

SNOW ON WINE

Wine: “The Best” Picking Acres -- Barrels

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Poor “Joe Consumer”! Featured in last month’s¹ shocking exposé of his sad failure to select a fine wine needed to compliment his special dinner, he returns but will he “live or die” this time? “Surely”, Joe thinks, “there must be a secret to finding excellent wine at a reasonable price which will pair with and enhance his budding gourmet tastes.” And occasionally fortune favors the deluded – Joe, repeating his “Shelf Appeal”¹ strategy for wine selection, chooses a wine shop, attracted by its “catchy name.”

Again, overwhelmed by the myriad of bottles, he’s now met by knowledgeable sales staff who listen to his menu plans and offer advice. The store clerk Dionne suggests a light Willamette Pinot Noir for his grilled Copper River Salmon with capers. And for his Traeger Baby Back Ribs another store wine professional Matt suggests a rich Cote’ du Rhone Village. Neither bottle seems to have any of the features¹ Joe had previously used in selection¹. How, he asks, could a person know to select these bottles? Wine shop owner John, overhearing this, rushed over and explained, “well it is a bit complicated.” Seeing Joe’s obvious interest, John goes on to explain that even with all the highfalutin’ talk one hears about wine, there are really only a few simple things that matter – just three really.

“Wow”, says Joe! “I think I can handle three things. Tell me more”. “First off it is, after all, ALL about the grapes. You cannot make good wine from poor quality grapes” he emphasizes. Where, Joe wonders, are the best grapes. John explains they can come from many places, but that PICKING is key. “Of course you’ve got to pick em” Joe thinks, as John goes on about possibly being PICKED too early, or too late, or not selectively or... “Wait, wait, wait”, Joe interrupts’, “this is getting too complicated”. John’s smooth reassurance continues. “Grape growers do this for us. The best growers and vintners test all ripeness factors daily and pounce at the ideal day and best weather.” “What, I must even PICK the weather”! “Easy beesy,” says John. “Good growers know this and hire the best PICKERS who select only ideal fruit and cull the rest”. “So its about when and how”, says Joe. “Well yes and no”, says John. “Yields play a roll as well”.

“OK, I yield,” thinks Joe. Then he hears that yield is just how many tons they PICK per ACRE. “So John” asks Joe “why should I care about yield”? “Because as ton/ACRE² decreases the fruit quality increases. But it is a double-edged sword – price also increases!² Seeing Joe’s quizzical look, he continues that a growers ACRE is valuable² and must produce a certain yearly income from the harvest. But the better quality grapes are actually worth more as they give a more flavorful juice which can command a higher price based on its quality alone (and not WNTD costs¹). “So,” Joe says, “it’s yield that determines quality of fruit, and eventually wine price follows.” He is disappointed to hear that not just per ACRE but also *which* ACRE matters as vineyard cost varies dramatically⁴.

“So what is the third simple thing that matters” asks Joe. “It is BARRELS.” “Sounds simple enough Joe thinks.” “Most think of French Oak BARRELS, but actually the oak may also be Hungarian, American or Yugoslavian. Each wood affects the developing wine differently, and each year of use changes the effect as well³. So which barrel, how much time, how many years to use? Let winemakers do their thing and SIMPLY see which result suits your tastes and foods best.”

“Well, how can I decide all that without buying and comparing all these wines, most of which I might not like?” John’s simple answer was that Joe could come and ask at his shop. Or he might consider joining Spokane Enological Society. SES members join each other monthly for inexpensive comparative tastings.

“Never heard of it” Joe said. So John gave him the web address. He explained that in addition having fun with like-minded individuals, wine can be tried with small food samples. An SES food committee tries the offered wines with a bunch of different food then selects choices they feel work best. A week later at the tasting the selected pairings are served with the presented wines. Thus all can see what foods best suit each wine for their individual tastes.

Now Joe Consumer was beginning to feel like a guy in control. His painful lesson in the cost of “WNTD¹” now fading as he learned the important 3 “What Is To Drink” factors which are what Joe and all of us want to pay for. And Joe has a way through SES tastings to identify for himself and his own personal taste which wine he should buy. Oh, funny thing, he found that John’s shop had a monthly club which typically had wines within his new wine spectrum. He is now a confirmed loyal customer of John’s Wine Shop, and a loyal new SES member. Welcome Joe Consumer, see you soon at an SES Tasting on a Monday night.

And that concludes our two-month series about the costs of **What’s Not To Drink** (WNTD¹) as discussed in the January 2022 Snow On Wine article, and February’s PICKING, ACRES & BARRELS – which make-up the cost of **What Is To Drink**.

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters and places are products of the authors’ imagination or are used fictitiously and are not to be construed as real. Any resemblance to actual locales, organizations or persons is entirely coincidental.

Notes:

- 1) “Wine: Cost of ‘What’s Not to Drink’, Snow on Wine, January, 2022, Wineminder
- 2) “Prices and Tonnage Drop like a Rock”, Wine Business, Tuesday January 25, 2022, winebusiness.com
- 3) “Oak wine barrel costs and price comparisons,” MoreWine, morewinemaking.com
- 4) “Buying a Vineyard? -- A Short Course Guide to the Basics”, Vintroux, Winter, 2022, vineyardandwinerysales.com