

Blown Mind

Toasting Gonzo's canonized ashes.

Duke is down. Hunter S. Thompson, High Goof of Gonzo, ate the business end of his magnum and ended his life-long battle against a terminal case of cultural nausea.

He was 67. Now family must wrestle with his last wishes, to have his ashes and bones blasted across the Colorado foothills from the business end of a cannon, which seems only appropriate, given the benchmarks of his long career. His mantle, his legacy — his bleeding-eyed, drug-inoculated, hard-edged willingness to stare into the rotten, corrupt heart of American corporate politics — will not drop whole onto the shoulders of some single NewGen paladin, but will more likely rain down as shards and fragments into the outstretched fingers of a thousand motley-garbed bloggers, mind-ripped intellectuals and ghetto poets. The Work, of course, can only go on.

I savor the memory of the night I attended a party with Hunter Thompson. It was about a million years ago, when I was still sorta crypto-faculty at UO. The Associated Students invited the author of *Fear and Loathing* ... to speak at the EMU. Their contract with him, out of some kind of attempt at self-protection, specified that he would be accompanied constantly, from the moment he de-planed to the time he winged back to Colorado. One provision called for a faculty member to attend the post-speech "reception." I don't know why the ASUO committee asked me to act as faculty rep, but I accepted the honor. Thompson's speech consisted mostly of half-mumbled maunderings peppered with semi-veiled threats; we loved it, cheered madly.

At the reception, I sat next to The Gonz, watched him throw down a coupla Road Runner glasses filled with Wild Turkey, a little ice, no water. He also puffed heartily on many rounds of some dark, chewy-looking substance said to come from Lebanon. For the record, I spent those two hours holding one breath. I stared, though, in fascination when Thompson rummaged in his backpack and came out with some quarter-inch-square items — I might have heard a term like "windowpane" — and dispensed several of those little wafers, like sacraments, first to himself, then, notably, to a young woman broadcaster who worshipped cross-legged at his feet. Thompson then kicked back, cleaning his fingernails with a Bowie knife that had also materialized from his pack. Minutes later, official student hosts hustled Thompson into a van and drove him to (pre-metal detector) Mahlon Sweet. Bet Duke put fun in that flight.

I wonder, now, what precipitated his decision to bite the barrel. Did he have one too many encounters with some Bible-wielding bigot? The hills of Colorado (and, yeah, Oregon) are crawling with these vermin; coulda happened. Maybe Captain Gonzo crossed paths with some CIA scumbag who

jets prisoners around the world to countries where contract torturers will break their bodies and their spirits while ignoring "quaint" Geneva Conventions (or even more quaint U.S. Constitution).

Maybe the event that pulled his trigger was grimly mundane: He popped into the liquor store for a jug of Wild Turkey, stood at the checkout; his blood-rimmed Argus eyes spotted one of those plastic yellow-ribbon car magnets, "Support our Troops," and he made the simple mistake of flipping to the back label: yep, "Made in China." Fact fell like the one extra feather needed to crack that fragile mind: Time to chew on 180-grain lead and depart this sweltering piss-pot. Coulda been all it took.

So Duke is down. But Gonzo lives, and it's coming for wine. Let's crack a bottle of bubbly for the dearly departed Prince of Gonzo Darkness.

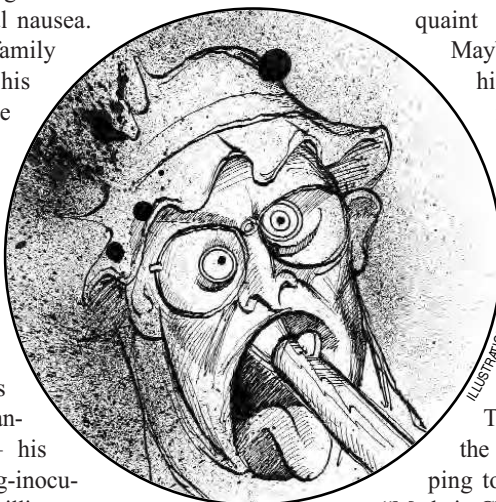
When we think of fine, tasty sparklers, our minds turn naturally to — New Mexico. Huh? A'ight, not many but the most adde-pated conjure up images of the Land of Enchantment (Hah!) for bubblewines, but shore 'nuff, **Gruet Blanc de Noirs** (\$17) is mighty tasty, and priced right. The "noirs" in the name is French (Security! He made a French word!) for black, meaning the grapes are pinot noir, meaning full flavors and sometimes a slightly salmon tint to the color profile. The Gruet name (also French, omigawd!) is one of the most respected in Champagne (the region in, uh-huh, France), and like many other Old World wine powers have invested in the New World, finding good grapelands in odd places. How they found a cool spot for pinot in and around Albuquerque probably involves suspicious anti-freedom plotting. Whatever, this is lips-mackin' sparkly, worthy of hearty toasting for blasting of Gonzo ashes.

I'm rarely excited by rich-guy wines, but these Domaine Chandon folks (Frenchies!) keep surprising. Latest is their **2002 Pinot Meunier** (mer-NYAY). This grape variety is usually blended into good sparkling wines (prominently Veuve Cliquot — French!) although Oregon's David Lett at Eyrie Vineyards has produced an unblended still-wine pinot meunier for years, and really good, too. Dom. Chandon's version is wonderfully delicate and complex (a little hot at 14.1 percent alcohol, aided by decanting), just charming, despite the tag (\$29), for a special experience.

For wine-buck bang, Italy is still champ. One of my favs is **Vignamaggio 2001 Chianti Classico Terre di Prenzano** (\$15), medium-bodied but layered in flavors of black cherries, currants, and sun-baked earth. All Italian wines love food (a two-way affair), so put this with some spring lamb or funky cheese, be happy.

Raise some glasses: Duke! Then we have to get back to tending the festering wounds of American politics. It's the least we can do. Watch for ash-fall.

EW



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