

New World Wines

Tel: 441 232 2325

Fax: 441 236 2260

Email: nww@bermudawine.com

Website: www.bermudawine.com

Newsletter

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To clients and friends a happy new year. This edition of the newsletter describes my trip to the west coast late last year. My timing was good as I was able to taste and purchase many wines from the excellent 2001 vintage, including several new houses.

The year promises to be quite exciting with the final two dinners from the winter series (Australia and California), and Deerfield Ranch in June. In addition I hope to get Serge Hochar from Chateau Musar to Bermuda (he has promised to come) as well as a well-known wine writer. New Champagne from Gosset and Jacquesson will be available along with other new arrivals.

Davis Bynum is tucked away in the heart of the Russian River Valley just down the road from Roccioli Vineyards. As one of the early proponents of Russian River pinot noir they have enviable vineyard holdings as well as access to some of the best fruit in the valley.

On a gorgeous early autumn day I met with Hampton Bynum at the winery and sampled through the current releases. My notes are as follows:

Sauvignon Blanc 2002

High acidity with grass and lemon notes. Definitely more New Zealand–Loire style than California.

Chardonnay 2000

Very good depth and mouth feel. Good complexity and balance. A very good Chardonnay and well priced for what it is.

Pinot Noir (Russian River Valley) 2001

Very pleasant tasting of red fruits and strawberries. Refreshing acidity, not a blockbuster but very enjoyable and an excellent price for the quality of wine.

Pinot Noir Lindley's Knoll 2000

Darker and full then the 2001 Russian River Valley with meaty red and black fruits. Lots of guts and a long finish.

Allen Vineyard 2001

This wine from the famous Allen Vineyard, considered one of the two or three grand cru vineyards in the Russian River Valley. Old vines and gentle winemaking have produced

what my notes describe as a 'gorgeous complete wine', by no means dark and brooding but full of finesse and length. I managed to cajole 10 cases out of Hampton and I would strongly recommend anyone who loves Pinot Noir to try this wine (\$34/bottle after discount).

Next stop was a meeting with Tony Fleming of *Wilson Fleming Estate Winery*. Tony and I had met at Horizons where he and his family are regular visitors. He and his wife, Edith Wilson, have planted a vineyard near Chalk Hill with Syrah and Cabernet Sauvignon and the first harvest was 2002. Their wines will be released in 2003 and no doubt a few cases will eventually be available in Bermuda. Tony had kindly agreed to introduce me to *Merry Edwards*. We met Merry and her husband Ken at the John Ash restaurant just north of Santa Rosa, or perhaps I should more accurately say we met Ken and then about an hour and a half later Merry joined us having just finished punching down the caps of various lots of pinot noir recently harvested. We tasted through most of her 2001 range of Pinot Noirs and her Sauvignon Blanc 2002.

Sauvignon Blanc 2002

100% sauvignon blanc but made in a Bordeaux style. Light and silky, fresh and vibrant. One of the best Sauvignon Blancs I have tasted recently from anywhere in the world. Unfortunately she was sold out but promised to reserve me a few cases of the 2003.

Pinot Noir Russian River Valley 2001

Crisp acidity with red cherries on the nose and palate. Quite structured but with the fruit to back it up. Quite burgundian in style.

Pinot Noir Russian River Valley 2000

Bold red and black fruits. Quite full but not as structured as the Klopp. Although less expensive I preferred it to the Klopp.

Pinot Noir Klopp Vineyard 2000

A big robust structured wine with considerable tannin, although ripe, good long finish. Red and black fruits making it an altogether bigger mouthful than the Russian River Valley example.

Pinot Noir Sonoma Coast 2001

Very lovely example. Again some backbone and refreshing acidity. It was clear throughout the range that Merry was not trying to make fruity easy drinking wines. The grapes for this cuvee came from the Meredith vineyard amongst others.

Pinot Noir Olivet Lane 2001

From one of the older vineyards in the Russian River Valley. Very typical Russian River Valley wine. Slightly more complex than the Sonoma Coast with lovely lingering flavours. Priced like and equivalent in quality to a top premier cru from Burgundy

The meal, service and ambience at the John Ash restaurant is exemplary. I highly recommend a visit if you are in wine country.

The following day I visited *Neyers Vineyards* at their new facility in Napa. I met with Swan Day and also caught up with Bruce Neyers' wife, Barbara. Bruce works for wine importer Kermit Lynch (author of one of my favourite books *Adventures on the Wine Route*). Because he is also involved in the trade Bruce understands the market and then has been proactive in pricing his wines competitively, especially his portfolio of chardonnays.

We tasted through the 2002 range of chardonnays. I was particularly taken with the Carneros bottling. Although bottled only a month before my visit it was already drinking well. Lovely nose of straw and light touches of oak. Mellow but not flabby with a long finish. Really a lovely bottle of wine and I have ordered 28 cases.

We also tried the 2002 Grenache which was very good, and the Syrah Hudson vineyard 2001 which was bursting with fruit and had a great nose and long smooth finish.

I also visited *Gary Farrell's* new winery and tasting room. The views are spectacular but unfortunately the 2001 lineup of Pinot Noirs were not. I heard later that he had spent so much time and money on the new winery that perhaps the attention to the wines themselves had suffered.

I was staying, as usual, at *Deerfield Ranch* and can report that their new caves are nearing completion. The winery should be built over the next two years and the tasting room open to the public late in 2005. The building will be in the style of a Jack London lodge and overlook the winery's vineyards and Kenwood Marsh. The wines from the 2001 vintage are currently on their way to Bermuda, including the 2001 Ladi's Syrah and Zinfandel and a sweet easy drinking 2000 Sonoma Cabernet. Speaking of *Ladi* we had an opportunity to visit his vineyard. He has merlot, cabernet and syrah and it was easy to see why his grapes stand out. The vines were in beautiful condition, he keeps yields sensible and every bunch was lovingly looked after. Robert Rex has a great relationship with Ladi and it looks like he will be getting most of the grapes from the vineyard in coming years.

After California it was on to Oregon. I had visited several times before in 1997 when the 1994 vintage was available and again in 1998 when the 1995 and 1996 vintages were on the market. The visits had highlighted both the possibilities and problems faced when purchasing Oregon wines, but I was keen to see what changes had taken place.

My first visit was to *Beaux Freres*, widely considered to be the finest producer of Pinot Noir in Oregon. Their sales manager took me through the vineyards where organic farming practices are followed. Then we met Mike Etzel, one of the owners, and tasted through several vintages.

Next stop was *Patricia Green Cellars* where Patty and her partner, Jim Anderson, agreed to meet me even though the crush had started. We tasted through a range of her wines, on which I had the following notes:

Sauvignon Blanc 2002

Very nice wine. 100% stainless steel fermentation. Current production about 350 cases but will move up to 800-1,000 cases eventually. I thought this was a well balanced flavourful wine.

Pinot Noir (Oregon) 2002

Made from grapes grown partly in a vineyard in Southern Oregon (1/4) and from purchased Willamette Valley grapes. Priced as an entry level Pinot Noir it was fresh and sappy, but without any great depth.

Pinot Noir (Shea Vineyard) 2001

The Shea vineyard is one of Oregon's more famous vineyards, the owner selling his fruit to a number of top wineries. I found the wine relatively light with some acidity although well balanced. It had the structure to improve over the next few years.

Pinot Noir (Eason Vineyard) 2001

More fruit and texture than the Shea bottling with less acidity. A slightly grainy finish but very good for current drinking.

Barrel samples of the 2002 Shea and 2002 Eason were also tasted. In both cases the wines were weightier and more intense, promising great things to come.

Patty's view on winemaking was quite traditional, low yields (around two tons an acre), filtering only when absolutely necessary, 100% french oak (one third new for the single vineyard wines) and stressing balance and finesse over raw power.

The northern Willamette Valley is a beautiful place. I stayed at Wine Country Farm, a bed & breakfast near the top of the Dundee Hills. Very nice rooms and superb cooked breakfasts. I dined in McMinnville, once at Kame, a Japanese restaurant, and the next night at Nicks. Both were very good.

I hope you will venture off the beaten path to try some of these new arrivals.

John M. Sharpe

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