

New Year's Resolution: Drink What You Like—and more



Where did 2015 year go? Somehow, in the last twelve months, I have managed to gain weight, lose hair, pay tuition (times three), win dares, lose bets, find peace and lose my mind. All of this while tasting over a thousand samples of wine. Some good. Some not so good. But every wine that I tasted provided a frame of reference for other wines and expanded my proverbial thirst for knowledge.

The good news is that tasting all of those wines has actually helped me hone my own every-changing palate and discover what it is that I love – and not love – about wine. And, as I do every time this year, I vow to enjoy, as oppose to “taste”, better wines. But it’s not as easy as one might think. Occasionally the wine sample queue gets a bit long, so I find myself getting into a routine of taste-swish-spit-rinse-write, taste-swish-spit-rinse-write without taking a moment to stop and smell the bouquet, as it were.

On the other hand, I am indeed grateful for the opportunity to explore so many wines and even more grateful that I have met many of the wonderful people who make, produce, import, distribute and sell these wines. Therefore, I am going to make a more conscientious effort to enjoy more of the wines I like instead of just putting them on the proverbial treadmill – which is another New Year’s resolution that comes to mind, but is too painful to think about right now.

So this year, my New Year’s resolution is to enjoy, I mean really, thoroughly enjoy, great wines without taking notes or looking for imperfections. Just to relax and take pleasure in the wine. I already have a good start, thanks to several friends who have opened up their homes and cellars this holiday season.

I don’t drink enough Italian wines, and I have no idea why. Almost every time I open one, I think, “I really like this. I should try more Italian wines.” One value-oriented red that caught my attention this past year was the palate-pleasing **2010 Arnaldo Caprai Montefalco Rosso DOC** from Italy. Arnaldo Caprai, one of the most well-known wineries in the Italian region of Umbria, produces a blend comprised of mostly Sangiovese grapes, however this wine gets its true character from the addition of the region’s indigenous grape, Sagrantino. While the Sangiovese grapes impart notes of berries, plums, and spice, the Sagrantino grapes provide structure and warmth. This full-bodied red blend is the perfect addition for either a nice flavorful home-cooked meal or a simple pizza. **\$23**

Another hot-button for my palate this year are French red blend wines, like the lovely and complex wines hailing from the southern Rhone Valley of France. The **2012 Domaine Grand Veneur Lirac Sixte** is an affordable offering from a well-known Rhone producer from the Lirac region. It has a traditional bouquet of dark cherry, ripe plums and black pepper. The round mouthfeel delivers flavors of rich cassis, black fruit, black olives and black licorice in layers across the palate with hints of spicy pepper on the full-bodied finish. **\$30**

Pinot Noir is a lovely and versatile wine, and the offerings from Oregon are often overshadowed by their cousins from France and California, which is a shame, because I think Oregon pinots have really come in to their own over the last decade. A wonderful example is the **2010 Bethel Heights "Estate" Eola-Amity Hills Pinot Noir from the Willamette Valley**. This wine really has a way of imparting a sense of “place.” The grapes for this wine come from the Casteel family estate vineyard, located in a region that is known for producing wines that are powerful and fruit-driven. Packed with loads of concentrated fruit – including dark cherries, black raspberries and ripe strawberries – this wine also has excellent structure. Hints of orange peel and cinnamon glide in on the long, luxurious finish to add balance and depth. **\$30**

As I mentioned last week, Americans don’t drink enough Champagne – and neither do I. One of the reasons could be because a whole bottle (750 ml) goes flat if it is not stored properly after opening. Well, a possible solution is to buy half-bottles (375 ml). One of my favorites is the **Non-vintage Moet & Chandon Imperial Brut** from France. This full-bodied Champagne offers scents of apple, honeysuckle and baked bread on the bouquet that leads to crisp, focused flavors of white nectarine, honey, apricot and pear on the palate. There is just a touch of buttered toast, adding richness to the delectable finish. **\$35**

Wishing you a happy and healthy New Year – and I hope you have a chance to splurge on some remarkable wines and drink the “good stuff” in 2016.