

Toasting Freedom

One nation under gas.

December must be the month when writers visit dentists. Last month, our *EW* colleague, Sally Sheklow, endured the exquisite agony of a root canal. Under the enlightening influence of giggle gas, she experienced an epiphany revealing the deep-rooted lesbian nexus of latex-enhanced sexuality. I envied her the insight, if not the process. These understandings are important, no matter the means of inducement.



Such as: **A to Z Wineworks 2002 Oregon Pinot Gris** (\$11) – gotta love these people's work, consistently high quality, stylish wines at affordable prices. They buy selectively from the best growers then show a deft hand (nose, palate) at blending to achieve varietal flavors (crisply ripe pears, white flowers, a mineral touch) and food-friendly balance. Right now, our fisherfolk are docking with fresh wild coho:

Oregonians know that we can ease the discontents of our winters through periodic and therapeutic applications of big, rich red wines.

My experience was far less intense and, probably predictably, more centered on criminality (tho', of course, rigidly righteous reich-wingers and neobushites would gladly criminalize all gays, even their very thoughts, but that wasn't my focus). Besides, the procedure in my case was much more superficial, being the mere excavation of the tender gum tissues, the location, apparently, of most of my body's pain receptors.

Wendy is one of the world's most competent and pleasant dental hygienists, even though I think she's genetically related to a long line of CIA-trained torturers. Wendy was wielding her space-age Sonic Gouger Xtreme, alternating with the state-of-the-art Roto-Reamer LZ, but I felt no pain. Instead, the lower half of my face was saturated in enough Novocaine to numb an oliphant, and I was drawing deep drafts of nitrous dream-clouds, waiting, hoping to drift into goofy-land. No way. Awake the whole while, I just managed to control my gag reflex while listening to a steady DMX stream of country Muzak (not that I don't like country music; some is grand, and country is still where lyrics went when they left rock & roll). I floated through two and a half hours of 'Bama, Bonnie, George, Willie, Hank, Tim, Alan, et twangy al — slowly, from the murk, insight arose like the bloated face of a three-day floater under a Hudson River dock: No Dixie Chicks, not once in over two hours!

Not possible. Vaguely waving my hands for a break, I mumble-muttered to Wendy: "Who put the hit on the Dixie Chicks?" She stared at me; I explained through thick lips. She got it, exclaimed, "You're right! And they don't even have advertisers!" Who ordered the hit? Who were the hitters?

The Bush-leaguers, sure, but who, which one? Karl Rove, the evil genius of the White House? King George 1.5? Condie? Rummy? The Big Dick himself? Klear Channel, of course, holding Chick disc burnings ala Berlin 1936. Sure, Toby played his role, along with other wannabe brownshirts: Well, FU2TK. Hope y'all choke on yer Koors.

Only one thing to do: Revenge! Listen to *Chicks Live* (new album)! Boycott boycotters! Take back the flag from phony, pseudo-patriots! Post the Bill of Rights in every courthouse and classroom, with a marble monument on Skinner's Butte! And toast free speech with good wines!

Make a buy, cookemup, any style, pour glasses of A to Z Gris, make smiles.

Our investigators and tasting engineers are developing a weakness for New Zealand's white wines. Two of the best have been **Kim Crawford 2003 Marlborough Sauvignon Blanc** (\$15) — bright fruit, citrusy, herbal, zesty and well-balanced, youthful but classy — and **Kim Crawford 2002 Marlborough Unoaked Chardonnay** (\$15) — so pretty, round and forward, delivering all the charm of the grape's unique flavors and surprising delicacy without mummifying it in an oak sarcophagus. We're also tickled that Crawford has the courage to adopt the screwtop closure: no cork, no corkscrew, no cork-taint, no phony ceremony, just twist, pour, sip, savor. Basic lesson for us to re-learn: It ain't glitzy packages we want, it's quality in the contents.

Oregonians know that we can ease the discontents of our winters through periodic and therapeutic applications of big, rich red wines. Even the grayest, most sodden evening can yield to the warmth and allure of **Piping Shrike 2002 Shiraz** (\$11) from Australia's Barossa Valley (possibly that country's finest grape-growing region): this wine is dense, dark, almost ebony, richly aromatic and packed with flavors of dark fruits (plums, currants) and black pepper, a glassful of concentrated sunpower.

Chile is emerging from the decades-long death-squad horrors of the Pinochet military dictatorship supported by the Nixon/Kissinger/Reagan axis, and Chilean wine is emerging into some of the world's best. We discovered **Montes 2002 Cabernet Sauvignon/Carménere** (\$14) at Café Soriah. The wine is soft, round, even voluptuous, complex in aromas and flavors, enriched by the carménere grape, a French varietal thought extinct but rediscovered alive and well in Chile. Winemaker Aurelio Montes has garnered worldwide winepress praise as an innovator who can lead Chilean wines to the next level, so watch this label, whatever the wine.

That's it for 2003, nasty year. Resolve for 04: Send some love to Natalie Maines and Dixie Chick sisters and all freedom-loving Americans; rescue the Bill of Rights from reich-wing thugs; tell the truth, expose lies; live and love and drink good wine. We hope your new year proves a gas.

EW

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