



I have been ranting as of late in this column, but in a return gesture of goodwill I shall refrain from any comments which could be construed as negative regarding the BATF and associated institutions. I do have things on my mind this month though, and they concern the media and the selling of wine. Various and sundry other topics will be touched on so prepare yourself for a mishmash.

Sometimes a wine can sell itself. If you are Madam Bize-Leroy, Mouton-Rothschild, Leonetti, etc., your name, well-earned reputation and exclusivity alone sell your wines even at unbelievable prices. For the average winery the name alone does not mean a whole lot. Marketing of all sorts needs to be pursued vigorously to move several thousand cases of wine. It is an intensely competitive market with strange nuances that often have little to do with common sense selling.

However, with the 1994 vintage Oregon Pinot noir producers have been tossed a softball. It may be the first time in the history of the Oregon wine industry that the vintage alone can accomplish what traveling and tastings and advertising and so on have accomplished in the past. From my dealings in the biz I have found that nearly universally the clamor for any given Oregon winery's 1994 Pinot noir is astounding.

How is this so? The 1994 harvest and subsequently the vintage was regarded as one that produced tremendously reduced yields on the vines and intensely flavored fruit. From the get-go the word has been, "Reduced wine quantity, fantastic wine quality". If this were Don King, skinny on the street would be that the fix is in. The wine drinking public has been inundated with the message that this is "The Vintage Decade". Retailers know it, distributors know it, and wineries cry in their beer that they have such limited quantities of 1994s.

So how much of this is spin and how much is useful information? Good question. Despite being in the biz I have to state that Oregon is not France. Winemaking is not scores of generations old in this part of the world. Vintage may say something about the style of the wines in general terms but it does not assure the consumer of unprecedented levels of quality. Even if 1994 were a banner harvest and vintage for the majority of winemakers in this state it was the first, maybe the second, harvest of its sort they had dealt with in their careers. Just because some fool owns Jimi Hendrix's guitar does not mean that he or she can play "All Along The Watchtower".

But the fix IS in so it may not matter. I have probably tasted as many 1994 Pinots as anyone else out there. I have tasted most every one that has been released and many that have not. There are some fantastic wines, and by and large they are made by the people whom you would expect to make exceptional wines. There is some plonk as well. What it comes down to in 1994, for the consumer, is what it always comes down to: Knowing your producers, figuring out what you like and (hopefully) tasting before you buy.

An excellent contrast to the heralded 1994 vintage is the far-from-heralded 1993 vintage. The initial press on these wines was that they were not exceptional, some were funky and many were backwards with chewy tannins. The vintage wasn't panned across the board but there certainly was no fanfare regarding it. The sales of 1993s were average, steady but unremarkable. Many have still not been released in an effort to smooth the wines and get as far away from the unflattering press as possible.

However, 1993 was a far more classic vintage for Oregon's Pinot noir. The fall was long, warm, and generally dry. The fruit labored to ripen through a cool summer but had the opportunity to hang on the vines for long periods of time. This is what Pinot noir likes to do. Wise wine buyers will probably be able to pick up some very good deals on 1993s as time goes by. These are cellaring wines that will show their true beauty in 3-5 years. Wine usually reflects the growth process of the grape. The 1993 wines are taking time to fill out and mature much as the grapes took time to develop flavors.

Now we have the 1995 vintage coming up. This vintage has been savaged in the press. The impressions are that this will be a subpar vintage with wines of diluted flavors being the norm. There was a lot of rain during the harvest season so deciding when to pick was tricky. Because of the rain the initial comments (even by some Oregon winery owners, of all people) were that this vintage was disappointing and that not much could be expected of the wines.

In my dealing with 1995 wines I have found the poo-pooing of them to be tremendously premature. There are some elegant wines with bright fruit flavors that will be very nice in time. This vintage will have its own particular signature and style that will separate it from other vintages. Neither for good nor bad but just because that is what happens when you farm for a living.

However, the challenge will be to sell these wines. Unfortunately, in America wine drinkers are often too well read about certain vintages. In France, vintage generally has a far less significant impact on sales and purchases than here in the States. My feeling is that there are few great, good or bad vintages, only great to poor winemakers. Good producers will come through the 1995 vintage with some sterling wines. Many consumers may miss out on them because they are focused on the year on the bottle rather than on the name. Again it comes down to knowing your producers, deciding what you like and trying to taste before you buy.

So go and revel in the splendor of the 1994 wines. Spend \$40 on Beaux Freres, Archery Summit and Ken Wright. Find the winemakers that made the cream of the crop and remember their names because when the 1994s are whisked off the shelves in a matter of weeks you will want to know who to purchase in the "off-vintages". When the onslaught of high-end 1994s hits the market in a couple of months you will probably find me poking around in the bargain bins looking for forgotten 1993s.

Okay, I couldn't last a whole column. The OLCC is considering a change of administrative rules that would severely tighten wine shipping laws in Oregon. The rule change would require senders (wine shops, wineries) and carriers (UPS) of wine to go beyond existing laws to document the age of the person having wine shipped to them. Forms and what not would have to be filled out upon shipment and delivery and then kept on file for two years. UPS has said that

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If history repeats itself, and the unexpected always happens, how incapable must man be of learning from experience!  
George Bernard Shaw, b. 1856

**UPPER LEFT EDGE**  
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JUNE 1995

**Some nights the wolf is silent and the moon howls.**

Graffiti

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\* sorry typographical error 1982

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MAY 1995

**Hooray, Hooray for the First of May!**

**WHERE TO GET AN EDGE**

- Cannon Beach:** Jupiter's Rare and Used Books, Osburn's Grocery, The Cookie Co., Coffee Cabaña, Bill's Tavern, Cannon Beach Book Co., Hane's Bakerie, The Bistro, Midtown Café, Once Upon a Breeze, Knoodlz, Copies & Fax, Heather's, Haystack Video, Mariner Market, & Cleanline Surf
- Manzanita:** Manzanita News & Espresso, Bayside Gardens, Cassandra's, Pacific Coast Books & Coffee, & Nehalem Bay Video
- Rockaway:** Sharkey's
- Tillamook:** Rainy Day Books
- Pacific City:** The River House
- Oceanside:** Ocean Side Espresso
- Lincoln City:** Trillium Natural Foods, Driftwood Library, & Eats 'n' Stuff
- Newport:** Oceana Natural Foods, Don Petrie's Italian Food Co., Café DIVA, Cosmo Café, Bookmark Café, Newport Bay Coffee Co., Cuppatunes, Bay Latté, Ocean Pulse Surf Shop, Coastal Coffee Co., & Canyon Way
- Eugene:** Book Mark, Café Navarra, Eugene Public Library, Friendly St. Market, Happy Trails, Keystone Café, Kiva Foods, Lane C.C., Light For Music, New Frontier Market, Nineteenth Street Brew Pub, Oasis Market, Perry's, Red Barn Grocery, Sundance Natural Foods, U of O, & WOW Hall
- Corvallis:** Not Necessarily the News, & The Environmental Center
- Salem:** Heliotrope, Salem Library, & The Peace Store
- Astoria:** KMUN, Columbian Café, The Community Store, & Café Uniontown
- Seaside:** Buck's Book Barn, Universal Video, & Cafe Espresso
- Portland:** Act III, Barnes & Noble, Belmonts Inn, Bibelot Art Gallery, Bijou Café, Borders, Bridgeport Brew Pub, Capt'n Beans (two locations), Center for the Healing Light, Coffee People (three locations), Common Grounds Coffee, East Avenue Tavern, Food Front, Goose Hollow Inn, Hot Lips Pizza, Java Bay Café, Key Largo, La Patisserie, Lewis & Clark College, Locals Only, Marco's Pizza, Marylhurst College, Mt. Hood CC, Music Millennium, Nature's (two locations), NW Natural Gas, OHSU Medical School, Old Wives Tales, Ozone Records, Papa Haydn, PCC (four locations), PSU (two locations), Reed College, Third Eye, TransCentral Library, & YWCA
- Long Beach, WA:** Pacific Picnics
- Nahcotta, WA:** Moby Dick Hotel
- Duvall, WA:** Duvall Books
- Seattle, WA:** Elliot Bay Book Co., Honey Bear Bakery, New Orleans Restaurant, Still Life in Fremont, Allegro Coffeehouse, The Last Exit Coffee House, & Bulldog News
- Bainbridge Island, WA:** Eagle Harbor Book Co.
- Washington, D.C.:** Hotel Tabard Inn