

Fun with War and Wine

No debating these standouts.

Oh, what a lovely war! Through this war, we are gifted with marvelous lessons in comparative values and relative meanings of language, all by virtue of charming charades. The Bushites, on the one hand, have offered us a view of civilized legalisms through which we can arrive at wonderful new definitions and distinctions for torture, when it is, when it isn't (must reach level of pain caused by damage to internal organs; lawyers know how to measure such scales of pain). These are refinements to rival the finesse of Torquemada, the Grand Inquisitor of the Spanish Inquisition. Radical Islamist butchers respond by decapitation, which Bush then describes as "barbaric," at the same time that American soldiers are going on trial for suffocating to death a prisoner in their charge.

Now, our problem, students of war, is to determine: Which is more (or less) barbaric in the treatment of helpless prisoners: severing the head from the body with a sword (recalling that the inventor of the French guillotine argued that this method would be more "humane" than, say, hanging); or slowly beating the prisoner nearly to death, then shoving him into a sleeping bag and smothering him? We could probably extend this debate to consider other forms of institutional killing, as in the application of executions for death penalty states: Which is more humane/less barbaric, hanging, electric shock, firing squad, lethal injection? Any votes for decapitation?

Related issue - isn't it swell how war raises profound questions of morals? Is it more (or less) civilized to show a beheading on broadcast television, or shoot digital film and then circulate that on the Internet? Probably most Americans will feel grateful that we have broadcast personalities like Rush Limbaugh and Jay Leno to help us distinguish between terrorism and frat-boy hijinks. For myself, I confess that I'm having a hard time keeping score. Better think about wine.

Last month, I was involved in helping raise funds for Davey Untz, a three-year-old fighting leukemia. We tried a wine auction at Eugene Wine Cellars, relying on the donations of local wineries and wine merchants. I'm pleased to report that we were able to generate, through the auction and raffle, over \$4,000 for the lad and his mom. I still glow with pride for the generosity and humanity shown by the winefolk. What a contrast to the burlesque of war.

While running from vineyard to winery in my pursuit of donations for Davey, I tripped over some treasures. Let's start with facts: It's summer and we're gonna burn (soon, I think) and even the most fervent winefiends will (usually, reluctantly) admit that summer is made for lighter wines, matched with lighter foods.

High Pass Winery 2000 Sauvignon Blanc (\$10) is lovely, has a little bottle age on it, so flavors have matured into pleasant roundness of tropical fruits on a firm but balanced frame. It goes very well with grilled halibut or chicken. Winemaker Dieter Boehm is also happy with his High Pass 2003 Pinot Noir Rosé (\$10); the wine is dark pink and so rich with fruit character that it drinks like a very light-bodied pinot noir, with bright cherry flavors, low alcohol (11 percent), and just enough acidity to accent foods like summer pastas, cheeses, and light meats. Makes a nice sipping wine, too.

Rosés are vastly under-valued as well as under-appreciated, and deserve a lot more attention. Some of the damage done to these wines can be blamed on the marketers who have corrupted rosé into "blush" wines like white zinfandel, too often schlocky sweet and utterly lacking in character. Oddly, though, the blushies have also opened the world of wine for the shy and reticent; after some time at the entry level, folks are ready to try wines with greater flavor and complexity. Good rosés make a fine transition.

One of our favorites for this summer will be Territorial 2003 Rosé of Pinot Noir (\$10), a fine product from Eugene's newest urban winery, bursting with bright fruit flavors (pie cherries, roses, tangerine), finely balanced in alcohol and acidity, just straight-forward delicious. While at Territorial, You might pick up Territorial 2002 Pinot Noir Stone's Throw (\$25). I'm a known pinotphiliac, okay? I love this wine, especially after an hour open; it delivers sweet black cherry/black raspberry flavors with a candied note and lingering finish with fine tannins. Its sister wine, Territorial 2002 Pinot Noir Capital T (\$25) is a deep, smooth, rich Pommard-style, probably best after two more years in the bottle (only 120 cases made). Hide some in a cool, dark place.

Since I made acquaintance with New Zealand sauvignon blancs, I've developed a severe jones, but Andrew Rich 2003 Willamette Valley Sauvignon Blanc Croft Vineyard (\$15) scratches my itch: lush flavors of lychee and other tropicals, mouth-filling, silky smooth, so satisfying. Serve with fresh fish, and blow somebody's mind.

One more: Some of the best merlots in the world are coming from Washington and fetching hefty prices in the \$50-100 range and beyond. One of the best I've tasted is Hogue 2001 Columbia Valley Merlot (around \$30): just explodes in the mouth, hits all the corners, a real bunker-buster, with profound black fruit flavors, satin-smooth, long finish. Don't give a rip for the swelter, must-have-big-red? Try this one, swoon in bliss.

Well, friends, pour a glass or two, lubricate your debates and enjoy the war. **EW**

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