is my choice. A wine with good fruit and acidity can help balance this meal's broad array of flavors. (Prices are suggested retail and may vary.) Some suggestions are:

Chateau Lamothe de Haux (a Bordeaux blend of 3 varietals), France	\$11.00
Chateau St. Michelle Indian Wells Riesling – Columbia Valley, WA	\$15.00
Sokol Blosser's "Evolution #9" (a blend of 9 varietals) - Anderson Valley, CA	\$17.00
Thomas Fogarty Gewürztraminer, Monterey, CA	\$18.00
Caymus "Conundrum" (a blend of 5 varietals) - Napa Valley, CA	\$27.00

Red Wines

Pinot Noir, my favorite varietal, is my choice here. This wine tends to be medium bodied, flavorful with "red" fruit notes such as raspberries and cherries and has good acidity, to tackle the various courses of this complex meal. Some suggestions are:

Mark West Pinot Noir - Sonoma Valley, CA	\$13.00
Regis de Valliere Bourgogne (the area in France known for Pinot Noirs)	\$14.00
Sanford Pinot Noir Santa Barbara – Central Coast, CA	\$25.00
Van Duzer Estate Pinot Noir – Willamette Valley, OR	\$28.00
Cristom – Willamette Valley, OR	\$30.00

Enjoy your time with your family this holiday season and bon appetit!

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