

MOLE'S BACK

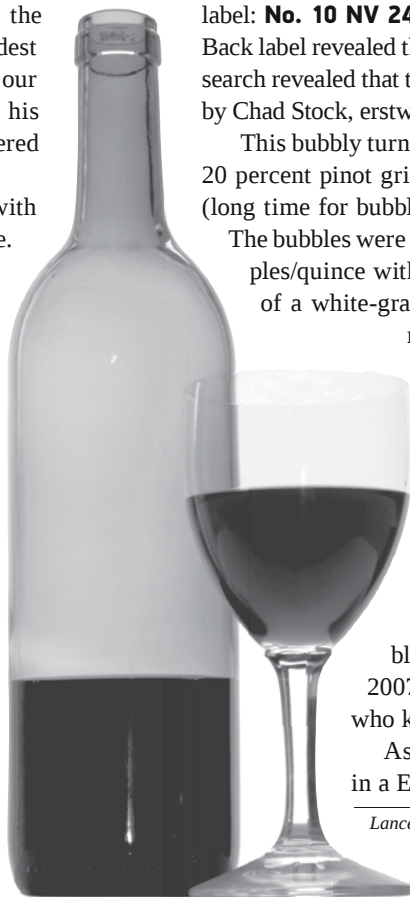
Local quaffs from bubbies to black cherries

I leaned back in my chair, propped my feet on my battle-scarred desk, stared out the window on downtown Eugene and watched as sheets of rain marched across the streets and flattened the tops of the maples. Even on the 17th floor of the burg's oldest high-rise, the window wore a grimy film. But our office-cum-lab was spotless; obviously, Mole and his wife, Molly, had held us together while I meandered through political nightmares.

My fault: I had lapsed, letting my disgust with right-wing politics disrupt our work on wine. According to the Oregon Liquor Control Commission, this state now licenses 545 wineries (not all active producers), 30 or more just in our area; at minimum, that means we should be working harder than ever to make folks aware of the best values in local quaffs. Neighbors who craft the vinos deserve support; people trying to enjoy their glug-'n'-grub deserve mindful tracking.

Instead of taking care of that business, I let myself get sucked into the muck of micro-politics.

I was mentally slapping my own face when the office door swung open with a screech. First, I read the black block letters on the pebbled glass: WINE INVESTIGATIONS. Then I peered at my old pal, Mole, standing still in the opening, a huge grin splitting his sweet, round face. He wore some outfit so nondescript it made him almost invisible.



Invisibility, by the way, is just one of Mole's gifts. He also has an unerring palate and can detect flaws in wine with just a whiff. We go to tastings together, and pourers can't remember even seeing him, but when we get back to the lab, his reports are spot on.

"Sleut," he said (Mole calls me Sleuth, an honor I never forget), "you'ah back. Dat's so cool! Dere's lotsa wine ta yak about. F'rinstance, we gots dis edgy bubbly."

Mole darted straight to our fridge, withdrew a bottle, handed it to me. He plopped two long, skinny glasses on the table. I read the label: **No. 10 NV 24 Months**, with sidebar notations of tech info. Back label revealed the maker name: **Minimus**, Rickreal (\$21). Web search revealed that this is one of the "experiments" in winemaking by Chad Stock, erstwhile maker for the respected Johan label.

This bubbly turned out to be a blend of 80 percent chardonnay, 20 percent pinot gris, with the grapes on the lees for 24 months (long time for bubbies). I dithered; Mole poured, still grinning. The bubbles were fine, the flavors surprising: intense baked-apples/quince with woody notes, not at all the airy frothiness of a white-grape bubbly. Production of all Stock's experiments has been miniscule, so the wine might be hard to find (smart folk at Party Downtown restaurant apparently bought a couple cases — always rewarding to search there). "Ou'ah pal Larry Malmgren steered us ta dis one," Mole said, giving credit where it's due.

We next pulled cork from a "find," **Sineann 2007 "Piedra" Pinot Noir**, elegant and long-finishing, still fresh with black-cherry flavors (sale bargain at \$15). The 2007 vintage got a bad rap, except from people who know and love pinot noir. Find this, enjoy.

As Mole said, "We'ah back." Good to be home in a Eugene autumn, wind, rain and all. ■

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