

SPRING EVENTS:

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WINE BY LANCE SPARKS

# WARMING WINES

Local vintners planning for climate change

Mainly just to scare the shit outta myself, I spent most of a Saturday afternoon in one of the UO's new science lecture halls, listening to three paleontologists describing the effects of climate change — warming — in Oregon, over the next century. The room was half-filled, mostly with very serious people, furiously taking notes. I looked for wild-eyed, barking-mad deniers but saw none.

And the three profs plodded through their PowerPoint presentations, being very careful to cite their sources and not claim too much. I couldn't help being impressed by slides that showed layers of soils in hillside cuts that the scientists could read like Earth's own diary of its changes: "See, this is early Holocene, and here middle Miocene ...." Thousands of years rolled off their tongues like days of the week.

There was a wine message in here. Greg Retallack, an Australian paleobotanist, had garnered headlines in the local daily (*R-G*) by arguing that continued warming would mean that Oregon grape-growers would soon have to replant their vineyards. Our region has become world-renowned for growing the notoriously fussy pinot noir grape, a varietal that thrives in our cool, moist climate and the varietal from which our winemakers have crafted some of the world's best pinot noir wines. Those have been the wines that have drawn hundreds of pinot-fiends to the annual International Pinot Noir Celebration held each summer on the Linfield College campus in McMinnville.

Retallack and colleagues made a convincing case that our region is "headed to a warmer and wetter future" — unless there is "global action" to reverse the warming trend, a possibility that drew chuckles in the hall. Global action? Oh, sure — could happen.

So, the thinking went, Oregon viticulturalists best plant grapes that thrive in heat — like syrah ("shiraz," as the Aussie prof

reminded us, is the term used in Australia, after the original name of the grape as it was discovered in its native Persia), a big, bold, full-bodied red with a bent toward certain peppery qualities, quite yummy stuff, really, but not pinot noir. After 2050, Retallack argued, we might look toward British Columbia for our pinot noirs.

Well, the good doc clearly knows his soils and climes, but we should be aware that many of our growers are already ahead of the changes and have well begun to experiment with warm-climate grapes like syrah and many others.

A terrific syrah is **Kandarian 2009 Pepper Mélange** (\$30). Jeff Kandarian was, until recently, winemaker at King Estate, hugely talented guy, now making wine in California, which, it must be admitted, is where he found the grapes for this wine, though it was made in Eugene. But the grapes could've come from the Rogue or Columbia valleys and still have shown the depth and silky texture of this version.

Some whites like warmth, too: **Troon 2012 Vermentino** (\$15) marks the successful grafting of a grape that long lazed in the sultry climes of the Mediterranean, especially the islands of Corsica and Sardinia. Apparently the grapes enjoy the Applegate Valley of southern Oregon just fine. This bright white is aromatic, floral, with a citrus zing and hints of minerality, delish with cheesy pastas or fresh seafood.

Gitcher pinots while you can: **Stanton 2010 Pinot Noir** (\$20) displays the qualities that drive wine lovers to this varietal: It's delicate, complex with rose-y aromas, a whiff of violets and flavors of cherries and raspberries, long finish. And it's home-country wine, from the (still) cool, sweet, Eugene part of the Willamette Valley.

Cave Junction is warm country, though cooled in places by coastal breezes, home, too, of **Foris 2012 Pinot Blanc** (\$12), a dry but lushly versatile white wine that would complement light meats and fresh spring veggies.

The Willamette Valley is gonna get toasty over the next century, according to the learned profs (7.5 degrees F average increase). I'll miss the worst, but my grandkids will be in the thick. Hope they learn to like syrah. Maybe by 2100 there'll be "global action." ■




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