

Silver Linings

Good wine buys ease in the New Year

Mole and his beamish bride Molly held their annual New Year's bash, this one called The Tea Potty Speshul. As always, Molly chefed a lavish spread that sated the horde, but Mole, usually costumed in oversized Depends, white silk sash and black top hat, instead was clad in street togs, sunk in full mope, on the verge of tears. For first-time readers, Mole (aka Round Mound of Merlot) is my sidekick and the world's sweetest guy, a fount of goodwill with bottomless faith in his fellow beings (unless they make bad wine).



So Mole in a mope bodes not well. I tried consoling: "Hey, pal, why the droopy jowls? It's a new year, a new decade. Oregon 2008 pinot noir is hotter'n last year's derivatives. Hoopla, buddy!"

"Sleut'," — he calls me Sleuth, an honor — "I been to da Tea Potty, 'n' dose guys gots crazy ideas 'n' lotsa dough from greedheads, 'n' dey're gonna make nasty politics dis year. Like, da poor billionaires, I nevah hoid wise oxy-morons!"

I couldn't disagree, and silver linings have been scarce lately, so I tried to re-focus him on wine, which he loves, which is also odd 'cause he doesn't drink much, just sips 'n' savors. "Chum," I said, draping an arm across his yard-wide shoulders, "it's always been like this, 'cept when it's been worse. Our job is to help people ease the pain by showing the way to good-value vinos that'll brighten their tables, right? Heck, we even found a decent merlot wearin' a fair sticker, 'member?"

His head came up, his eyes narrowed. Not a good idea to jab at merlot with Mole; mention the movie *Sideways* and he gets edgy. "Yeaahh," he drew it out, checking

me for irony, "dat's true. Really good juice, good price."

James, bartender at Marché, tipped us to this Washington op: The House of Independent Producers, run by Christophe Hedges, wine iconoclast with deep eno-breeding, breaks all marketing rules and utterly disdains the 100-point rating scale used by wine press. Starts

by growing sustainably, making really good wines — chardonnay and merlot, both often pooh-pooed these days, outta fashion — then slaps on an elaborate label, dripping with gewgaws like ersatz coats of arms, Latin phrases, French names, cryptic numbers, gold filigree, yadda-yadda. Shuns advertising, tickets the whole package for value. Fun stuff.

Watch for **La Bourgeoise**, red letters, white background, then, first, **Dionysus Vineyard** (gold script) **Chardonnay 2009, Columbia Valley** (\$12!); unscrew the cap, pour, taste the full, rich character of real chardonnay fruit, no oak-table-leg flavors, ripe, round, food-ready, delish. Or: **La Bourgeoise 2008 Merlot** (\$12), Columbia Valley, forward fruits (black cherry, cassis, whiff of chocolate) but not at all flabby and spineless, distinctly steak-friendly.

Local excellence, back from the brink: **Iris Vineyards 2008 Pinot Gris** (\$15) has the crisp, tangy pear/apple/citrus flavors that make Dungeness crab just zing. Give a hand for the Cottage Grovers.

These are the wines that lifted Mole from the funk and made "da Tea Potty Speshul" the New Year's best party. Wish you were there. Oh, and go Ducks. Quack 'em up, champs. **EW**

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