

The Oregonian

Being in the red can be deliciously agreeable

Sunday, January 29, 2006

Regular readers of this column know that I am a devotee of deals. I like 'em good and cheap. Alas, it doesn't always work out that way. I taste plenty of wines that are cheap and nowhere near good enough. And I taste even more wines that ask a highfalutin price and don't deliver the goods. Really, you'd be amazed at just what kind of posturing goes on in the wine world these days when it comes to high prices and mediocre quality.



MATT KRAMER

The wines recommended this week are not bargains. Pity about that. But there's no denying that they are exceptionally good, even spectacularly good. They're worth your money. In the end, I can offer no higher, or more sincere, praise than that.

Abacela Vineyards "Estate" Tempranillo 2003: Southern Oregon has yet to prove itself a reliably good wine region. Oh, there have been a good number of fine wines that have emerged over the years, but I don't think that even southern Oregon's biggest boosters would claim their successes rival those of the Willamette Valley.

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Where the Willamette Valley's cool climate helped growers narrow their choices to pinot gris for white and pinot noir for red -- with some producers still keeping the porch light on for chardonnay -- Southern Oregon's warmer climate allows many more options. That, ironically, has slowed progress.

Nobody knew what worked best. Besides, the climate extremes are greater in Southern Oregon than in the Willamette Valley. So what's true for your site may not be so for your neighbors'.

The proof of this is found in the singular success of Abacela Vineyards and Winery in Roseburg. Consider the array of grapes planted in Abacela's 57-acre vineyard: tempranillo, grenache, albarino, graciano, bastardo, tinta roriz, tinta amarela, tinta cao, touriga nacional, dolcetto, nebbiolo, muscat, syrah, merlot, cabernet franc, malbec, viognier, petite verdot and tannat.

Most of these are Spanish and Portuguese varieties that, to the best of my knowledge, have never previously been planted in Southern Oregon. Yet the results in several cases -- nine of the preceding grapes have been bottled separately -- have been nothing less than superb. The newly released 2003 "Estate" tempranillo is a case in point. This Spanish grape variety is rare in the United States, although common in Spain. Yet even the Spanish would have to agree that what emerges from Abacela is exceptionally good even when compared with some of Spain's best. That's no small achievement, especially when you consider that these tempranillo vines were planted just 10 years ago.

The result is a deeply colored, intense, lush red with strong flavors of plum and very ripe blackberries delivered smoothly. This is a big wine yet graceful. And it's ideal for all sorts of grilled meats or just a good salami.

Abacela "Estate" Tempranillo 2003 is very much worth its \$29.95 asking price. You'll be impressed, I promise. (Distributor is Galaxy Wine Co.)

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