

ALWAYS ROOM FOR OREGON WINES

Celebrating the fruit of the vine in a season of weed

I paused outside our lab door on the 15th floor of the old high-rise, the pebbled glass bearing the painted legend "Wine Investigations." I pushed on the door, already ajar. My partner, Mole, sat behind our scarred desk. He looked deeply morose.

A mokey Mole is a sad sight to behold. For newbies, my sidekick is the sweetest guy in the world. Everybody loves Mole, even though, at wine tastings, he's invisible, leaving only the impression of a great guy. He also has an acute, critical palate, doesn't take notes and never forgets good wines and wine-making.

"What's eating you, pal?" I asked. "Is it politics? Trump and his horde of bigots? His minions of misogyny? The KKK? NRA? American Taliban dragging us back into civil war? 'Zup?"

"Nah," he answered, lifting his round head. "I mean, shuah, all dat but not. I's worried ya might shut us down. Ev'body's talkin' 'bout weed, not wine. Or soopa beahs. Or 'speer-its,' tha's good booze, right? Growers're up. Weah down. Probly oughta shut the doors, sell the ge-ah. Whachatink?"

"You're right, but check it: One, we both like good herb and're glad it's finally legal to puff 'em up, OK? Two, wine's been around for thousands of years, will be here long after we're gone, 'cause it's food and also makes food taste better. Nah, pal, we're still in business. 'Sides it's May, Oregon Wine Month, more than 400 wineries in Orygun, more every day, lots to keep us busy. So, chill-lax, pal, 'n tell me what we got."

Mole smiled, came back: "Fer the peeps, we's gots some pretties fer da spring eats, wit' some surprises."



Mole's report (Note: he's an unashamed locavore, really favors wines made here in the South Willamette Valley):

First a dry, white shocker, **LaVelle Vineyards** (Elmira) **2015 Lunar Eclipse Early Muscat** (\$26), aromatic, floral, flavors of lychee-meets-grapefruit, delish with white cheeses or spicy Asian dishes. Muscats are often sweet, wonderful to eat, great for dessert wines, but this one is crisp, clean, its acids ready for food. Sure, the sticker seems steep, but this is as rare and enjoyable as the total eclipse of the "supermoon" its name memorializes.

Benton-Lane (Monroe) has had successes with its pinot gris and **Benton-Lane 2014 Pinot Gris Willamette Valley** (\$17) continues the run. It's just excellent, with distinctive Asian pear/green apple flavors, balanced acidity, superior wine for fresh salmon cooked medium-rare (letting the flavors meld).

Pinot gris can be vinified into a lovely rosé. **Territorial Vineyard** (Eugene) **2015 Rosé of Pinot Gris** (\$15) is pale pink, dry and delicious, just the wine for outdoor cookery, as an aperitif sipper (don't get it too cold — you want these flavors) with spring veggies, cheeses, whachagot.

Noble Estate (Eugene) does not grow syrah (needs more heat than we get) but found a good source at Quail Run Vineyard in the Rogue Valley. As a result, **Noble Estate 2013 Syrah** (\$29) delivers deep flavors of black currants (cassis), plums and pepper to match with grilled meats or strong cheeses. Still young 'n' kinda sulky, so pop the top a couple hours before serving, or decant, letting the wine open up.

Mole sez: "Dere it is, good glugs fer da mont'. Dig 'em. And we's still in da biz, Trump 'r no Trump, weed 'r not." Much better. ■

may
fair

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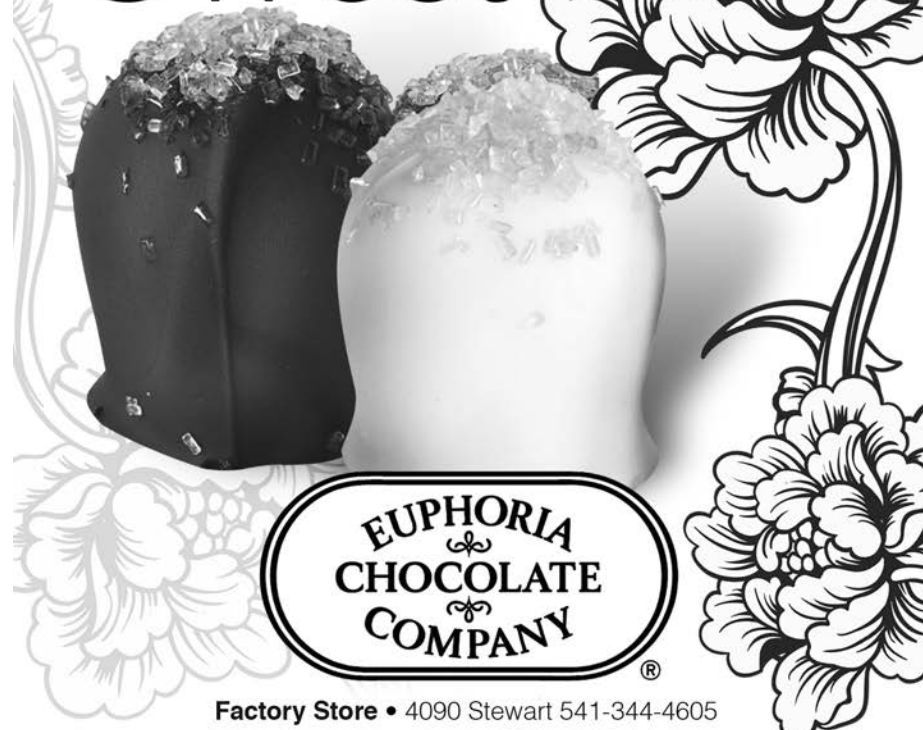


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May desserts of the month



Toasted Coconut Lime Cake

coconut cake
key lime curd
vanilla buttercream
toasted coconut
gluten-free optional



Banana Cream Pie
gluten-free optional

Dulce de Leche Cheesecake
gluten-free optional



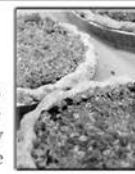
Raspberry Buttercrunch Tartlet

Gluten-, Egg- and Dairy-free Desserts of the Month



Chocolate Cherry Cupcake
gluten-, egg- and dairy-free

Mixed Berry Pie
strawberry, blueberry, raspberry, blackberry
gluten-, egg- and dairy-free



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