


FROM THE GRAPEVINE



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May-June 2007

Over the recent years, I've heard my children use the word 'geek' to describe someone truly passionate about a subject. Not to be confused with the negative put-down 'nerd', geeks are to be celebrated. Geeks embrace their passion and share their unabashed enthusiasm and knowledge with others. You can 'geek out' over anything – classical literature, travel, animation, cigars – and life is richer for it.

So I hope that the founders of [Sauvignon Republic Cellars](#) understand the full extent of the compliment I'm paying them when I call them geeks. Four men started this Santa Rosa winery in single-minded pursuit of their fascination with the Sauvignon Blanc grape: winemaker and educator John Buechsenstein, culinary director and author Chef John Ash, former Fetzer Vineyard president Paul Dolan, and restaurateur and brand director Tom Meyer.

Why Sauvignon Blanc, an often dismissed varietal? It boils down to a belief of this grape's leading role in the world stage of wine. Sauvignon Blanc compliments a wide range of regional cuisines, and expresses *terroir* from the many countries in which it is grown.

Recently, [Anthony Diaz Blue and his Tasting Panel](#) organized an event in Los Angeles. John Buechsenstein led the tasting. He started by introducing the crowd to some terminology that he wanted us to use when describing the wines he was about to pour:

- *Typicite* - a category that includes fruity, veggie, grassy, and herbal flavors, and can be broken down to subcategories of citrus, fig, tropical fruit, sweat, cat pee (yes, you read that right) smoke, caramel, butterscotch and honey.
- *Originalite* - encompasses references to climate, sunlight, water, soil, exposure, local flora, fauna and whether the wine comes from the old or new world.
- *Minerality* – a category of notes that cover earth, mold, and minerals.
- *Old World* – describes wines that are lean, well-structured and flinty.
- *New World* – wines that are rich, fruity, full-bodied and stylized.

After the winemaker lecture, we were served 8 glasses blindly, with instructions to guess hemisphere, new/old world status and producer/appellation based on our tasting notes. It was a fun, challenging exercise.

We started off with what proved to be a Chilean offering, a 2004 *Veramonte* (\$11), which had notes of spice and apple that gave it away as ‘southern hemisphere’ and ‘new world.’ Next was a Sancerre – a 2005 *Domaine Patient Cottat, Vieilles Vignes, Sancerre* (\$20) – with classic austere tropical flavors associated with ‘old world’ and ‘northern hemisphere’. We moved on to a dryer, tighter offering, which proved to be a 2005 *Sauvignon Republic, Russian River Valley* (\$18), and thus solidly ‘new world’ and ‘northern hemisphere’.

Others of note were the impressive 2006 *Sauvignon Republic, Marlborough* (\$18). A smooth wine, it displayed green herb flavors, juicy apple and pear notes, and a long finish. A 2005 *Sabathi Classic*, from Austria (\$15), was stylized, with green grass and fruit not quite up yet. My favorite of the day came from the southern hemisphere: the 2006 *Sauvignon Republic, Stellenbosch* (\$18) burst with crisp, bright tropical fruit. Possessing a long finish and good balance, this bottle is one of John Ash’s favorites too.

The event achieved its desired purpose of helping attendees view Sauvignon Blanc in a different, more knowledgeable light. It’s an achievement of which the wine geeks would be immensely proud.

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In preparation for the upcoming [LA Wine Fest 2007](#), I’ve been making many trips to Napa, Paso Robles and other California wine countries. On one of my outings, I attended a vertical tasting hosted by my friend Dr. Tom Morgan, of [Casa de Caballo Winery](#) in Templeton. It was a fun, relaxed exploration of the winery’s foundation offerings for about 30 friends and fans of the Morgans.

We started with the 2006 *Fantasy Riesling*, a dry blend of Riesling and Muscat. Sweet on the palate, this was my favorite. As we went back through the years, I noted the ‘02 showed a stronger, earthier nose, but still had a nice structure and finish. The ‘99 was over the hill, but the ‘97 proved to have retained its rich taste and smooth palate.

The 2004 *Periwinkle Pinot Noir* burst with spice, cherry and red berry notes. It was candied on the palate, but wasn’t too cloying thanks to a good structure and medium finish. The ‘01 was good though not as dynamic, with some pepper on the nose, fading fruit and a light body. The ‘97 and ‘95 were past their prime. Interestingly, the ‘91 was drinkable if jammy, and the ‘87 still had a solid nose and light fruits.

Tom’s 2006 *Forget Me Not*, a Merlot-Cabernet blend, has nice color and great potential. The ‘04 was aging beautifully, with a big nose and nice tannins. The medium-bodied ‘01 similarly showed a nice balance and ripe-fruit flavors. The ‘99 was another excellent

year, showing fruit forward, good tannins and a strong finish. I was pleasantly surprised to discover that the fruit held up in the '97, now with touches of smoke and spice.

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My goal for this column, as always, is to inspire you to explore wine in new ways. Whether you buy a bunch of Sauvignon Blancs from around the world for your next summer BBQ or are lucky enough to find a few different production years of the same wine for a dinner with friends, have fun with what you're drinking. You never know what you may geek out over.

As always, happy drinking!



Joel M. Fisher, Ph.D. was the main Wine Instructor for the Culinary Arts Department, Art Institute of California Los Angeles, for more than six years. As cofounder and partner in WineVine&Dine, he conducts wine tastings, dinners, and pairing events throughout Southern California. After launching LAWineFest last year, he is currently working on the upcoming [LAWineFest 2007](#) **Sara Fisher-Chapin** enjoys demystifying and decoding wine for the under 35-set. [Find more of Joel's Wine works for-Public, Trade, Business Wine Education, Wine Event Planning, Wine Tastings, Speaking, Seminars, Wine Judging at Joelfisher.com.](#)