

Wine Banter

by John Haggard of Sophies Cellars

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Spring is here?, time for Rose. Well, in between the rain...

Yesterday, when the sun came out and I spent as much time as I could pulling weeds in the front garden of Sophie's Cellars in between guests, I had only hours before I received a phone call from Eric Sussman, winemaker and owner of Radio Coteau, informing me that he had released his County Line Rose.

While it may seem early to start thinking about Rose's, this particular Rose is absolutely exquisite with food and always in my top two Rose picks from Northern California. Made from Champagne clone pinot noir grapes, this whole cluster pressed single vineyard designate from Elke Home Ranch pairs amazingly well with the richest of seafoods, particularly good with oysters on the half shell.

Hog Island Oysters from Tomales Bay are a perfect pairing as well as duck confit – a very rich preparation of duck leg, however the acidities from wines produced in Mendocino's Anderson Valley enhance the food compatibility. (By the way, Radio Coteau a Sonoma Winery sources its fruit from Sonoma County with the exception of "County Line" which, as the name suggests, is on the border of Sonoma and Mendocino.

All Radio Coteau's vineyards are low water maintenance, close to being Dry Farmed, though the only vineyard that can be claimed as truly "Dry Farmed" is Von Veidlich, and the 2007 vintage is, unfortunately, the last of the Zinfandel Radio Coteau will produce from this vineyard. If you can find any of the Radio Coteau 2007 Zinfandel, which I don't have, I recommend you try it.)

Rose d'Anjou, Marquis de Goulaine, 2008 Le Roseraie – well quite a lot of pretty words to describe this soft-red fruit, subtle strawberry and elegant red-cherry dry rose from France. At \$9.99 retail, it is great buy and delicious sipping wine.

And for the rose bubbly lover, Lucien Albrecht Sparkling Cremant from France (retailing at \$22.99) is an excellent dry brut that can be enjoyed as a sipper. Enjoy a rose now and Spring will hang around.

A Thing of Beauty is a Joy Forever

Scientist, Sandra Barrett, PHD, takes a very close look at, not only the wine, but what we taste and how it looks at the microscopic level. What first drew me to this book was the abstract imagery and beauty of the front cover, having been a collector of art for many years. So many of her wine photography is spectacular and jeweled, filled with vibrant colors. Winemakers will always tell you their wines are "living beings" which develop in the bottle over time, and there seems no better way to understand this than to thumb through this magnificent book "Wine's Hidden Beauty."

Water Update

I'd like to thank all the readers who have taken the time to email or stop by Sophie's Cellars with insights and responses to my columns. This was particularly evident with my last month's column on "Dry Farming".

There are two responses in particular that I'd like to share. Farmer C of Sebastopol wrote with a correction: I referred to a root stock as "Georges de Latour" and, in fact, it should have been "Rupestris St. George". I singled out "Precious Mountain Vineyard" in Cazadero as an example of Dry Farming. Farmer C pointed out that in Cazadero they receive so much rainfall that Dry Farming in Cazadero is much easier than elsewhere in the County, and perhaps should not even be called Dry Farming. I think we can disagree on this point, but fundamentally, Farmer C wanted to make it known that many small Sonoma County farmers are making great efforts to conserve water, and I duly note that.

I received a very interesting video link from Kate Wilson of Russian River Keeper who has recently produced a video about Dry Farming in the Russian River Valley and was kind enough to send the link. The video is very informative and pertinent and can be viewed online at <http://vimeo.com/8962202>.

John Haggard is owner of Sophie's Cellars, The Sonoma Wine & Cheese Market in Monte Rio, California. Sophie's Cellars is open 11am – 7pm, closed only on Wednesdays. www.sophiescellars.com

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