

Amherst Wines & Spirits

January 2012

MARKET OUTLOOK

2011 was a year of relative stability in the wine market as the worldwide supply/demand equation had adjusted to the global economic slowdown. Quantities of super expensive wines shrunk as producers diverted some of their grapes to lower priced labels to avoid image-damaging price cutting on oversupply of pricey wines. It looked to us like a welcome return to normalcy, at least from a pricing point of view. The Asian market, especially China, has driven pricing of the top Bordeaux and Burgundy to insane levels, but this has no effect on the wines most of us are concerned with. 2011 did see upward price pressure on distilled brown goods – single malt scotch, American whiskeys (bourbon & rye), and Cognac/Armagnac. We expect these increases to continue as all are dependent on aged products, so when demand spikes (as it has), it takes some time for supply to catch up. 2011 was a tricky growing vintage in much of Europe. As a result, wine production was a bit lower and this may firm up, even increase, some prices in 2012 if worldwide demand holds up. Big “if” here. However the chips fall, we will continue to work hard to ferret out interesting wines at sensible prices. Stay tuned.

SATURDAY IN-STORE TASTINGS

Each Saturday from 2:00 – 5:00 we offer a range of wines for tasting, compliments of the house. You get a tasting sheet with information about the wines we’re tasting. You also get to munch fresh baked baguettes and mingle with the Valley’s beautiful people (our customers). It’s informal and fun. Drop by if you can.

January 7: Bargain Reds Under \$10

If you’re willing to be a bit adventurous, you’ll find a world of really good wines at bargain prices. We spend lots of time searching for these. Come check out our discoveries.

January 14: Tuscan Red Blends

When Chianti producers extend their reach these days, they look towards non-traditional blends, including grapes such as Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, & Syrah, often with stunning results.

January 21: Winter Whites

Full-flavored whites to match the heartier fare of the season. We’ll taste good examples from California, France, Italy, & Austria.

January 28: Merlot U.S. Style

Forget what you knew about Merlots from a few years ago. This is now, and they are better than ever. We’ll be tasting from California & Washington.

WHILE THEY LAST . . .

Knob Creek is one of our favorite bourbons, a full-flavored 9 year old Kentucky whiskey which weighs in at a toe-warming 100 proof. We like to cut it with a splash of water, but however it works for you is just fine. We inherited a supply of lovely, non-tacky Knob Creek coasters and will be giving away a set of 4 with each bottle of this fine bourbon as long as supplies last. At \$34⁹⁹ this is a good buy even without the coasters. Procrastination discouraged.

WE LOVE THIS SCOTCH

The **BenRiach** distillery was founded in 1898 in the heart of the Scotland’s Speyside region and has quietly been bottling some stunning Scotch ever since. Not well known in the U.S. and we’re hoping it stays that way (lest the price go up). We recently found their 12 year old bottling (\$48⁹⁹) and love its aromas of fruit and honey and well-rounded flavors of spice, vanilla, and oak. We think it compares well in balance and complexity to others costing much more. If you know someone who loves single malts (maybe yourself), here’s something new and wonderful to try.

WINTER WHITES

The crisp, lighter whites which can seem so perfect in the summer may not be the best fit for the heartier flavors of winter. We enjoy more full-bodied, robust whites in the colder weather. Here are some of our seasonal faves.

Snoqualmie "Naked" Gewurztraminer 2010 (WA) . . \$12.99

From organically farmed vineyards in Washington's Columbia Valley. Richly fruity, with flavors of clove, spice, and lychee with an earthy undercurrent. A voluptuous white with a definite touch of sweetness.

Macon-Chardonnay, Talmard 2010 (FR) . . \$12.99

The flavors of peach & citrus are bold and full in this white Burgundy. The fruit is nicely balanced so the flavors are always fresh and lively. A basic white Burg, nicely done.

Yalumba Viognier "Y series" 2010 (AUS) . . \$12.99

Pear, apricot, & lemon zest, a symphony of flavors, bold and lively. Aromas of nutmeg and honey give way to full, dry-but-not-too, concentrated flavors with a crisp finish.

Pfefferer 2009 (IT) . . \$14.99

Italy's Moscato grape is usually vinified sweet, but not this one. The flavors of white peach and mandarine are full and deep with a velvety texture. Dramatic stuff.

Torbreck Semillon 2009 (AUS) . . \$16.99

Aromas of pineapple and yeast introduce this full, richly flavored white. Although it has impressive depth, it is also totally dry with a crisp finish. Interesting combination. This is stylish stuff, very well made.

Starmont Chardonnay 2008 (CA) . . \$17.99

The flavors of melon & pear, show a lovely purity. We love this style. A core of ripe acidity really elevates the wine. A dollop of oak adds complexity. A really lovely Napa Chard, full and quite expressive.

BIG SIZES

If you are in the habit of having a glass or two of wine with dinner daily, we'd like to suggest you have a peek at our large bottle section next time in the shop. Just under the spirits section (where else would it be?) you will find a good selection of 1.5 liter bottles which offer both convenience and savings.

WHITE

Pinot Grigio, Stella (IT) . . \$13.99

Grillo, Arancio (IT) . . \$15.99

La Vieille Ferme (FR) . . \$16.99

Sauvignon Blanc, Santa Ema (CH) . . \$17.99

Sauvignon Blanc, Touton (FR) . . \$17.99

RED

Montepulciano d'Abruzzo, San Lorenzo (IT) . . \$10.99

Shiraz, Peace Family (AUS) . . \$15.99

La Vieille Ferme (FR) . . \$16.99

Cabernet Sauvignon, Santa Ema (CH) . . \$17.99

Chianti, Masi (IT) . . \$18.99

Côtes-du-Rhône, Vignerons de Caractère (FR) . . \$32.99 (3L box)

BIG REDS

Somehow, there's nothing like a full-bodied red to warm the toes on a cold winter day. They come from all over and we stock way too many to mention here. Here are a few to give you the idea.

The Wolftrap 2010 (S. AF.) . . \$10.99

Luscious blend of 65% Syrah, 32% Mourvedre, & 3% Viognier. Rich, spicy flavors of black cherry & raspberry.

Sainte Eulalie 2009 (FR) . . \$11.99

Round, ripe flavors of blackberry with an earthy slant. From the Minervois region in southern France

Cabernet Sauvignon, Sean Minor 2010 (CA) . . \$13.99

Lush and ripe, this Cab from Paso Robles offers up a full-blown black fruits style with little tannin. Soft & round.

The Rook 2009 (WA) . . \$13.99

Blend of Syrah, Merlot, & Cabernet. The ripe flavors of black fruits, smoke, and spice are soft, lush, and deftly balanced.

Shiraz, Greg Norman 2007 (AUS) . . \$14.99

The full, ripe flavors of currant and blueberry are underlined with a mineral sense which give it structure. Long finish.

Nero d'Avola, Colosi 2010 (IT) . . \$15.99

Blackberry jam, deeply colored and flavored. Hints of toasty vanilla bean. A mouthful!

Syrah, Fess Parker 2008 (CA) . . \$18.99

This Santa Barbara red offers up oodles of dark fruits, earth, pepper, & spice. Supple, velvety texture. Sexy stuff.

RYE WHISKEY – IT'S HAPPENING (AGAIN)

Rye whiskey, popular many years ago especially in the northeastern states, practically disappeared after Prohibition. The liquor business, however, has a way of not forgetting. Those of us who pay attention to such things have witnessed the explosion of the premium spirits business over the past 15 years, especially the “brown goods” segment – single malt scotch & bourbon. Now comes American rye. Long dormant, rye has been adopted by leading bartenders across the country as the mixed cocktail has returned to fashion. The purists are more attuned to enjoying it straight, as with good scotch and bourbon. There are Canadian whiskeys called rye, but they need not contain any rye. By contrast American rye must have a minimum 51% rye, the balance being corn and malted barley. Most of the best ryes have considerably more than this minimum. They then spend time in new charred oak barrels before bottling. As with most brown spirits the longer in wood the pricier. Bourbon, a first cousin if you will, is a minimum 51% corn and a bit sweeter and more full-bodied than rye. Good rye has an exotic style with spice and smooth tartness. We have assembled a modest but excellent selection and urge you to boldly take the plunge. (*Patriotic note: George Washington made his own rye*)

Rittenhouse . . \$25.99

100 proof, made in Kentucky

Redemption . . \$27.99

95% rye, bottled at 92 proof after 2 years in oak

Bulleit . . \$36.99

95% rye, bottled at 90 proof, aged in heavy char white oak

High West “Rendezvous” . . \$58.99

95% rye, blend of 6 yr. old and 16 yr. old whiskeys, 92 proof



ON SALE – CALIFORNIA SAUVIGNON BLANC

Better than ever, we say, about these wines. Gone are the days of overblown, overoaked fruit bombs. Sure, wines from sunny California will almost always have ripe fruit flavors. That's a good thing. But today we're seeing these SB's made with a lighter, more confident touch. The flavors are brighter and fresher. We've got some excellent bottlings at great prices in January.

Chateau St. Jean 2009 . . \$12.99

Generous aromas of ginger and spice lead into a supple, velvety textured white. The flavors of peach, melon, and pear are accented by French oak which adds complexity without snuffing out the luscious fruit flavors.

Heron 2009 . . \$12.99

The bouquet of wild herbs and fruit explodes from the glass, followed by full, deep flavors. The fruit flavors are bright, showing hints of spice, lemon grass, and a silky texture.

Clayhouse 2009 . . \$14.99

The fruit is full and ripe, but what sets this one apart from the pack is the mouthwatering acidity which nicely balances out the flavors. You'll find mandarine, apple, and peach flavors in this crisp beauty from Paso Robles.

Starmont 2009 . . \$15.99

A rush of ripe tropical fruits defines the flavors of this beauty. Juicy but not over the top. Then the acidity kicks in to deliver a tangy style with a lightly tart finish. The flavors seem to dance on the palate. Just lovely.

Frogs Leap 2009 . . \$22.99

This Napa SB is the closest California wine to French Sancerre we have experienced. Full, quite dry, with a minerally flavor profile. Crisp, elegant, fragrant, long finish. Very big league, in our view.

SPECIAL PRICING

The Sauvignon Blancs listed here may be combined in January for special discounts:

- Any 3 bottles – deduct 5%
- Any 6 bottles – deduct 10%
- Any 12 bottles – deduct 20%

MIDMONTH NEWSLETTER

You say you want more?? We do a midmonth newsletter which we're pleased to send you. Electronic only. Shorter than this, with different stuff and often announcing special sales or limited quantity items of interest. You can get on the list by visiting our web site, www.amherstwin.es.com, or emailing us the request, steve@amherstwin.es.com.

NEW ARRIVALS

WHITE

Castello di Jumilla 2010 (SP) . . \$8.99

We love these crisp, dry whites from northern Spain. They are perfect aperitif wines and match so well with lighter fare. The flowery aromas give way to a delicate, fresh white which just seems to go with everything. Strong value.

Bianco Vergine, Masi 2010 (IT) . . \$8.99

This is the kind of wine you'd be served by the carafe in a trattoria in Tuscany. It's the local Trebbiano grape. Crisp and dry, with a hint of lemon peel in the flavors. Try some and save the plane fare.

Gruner Veltliner, Brundlmayer 2009 (AUS) . . \$23.99

Willi Brundlmayer is one of Austria's most esteemed producers. Gruner Veltliner is the most important white grape here and this is a classic example, showing green apple, lime & gooseberry in the bouquet and a full, firm style. Plenty of ripeness and a dash closing acidity to keep things fresh and dry. Tired of the usual? Try this.

RED

Alto Real 2010 (SP) . . \$6.99

The Monastrell grape is one of the basic building blocks of Spanish wine. This "everyday" red shows how good it can be at a very modest price – dark fruits flavors, medium-full. Nothing fancy, but solid value. Anyway, who needs fancy?

Père Caboché 2010 (FR) . . \$7.99

There are still great bargains to be found from southern France. This is one. A blend of Grenache & Syrah which asks nothing more than to be enjoyed in the simplest way – with cheese, tuna fish casserole, pasta. Earthy, ripe, top value.

Salice Salentino, Luccarelli 2010 (IT) . . \$9.99

From Puglia, the "heel" of Italy's "boot" comes this quintessentially Italian red. You can almost taste the sun and soil of the south in this medium-full, easy-to-like, versatile red. Real vino.

Brachetto d'Aqui "Niades", Garitina 2010 (IT) . . \$16.99

Brachetto is a red grape grown in northeastern Italy's Piedmont region where it yields a lightly sweet and fizzy red, low in alcohol (5.5% in this case). The bouquet and flavors of fresh strawberries are awesome. Served with a light chill this is hard not to like. It's a big world - here's something different (and quite delicious).

Pinotage, Warwick 2008 (S. AF.) . . \$16.99

The Pinotage grape, a hybrid of the French Pinot Noir and Cinsault grapes, is unique to South Africa. We've tried to find inexpensive examples without much success, but here's a beauty which nicely showcases this unique grape. Aged for 18 months in oak, 100% Pinotage, firm style, deeply flavored. Black fruits with light spice playing off against the ripe flavors.

Zinfandel, Buehler 2010 (CA) . . \$22.99

Just released and perhaps a bit young, but we recommend grabbing some while it's still around, small-ish production here. The bouquet of fresh picked raspberry is pure and exciting. The wine is beautifully balanced, even at this young stage, showing wild berry, spice, and a hint of oak. This should round out well given a few more months in bottle.

AMHERST WINES & SPIRITS 233 North Pleasant Street Amherst

Tel: (413) 549-0900 www.amherstwines.com Email: steve@amherstwines.com