

Ancient World, Modern Wines

& Winemaking the Old Fashioned Way

The notes which follow pertain to a fascinating group of wines assembled by Joel Butler MW and presented in two separate seminars during the 2014 Annual Conference of the Society of Wine Educators. Joel recently co-authored *Divine Vintage*, which follows the Biblical trail of wine. The early history of wine has fascinated me for some time, and I welcomed the opportunity to taste wines which were grown around the Mediterranean in lands associated with historic winemaking. The first group features examples from Turkey, Israel, Lebanon and Greece while the second takes in curiosities from the Middle East to Oregon produced by passionate artists replicating antique methods including terracotta vessels. While the Turkish and Greek wines were familiar to me, the others were unknown – even MWs need to discover and learn!

Seminar No. One: Ancient World, Modern Wines

Diren Narince 2011, Tokat, Turkey

Light yellow gold. Very clean nose revealing modest richness, ripe yellow fruits and a note of honey. Ripe and textured attack leading to a fleshy, moderately ample palate. This white possesses a restrained expression and ends short.

Carmel Kayoumi Vineyard Riesling 2012, Northern Galilee, Israel

Light bright gold. High-toned, surprisingly cool-climate Riesling scent suggesting apple flesh and citrus. In the mouth, this Riesling is clean, well-balanced and shows good persistence, finishing with a dry impression (<5 g/l RS). A surprise from this part of the world, indicating how the altitude of this single vineyard – around 2,400 ft. – creates a hospitable habitat in a region which is too hot at sea level for good Riesling. Available in the US below \$30 retail.

Gai'a Wild Ferment Assyrtiko 2013, Santorini, Greece

Light gold. Intense, vivid and expressive nose offering white fruits and citrus pith. On the palate, this excellent (and widely respected) Assyrtiko delivers a focused impression together with exciting tension and a precise acid frame. There is an appealing saline accent at the end. Grown in Santorini' volcanic soils as a coiled vine hugging the ground to protect from the wind. Having tasted with the

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proprietor in Greece and encountered this wine over several vintages in the U.S., it was a wine I could claim to know fairly well.

Vitkin Old Vine Carignan 2008, Sharon, Israel

Dense dark red with purple rim. Concentrated, intense aromatics displaying black and wild fruits and an inky highlight. The taste is similarly concentrated, layered and balanced. There is notable tension and marked though embedded acidity along with black fruit and a smoky accent from well-managed French oak. A highly credible rendition of Carignan with plenty of personality from dry-farmed vines up to 40 years old (a rarity in Israel according to Joel).

Vinkara Reserve Kalecik Karasi, Kalecik (Anatolia), Turkey

Pale very dark red with clear purple rim. Modestly aromatic nose of low concentration revealing a mix of dark fruit and dried red plum. The taste emphasizes sweet plummy fruit and is creamy, medium weight, soft and well-balanced. Aged in 30% new oak for 14 months. This distinctive Turkish variety – “the black grape of Kalecik” – shares traits with Pinot and Sicily’s Nerello Mascalese. Kalecik is located on the Anatolian plateau at an elevation of over 2,000 ft. and benefits from diurnal temperature variation.

Zafeirakis Limniona 2008, Tyrnavos, Greece

Moderately dense very dark red with clear purple edge. Intriguing, subdued aroma of red cherry, red plum and plum jam. The taste is clean and fresh, medium-bodied, and concludes with a dry finish. Has an appealing delicacy. Matured in used oak barrels leaving no detectable imprint on the wine.

IXSIR Altitudes 2010, Batroun Mountains, Lebanon

Dense red, black center, purple rim. High-toned, concentrated nose of ripe black fruits with an overlay of new oak. The palate is chewy and reveals noteworthy substance backed by gripping tannins. There is no lack of raw material in this unusual blend of varieties. Needs to soften in bottle. 35% Cab Sauv, 26% Caladoc (Grenache x Malbec cross), 22% Syrah, 17% Tempranillo. Bordeaux heavyweight Hubert de Boüard of Château Angélu consults for this winery, and their Altitudes bottling comes from vineyards at 3,100 and nearly 5,600 ft.

Kavaklidere Prestige Boğazkere 2009, Southeast Anatolia, Turkey

Moderately dense very dark red purple. Revealing aroma, gently warm, featuring fragrant black raspberry jam. The palate delivers appealing berry fruit and is textured and medium weight. This enjoyable red wine finishes with lingering dry tannin, well-integrated acidity and berry jam highlights. Kavaklidere is Turkey's largest winery and offers solid quality, often at very modest prices. Boğazkere translates as "throat burner." Modern winemakers have by and large conquered its most aggressive tendencies, and I enjoyed many wines from this grape, and those blended with Öküzgözü, during my 2013 visit to Turkey (see "Master of Wine Weekend, Istanbul" on vintrinsic.com).

Domaine de Castel Grand Vin 2010, Judean Hills, Israel

Dense dark garnet with thin purple edge. Arresting nose displaying concentration, accented ripe red fruit and toasted, tertiary highlights. The palate is quite rich and substantial. There is marked oak, toast and vanilla along with a firm tannic frame. 70% Cab Sauv plus Merlot and Petit Verdot. Aged in all-new oak for around 24 months, clearly leaving a strong mark on the wine. Another wine in this tasting resulting from higher altitude vineyards (2,300 ft.) to escape a "hot" region. Ambitiously priced at \$70 retail. Kosher.

Massaya Gold Reserve 2010, Beka'a Valley, Lebanon

Dense very dark red purple. Pronounced aroma dominated by black cherry and boysenberry conserve. Generous, fleshy, expressive taste with notable length and embedded acidity as well as lasting tannin. The new oak has been successfully absorbed by the wine. Youthful and capable of mid-term development. Reflects an inventive blend of varieties and a unique origin: 50% Cab Sauv, 40% Mourvedre, 10% Syrah matured for two years in new French barriques. At \$40 US retail, reasonably priced for its intrinsic quality and individuality.

Yatir Forest Bordeaux blend 2009, Jerusalem Hills, Israel

Opaque black purple. Warm, lifted, peppery nose with muted red and dark fruits. Ample and mouth-filling with evident substance. Balanced, with firm tannin and moderate acidity. A very successful example grown at elevations nearing 3,000 ft. Roughly two-thirds Cab Sauv with Petit Verdot aged for 16 months in one-third new French oak, which is well-integrated. Not exactly inexpensive at \$80 retail.



Chateau Belle-Vue La Renaissance 2005, Bhamdoun, Lebanon

Dense black red with purple rim. Concentrated, ripe and warm aroma with ripe black fruit and berries. The palate is concentrated, deep, and chewy with notable structure, imparting astringent tannins for a wine of this age. Well-endowed but perhaps lacking refinement. In fact, this is a still youthful wine and shows the need and potential to develop further in bottle. Here, once more, a Middle Eastern wine made possible by cooler elevations, 3,600 ft. in this case.

Thymiopoulos Uranos Naoussa 2011, Greece

Nearly moderately dense dark red purple. Sweet, fragrant aromatics offering ripe fruit and jam. In the mouth, this Xinomavro possesses attractive, forward fruit qualities and is medium plus in weight. The finish is dry yet possesses underlying texture that offsets the chalky finale. A good example of one of Greece's best red wine denominations based on an indigenous variety. About \$30 US retail.



Seminar No. 2: Winemaking the Old-Fashioned Way!

Schloss Gobelsburg Grüner Veltliner Reserve Tradition 2011

Pale yellow gold. The inviting, clean and softly scented nose is characterized by ripe yellow fruits, notably peach and a hint of pineapple, and the barest suggestion of leaf and spice. In the mouth, this appealing white wine displays polish and controlled richness. Well-calibrated, medium full, with concealed alcohol (13%). Dry, harmonious ending. They practice minimal intervention: gentle pressing, indigenous yeasts, fermentation and aging of 18 months in 25-hectoliter Austrian Manhartsberg oak. An excellent wine from a top-class property – and the “control” in this flight of wines.

Pheasant’s Tears Rkatsiteli “Amber Wine” 2010, Tibano AOC, Kakheti, Georgia

Pale tawny (note: this is a young white wine). Distinctive, expressive nose: sweet overtones of dried sultanas and yellow peach. The palate is more restrained and held in by high acidity and soft tannins. The wine leaves a clean, understated and balanced impression. Calls for a new frame of reference. Fermented on the skins for six months in earthenware qvevri (or dolia) buried in the ground and bottled unfiltered.



Vodopivec Vitovska 2006, Friuli, Italy

Very pale gold tawny. High-toned, individual yet intriguing and attractive scent of dried small white fruits. In the mouth, the wine is direct and incisive, with elevated acidity and moderate tannin. The aftertaste is abrupt and sharp. Fermented in amphorae from Georgia. The maker, Paolo Vodopivec, says Vitovska is “capable of profound aging.” I just don’t find the wine convincing, particularly at \$75 retail. Do we need to wait 20 or 30 years for it to reveal its true quality?

Beckham MMXII Minimus #8 A.D. 2013, Willamette Valley, Oregon

Cloudy dark yellow. Curious, individual nose of pepper, dried herbs, spices and dried lemon peel. The wine's taste is focused, cool and tightly wound. There is a severe, astringent finish with sharp acidity. On the positive side, there are subtle aromatic notes which surface at the end. Vaguely suggestive of an herbal liqueur minus the alcohol and sugar. Gruner Veltliner is the grape. Kept on the skins for 77 days in U.S.-made amphorae, then pressed with bare hands. Light SO2 dose that might keep this wine stable.

COS Pithos Bianco 2011, Vittoria, Sicilia

Moderately dense gold yellow. The highly expressive aromatics command attention and convey dried yellow fruits, dried coriander powder and a faint herbal accent. Following a promising nose, the wine is lean in the mouth with an etched acid spine and a touch of tannin. Needs more flesh on the bones to my taste. I am stunned by the 90+ scores for this wine – are they enamored of the taste or the idea? Based on Grecanico macerated seven months (!) on the skins and fermented in 400-liter pithos or amphora. SO2 at bottling.



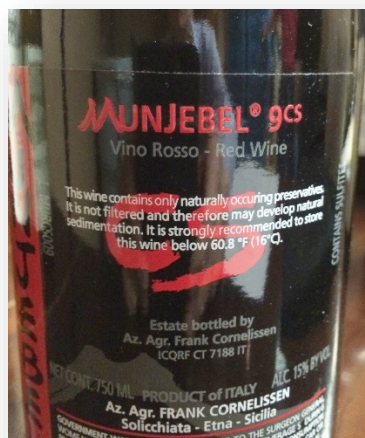
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COS Pithos Rosso 2012, Vittoria, Sicilia

Pale very dark purple red. Soft, gently warm nose revealing an attractive mix of black and red fruits. Very clean, fresh and medium plus in weight. Marked acidity and persistent dry tannins. Youthful, still reserved finish with subdued fruit expression. Imparts an unadorned feel. I find this more successful than the white. 60% Nero d'Avola, 40% Frappato in amphora as for the bianco. Light finishing SO₂.

Cornelissen Rosso 9CS 2012 (subzone-Chiusa Spagnola Contrada), Etna, Sicilia

Pale dark purple red. The aroma expresses a mélange of dark fruit and crushed fresh berries. Youthful and reserved yet exhibiting lovely feel and presence on the palate. Medium plus in body, the taste offers attractive fruit together with meaty, smoky highlights. This Sicilian red possesses a youthful, undeveloped, dry finish. Pre-phylloxera, ungrafted Nerello Mascalese. The proprietor claims to have “no philosophy” and refuses to intervene unless the vine is at risk. Fermentation is in neutral fiberglass tubs, and no SO₂ is added. The back label text “strongly recommends” storing the wine below 60.8 F – and if not??

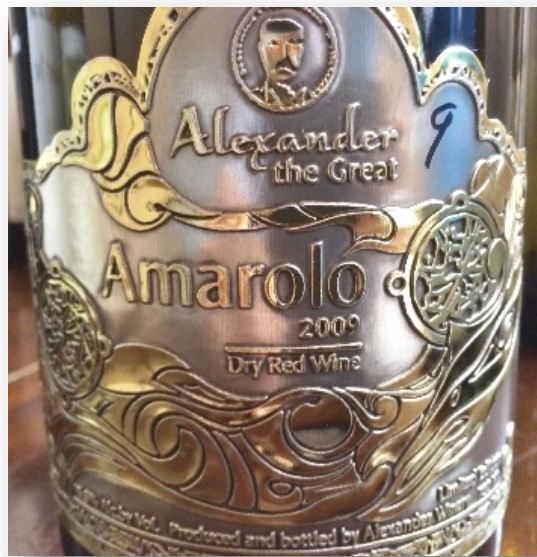


Kadma “Copiae” Amphora 2012, Shomron, Israel

Nearly moderately dense very dark red with purple rim. This unusual wine exhibits a distinctive aroma – soy milk, wild dark fruit – which carries over to the taste. The palate offers an appealing creamy feel and is moderately full-bodied. The wine persists in a textured finish and is supple and well-integrated. 40% Cab Sauv, 30% Merlot, 30% Syrah fermented in 500-liter Georgian qevri lined with beeswax. The amphorae are not buried. The wine spends four months in barrel and is filtered. Kosher.

Alexander the Great Amarolo 2009, Galilee, Israel

Dense very dark brick. Deep, warm multifaceted aroma marked by roasted red meat, very ripe plum and black cherry. The palate is less ample than the nose suggests and is dominated by roasted and tertiary highlights. Quite dry, verging on angular. Produced from grapes partially dried (under shelter, not in the sun) in the style of Amarone. The wine matures for 40 months in old and new barrels. Little SO2 is added.



Argyros Vinsanto 1999 12-Year Old, Santorini, Greece

Pale dark tawny with broad lime green rim. Soft, sweet, complex bouquet with a fascinating mix of roasted accents, subtle nuttiness, sultana and a faint suggestion of mint. In the mouth, there is the immediate sweetness of raisins, then the wine displays finely calibrated acidity. Delicate rather than forceful with a long, understated aftertaste with an interplay of sugary sultana and fine, elegant dryness. The sugar content is again more dominant at the very end of the finish. This Vinsanto possesses noteworthy refinement and shows no assertive volatility. The grapes are Assyrtiko and Aidani, sun dried for 10 to 14 days. Unfortified, this delicious drink spends 12 years in cask and is occasionally refreshed, eventually containing perhaps 5% younger material. 13.5% alcohol, 220 g/l residual sugar.

Bravo to my colleague Joel Butler MW for assembling this intriguing and unusual range of wines, and for providing insight and historical context!