

Run, Find Wine!

Sampling the local pleasures

America's track athletes, families, friends and fans, welcome to sweet little Bluegene, Oregon. We hope your brief stay is spectacularly successful, not only on our tracks and fields but in our nearby communities and neighborhoods.

And if nobody told you (though we've certainly tried), please be aware that you're running in the midst of some of the country's most beautiful Bach, finest beers and best wines — some mighty good food, too, if you care to try carbo-packing in friendly eateries.

In fact, whatever you've heard — about rancorous local politics and cultural divisions — we think you'll find our burg one of the most comfortable anywhere and our citizens among the most sophisticated track enthusiasts you're likely to encounter in any venue from here to Beijing. Sometimes it seems that half the town is running (or walking or biking) while the other half is lacing up their kicks or pumping up their tires.

Happily, that's an exaggeration. There's actually room for those of us who find the whole athleticism thing just a bit quixotic, suspiciously too much like get-fit-for-the-Fatherland (and we're not much into getting war-ready). Some of us, of course, are simply allergic to most forms of exercise; in my own case, I tend to queasiness just at the sound of Nikes flapping on the sidewalk, and when I discourse about such terms as "finish," I'm referring to the lingering flavors of a well-made pinot noir, not to a runner's strategy for closing a footrace. And that happy note — still welcoming — brings us to wine:

Last column — we're in the middle of a conversation here — I promised more on the big, bold red wines of the Umpqua Valley (for visitors, that's about two marathons south of Eugene, the area around Roseburg, where, I'll wager, some of you had to find motel rooms). I wrote then and mean now that the big reds of the Umpqua will blow stuff UP. Umpqua-land is much warmer than our little slice of Eden, and their wine folks are experimenting vigorously with grape varieties that thrive in the warmer regions of Europe (and other places, like Australia, Chile, Argentina), like syrah, malbec, baco noir, grenache, tempranillo, merlot and the like. And the wines they've been putting into barrels and bottles are creating strong buzz in wine-world. There are many worth tasting; we offer a few examples:

Start with **Spangler 2006 Cabernet Franc** (\$30); this wine is dark, rich, round in flavors (black cherries, chocolate, oak), approaching profound and winning gold medals all over the country. Cabernet franc is usually a grape used in Bordeaux to give heft — body and color — to the region's distinctively blended wines. Unblended, Spangler's version has surprising finesse, just cries for grilled flat-iron steaks.

Earl and Hilda Jones of Abacela Vineyards feel passionate about the wines of Spain, and Earl is convinced that their particular

site is just about perfect for growing Spain's noblest grape, tempranillo. His wines provide convincing evidence that he knows whereof he speaks. Abacela's reserve tempranillos are super wines, but **Abacela 2006 Tempranillo Umpqua Cuveé** is bargain-priced (\$20) for this quality and is ready to drink (though it certainly could mature gracefully for several years). Tapas and tempranillo? Well, yes.

Melrose wines are hard to find, except at the tasting room (and the Internet), but owner Wayne Parker knows what he wants: "If it doesn't go with food, you have the wrong wine." Good attitude, good wines; **Melrose 2006 Baco Noir** (\$36) might be a tad spendy for most folks, but the return is a glassful of deep purple juice bursting with flavors of blackberries, cherries, pepper, hint of anise, a compulsion to fire up the barbecue.

The Umpqua is a lovely river in a dazzling valley, and it wends through the heat into cool regions at tiny Elkton where Terry Brandborg makes some of Oregon's best pinot noir. **Brandborg 2006 Pinot Noir Estate, Ferris Wheel Vineyard** (\$38) is complex in flavors (black cherries with notes of dark plums, spices), mouth-filling, and as close to flawless as wine comes. Brandborg's entire line-up is worth finding and hoarding.

OK, back home: You've run your heats, win or lose (good luck). Now's time to kick back, sample local pleasures. Among various not-to-misses, include the **Maude Kerns Art and the Vineyard**, three days (Friday, July 4, through Sunday, July 6, starting at 11 am) of food, music, art, brews and wines in lovely river-cooled Alton Baker Park, just a brief stroll from Hayward Field. This is a chance to experience some of this area's discrete charms, such as the fact that we're home to many amazing artists and craftspersons. And we make some of America's best wines, a good number of which will have tasting booths at this event. Among our locals, you'll find superb juice produced by **RainSong, Brigg's Hill, LaVelle, High Pass, Chateau Lorane, Territorial, Noble Estate, Silvan Ridge**, and **Capitello**. The Umpqua Valley (that heavenly slice down south) will be represented by **Spangler, Sienna Ridge, Bradley, Girardet, River's Edge, Misty Oaks, Julianna, Saginaw, Vitis Ridge**, and **Henry Estate**. In all, a mighty line-up; we suggest several laps around the fields.

Quick closing shopping note: High quality pinot noir at bargain prices, made by local guy Kevin Trexel, labeled **Two Birds and a Sheep 2005 Pinot Noir Willamette Valley** (\$12.95!). It's got flavor, depth, character, good balance. Run, find some.

Last words: Thanks for coming and giving us all such brilliant performances. We love your work and wish you the very best. And when you get home, please tell your friends and others that Eugene is really weird and wet all the time. Thanks again. **EW**



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