

TASTING

In *GiraMondo Wine Adventures'* second session on Iberian wines on April 2, discover some of the most enticing wines from northern Spain. In this wine class and tasting, learn about the wine regions of Rioja, Ribera del Duero, Toro, Rueda, Rias Baixas and Penedes. Visit localwineevents.com for more information. **Price:** \$65

SCOTT GREENBERG *Vine Guy*

The best wines you've never heard of

Wine people are some of the friendliest folks you'll ever meet — and they're generous too. That's why when I wanted to write a column on the best wines I have never heard of, I had to turn to people I didn't know. It may sound a bit odd, but the people I usually hang out with in my various wine groups know all of the same wines I know. So to really find wines that I had not heard of, I had to completely remove myself from my normal tasting groups and find "strangers" to help me on my quest.

And there is no better place to find new wine friends than on the Mark Squires bulletin board (<http://dat.robortparker.com/bboard/>), where you can post a request to meet complete strangers in the "Offline Line Planner" forum. "Offline" is the term used to describe wine events that are organized and planned in chat rooms or on bulletin boards and then held at either a restaurant or private home — offline. There are enough topics, themes and tastings to suit everyone's palate, just as long as you monitor the board on a regular basis and can reply fast enough to reserve a coveted spot.

So I proposed the following theme: "The Best Wines You've Never Heard Of." The rules for the offline were fairly straightforward: each participant had to bring a bottle of wine that was affordable (under \$100), available (either at a local wine shop or through a popular online purveyor), and, lastly, it had to be a wine that no one else in the group was familiar with.

Well, the idea proved popular enough to fill up the 10 coveted slots the same day. When we met a few weeks later at the Blue Duck Tavern in Washington, D.C., both the chef, Brian McBride, and my new friends went out of their way to provide a great food and wine experience. We sat at the chef's table and dined family style, which allowed us to pick and chose the order in which we opened the 17 different wines.



At left, Elliot Levy of Washington, D.C., concentrates as he smells a white wine at an "offline wine dinner" hosted by Scott Greenberg.

Unfortunately, space prevents me from reviewing all of the wines, but here are several of my favorites from the tasting. Retail prices are approximate and are subject to change.

2000 Bertrand-Delespierre Brut Champagne, Chamery, France 2000 (\$60) SCHNEIDER'S OF CAPITOL HILL IN D.C.

In my opinion, there is no better way to get any evening started than with vintage bubbly. Fresh green apples and nectarines were kept bright and focused thanks to the crisp acidity of this wine. The tight bubble delivered waves of toasty notes on the back of the palate where hints of ginger joined in.

2006 Do Ferreira Albarino Cepas Velas, Rias Baixas, Spain (\$33) MACARTHUR BEVERAGES IN D.C.

The albarino grape always reminds me of a cross between semillon and sauvignon blanc. This sample sported a lively nose of acacia and green grass. Nice, easy flavors of nectarine, pineapple and citrus were refreshing. The minerally finish lent it character and weight and made it a good match for the charcuterie board.

2005 Domaine Hauvette Blanc de Blancs Vin de Pays des Bouches-du-Rhone, Bandol, France (\$63) CABRINI WINES, NEW YORK CITY (AVAILABLE ONLINE)

Well, if you're going to play "stump the wine writer," this is a great wine to do it with. Luis, a visiting professor from Portugal and a part-time wine journalist himself, proffered this interesting white wine. The intriguing nose featured aromas of buttered pasta, cream and honey. Flavors of apple, pear, cloves and brioche continued to evolve and deepen as the wine opened throughout the evening, developing a lush finish. It was a hit with the wood-fired bone marrow.

2000 Yacochuya Malbec Cafayate Vineyard, San Juan, Argentina (\$50) WIDE WORLD OF WINE IN D.C.

World-renowned wine consultant, Michel Rolland, is part-owner of this winery and his signature style is in full bloom here. This jet-black blockbuster took quite a while to open up, but it finally revealed wonderfully integrated flavors of cassis, blackberry, espresso and pepper on the

front and midpalate. Warm, melted licorice glides in on the powerful, long finish. It's a good thing we had dry-aged sirloin with which to tame this wine.

1999 Patrigliane Salento Rosso, Puglia, Italy (\$55) MACARTHUR BEVERAGES IN D.C.

This wine, made from the negroamaro grape, was worth the trouble of putting this all together. The grapes are left on the vine to dry out before being pressed. This creates an amaronelike style wine with a nose featuring espresso, dried plums and smoky cedar. The firm-but-supple structure boasts flavors of currants, dried fruits and hints of licorice on the lingering finish. If any wine can stand up to country sausages, this is it.

2002 Sean Thackery Eagle Point Ranch "Sirius" Petite Sirah, Mendocino County, Calif. (\$50) DOTCOM WINE AND SPIRITS IN CONNECTICUT (DOTCOMWINES.COM)

I have professed my love of petite sirah many times in this column and this wine did not disappoint me. The inky black juice was full of dark plums, black cherry and black raspberry fruit up front and rich chocolate and licorice notes on the supple finish. A winner with the chocolate bourbon cake.

I'd like to extend a special note of thanks to the guests, Dave, Phil, Gary, Jim, Nicki, Elliot, David, Lou, Mike and Luis — who worked this dinner into his busy schedule while visiting from Portugal — as well as to the patient staff at the restaurant.



Photos by Andrew Harnik/Examiner



Do you have a favorite royalty of wine? E-mail me at scott@vineguy.com.



Luis Antunes, left, of Lisbon, Portugal, and Mike Piepiso of Germantown, Md., inspect wines before trying them at The Blue Duck Tavern in D.C. on March 6.

