

Whammy Days

Pondering Mondo Vino amidst the bluster

I sat at my burn- and bullet-scarred desk, hunched over my ancient Remington rat-a-tat tapping tasting notes for my monthly wine report. Suddenly, the rickety old high-rise shuddered and swayed, and my 23rd floor office took a dip toward the street. The windows rattled. It felt like a giant had shaken the building in his fist. I spun around in my chair in time to see the wind gust ripping through tree-tops, traffic lights swaying like piñatas, tornadoes of street trash toe-dancing through gutters. Lightning backlit the blackened sky in ragged webs. Then the thunder broke open the air, and the clouds split their bellies and dropped train-loads of bean-sized ice onto the twilight city, punching holes like shrapnel through the new leaves of the maples and oaks, shredding blooms of



tions AND wine-hip folks ready to help. Among the larger food markets, Kiva and the PC Markets also have folks on the floor who know the stock and make efforts to connect customers to the right stuff.

Listen for the right questions — whattaya like? What's yer budget? — and be ready to answer those. Often a pro will also ask about the food you're planning to serve with the wine. Suggestions will follow, usually involving a world tour. Sundance, for example, offers 3,000 facings, with new stuff coming in every week from new players in Mondo Vino — lovely whites from Austria and South Africa, monster reds from Argentina and Brazil, ice wines from British Columbia, with more on the way.

'Sleut'! What the heck ...? We been hit by a plane?'

rhodies and roses. I half-expected frogs, frozen, in the deluge.

Mole came running out of the lab, a frantic roundness, quaking glass of merlot in hand. "Sleut'! What the heck ...? We been hit by a plane?"

"Naw, pal, just a little global warming whammy, Mom Nature rockin' the playin' field. We're still workin' on deadline."

"Wow." He tossed back the dregs of his glass and stared out the still-trembling window, watching as the ice pellets turned pea-sized, still falling in sheets so thick and heavy they must've filled the building's drains; the sky spilled a beaded curtain of ice and water between window and street-scene: "Wow." Eloquent little dowsers he is. "So, whatta we workin' on?" We turned away just as another deep, growling rumble made the old building tremble beneath our feet.

"We're trying," I said, easing back into my chair, "to help our wine-loving readers become more savvy shoppers. This is going to take a bunch of columns."

"Jug wines? Box-o-wines? Coolers? Mad Dog? Any o' dem?"

"Nar, the real stuff. Smart buys. Value, Mole, value. Let's have The Book." While he rolled into the lab to retrieve The Book, our record of buys and tastes, I scratched out some notes.

First thing to know about wine is that there are more than 5,000 new releases each year, which means almost nobody knows everything, and even the heavy hitters have to scratch to keep up — reading wine books and mags, cruising the gazillion wine-related websites, talking, listening, tasting.

First tip: Find a good wine store with people who'll help. Wine is a global commodity, found on shelves in stores from quickiemarts to supermarkets to big boxes, sometimes in huge arrays, but in only a few places can we find real people who taste a lotta vino and give real service to shoppers. In Eugene, places like Sundance Wine Cellars, Jiffy Market, The Broadway, and Oregon Wine Warehouse have large selec-

Tip two: Ask about post-offs and close-outs. Post-offs are wines temporarily reduced in price, usually to get some action from buyers; sometimes the reductions are substantial, resulting in affordable values. Close-outs, as you might guess, are wines the store won't be re-stocking, usually because the supply stream has dried up and the store's down to the last few bottles and wants the shelf space. Occasionally, close-outs can mean scream-ass bargains, but be careful and ASK! We've taken some bad shots on close-outs. A certain local Mart offered Duck Pond 2002 Merlot: good source (Columbia Valley, Wahluke Slope), usually ten bux, marked to move at \$3.49! Yow! Nope. Dud: acidic, thin fruit, decent cooking wine. Some ya lose; at least the lesson wasn't too expensive.

Mole came back with The Book, gleeful, pointing at a recent discovery: **Heron 2002 Merlot** (\$9.79, PC) from France's Pays d'Oc, not known particularly for merlot, but this turned out to be round and ripe, juicy and plummy and pleasant at the price. Trust Mole for quaffable merlot.

Sun's coming, right? Right? Sure, soon. And when it does, we'll want pretty sippers like **Meriwether 2005 York's Rosé** (\$14). Full disclosure: this wine was made by Ray Walsh, erstwhile winemaker at King Estate and present father to my grandson. Ray's a talented Kiwi now making wine for Buzz Kawders, locally prominent as owner of Silver Screen Video, now owner of Domaine Meriwether. This is crafty rosé, an artful blend with lovely sockeye-salmon color and flavors as delicate and complex as rosé can get: raspberries, lychee, touch of pineapple. Charming. Die-hard pinot-heads: don't miss Ray's first release of his own wine, own label, **Capitello 2003 Pinot Noir**, rich in dark cherry fruit, silky texture, flawless balance. Can't find it? See Tip One: Order it, takes only days.

Mole has tip three: "Trust yer local wine sleut'. Heunh-heunh."

Lighten up. It's raining. We need the laughs.

EW



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SATURDAY, JUNE 17 - TYRUS EVAN
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SATURDAY, JUNE 24 - CARLTON HILL
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