


FROM THE GRAPEVINE

BY [JOEL M. FISHER](#)





ACF / Chefs de Cuisine
Assn. of California

Joel M. Fisher, Ph.D.
WINE COLUMNIST
CULINARY CONNECTION

15981 Yamell,
#124 Sylmar, CA 91342-1054

Ph(818) 783-4946 Cell(818) 429-6770 Email: joel@winevineanddine.com

August 2005

Five years ago my European correspondent, Matt Fisher, and I had the great pleasure of visiting the [House of Chapoutier](#) in the Cote Rotie portion of the Rhone. Both the trip and the wines were exceptional. Well, this summer I didn't have the luxury of zipping across the ocean, but I did get to revisit the Chapoutier wines at a recent tasting held by [Paterno Wines International](#) at the new [Chapter Eight](#) restaurant in Agoura Hills.

My favorites from the evening included a [Cotes-du-Rhone 2003 Belleruche](#) (\$12), a white blend consisting of Clairette and Grenache Blanc grapes. This fresh wine carried delicate aromas of crisp apples and white flowers, and finished dry. My other favorite white was from [Chateauneuf-du-Pape](#). The *La Bernardine* (\$36) again had the clean floral aroma typical of Grenache Blanc, and displayed a citrus and nuttiness on the palate that tapered off into a long finish.

Of the reds, one of my favorites was the 1999 [La Sizeranne](#) (\$70), a Syrah from the northern Rhone. So garnet it was almost purple, the wine possessed firm tannins, rich fruit and spices on the nose, and a complex finish. The evening's best to me, however, reflected both my expensive taste and my enthusiasm for Cote Rotie products. The [2002 La Mordoree](#) (\$80) was produced from 70-year old Syrah vines. The wine opens with red fruit and black currant aromas, transitions into floral notes, and then unwinds into a finish filled with vanilla and stewed fruits. The nose was amazing. If you ever find yourself inclined to splurge, this would be a good choice.

...

Mention kosher wines, and most people in the know shudder. Sickly sweet Manischewitz immediately springs to mind. But kosher doesn't have to mean undrinkable, as [Herzog Wine Cellars](#) is busy proving. After bouncing around different rental spaces in northern California since 1985, Herzog opened its beautiful new winery to the public this summer.

Located in 77,000 square feet of an Oxnard industrial park, Herzog can finally call a place home.

At the opening I had the pleasure of meeting Peter Stern, Herzog's executive winemaker for the last two decades, and Joe Hurliman, winemaker for both Herzog Wine Cellars and [Baron Herzog](#) wines. Hurliman played a major role in the design and construction of the new facility, which will soon also boast a restaurant, **Tierra Sur**. Todd Aaron Mosaica, formerly of the Savoy in New York, will be chef.

I sampled a couple of wines at the opening. They were pleasant, but fairly young. I expect them to age nicely since I expect big things from this experienced crew. Of note were the *2003 Zinfandel* – made from old vines located near Lodi, and showing nice touches of pepper, soft tannins, berry, tea and spicy oak – and *The Alexander Valley 2002 Cabernet*, which exhibited soft berry, plum and vanilla on the nose.

...

Champagne is usually associated with New Year's Eves and weddings, but quality bubbly can be a fun sipping choice year round. In that spirit, Paterno Wines recently brought Etienne Bizot, Managing Director of [Champagne Bollinger](#), to Bel Air for a special 'invitation-only' tasting.

The venerable House of Bollinger was founded in Ay, not far from Reims in the heart of champagne country. Bollinger is not the largest of the champagne producers, but is admired for its consistency and quality, receiving scores in the 90's from [Robert Parker](#), the [Wine Spectator](#) and the [Wine Enthusiast](#).

We tasted three bottles. First was the non-vintage *Special Cuvee* (\$65), made from mostly the 2000 vintage with 60% Pinot Noir, 25% Chardonnay and 15% Pinot Meunier. Considered a Brut, the wine showed burnt toast and yeast on the nose at first, but then the familiar green apples slid in. The wine improved noticeably in the glass as I let it stand in order to compare it with the other two champagnes. An interesting note: Bollinger sells half of the must (juice) used for this cuvee to other negotiants, and keeps the best (more acidic) half for itself.

Next came the *1997 La Grande Annee* (\$135), which is a blend of 65% Pinot Noir and 35% Chardonnay. I felt the nose opened with some unidentifiable vegetable, but moved quickly to a great, slightly smoky taste. We wrapped up with the *Recently Disgorged* (RD), made from the 1995 and 1990 vintages. This is a downright elegant wine, with toffee and honey aromas on the nose and honey on the palate. The complex R.D. exhibited a nice, fresh finish. If I ever make it back to Champagne, I will definitely visit Bollinger. I can't wait.

This event signaled a changing of the guard. Bollinger had recently left its former importer and signed on with Paterno, which in term maintained the partnership with the

former local distributor, [San Antonio Winery](#) and the Riboli family. Of the nearly 50 people there, only a handful had previously met each other's crew.

• • •

As always, happy drinking!

Joel M. Fisher writes a monthly column ("THE CULINARY CONNECTION") for the [Chefs de Cuisine Association of California](#) and has been the wine instructor for the culinary program of the [Art Institute of California-Los Angeles](#) for more than five years. He is also a partner in the Los Angeles wine education company [WINEVINE&DINE](#), which conducts programs throughout Southern California.