

ALTERNATIVE FACTS? NO. ALT-WINES, YES.

Wine truth as we know it

In President Benito Tweety's post-truth, "alternate-facts" world, it probably doesn't matter if we reported a story with some misleading information in January's "Wine Label Whimsy," when we wrote about **Charles Smith K Vintners 2012 MCK (Motor City Kitty) Syrah**.

Lisa Sprague, one of the wine-savvy mavens at Sundance, dug out a story on "Wine News" that clarified the tale. So here it is: Charles Smith (Walla Walla) sold five of his top-selling wines, and *not* his top-shelf K brands, as we thought, to Constellation Brands for a mere \$120 million.

The story also notes that Smith owns no vineyards, for what that's worth. We still consider Smith a mighty wily marketer, and many of his K wines are superb.

Okay? Clear? Add this: a prominent local winemaker said, in response to this development, "good for him."

It's been a fine wine month, despite ice and snow, broken trees and frozen plants. For one, we found time to taste some 2016 wines still in barrels, and we feel confident in predicting that '16 will be another strong vintage for Oregon wines.

Case in point: My pal Larry Malmgren and I wheeled through miles of fallen trees and broken limbs along Fox Hollow Road to the backside of Spencer Butte, arriving at the palatial digs of Abbelone Wine (see the building on the Abbelone label). We yakked with owners Angela and Kris Ferry in their basement winery, tasting from bottles, sampling from barrels.

Our hosts were charming, the wines delish "top to bottom," Larry judged. I agreed but was aroused by **Abbelone 2015 Rosé** (\$15). It's a *saignée*, a 'bleed' from the first pressing of pinot noir, light red in color, dry but juicy with red-berry flavors (cherries, raspberries, red currants), well-balanced, a fine match with a wintery beef stew with root veggies.

Larry was also my partner as we wove through the basement storage area of Kastle Hill, importers of fine German wines. All these were from the Pfalz region and all superior. I was taken, though, by **Herxheim am Berg 2015 Scheurebe** (\$22), semi-sweet, just the wine to pair with spicy dishes like stir-fry.

German wines are a tough sell in retail, in part because of many consumers' fears about mispronunciation, understandable when we come to Scheurebe: Looks like it might be shoe-ree-bee, right? Corrected, it's SHOY-ray-buh. But it's tasty wine, with flavors like ripe pears, quince, dash of Meyer lemon, with bracing acidity.

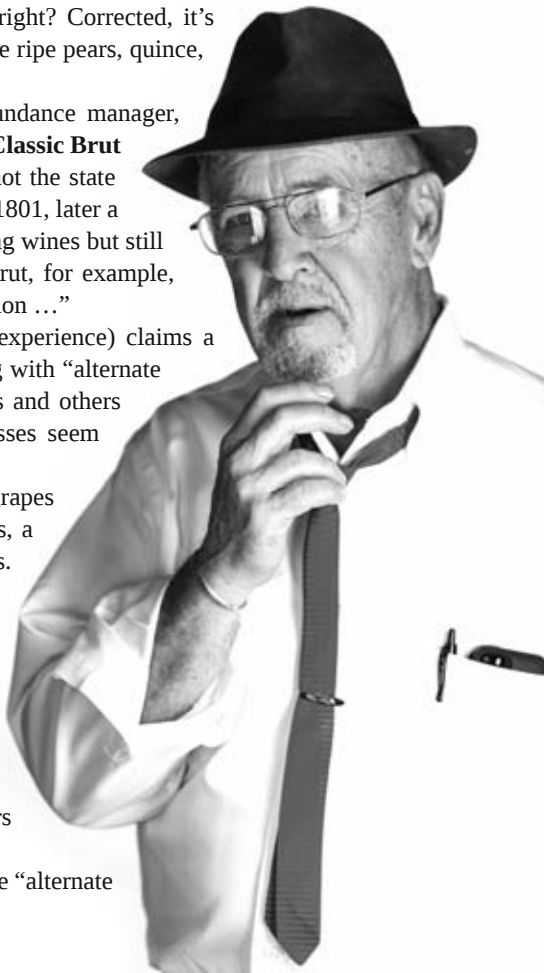
I was looking for bubbly. Randy Stokes, Sundance manager, steered me to a weird discovery, **Bagratioti 1882 Classic Brut** (\$11.50), a bubbly from Georgia — the country, not the state — formerly a kingdom until annexed by Russia in 1801, later a member of the USSR until the 1990s, now exporting wines but still making exuberant claims; the back label of the Brut, for example, opens "with over 7,000 years of winemaking tradition ..."

What? Seven thousand?? No country (in my experience) claims a history of winemaking that old. But we're working with "alternate facts," right? And we can let the Greeks, Persians and others argue with Georgians. Not me, and no eyewitnesses seem available, so y'all fight, 'kay?

Meanwhile, the wine's very good, made from grapes we never heard of, bursting with vigorous bubbles, a bargain at this price, fun on the table and in the glass.

Larry also found **Alvear Light Cream** (\$13), lovely afternoon sipper-wine, Sherry-like; it ain't Sherry because it doesn't come from the Sherry region of Spain (like sparkling wine isn't Champagne unless it comes from the Champagne region in France). Alvear uses Pedro Ximenez grapes, very nice (flavors like honey and golden raisins), grown in Andalusia. Serve with cheese and crackers for a slanting-sun aperitif.

And that's the truth — as we know it. If you have "alternate facts," inform us. Please. ■



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