

Amherst Wines & Spirits

February 2013

FRENCH WINE DINNER

We're kicking off our 2013 wine dinners in style as we turn to France for inspiration on food and wine. We will pair each of four courses with a wine to compliment, giving substance to the quote from the late Andre L. Simon, founder of the International Food & Wine Society - "Wine enhances every meal . . . but to the French wine enhances life itself." Please join us for this life enhancing event. As in the past, reservations are required and must be paid prior to the event to secure your place. Procrastination is discouraged as these dinners often sell out. Seating will be by place card, so let us know if you are coming with friends and we'll seat you together. We're still in the tasting and pairing stage; we'll firm up the exact wines in the next newsletter.

For starters . . .

Gravlax de saumon fait maison

House cured gravlax served on galette de pommes de terre, accompanied by fennel salad with a Dijon mustard chantilly

Wine: white Burgundy

And then . . .

Poisson de mare

Fresh cod wrapped in thin slices of zucchini and pancetta sautéed with a marmalade of fennel spiked with a vanilla pepper sauce

Wine: Loire Valley red

And then . . .

Steak au poivre

Sirloin steak finished with a brandy peppercorn reduction, served with gratin de pommes de terre

Wine: Rhône Valley red

And finally . . .

Coupe Dijonnaise

Pear poached in white wine dusted with crushed pistachios

Wine: Sweet dessert white

THE FINE PRINT

You can reserve your places by phoning the store (549-0900) with credit card, via email (steve@amherstwines.com), or when next in the shop.

Date: March 27 (Wednesday)

Time: 6:30

Location: Bistro 63, 63 North Pleasant Street, Amherst
(parking in town lot just behind)

Cost: \$80, includes tax & gratuity

SAY YOU WANT MORE?

We're tweeting tasting notes as we come across something special, reminders of upcoming events, general wine rambles, etc. Our twitter feed is [@winosteve1](#). Also, our electronic midmonth newsletter is a shorter, scrappier take on the wine scene, often with special sales unannounced elsewhere. You can sign up on our web site, www.amherstwines.com, to receive it once each month.

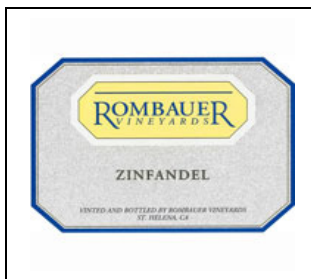
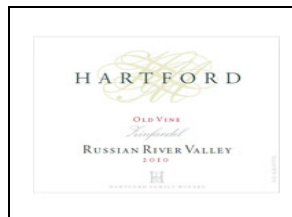
ZINFANDEL GROWS UP

For many years the grape got no respect, planted in sites without much regard for what would do well where. About 15-20 years ago things began to change. Led by the determination of Paul Draper of Ridge Winery a few adventurous growers started to realize that, properly grown and vinified, terrific wine could be made from this long neglected grape. Soon others followed and today there are several wineries turning out very special Zins. Our collection starts at \$7.99 and we have many tasty wines under \$17 to choose from. This time, however, we will focus on the upper end. Unlike grapes such as Cabernet Sauvignon there's no need to wait several years to enjoy these. The opulent fruit in young Zinfandel is part of the attraction.

BIG TIME ZINFANDEL

Hartford 2011 . . \$32.99

This small family owned winery controls some of the oldest Zinfandel vineyards in Sonoma, many 80+ years old. These dry farmed vineyards in the eastern end of the Russian River section of Sonoma yield fruit of immense concentration and complexity. Hand harvested, cold soaked before fermentation, free run juice only (not crushed) and about 1 year in tight grained French oak. Production is quite small.

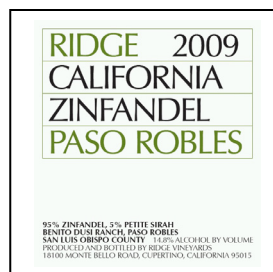


Rombauer 2010 . . \$32.99

Koerner & Joan Rombauer set up shop in Napa in 1982 producing small quantities wines from grapes purchased from trusted growers. The grapes for their 2010 Zin comes from warmer growing sites in Sonoma, Mendocino and the Sierra Foothills. The wine spent 15 months in French & American oak and sports an almost opaque, inky color – a hint of the impressive concentration. Tongue-coating flavors of boysenberry jam, spice, and dark plum are a hedonist's delight. This is a powerful, layered big boy.

Ridge, Paso Robles 2009 . . \$32.99

No Zinfandel discussion would be complete without acknowledging the immense role of Ridge, the first to explore what was possible with the grape. From its location in Santa Cruz Ridge has assembled vineyard sources from some of the finest sites in California. This one is from their Paso Robles site. It is an intense, silky, jammy Zin with a rustic, brambly sense, oodles of ripe fruit with balancing acidity, pepper and wild berry. It's the real stuff.



ZINFANATICS SALE: Experience Zin nirvana – 1 bottle each of the above . . **\$84.99** (singly \$98.97)

SATURDAY IN-STORE TASTINGS

Drop by on Saturday anywhere from 2:00-5:00 to taste interesting wines – compliments of the house. It's casual, fun, you'll learn stuff and get to munch fresh baked baguettes. Here's what's coming:

February 2: Red Blends from the U.S.

Wineries in California & Washington have taken to blending different grapes to achieve certain style and price points. Many of these are really good. You'll be impressed.

February 9: Malbec – France vs. Argentina

Malbecs from Argentina are all the rage today. But where did the grape come from originally? Southern France. This tasting will compare Malbecs from both regions. Should be an interesting tasting!

February 16: Spain's Little Known Whites

Justly known for their reds, Spain is also the source of some well-priced and interesting whites. Grapes you never heard of, but wait till you taste.

February 23: Cabernet Sauvignon Around the World

The world's most planted fine wine grape is grown in most major wine producing countries. We'll taste from California, South Africa, Australia, & Chile to see similarities and differences.

WINTER WHITES

If it's whites you're craving during the cold winter months (and there's many of you out there), we offer a short list of those which offer full, rich flavors to pair with the hearty flavors of winter fare. There are more but space is precious.

Torrontes, Rodolfo 2012 (ARG) . . \$9.99

Torrontes is an important white grape in Argentina. In this example you'll experience a lush, fruit-driven white, dry but not too, with flavors of white peach, apricot and notes of spice in the background.

Chardonnay, Acacia "A" 2010 (CA) . . \$12.99

Quintessential California Chard, full flavored and lush. Toasty vanilla bean flavors mingle with peach and other citrus.

Grillo, Fondo Antico 2010 (IT) . . \$13.99

Grillo is a white grape indigenous to Sicily. Impressively concentrated, this is a white for red wine lovers. It's showing white peach, apple, and hints of anise with enough grip to add lift and drama.

Côtes-du-Rhône, Guigal 2011 (FR) . . \$14.99

The heart of the blend is the Viognier grape which contributes the gorgeous floral aromas. This is just bursting with tropical fruit flavors while still maintaining its balance and freshness. Great winemaking. Dry but not killer.

Semillon, L'Ecole 41 2010 (WA) . . \$15.99

Semillon is a specialty of this Washington winery and this does not disappoint. 100% barrel fermented which yields a creamy texture. Bold flavors include pear, spice, melon & baker's yeast. A beauty.

d'Arenberg "Hermit Crab" 2010 (AUS) . . \$15.99

A blend of Viognier & Marsanne grapes, barrel fermented. Shows impressive concentration and depth while still maintaining its freshness. Pear, spice, vanilla bean, a hint of toasty oak and a long finish. Must be tried.

Gewurztraminer, Pierre Sparr 2011 (FR) . . \$17.99

The Gewurztraminer grape is one of the superstars from Alsace in northeastern France. Big flavors of dried fruits, mandarin orange and a hint of lychee. No shy wallflower, not for wine wimps.

MALBEC – THE FRENCH CONNECTION

The Malbec grape from Argentina is all the rage, perhaps the hottest category in red wines today. Less well known is that its origins are French. It is one of the grapes permitted in Bordeaux, but its primary stage is the small wine region of Cahors in southern France. By French wine law Cahors must be at least 70% Malbec. French producers, noticing the success of this grape from Argentina, have begun putting the Malbec name on the labels and guess what? Cahors is beginning to happen. Our store tasting on [February 9](#) will offer head to head comparisons of Malbec from Argentina and Cahors. Meanwhile, we cannot recommend highly enough these French Malbecs from Cahors. Take a peek.

Gouleyant 2011 . . \$11.99

The most difficult red for us to keep in stock during the past year. Soft, full, earthy . . a wonderful wine at a great price.

Château de Chambert 2007 . . \$17.99

Malbec has been grown on this estate since 1690! Firm style, deeply colored & flavored – raspberry, currant, & minerals.

Château de Mercués 2009 . . \$23.99

Deeply colored, intense and concentrated flavors of plum with a mineral underpinning and ripe, lush tannins. A big boy.

OUR TAKE – "OLD VINES"

From time to time we will offer opinion pieces on topics which we think deserve some attention. This is the first.

Increasingly, we're seeing the words "old vines" on wine labels, mostly from California. There's some hocus pocus afoot here. The notion of wines made from old vines is legit. As vines age beyond a certain point, they tend to yield fewer grapes and so economics pushes growers to tear up these vines and replant with younger, more productive ones. If, however, these vines are allowed to age, here's what happens: the roots do not stop growing, resulting in a more extensive root system providing more nourishment to fewer berries. Grapes from these vines have more concentration of flavor and the resulting wine is better. So far so good. The problem, as we see it, is that the term "old vines" is unregulated. How old is an "old" vine? Unclear. If 5% of a vineyard contains truly old vines, can the entire production be bottled as "old vines"? You bet. Brand owners have figured out that there is some cachet and sales oomph to having these words on the label, but our take is that it is a bit shabby. Our advice – ignore these words.

A VERY LOCAL BREW

Bill Goldfarb, a pleasant guy with an easy smile, walked into the shop a few months ago and introduced himself as the owner of **Lefty's Brewing Company**, a new micro brewer in Greenfield. He dropped off samples. The staff tasted them – all quite good – and we now stock two: Irish Stout (\$4.95), a rich and robust stout which is packed with flavor without being heavy, and Maple Ale (\$6.70), slightly lighter with just a hint of sweetness, made with maple syrup from Shelburne Falls, both in 22 oz. size. Both show a fine touch and were big hits with the staff. We highly recommend both.

NEW ARRIVALS

WHITE

Gavi, Batasiolo 2011 (IT) . . . \$10.99

Gavi is a small winegrowing area in northwestern Italy's Piedmont region. The wines are quite dry, fragrant, delicate, and with a crisp acidity which brings out the best in food flavors. Most are more expensive – strong value here.

Chardonnay, Sebastiani 2010 (CA) . . . \$15.99

Big boned Sonoma Chard showing vivid flavors of melon, fig, vanilla, and spice. The flavors are bold and assertive without being out of control. This showcases the ripe California style beautifully.

RED

Côtes-du-Rhône, Domaine St. Jean 2010 (FR) . . . \$7.99

Here's your Tuesday night pizza red. It catches the simple, unadorned style of French country wines beautifully. Mid-weight, lightly earthy, clean & fresh. A treat as an "everyday" red.

Primitivo, Luccarelli 2011 (IT) . . . \$9.99

The Primitivo grape from southern Italy is the same as California's Zinfandel. This is perhaps a bit more earthy, a bit less ripe in keeping with the style of the region. True "vino".

Pinot Noir, Castle Rock 2009 (CA) . . . \$12.99

This is the Carneros bottling from Castle Rock. Carneros, at the lower end of Napa & Sonoma, is one of the state's prime growing areas for this grape, but it's rare to find one at this price. Pinot people – take note.

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