

# Sommelier News



INTERNATIONAL  
Sommelier  
GUILD

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## Appellation Magrez

*The career builder becomes a terroir unto himself*

By Roger Morris

As I sit down on an early October evening with Bernard Magrez and his party for dinner and a wine tasting at the Arabelle restaurant in the Plaza Athénée hotel in Manhattan, we first spend a couple of minutes exchanging business cards. Corporate etiquette has taught me that I am not to deposit the cache of cards in my jacket pocket until I first scrutinize each for a few seconds to get the full impact of the personages just met. One card, a bi-fold, has a list of properties that Magrez owns or runs, segmented into *Grands Crus*, *Nouveaux Tal-*

*ents*, and *Cuvées d'Exception* categories. My count later shows there are 35 properties named, including the flagship Château Pape Clément, but, as the dinner progresses, Magrez mentions a new one in Japan, so new it is not listed on the card, so new some in his party have not yet heard of the acquisition.

Trying to keep up with Bernard Magrez is not easy these days.

After selling off his négociant business, *William Pitters*, about

*(Continued on page 2)*

## First Press

By David Wilkening

### Wine year does not matter, says top writer

Top UK wine writer Hugh Johnson says wine vintages do not really matter any more. The veteran taster told the *Times* in the UK that numerous techniques have been developed by wine growers to insure crops are no longer ruined by bad weather or disease. Any year now is a good year. "The reasons people buy a particular wine are complex but have a lot to do with snobbery," he says. "If you sold a non-vintage Bordeaux nobody would buy it. It would be just as good, but it would not have the romance and interest."

### Don't drink the wine in Kansas?

Comments printed in a Seattle newspaper from Kansas Governor Kathleen Sebelus saying "If you ever see Kansas wine, don't drink it," is turning out to be a good thing for the wine industry, reports *Eyewitness News 12*. After she made national headlines with the comments, local wineries are seeing a boost in sales. "A lot of people have said, I've always wanted to come see what Kansas wine is all about and I never did and that's the thing that really motivated me to come find out for myself," says Norm Jennings of Smoky Hill

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*Magrez has concentrated on locating and acquiring prime properties around the world into a collection like no one else has ever put together. Robert Mondavi spread his wings from Napa Valley to Italy and South America in a grand journey before meeting his viticultural Waterloo in the South of France. Jesse Jackson has taken a similar path as Mondavi, though apparently more successfully. Corporately, a few large Champagne houses, no longer dominated by a single family, have expanded to establish wineries in New World climes. But 35 – make that 36 – properties in France, Chile, Napa Valley, Spain, Morocco, Uruguay, and now Japan?*

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My mind tries to wrap itself around this fact, to decide how I can classify this man and his empire so that they can be explained, so that they make sense. *Family of wineries? International network? No and no.* And then it comes to me – Bernard Magrez is like a *terroir*, an AOC without borders unto himself:

#### **Appellation Magrez!**

Magrez who at 71 is still a handsome, distinguished man bearing a passing resemblance to the late American actor Glenn Ford, will be the first to tell you his life wasn't always like this, that he was not born with a silver *tastevin* dangling from a colorful mobile hanging over his crib.

Although his father owned a small construction firm, Magrez sees himself as a different breed from those who inherited their châteaux or whose families were otherwise engaged in the wine business. Part of this self-image

may have resulted from his love/fear relationship with his harsh and demanding father, who threw him out of the house as a teenager. (He has a wine from the Côtes du Roussillon called "Si Mon Père Savait" – "If my father knew...") Perhaps this relationship strengthened the streak of survivalism and entrepreneurship that has guided his life, beginning when at a young age he bought a mom-and-pop Port sales business and built it into *Pitters*, a juggernaut in supermarket wines and spirits.

Yet, for all his youthful rebellion and his self-view as an adult renegade, Magrez dresses conservatively and is formal in his manner. As a manager, he is a demanding task master. Although he speaks English reasonably well, he starts out most conversations with Americans through a translator. At our dinner he soon switched over to English, a change I took as a compliment.

Whether speaking English or French, Magrez proves to be a charming dinner conversationalist. When the topic turns to the intricacies of business, he becomes smiling and animated. Among the matters we discussed were:

#### ► **Assembling a Portfolio**

When considering buying a new property, Magrez has three things in mind. "First is the quality of the *terroir*," he says. "Second, the quality of the vines. Third is the infrastructure – but, that being said, the equipment almost always needs to be replaced! The decision (to acquire) is based very little

*(Continued on page 3)*

*Magrez makes his home at Château Pape Clément, located literally within the Bordeaux suburb of Pessac, but he travels about two weeks out of every month on business. In spite of the fact that his signature is inscribed on every label of every bottle of Bernard Magrez wine, there is a lot of decentralization in his company. "I have 35 winemakers and a different comptroller at each property," he says.*

(Continued from page 2)

upon what's happened in the past." But why such a diversity of properties? "I always choose them for their international dimensions," he says, noting that he has more than 110 labels. "The international consumer is becoming more eclectic in what he buys, so the portfolio is trying to respond to that diversity within the customer."

#### ► Home and Away

Magrez makes his home at Château Pape Clément, located literally within the Bordeaux suburb of Pessac, but he travels about two weeks out of every month on business. In spite of the fact that his signature is inscribed on every label of every bottle of Bernard Magrez wine, there is a lot of decentralization in his company. "I have 35 winemakers and a different comptroller at each property," he says.

#### ► The U.S. Market

Magrez has 40 different brands or labels sold in the U.S., and he acts as his own importer – which allows him to make certain that his wines do not get neglected.

#### ► Wine as Luxury

Like fine automobiles, clothing, and perfumes, wine at the higher end of the scale must be marketed as a luxury

item, Magrez believes. "A customer likes to discover new wine for himself as part of his self-image," he says. But with that image must come quality. He says, "(Consultant) Michel Rolland likes to ask his clients, 'What can be done next year to improve the quality? The customer demands it!'"

#### ► De-Accessioning the Portfolio

Why did Magrez sell his winery in Tuscany? "The vineyard was beautiful, but I never really understood it," he says simply with a verbal shrug.

#### ► On Being an Iconoclast

Magrez is aware of his image as a contrarian, but he smiles frequently as he discusses it. "I am not an aristocrat," he says, "and I'm not a diplomat. Not having inherited anything, then why should I be afraid to lose it?"

Finally, I asked Magrez about his desire not to, with a few exceptions, take on partners.

He grins. "It's very difficult to suddenly tell your partner that you've decided to sell the business because you've had a change in strategy." That go-it-alone characteristic may also explain why he takes a two-weeks vacation every year at Val d'Isère in the Alps. "For two weeks," he says, "I don't have to argue with anyone!"

***In addition to writing for The Sommelier News, Roger Morris regularly contributes articles to Saveur, The Robb Report, The Wine Enthusiast, Drinks, and Beverage Media, among others.***

## Scotch Whisky Revival

*Blended Scotch continues to rule and is changing with the times*

By J. Herbert Silverman

*Scotch is the leading international spirit drink. Nine out of every ten bottles produced are exported from Britain, which might explain why the Greeks drink more Scotch than ouzo and why the French put away more Scotch in a month than they do Cognac, according to the unbiased Scotch Whisky Association.*

Single malt scotch may be the shimmering star in the whisky category, but top-of-the-line blends are holding their own in terms of American palate preferences. Major distillers think in grand terms. Most recently, Chivas Regal introduced an 18-year-old Gold Signature version retailing at \$299. Johnnie Walker now markets a \$600 decanter filled with Blue Label.

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### A Dram of History

For more than a hundred years, blended Scotch was Scotch. Single malts just didn't exist in the market. In addition, it was blended Scotch that made the drink respectable. Highland farmers concocted the whisky in their barns using homemade pot stills and created the \$3.5 billion world-wide industry it is today.

In the 18th century, Scotch was considered unworthy of note by the good burghers of Edinburgh. These respectable folk would no more consider drinking this firewater than they would turpentine, as their tipples were Sherry, Port and Cognac - all refined, gentlemen's drinks.

By the 19<sup>th</sup> century, however, some enterprising merchants, with names like Johnnie Walker,

George Ballantine, James Buchanan and the Chivas Brothers, hit on the idea of blending their inexpensive, grain whisky with the more distinguished whiskies from the pot stills of the farmers, which were by that time legal. This eventually led to the emergence of predictable and consistent brands, many of which are still available today.

Scotch first won acceptance in its homeland; then its popularity spread south of the border to England, and eventually, thanks to the wide reach of the British Empire, stretched to the four corners of the globe.

It is worth noting that Chivas Regal played a key role in creating the deluxe Scotch whisky category to the U. S. when soldiers returning home from Europe after WWII brought a newly acquired taste for the prestige spirit which was twice the cost of other blends and used it as a sign of business sophistication.

Currently, the industry is concerned about the dilution of its whisky identity. Under proposed UK regulations; whisky will be strictly defined under one of five categories, single malt, single grain, blended, blended malt and blended grain.

Distillers will also be allowed to attach one of five regional names - Highland, Lowland, Speyside, Campbeltown, Islay - but will be barred from labeling whisky with the name of a distillery or a similar name if it is not a product of that distillery.

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The following cocktails are quite popular at The Campbell Apartment and The Carnegie Club, where brown spirits dominate.

### Smokey Scotch Sour

1.5 oz JW Red  
.75 oz Fresh lemon juice  
.75 oz. Simple syrup

Combine all ingredients and shake over ice. Strain into an ice-filled old fashioned glass. Garnish with an orange wheel and maraschino cherry.

(recipes continued next page)

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### Keeping Secrets

The exact formulas of the various blends are closely guarded, but it is possible to detect certain obvious characteristics. For instance, Johnnie Walker Red Label has strong hints of the highly distinctive Skye malt, Talisker.

When any Scotch has an age statement on its label, this indicates the age of the *youngest* whisky in the blend. There are often appreciable amounts of older whiskies, too. The difference between the various price categories of blended Scotch does not indicate that they contain higher proportions of malt whisky, but that both the grain and malt whiskies are older. This can mean a smoother blend, as in Chivas Regal, or a more flavorful blend, as in White Horse 12 year old, or both, as in Famous Grouse Gold Reserve.

### Mixing Blends

Do you want an exemplar of upscale cocktailing? The Campbell Apartment in New York is reflective of high flying trends in Scotch and its permutations. Formerly the private office and salon of 1920's tycoon, John W. Campbell, the apartment is located in Grand Central Terminal and has been fully restored to its original splendor.

Reborn as a chic cocktail lounge and resembling a private club, it is arguably one of the more interesting bars in America. The Apartment is part of Hospitality Holdings, a luxury set of venues collected by restaurateur Mark Grossich which includes such ultra sophisticated boites as The Carnegie, The Trump World Bar and the Bookmark at the Li-

brary Hotel.

Lead bartender for the group is Jonathan Pogash with a background in the same role at such prestigious restaurants as Solo and The Prime Grill and an authority on Manhattan cocktail trends.

"Here, the two most popular blended Scotches at our locations are Chivas Regal and Dewar's. They are both straightforward, balanced, clean, and make mean Rob Roys. Those Scotches that are smokier, such as JW Red, are popular at The Carnegie Club, our smoking lounge. Cigar lovers find them perfect to sip on while puffing away and listening to Stan Rubin and his orchestra playing Sinatra tunes."

There is a trend towards using blended Scotches in cocktails, according to Pogash. "The balance and full-bodied flavors that blended Scotch exudes complement strong touches such as sweet vermouth, spices, even dark berry fruits. JW Red, for example, makes a deliciously intense Scotch sour, with its smokiness coming through in the nose and taste. I'm always looking to lure the younger crowds that frequent my bars to try new spirits that they thought only their grandfathers drank.

"The push is towards blending sweet fruit flavors, such as peach, raspberry, and red currants with blended Scotches to create beautiful looking drinks that the typical cocktail drinker would enjoy. Even chocolate is perfectly paired with Compass Box Scotches, for example. They have a robust line of whiskeys ranging from very peaty to light

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**Rusty Nail (served at all Hospitality Holdings locations)**

**1.5 oz Dewar's scotch  
.5 oz Drambuie**

**Pour ingredients into an ice-filled old fashioned glass and stir gently. Garnish with a lemon twist.**

**Rob Roy**

**2 oz Chivas Regal  
1 oz sweet Vermouth  
3 dashes Angostura Bitters**

**Combine ingredients in a cocktail shaker with cracked ice. Stir for 30 seconds and strain into a chilled martini glass. Garnish with a maraschino cherry.**

*(Continued from page 5)*

and buttery."

### **Following the Blended Brands**

"Johnnie Walker has become the most popular whisky brand in the world and continues to be the benchmark for quality and innovation for blended Scotch whisky," says Bill Topf, Vice President of Scotch and Irish Whiskey, Diageo. "In 2006, Johnnie Walker sold more than 12.4 million cases in 200 countries worldwide, with Johnnie Walker Red Label and Black Label heading the charge. Today, the Johnnie Walker blending team has the resources of over seven million cases of maturing Scotch whisky in its warehouses."

Blended Scotch is the result of blending approximately 65 percent grain whisky with 35 percent single malts, sometimes from dozens of different distilleries. Each brand of blended whisky has its own particular flavor profile, and while the grain whisky that goes into it is pretty consistent, the barrels from the individual distilleries all vary. So the tricky task falls on the master blender to produce a consistent product, year after year, from these endlessly varying components.

Paul Walsh, chief executive of Diageo (owner of Johnnie Walker) likes to talk of a Scotch "renaissance." And Christian Porta, chairman and chief executive of Chivas Brothers (the Scotch whisky business of Pernod Ricard) says whisky has become "trendy."

Bacardi, the Bermuda-based distiller, is spending more than \$240 million in Scotland to expand production of its Dewar's brand, which will involve building

new warehouses and buying 100 acres of land.

Meanwhile, Diageo is spending \$200 million building a new malt distillery. The group sold a record 15 million cases of its Johnnie Walker brand over the past 12 months, which accounts for about half of its total Scotch sales.

Diageo and Pernod Ricard have also been investing money in global marketing campaigns for brands such as J&B, Johnnie Walker, Chivas and Ballantine's.

The growth of the Scotch industry is a boon for Scotland, because whisky accounts for 13 per cent of Scottish exports (excluding oil and gas).

Although some distillers have begun revamping their Scotch brands to create a more "contemporary" look, they say the heritage of Scotch appeals to newly affluent consumers in Asia and South America.

China is the fastest-growing market in Asia, with sales volumes rising some 36 per cent last year, according to the International Wine and Spirits Record. China became one of Scotch's top 10 export markets for the first time last year.

Blended Scotch whiskies continue to make up the bulk of the Scotch category -roughly 95 percent-with Dewar's White Label as the top selling brand in the United States. As for specific volume numbers, the 2007 Adam's Liquor Handbook reports Dewar's total volume in 2006 to be 1.36 million cases. The Dewar's portfolio is rounded out with Dewar's 12-Year-Old Special Reserve and Dewar's Signature. At the core of each of the Dewar's blended ex-

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pressions is the Aberfeldy Single Malt, an exceptionally balanced malt from the Highlands region of Scotland. Last year, limited quantities of the Aberfeldy 12- and 21-year-old malts were bottled and sold in the US for the first time.

Cutty Sark is known as the ship that brought America its taste for Scotch - an honest and genuine spirit. As on-premise trends move towards the premium end, Cutty Sark's new packaging has certainly helped secure its position as a bartender's favorite premium Scotch.

#### **The Importance of Whisky**

More than 40,000 jobs in Scot-

land depend on whisky production, including local cereal suppliers plus bottle, label and packaging companies, transport and haulage and suppliers of a wide range of goods and services.

Whisky-related tourism is also rising in importance. Distilleries represent 25 per cent of Scotland's five-star tourist attractions, hosting one million visitors a year.

The Scotch Whisky Association says it can be fighting up to 70 court cases around the world at any one time against overseas manufacturers who use tartan designs or pictures of pipers on their packaging, or who give their whiskies names which are supposed to sound Scottish.

***J. Herbert Silverman is writing a book about colorful characters in the wine and spirits business and a history of Irish whiskey.***



## **Ontario Wine Awards Sommelier Competition**

### ***Calling all ISG graduates***

Tony Aspler has announced that working sommeliers (those affiliated with a restaurant) are invited to compete in the Ontario Wine Awards Sommelier competition. In the preliminary round, each prospective candidate is asked to write the most important duties of a sommelier (maximum 200 words). Written entries should be emailed to [tony.aspler@sympatico.ca](mailto:tony.aspler@sympatico.ca) with your name and your restaurant affiliation. Please notify your employer of your intention to compete. The deadline for receipt of the written work is March 15th. Please ensure that a contact phone number is added as well as the email address. Our committee will select the ten best entries.

The ten top entrants from the preliminary round will be invited to compete in a Blind Tasting— to be held on Saturday, March 29th at Brassaii restaurant, King Street West, at 3pm. Participants will be asked to identify six wines - variety, region, vintage and, if possible, producer.

The winner will be presented with the trophy at the Ontario Wine Awards gala dinner (Queens Landing, Niagara-on-the-Lake) on Saturday, April 26th.

## New Face, Ancient Vineyards

### *A Profile of Quinta de Ventozelo, Douro Valley, Portugal*

By Sylvia Jansen

The Cima (Upper) Corgo holds the most prestigious vineyards of the Douro Valley. This is the place where famous port houses will display their names, Hollywood-style, on steep slopes where they will be visible from the roadways. After all, these are all Class "A" vineyards: if you want to be on the quality Port wine map, you need to have

some vineyard property here.

Along this famous riverbank, some 100 km (60 mi.) east of Porto, the road snakes away from the river bank and climbs up toward São João da Pesqueira. At the top of a rise is the entrance to one of the largest single quintas in the Douro: Quinta de Ventozelo. Watch this name.

*(Continued on page 9)*



**A view of the estate from its highest point.**

*The Fernández family, and managing director Rafael Molezún, are sincere in their investment in the Douro economy, hiring regional expertise and workers. To the greatest extent possible they make upgrades to the physical plant using regional contractors. And the talent is also drawn from the region: Tiago Maia, Agricultural Engineer, says he grew up 'playing' in the vineyards of the Douro.*

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### **A Long History**

With around 200 Ha (500 acres) of vineyards, the property is one of the largest single quintas in the Douro, and one of the oldest. Evidence is that the Cistercian monks were planting vines and producing wine in the 12<sup>th</sup> Century. In the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, the famous Baron Forrester included Quinta de Ventozelo among the properties he mapped. But with its new owners taking charge in 1999, it also ranks as one of the newest.

### **An investment in People**

The Spanish group Proinsa owns Quinta de Ventozelo, which means that the family of José Juan Fernández oversees the operations. It makes a difference that there is a family here: every family has its own values, its own

culture and its own way of doing things. With the Fernández family, the values are that their people are worth something, and that Quinta de Ventozelo ought to be something.

To these people, community matters. The Fernández family, and managing director Rafael Molezún, are sincere in their investment in the Douro economy, hiring regional expertise and workers. To the greatest extent possible they make upgrades to the physical plant using regional contractors. And the talent is also drawn from the region: Tiago Maia, Agricultural Engineer, says he grew up 'playing' in the vineyards of the Douro.

Moreover, all the people who work at Quinta de Ventozelo—vineyard workers, office workers and management—receive two

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**Classic Douro schist at the Quinta**



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meals at the Quinta during their workday, cooked onsite. This simple, hospitable practice helps to create a community of people, not just a collection of hands that do the work.

Winemakers Sebastião Mesquita and Joaquim Trigo similarly have deep connections in the region. Importantly, as the critical conjunction between vine and wine lover, the two are continually searching for new expressions of the Douro character. They enjoy enviable autonomy in their work, and their careful creativity has already shown itself in fine table wines from single varietals as well as Douro blends under the Quinta de Ventozele label.

#### **The Wines**

Quinta de Ventozele is among the new class of producers in the Douro which recognizes the value of classic Ports, and at the same time, sees the potential of a range of excellent Douro table wines. Their wines are produced in several categories:

#### **Quinta de Ventozele Port:**

These classic ports include rubies, tawnies, LBV and vintage, all with an accessible style, well done in each classification. Vintage ports are generous, with wonderful fruit, balanced sweetness, good acidity, and in general, an early maturing style that shows great quality for the asking price. The rest of the port line follows suit, with class.

**Sylvia Jansen is a Winnipeg based sommelier and writer. She is a frequent contributor to *Sommelier News*.**

#### **DOC Douro Quinta de Ventozele:**

The table wines are a treat. DOC and DOC Reserva are drawn from traditional port varietals (mainly Touriga Nacional, Touriga Franca and Tinta Roriz, with an average vine age 60 years for Reserva). The Reserva is simply fantastic. Varietals (Touriga Nacional, Touriga Franca and Tinta Roriz) are the happy result of people dedicating their talents to showing what the Douro can do.

#### **DOC Douro Cister da Ribeira:**

These are entry-level table wines (in some markets DOC *Vinzele* wines are also available) that show good fruit and an easy style. Cister da Ribeira wines show particularly good value.

#### **Lauded and awarded:**

Both DOC table wines and ports have garnered attention recently from numerous reviewers, including *Wine Spectator*, *Decanter*, the *Concours Mondial de Bruxelles*, *Wine & Spirits*, and *Wine Enthusiast*.



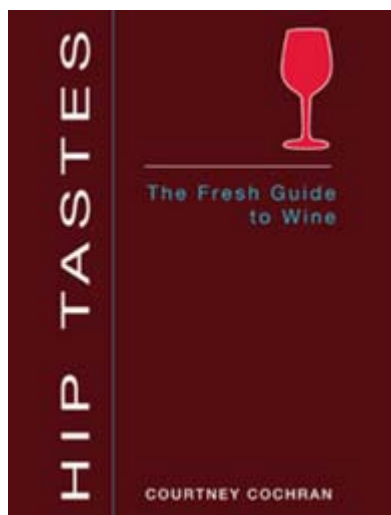
Distinctive wines that show the capability of their region with honesty, class and good value are true gifts to the wine lover.

## Tudor's Picks

### Dean Tudor surveys recent books of interest to Sommeliers

By Dean Tudor

**HIP TASTES; the Fresh Guide to Wine** (Viking Studio, 2007, 303 pages, ISBN 978-0-14-200519-4)

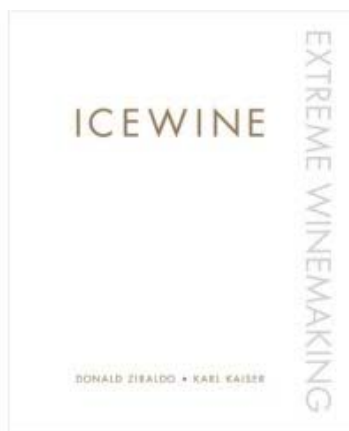


This is by Courtney Cochran, an ISG certified sommelier working in San Francisco. This is a quick review book, with lots to memorize if you want to be profound. The book is meant for a young audience. Hip vocabulary is used, and the style is anecdotal. Tips and advice abound: how not to get ripped off in restaurants, food and wine matches for simple flavors, label essentials, phonetics for difficult-to-pronounce wine terms, best wines for a party, hip producers in hip regions, and the like. You can check out hip-tastes.com for more ideas. Her appendices present a list of Euro wines named for places (e.g. Bordeaux), a phonetic guide, a region and vintage guide (plus an indication of values), and a list of US retailers and wine festivals.

**Audience:** new and young wine drinkers.

**Quality/Price Rating:** 89.

**ICEWINE: Extreme Winemaking** (Key Porter Books, 2007, 192 pages, ISBN 978-1-55263-926-9)



This is mainly by Donald Ziraldo, who, with winemaker Karl Kaiser, founded Inniskillin Wines in 1974. It was the first small and new winery in Ontario since 1929. There's a foreword from Hugh Johnson, an Icewine flavor wheel from Shari Darling, some notes from John Schreiner's book on Icewine, scientific notes from Karl Kaiser, and recipes from the late Izabela Kalabis-Sacco pulled together by Lyn Ogryzlo. The promotion bumpf says, "A gorgeous collection, with full-color photography and delicious recipes that explains the art behind Canada's wine delicacy." They forgot to include that the book also contains a big whack of scientific and technical data, with copious charts, graphs, and tables, compiled for the most part by Kaiser. He has all the figures for the history of Inniskillin Icewine, including, on a year by year basis, harvest brix, harvest temperatures, acid levels, ABV, residual sugars, all from 1983 through 2006 (the latter was harvested in January 2007). In addition,

there are figures for all of BC, all Ontario productions, Germany and Austria.

Icewine made in other locations, such as New Zealand or New York, are cryogenic extractions (wines from the freezer). The book is very detailed with maps and photos, discussing the effects of *terroir*, grape varieties, pressing techniques, cork quality. There's a discussion of the VQA and the new sub-appellations in Niagara. Ziraldo has material on how to properly appreciate and taste Icewine, using Riedel glasses which he had helped to create. There are cocktail recipes, and 20 food recipes using Icewine or accompanying Icewine.

**Audience:** lovers of Icewine, sommeliers.

**Quality/Price Rating:** 89.

*Dean Tudor is Professor Emeritus at Ryerson University. He writes extensively about wine and food.*

## SOMMELIER OF THE MONTH: Jeff Kycek

*Notes on Minnesota, roto-tillers, and keeping things simple*

By G. Wyatt Snoe

Saint Paul, Minnesota, native Jeff Kycek has the kind of colorful background which seems to accompany most modern sommeliers. An ex-film major, ex-disc jockey, ex-toy collector, he remains an avid reader of Ancient Greek history, J. D. Salinger and wine books. "I'm more of a movie snob than a wine snob," he says. "And I'm tired of being asked if I saw *Sideways*, then listening to

them misquote the, "I'm not drinking any f-in' Merlot!" part. And I'm an "old school" Star Wars geek."

In the tragically short Minnesota summers, he tries to spend as much time as possible out of doors with his wife and 8 year old daughter, Annie (after Annie Hall). "I love landscape design and gardening. Last summer I

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*Jeff Kycek seasons the griller*

*I think there are times to be adventurous with the pairings and times to play it safe. When establishing a relationship with a customer that doesn't know me from Adam but simply wants to know what to eat with his turkey dinner, that is not the time to get cute with a pairing.*

(Continued from page 12)

completely re-landscaped a friend's front yard for the price of a new roto-tiller. It looks amazing, by the way. And most of the summer is spent in my yard/garden or grilling everything including appetizers, salads and desserts."

"I quit smoking 8 years ago," he adds, "and I don't, as promised, taste things better or feel better."

#### **What is your most memorable wine? Why?**

Probably the first time I had Châteauneuf-du-Pape. Early in my wine exploration I purchased one and really understood for the first time the whole idea of the wine tasting like it came from somewhere: the stoniness, the spice and berries with just enough tension between the grip and acidity to keep it interesting. I had not written down the producer and didn't realize that the wine would stay with me that long. So I ended up spending a small fortune trying to find that wine to experience it again.

#### **How did you develop an interest in wine?**

In the early 90s I worked on cruise ships and our Cruise Director at the time knew just enough about wine to sound good and he always ordered a bottle of Chateau St. Jean Chardonnay for the table. That was probably my first introduction to wine every night with dinner. Then, maybe ten years ago, I felt like I should know something more about wine. I wanted to be culturally well rounded and know just enough to sound good at a restaurant should a bottle of wine be

necessary. I purchased *The Wine Bible* by Karen MacNeil and read it front to back and the minute I was done I turned back to the front and started over again, this time tasting along with her region by region. The way she described the wines and the regions from which they had come just spoke to me. So I continued purchasing book after book and bottle after bottle until I realized that I was a full fledged wine geek and needed to do something with all the wine info I had stored in my head.

#### **What is your current position?**

I work at a cool little wine shop in St. Paul called The Wine Thief and do some part time work with a local wine distributor, Bourget Imports. Working at The Thief, I have the opportunity to do tasting events for parties and in-home wine education classes.

#### **What is your personal philosophy when it comes to being a sommelier?**

Don't "F" it up. I think there are times to be adventurous with the pairings and times to play it safe. When establishing a relationship with a customer that doesn't know me from Adam but simply wants to know what to eat with his turkey dinner, that is not the time to get cute with a pairing. But after the customer searches me out because he liked the last few things I have recommended and he starts to trust me, then I can start playing around. I've built up some equity.

The other thing for me is that there are only a handful of truly classic pairings. So I look for a simple balance, a harmonious convergence between the wine and the food. Something that

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makes you want to take another bite of food after you drink and drink after you have taken a bite. When all else fails, I love regional pairings.

**What is your most memorable wine-related experience? Why?**

There are many. I consider the ISG Sommelier course among them. I really loved the experience of great people getting together at ungodly hours of the day focusing in on one topic until we can't see straight.

But I think one that really sticks with me is a \$20.00 class I took at the Minneapolis Food and Wine show several years back. It was a wine blending class taught by the winemaker for Honig. He had brought very young bottles (they had been taken from the barrels at Honig and had only been in those about 4 months) of Cabernet, Merlot and Petit Verdot. Half the reason I went to the class was to taste a Petit Verdot but it was so interesting and informative and I walked away from it feeling like I had really gotten some rare behind the scenes knowledge and I also walked away with a one-of-a-kind "Jeff's Meritage."

**If you were stranded on a desert island, what three wines would you like to have with you? Why?**

1. A Châteauneuf-du-Pape: Château La Nerthe. I just drank my last bottle of '99 and caught it at its most charming, so probably a 2000 or 2001. I would bring it to remind me of my first "I get it" wine experience.

2. A Cru Classé Bordeaux. I col-

lect the fifth growth, Haut-Bages Libéral from Pauillac so it might be nice to bring the 2000 or, if I have a few months before I leave for the island, the 2005.

3. It seems I would need something white for the simple island fare and I'm a simple man. Perhaps a Villa Maria Sauvignon Blanc or perhaps something more elegant like the Louis Latour Pouilly-Vinzelles. Nummy.

**What is your favorite grape?**

I love Grenache.

**What wine resources are must haves?**

*The Wine Bible* (see above).

Oz Clarke's *Encyclopedia of Grapes*. It has only let me down once when I was looking for the "Bobal" grape of Spain.

It's not really a resource but for pure enjoyment and I was sad when it ended, *Adventures on the Wine Route* by Kermit Lynch.

*Winetaster's Secrets* opened me up to the whole science of wine.

Hanging out with wine geeks and wine reps at the shop is also important to me. They know a lot about the wines they carry and picking their brains is invaluable.

**Who (living or dead) would you most like to sit down with, have dinner and talk about wine?**

Kermit Lynch. But it would have to be dinner in Bandol, France after a long day of meetings and tastings. I just finished *Judgment of Paris* and it's a great book that really delves into the history of California wine production. About 75% of the book deals with Warren Winiarski and Mike Grgich. I

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One of the great things about doing this stuff for a living is the experimentation. I try not to get too hung up on one grape variety or style for any one type of food. I learn more by mistakes than by successes.

## Sommelier News

### Mission Statement

The International Sommelier Newsletter currently reaches more than 17,000 readers

Our Aims are:

- To provide a forum for the exchange of knowledge and experience of food and beverage industry professionals and enthusiasts world-wide.
- To spread enthusiasm for wine, beer and spirits with intelligent, educationally-oriented material.
- To encourage input and contributions from our readers in all aspects of wine, beer, and spirits.
- To encourage diverse perspectives on the beverage alcohol industry, and to study our topics from the earth to the table.

Authors are responsible for the accuracy of their submissions and their opinions may not represent those of the International Sommelier Guild

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think those two would be a hoot to dine with.

#### What are some of your favorite wine and food matches?

A year and half ago I made myself two hot dogs with mustard and ketchup for lunch and I happened to have half a bottle of some moderately oaked Chardonnay left in the fridge and decided to finish it up with my dogs. I was knocked-out by how great they were together. The yellow mustard and the Chard worked so well together.

I love bringing a late harvest dessert style wine like orange Muscat along with Pepperidge Farms "Chessmen" cookies to people's houses for dessert. They are always stunned by how great they are together, especially dipped. And how easy it is.

I love crianza Riojas with grilled chicken.

One of the great things about doing this stuff for a living is the experimentation. I try not to get too hung up on one grape variety or style for any one type of food. I learn more by mistakes than by successes.

#### Plans for the future?

I hate this question. I have never had any desire to work in a restaurant and I love working at The Wine Thief. To me there are few things more satisfying than having customers come

back the next day and tell me how much they loved the wine I recommended for their dinner...and what can I do for them today? I do enjoy doing tastings and wine dinner type events and would like to do more of them. People seem to thirst for wine knowledge and it's fun to stand in a room with a bunch of people, have them pepper you with questions and be able to tear through the answers in a way that is easy to understand. I think I'm good at that kind of thing.

Last summer I realized that our neighbors across the street have grapes growing on their back fence. We have been in discussions about our first wine making venture this fall.

#### What advice would you give to a novice wine drinker or a person interested in the sommelier profession?

I doubt I'm breaking any new ground here but, read everything you can get your hands on. Taste a lot of stuff and get on a roll with a certain grape. Do a Cabernet month where all you drink is Cabs from anywhere you can find and make notes about them. What makes them different? Then do Grenache and Pinot, etc.

And learn to cook. I started out as just a wine geek and I hated cooking. But after awhile I realized that I'm not going to open up a \$40 Rhône wine and just drink it by itself some afternoon so I taught myself to love cooking.

*G. Wyatt Snoe is a sommelier who specializes in writing about interesting figures in the wine industry.*

*Where Are they Now?  
Or, Building the  
Sommelier Community*

**Sommelier News is interested in compiling an alumni directory for graduates of the Sommelier Diploma Program. Graduates of the SDP are encouraged to submit a listing stating the following:**

- Name**
- Graduation Year**
- Title/Position**
- Business Contact Information**

**In every issue, we will feature *Sommeliers on the Move*, where graduates can announce new titles, positions and responsibilities.**

**Email to**  
[wgotts@internationalsommelier.com](mailto:wgotts@internationalsommelier.com)

**First Press**

*(Continued from page 1)*

Vineyards & Winery.

**Wine? Whisky? Beer**

A new survey by foodservice consultants *Technomic* found that consumers were more than twice as likely to order beer or mixed drinks than wine when drinking away from home. In examining all dining- and/or drinking-out occasions, 48 percent involved spirits/mixed drinks, 46 percent included beer, but only 18 percent included wine. But the picture changes considerably when examining alcohol consumption by type of occasion. For example, wine consumption jumps to 37 percent when the occasion is a business meal. Special events, such as a romantic meal or other planned special occasions, are also much more likely to include wine.

**Bringing the bottles home**

BottleWise, a maker of smart travel bags for the food and wine enthusiast, announced the availability of BottleWise Duo, described as a stylish yet functional bag for safely transporting wine inside checked baggage. Developed in response to U.S. Transportation Security Administration (TSA) restrictions on liquids in carry-on bags, BottleWise Duo's padded and insulated sleeves "allow travelers to once again bring home that special souvenir from their wine country experience," says the company. Prices start at just un-

der \$50.

**Women behind growing wine consumption in India**

Wine consumption has been growing in India by 25 percent a year. And it's in no small measure due to women. Women's social acceptability of being able to drink in public has helped increase consumption. "Women naturally gravitate towards wine, which has the dual benefit of being more socially acceptable than hard liquor, and also more suitable to a woman's psychology," say wine reports.

**Corking debate continues**

The debate over whether to uncork or unscrew your wine bottle has made its way to Long Island wine country, reports *Newsday*. Paumanok Vineyards of Riverhead disclosed it became the first in the area to install a screw-cap bottling line on select bottles, while corks remain the bulk of the offerings. Wine-maker Kareem Massoud said it's not primarily a matter of cost or convenience but quality. About 1 percent of corks spoil the wine they're supposed to seal and protect, he said. "That's 1 percent more than we care to lose."

**Wine like dead deer**

What would you do to promote wine? If you're Gary Vaynerchuk, 31, the host of *Wine Library TV*, an online video show, you might lick rocks, suck leather and eat dirt on camera.

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**First Press**

*(First Press, Continued from page 16)*

Why? To illustrate the unique properties of wine. Just one example: Talking of a "wild and gamey" red from Rioja, Spain, Vaynerchuk says, "Hit a deer on the road. Throw a bunch of cherries on it. Take out your knife, cut the deer. Bite it. That's the flavor profile." About 40,000 Internet viewers, many of them 20-somethings, have a daily appointment with "Wine Library TV." The low-budget video blog is produced five days a week from a nondescript office in the three-level wine retail operation that Vaynerchuk's family owns in Springfield, New Jersey.

**The weak US dollar has impact everywhere**

Writer Jeff Siegel in the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* says if you ask foreign winemakers what their biggest problem is, the answer is almost always the same: the historically weak U.S. dollar. "We're getting absolutely slagged," says Hugh Hamilton, an Australian whose brands include Hugh Hamilton.

*The First Press features monthly wine related news selected by roving correspondent and long-time professional journalist, David Wilkening.*

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*It's a Matter of Taste*