

# *New World Wines*

Tel: 441 232 2325

Fax: 441 236 2260

Email: [nww@bermudawine.com](mailto:nww@bermudawine.com)

Website: [www.bermudawine.com](http://www.bermudawine.com)

## *Newsletter*

**April 2002**

**No. 6**

The "wine industry" in California is in a state of transition. In the 90's wine prices rose rapidly as consumers bought into the "lifestyle". More and more vineyards were planted, some replacing those affected by phylloxera, often with varietals like Chardonnay and Merlot. It seemed that there would be no end to demand.

Reality has now arrived! My forecast - prices for all but the "cult" wines will drop because:

- wineries will push out ever expanding inventories onto the market
- many wines from the rest of the world are now relatively better value due to the strong US dollar
- the quality of wines from France and elsewhere continue to improve
- thousands of acres of Chardonnay and Merlot planted in the wrong areas with the wrong clones will depress grape prices
- the slowing economy will drive consumers to buy better value wines.

The result in the short term will be keener prices (and better choice) for consumers, a shake out of California vineyards with grapes that are no longer in great demand and the closure or sale of certain wineries whose existence was only viable in the boom times. I foresee an increasing number of takeovers of smaller wineries by the big consortiums whose economies of scale can make the difference

I have found more compelling values in France over the past couple of years than California. However if one selects carefully there are still many good value high quality wines to be found in California. My trip in early September last year (2001) confirmed this. As a result of being a low volume importer I am generally able to select small lots of those wines and vintages that I believe represent the best a particular producer has to offer.

Regarding vintages it appears that 1999 will be a good year for all varietals, while 2000 will be better for the earlier ripening Chardonnay and Pinot Noir.

I started my journey at **ZD Wines** where I met with Brett de Leuze and Teresa D'Aurigio. Wines tasted:

### **Chardonnay 2000**

Traditional ZD style, no malalactic fermentation.

**Chardonnay (Reserve) 1999**

Light oak nuances, pretty nose, stylish and long.

**Chardonnay (Reserve) 1998**

Taste of hazelnuts, full and mouth filling with a long finish. Superb.

**Pinot Noir 1999**

Sweet fruit with medium body, from Carneros.

**Cabernet Sauvignon 1998**

Sweet powerful nose of red fruits and oak. Not super ripe but balanced and easy drinking.

**Cabernet Sauvignon (Reserve) 1998**

Similar nose to the regular bottling. Very smooth.

My next visit was to **Whitehall Lane** where I met with Tom Leonardini II. It was a beautiful day and we sat in the garden. Wines tasted:

**Sauvignon Blanc 2000**

Citrus overtones with a delicate layer of oak. Very easy drinking.

**Merlot Bommarito 1999**

All Napa Valley grapes. Uncomplicated nose but good value.

**Merlot 1999**

Sweeter and more intense than the Bommarito. From their own grapes. A very good year.

**Cabernet Sauvignon 1999**

Sweet fruit with some tannin. Medium bodied. Very good wine.

**Cabernet Sauvignon (Reserve) 1998**

Deep colour. Very good if not in the class of the 1997 Reserve.

**Cabernet Sauvignon (Morisoli Vineyard) 1999**

This wine was tasted from the barrel with Dean Sylvester, Whitehall Lane's winemaker, on a tour of the winery. Huge dark and brooding. The wine will be stunning.

My next visit was to **Landmark** where I tasted through their current offerings with their Sales Manager, Bob Cooney. Tasting notes:

**Damaris (Reserve) 1999**

Rich, full bodied, light oak. Big and bold, yet stylish. Mid-low acidity. Very good.

**Lorenzo 1999**

My favourite wine from Landmark but unfortunately one I cannot get due to the small quantities made. Beautiful wine with great finesse. Look out for this on wine lists in the better restaurants in the US.

**Overlook 2000**

Tasted, or rather drunk, with lunch at the Kenwood Restaurant in Kenwood where Jeanna Beck and winemaker, Eric Stern, joined us. Slightly higher acidity than the 1999 version but with distinct Burgundian nuances. I actually prefer this to the 1999 as it has more subtlety.

Landmark continues to get outstanding reviews for its Chardonnays and Pinot Noirs from Robert Parker and the Wine Spectator and the Overlook in particular at \$21 a bottle (after case discount) represents very good value.

After Landmark it was on to the Russian River Valley. **Davis Bynum** are one of the oldest wineries there and have some fine pinot noir vineyards in what is now generally considered the top pinot area in California. 1999 was an excellent year and it showed in the offerings. Davis Bynum also produce some very good Cabernet and Zinfandel, all from Sonoma fruit. I met with their sales manager Christina Welling. Tasting notes:

**Sauvignon Blanc 2000**

Citrusy with quite a lot of acidity. More towards a New Zealand style.

**Pinot Noir (Russian River Valley) 1999**

Lightish colour in the glass but a medium nose of red fruits with a light touch of oak. Considerable depth and finesse. I was told that it will develop more colours as it ages. Very good effort.

**Pinot Noir (Bynum & Moshim Vineyard) 1999**

A more powerful nose of red and some black fruits. Lots of fruit with light ripe tannins in the background. 13.8% alcohol. Very fine indeed. 240 cases were made of which I managed to get 14.

The wine was subsequently reviewed in Wines & Spirits Magazine which stated: " All about deep satisfaction, the kind that pinot can give when grown to this sumptuous maturity. There's a heart beating in the aroma, a potent cherry ripeness without any super-ripeness or rot. Only super-complexity, a well of flavor, a textural finesse that makes the structure feel smooth as satin for all its tarry tannins. Herbal touches give length to the complexity, but the wine somehow remains all fruit nonetheless. Dramatic stuff, well worth the patience to age. "

**Pinot Noir (Lindley's Knoll) 1999**

This wine was made from grapes grown in a hillside estate vineyard in the Russian River Valley. Intense fruit flavours and aroma with a touch of alcohol on the nose. Not as refined or perfumed as the Bynum & Moshin.

**Zinfandel Sonoma County Old Vines 1998**

Made from grapes grown in five different vineyards around the area the wine was smooth, easy drinking and very good value. I was impressed.

**Boar Doe 1998**

A true Bordeaux blend of 60% Cabernet Sauvignon, 35% Merlot and small amounts of Cabernet Franc and Petit Verdot. The formula was slightly different in 1999 with Merlot dominating the blend.

I thought this was a terrific effort at a very good price. Ripe but with tannins to allow it to age gracefully for years it was an excellent expression of Sonoma terrior.

**Laureles Merlot 1997**

From an excellent vintage this was an easy drinking wine with some structure. Red fruits on the nose and palate. Very good effort.

**Meritage 1997**

Made from 50% Merlot, 40% Cabernet Sauvignon and 10% Cabernet Franc this was a good, well made wine. Smooth with a medium - long finish.

**Cabernet 1997**

Deep dark coloured wine with a very nice nose and quite a lot of tannin. While I went to Davis Bynum for Pinot I left feeling very impressed with their whole line.

My final review deals with **Deerfield Ranch**. As usual I stayed at Deerfield (as an investor I am entitled to a number of nights per year) and enjoyed the hospitality of Robert and PJ Rex. As I have mentioned before Robert is a fantastic cook and PJ a fanatic (in the nicest sense of the word) for fresh healthy produce. As Philip and Barbara Pedro will attest the breakfasts at the Ranch are superb and for Bermuda visitors Robert and PJ will usually cook dinner and do a tasting of Deerfield wines as well.

When I was there harvest was in full swing and Robert and assistant winemaker Michael Browne were here, there and everywhere supervising the harvest and organising the crush. The fruit seemed to be in great shape and provided clear evidence that 2001 should be a very good year for all varietals in California.

**Tastings****Merlot Russian River Valley 1999**

Although young the fruit was sweet and pure if a little subdued on the nose. The wine should flesh out over time and be a tasty example of Sonoma merlot.

**Gewurtztraminer 2000**

A bold ripe off dry style of Gewurtztraminer, but balanced and very drinkable. Very enjoyable wine.

**Zinfandel 1999**

A blockbuster with over 16% alcohol. Very ripe grapes with pure fruit flavours. The debate rages about these high alcohol wines but as Robert says he picks the grapes when they are ready not on the basis of the alcohol content.

**Sangiovese 1999**

Another excellent Sangiovese from a vineyard in lake County north of Sonoma. Smooth, easy drinking and priced like a Chianti Riserva.

We also barrel sampled lots of wines including the 2000 Pinot Noir, the first Pinot for many years from Deerfield. The next Meritage released will be the 1999 DRX which should be available in Bermuda in October.

Robert and PJ will be visiting Bermuda in June and a wine dinner has been scheduled for the downstairs terrace at Horizons & Cottages, Paget on Saturday, 8th June at 7:30 for 8:00 pm. The dinner will cost \$95 per person and feature four courses and five wines. Total capacity will be 120 so please book early through me at this stage.

(email: [nww@bermudawine.com](mailto:nww@bermudawine.com)).

**John M. Sharpe**

April 2002