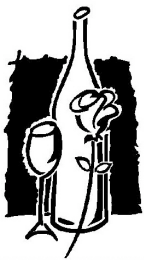


Alex's Newsletter #24 January 2009



Rose Bay Drive In Liquor

Domaine Rotier "Renaissance" Blanc Doux Gaillac (2006)

The region: Gaillac AOC (France)

The alcohol: 13.0%

The price: \$55 or 10% off in a dozen



Dessert wines are often overlooked in Australia. I had a chat with one of the winemaking panel from Veuve Clicquot at a lunch (tough life) about this. The chef at Manta has been charged with making dishes that matched the different Veuve labels and one of them is a sweeter style, called the Demi-Sec, sort of like a dessert wine Champagne (which is what Champagne was originally like, from what I've read).

I asked him if this was a big seller for them and he said that it was in France, but not in Australia and he was a little mystified by that. In France, dessert is had with every dinner, as well as just about every lunchtime, so this sweeter style of wine is the perfect match with sweeter desserts.

Because we don't eat as much dessert as other parts of the world, we tend to drink less dessert wine too. It's a shame, because there are some belters out there. De Bortoli Noble One is Australia's most famous example, but let's have a look at a French one.

Rotier makes wine in three levels. *Initiales* is the entry level label, *Les Gravelles* is the middle level and the flagship range is *Renaissance*. Made from a grape called *Loin de l'Oeil*, this comes from a dry, early year with good acidity and lovely richness.

It's seen a bit of new French oak (15%) and sitting at 155 grams of residual sugar per litre, this is quite a sweet wine. Dry wines have close to 0 g/L residual sugar.

Look for apricot, figs, marmalade and quince character with a long finish. Put it with strong cheese, a nice lemon tart, a fruit dessert or hot foie-gras and you've got a wonderful finish to dinner.

The Martini

The martini is one of the most famous cocktails around, partly due to celebrity fans like Winston Churchill, Cary Grant, Ernest Hemingway, BJ Hunnicut and, of course, James Bond.

How exactly do you make a martini? It seems like a simple question, but there are many different versions of the martini out there. Let's have a look through them.

The current version of the "traditional" martini involves mixing two shots (60mL) of gin and half a shot (15mL) of vermouth. You can vary the ratio according to your taste. These are put into a cocktail shaker with ice and stirred, then strained into a chilled martini glass, so no ice is in the final product. The usual garnish is a stuffed olive, but twists of lemon peel are sometimes used.

Since the gin is the majority of the cocktail, you want to make sure that you're dealing with a high quality gin. Instead of Gordon's, try Tanqueray (Tanqueray 10 if you can find it), Bombay Sapphire or South Gin.

As for the vermouth - which is a fortified wine flavoured with herbs and spices - you want a dry one. Cinzano will set you back about \$18 for a litre while Noilly Prat is \$25 for 750mL and much better quality. Remember, with the martini, you're not diluting the ingredients with other mixers, so if you really want to enjoy your cocktail, don't skimp on the ingredients.

Vodka martini

If you're not a gin fan, you can substitute vodka into the cocktail instead. Many people today order a

martini with vodka in mind and are disappointed when they get gin in there, so be sure to ask for a vodka martini if that's what you want.

Stirred, not shaken

According to many people, James Bond gets it wrong when he asks for his martini "shaken, not stirred". Some people will tell you that shaking dulls the taste of the vermouth, others will tell you it makes the gin more crisp due to "bruising". Bartenders are weird like that. But the major problem with shaking the martini is that it chips the ice, which melts quite quickly and dilutes the cocktail. It could be that Bond is trying to keep his senses about him, but I doubt it when he's drinking 6 of them in a sitting. A vodka martini that is shaken, not stirred, is properly called a Bradford.

Other Variants

Gibson - same as a normal martini but garnished with a pickled olive instead.

Dirty martini - olive brine instead of (or with) vermouth.

Smoky martini - add a dash of scotch
Dirty pickle - like a dirty martini but with pickle juice instead of olive brine (weird, weird Americans)

Perfect - equal parts gin and vermouth

Churchill - all gin, stirred, with an unopened bottle of vermouth waved over the glass... wasn't a fan of the vermouth, ol' Winston.

Roosevelt - two olives

Appletini - vodka martini with apple schnapps

Naked or diamond - no ice, but in a chilled glass

Tequila martini - um, guess

Gin salad - ordinary martini but with three olives and two cocktail onions

Valencia - use Fino sherry instead of vermouth

Mantini - beer instead of vermouth

Champagne region expansion

More and more people are drinking Champagne these days, even with these evil economic times happening. I've seen this referred to as the "Champagne paradox". In fact, some producers in Champagne are so confident that they're releasing a new tier of wines above and beyond what were previously thought of as the top of the pops.

One example is Krug. Until recently, their top shelf bubbles was clos du Mesnil, from a very select single vineyard that is sheltered from harsh weather by a stone wall (which is what the word clos indicates). Chardonnay is the only grape planted in this vineyard, resulting in a blanc de blancs of pure minerality and subtle honey.

Just recently they've released the clos d'Ambonnay 1995, the new top shelf wine, also from a single walled vineyard in the village of Ambonnay. In contrast to the clos du Mesnil, this is 100% Pinot Noir, so this wine has a rich, creamy bouquet, heaps of ripe fruit and a full flavour that likes to hang around for awhile.

Want a bottle? Righto, you're looking at well over \$1,000 per bottle. And that's the point, it's reserved for the super rich.

Actually, that's why the Champagne region is expanding. Keep in mind that French producers can't just use grapes from anywhere to put into their products, as we can. They're governed by a strict set of rules, so this expansion is not being taken lightly.

A whole bunch of newly rich people are springing up in countries with huge populations such as China, Russia and India. These areas are new markets for Champagne producers, which means there is less to go around for the rest of the world... and as demand goes up, so do prices.

In 1999, a record was set with 327 million bottles of Champagne shipped. In 2007, a new record was set with 338.7 million bottles shipped. And the world wasn't even celebrating a new millennium either! So, they need to start planting more vines. Only problem is, the entire Champagne region that can be legally planted is already chockers.

So for the first time in 80 years, Champagne is expanding beyond the 319 villages that are currently used. Forty new regions in four *départments* (French equivalent of a state) have been proposed. These *départments* are Marne, Aube, Haute-Marne and Marchais-en-Brie.

By one estimate, the land values in these 40 new villages will rise from around 5,000 to one million euros per hectare. Of course, they weren't the only villages to apply so the ones that missed out are disputing the proposal. Nothing is finalised yet, but it'll be very interesting to watch anyway.

Some (slightly more influential) wine writers are even arguing that some of the lesser existing villages in Champagne should be kicked out too... we shall see. Either way, it'll be interesting.

Past Newsletters

Past newsletters are available online www.rosebaydriveinliquorstore.com.au

Mr Riggs Yacca Paddock Tempranillo 2006

The region: Adelaide Hills (SA)

The alcohol: 15.0%

The taste: Tobacco, vanilla, plums

The price: \$30 or 10% off in a dozen



Mailing List

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It's refreshing to see more and more grape varieties getting air time in Australia. Grapes that are famous overseas such as Grenache Noir, Sangiovese, Nebbiolo and Cinsault. So what about Tempranillo? It's basically Spain's national or "noble" grape. Ever heard of a Rioja? They're mostly Tempranillo.

Wines made from Tempranillo tend to be dark ruby red in colour and can sometimes produce wines that are so deeply coloured that they are almost opaque. You're usually looking for aromas and flavours of tobacco, vanilla, leather, herb, plum and dark red berries. Wines made from Tempranillo are pretty food friendly, which is typical of wine made from grapes that are native to the Mediterranean region.

Mr Riggs is the label of Ben Riggs, who makes wines under quite a few labels, including Wirra Wirra and various overseas wineries in the Napa Valley, Bordeaux, Greece, Italy and southern France.

Now he's making wine for himself. The lineup includes two Rieslings, a Viognier, a Shiraz (called the Gaffer), a brilliant Shiraz Viognier and a dessert wine. That's a fairly standard lineup for a winery based around Adelaide, so it's interesting that he also chose a Tempranillo.

Good thing he did though because it's a great drop. He describes it as a "wonderfully rich, stylish wine, with natural fruit sweetness and elegance... One of the key characteristics of the variety is the savoury tannins, evident in abundance, as well as the sweet red berry flavours of the fruit." Get into it and try something new.