

SLEUTH & MOLE TURN OUT THE LIGHTS

Our longtime wine writer and his bosom buddy bid a fond farewell

On the 15th floor of Eugene's most decrepit high-rise, I dragged my feet down the hallway littered with pieces of broken tiles and remnants of worn carpet. I stopped outside the door with the pebbled glass bearing the legend "Wine Investigations."

I hate funerals — hope to miss my own — and this felt like a funeral. A month shy of 20 years, Mole and I were shutting down, closing the door, packing the lab gear, turning out the lights.

I wasn't worried about me. I had long known this day would come — and yet, the time passed so fluidly, seemed like minutes, maybe days, that it still took me by surprise.

But Mole was another matter. That sweet little guy wasn't ready to quit, still had the energy, still felt the passion for the work. I did, too, but it was time to put my guns in the ground. Mole, I knew, would always find a welcome in wine-dom.

The door creaked when I swung it open. Mole was already at work, packing the equipment. But grief darkened his usually smiling face when he looked at me. His voice cracked with emotion. I felt a lump in my throat.

"Sleut," he began — he's always called me Sleuth, an honor then and now — "why's we closing the shop? Dere's lotsa wines 'n' people still dig it 'n' wanna read about it, huh? Shuah beers 'n' buds're hot, but wines're ferevah. So how comes it that we'ah done?"

"You're right, pal," I answered, my own voice hoarse, "and I couldn't have done any of this without you, but I feel like I'm knocking on Heaven's door, having trouble seeing or even staying on my feet. I can still taste pretty well."

"So dis's really ouah last rodeo? Whaddaya wanna do?"

"Our last round-up, mi amigo. And I thought we'd close out by finishing our business on rosés. We've done our part to spur their revival, and we both love 'em, so let's catch some of the ones we missed last month."

"Cool, 'n' ready. Rosies're great, so — what's da woid? — ver-sa-tile, go with lotsa forms o' grub, outside cookin', da las' summah grillin', or inside, mebbe sum chicken oah po'k."

"Right," I interrupted. "So what've we got?"

"Well ..." Mole didn't miss a beat, "... da Frenchies still gets da gold statues 'f rosies."

Right, as usual. He was referring to rosés from southern

France, especially Provence, where making fine rosé garners affection and respect. We both loved **Chateau Saint-Honoré 2016 Cotes de Provence** (\$18.50). The price hurts, but the wine is so pretty: very pale but delicate flavors of rose petals, with an edge of tangerine rind — oh, my. Even the elegant bottle graces a table.

Another elegant bottle comes from **Gérard Bertrand Cote des Roses** (\$15), a blend of Grenache, Cinsault and syrah that leaps in the mouth, retaining that citrusy zing.

For domestic efforts, from Walla Walla via Columbia Valley, one of our faves is **Seven Hills 2016 Dry Rosé of Cabernet Franc** (\$17), lovely stuff, lotsa red fruit, dash of white pepper.

Local rosés (Oregon and South Willamette Valley) are often excellent: Two examples, both using grenache grapes, are **Abacela 2016** (\$18) and superb **J. Scott Cellars 2016 Grenache Rosé** (\$19), flavors of rose petals, pink grapefruit, passion fruit, very satisfying.

How to end this after 20 years? Mole helped; he held up a bottle with a beautiful wing design on the label: "F" ya swan song," he quipped. Cute.

One of the most promising new wine ventures in Oregon's future has to be Heath Payne's Payne Wine in Salem. Payne's **Little Wing 2016 Rosé** (\$15.50) has a lively grape blend, "pinot noir-based," according to owner-winemaker Heath Payne, with melon de Bourgogne and a dash of syrah ("I'm still playing with the blend," Heath claims.). Right now, Little Wing has pretty pink-ish color, zingy "natural" acidity and stylish flavors (cherries, watermelon). It'll fly.

Heath Payne is serious about his rosé ("I drink rosé year-round," he says), about all his wines, and he's excited about being in the Eola Hills region with Bethel Heights and other superb growers.

Wines, brews, ciders, spirits, Oregon's beverage entrepreneurs are guiding us toward a tasty, economically viable future, barring the depredations of climate change or more mad maunderings of President Twitter-pate. Hard to think we won't be around to contribute to those developments.

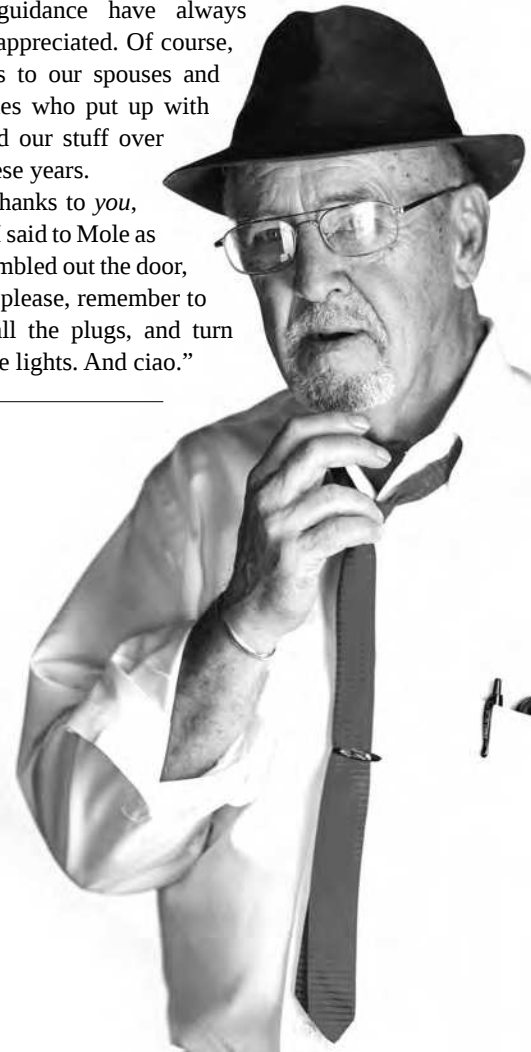
There are — and will be — boatloads of fine wines — whites and reds — from so many places — especially here in the South Willamette Valley. How can we let this go? But we must.

Yet we can't depart without saying some thanks to too many people to name in this narrow space. Special thanks, though, to our publishers — Anita Johnson particularly — without whose backing none of this could happen. And our editors, who gave us such latitude with language and style, while catching and fixing our (my) many errors.

Thanks, too, to all the skilled, creative folk whose crafts produced these pages; it's been an honor to share ink and space with you.

Thanks to all the wine pros who helped us taste hundreds of wines; your courtesy and guidance have always been appreciated. Of course, thanks to our spouses and families who put up with us and our stuff over all these years.

"Thanks to you, pal," I said to Mole as I scrambled out the door, "and, please, remember to pull all the plugs, and turn out the lights. And ciao."



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