

Sunshine on the Glass

Here's to those people with a talent for making me feel a little less lost at the time of year when I need it most - well, that and the slow scrambled truffled eggs, Snowy Mountain cheeses and firm Lucque olives washed down by gallons of perfect old white burgundy that capped one recent and necessary evening - and all of it just in time for the endless inventories of year-end reflection. My friend and I didn't waste a word on the food or wine. "Oh that's good" was about the extent of it, punctuated by a happy grunt and burp. (For the record we did toast the absent author of the recipe for her contribution).

It is at this point in the story that I officially risk my membership in the "Very Serious Palates" club. Food and wine wasn't the point of it, food and wine should never be the point of "It" it's just a means to an end, an excuse to bliss singly or collectively. That's all. I know the difference. It is my business to know the difference and it is a boorish exercise to think otherwise. Of course I can bark out lusty adjectives aroused by some slatternly bottle of fermented glee -- on demand and that to a mind-numbing degree of bloodless pedantic excess heretofore unseen, Polly want a Malbec? It's a peculiar vein in my line of work, the incessant need to take the magic out of the magic, transforming what should be a happy exercise into a bloodless grind.

We react, we sniff, we slaver, we drool and in the gathering, the breaking of bread, it becomes possible to forget all the rest of it; the fight with the significant other, the dressing down from the boss, the parking ticket, the all around no-good-very-bad-dayness or any other number of calcified bitter self-rehearsed soliloquies that have been lurking deep down in the breast for God knows how long. The anticipation of it wipes the slate clean. We set it aside. Auteurs and authors and playwrights and poets all know the simple fact of the matter is this, a seat at the table is a prompting to life, an invitation to necessary exchange. The act propels the narrative forward; it's a sweeping aside of the confessional curtain, an invitation to absolution and communion with the chosen members of one's tribe in hopes that the ritual will bring us all 'round. We may not be tearing hearts from the innocents anymore like our pre-Columbian forebears, but our collective hope for communion with something larger than ourselves hasn't changed. (Mental masturbation aside, I am sure I could chalk this mess up to a cascade of biochemical reactions but the grander truth of the matter is that when the mouth is full the metaphysical pants drop and one's sunshine gets pressed against the glass for all the world to see and what a reveal it is).

I refuse to give in to this year-end impulse that requires I catalogue every experience with a rank or a number, I much prefer thinking of the year's brushstrokes as the necessary removing of unnecessary rubble and bullshit -- as I still believe that a masterpiece lies underneath. Arrogant? Yes. Hopeful? Utterly, and I will continue to surround myself with lively vibrant people in aid of that goal.

Therefore I refuse to trust the perpetually cheery, those souls that are always "on", the ones for whom all things are "amazing", the ones that never stub a toe, or spit the word "fuck" in response to a moment of genuine pique (I like imagining that such monochromatic folks burn through crowns as quickly as I do), perpetual cheer betrays an unhuman selfishness of the soul, an unwillingness to be seen or known. Its dishonest. I remember actually learning to enjoy Michael Jordan's athletic theatrics more toward the sunset of his career. He was more human and I admired him for the struggle, or at least letting me see the struggle and I cheered him then. I can identify with humans, people who rise.

I learned the necessary art of venting vexations at the feet of the best~ my dearly departed mother actually elevated the use of that particular word far past its common grammatical strictures, using it as noun, verb, adjective, gerund, pronoun and yes, preposition. From her I learned a certain amount of verbal gymnastics when it came to bending language to my will, from father I learned the other half of the coin, the value of silence and his straight razor-and-strop talent for exploiting the spaces between the notes - think Miles Davis without the attitude - or the racism. Let it be said that I learned to spit with precision and lyricism and that holidays at the Fecteau house were unusually "musical". Even so, venting even for the artful only delays the natural process of time. Regrets always accrue and ferment, and second-guessing becomes much much too frequent; if the universe is ever right this inevitability bludgeons us all, even the perpetually cheery and one obvious solution for this wintry metaphysical acid backwash is flight. It was then my dentist announced that I would need another set of crowns to accommodate my bulldog bite. (Of the physical structures of my mouth, it can be said that very little that is genuine remains).

I won't lie, things got dark for a minute - my daylight-deprived mind left to its own devices has an unerring instinct for finding the rustiest tool in the box. This is not the carefree Peter- Pan-ish Me of warmer months but a fatter duller more sullen cousin, the one it's best to avoid, especially around the holidays. Better to play the fat-dumb-and-happy card and greet the wintry months with a grin rather than the usual assortments of snarls and spits and scowls, all framed with the worst sort of mawkish gray, dour, existential angsty belly button picking. (Cont'd on p2)

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Sunshine (continued from p.1)

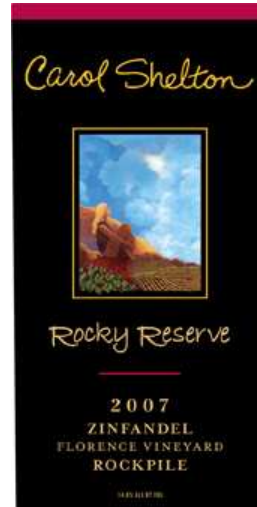
(Cont'd from P.1.) And so it was that a boozy late night November haze punched the button for Seattle and family (Drinking, credit cards and the Internet DO mix). I have always been a happy drunk, happier still at 36000 feet - flight being the happy result of my repressions having reached a fever pitch (from too many those aforementioned self-rehearsed unspoken soliloquies buried in the heart for too many days, days that stretched into years, as if sprouting from some lotus eating dreamland brought on by endless days of dulling routine). Unfortunately on my return from the Thanksgiving table, the season imposed itself upon the landscape with a dull gray foul-smelling fog. The suddenly increased loss of daylight dropped me into this gentle winter with a great kerplunk, as if I were some fat doughy white boulder dropping to ocean bottom; and it was from there the season radiated outward with an ever increasing rippling chill, slowing my pulse.

My mind spent those first few days of lost daylight carving scrimshaw miniatures; those small detailed tasks kept me focused on the immediate and necessary. It's a twelve-stepper's talking cure and it's a mental discipline that leads me out of this foul smelling mood. Slowly, I wend my way through the necessities of this chilling season punctuating my week with trips above the smog line where the sky is still blue and the birds still sing (without the same tubercular hack as their city bird cousins). I relish the sharps, the flats and the spaces between the notes that hang in the air. I contemplate the great David Breskin poem "Free Tibet", where the poet greets his holiness with "Hello Dalai" (I am sure his holiness appreciates jokes). The verse continues, "an attachment that does not work properly creates suffering". In this chill blue stillness it is a kind release, a soft surrender and at long last an understanding. My palate shifts away from the summer's racy bright flavors to more saturnine registers and I know I must patiently wait out the cold, suppressing an incessant ache for warmth and sun all the while suckling at some unfiltered unfiltered bottle of dinosaur blood from some forgotten corner of southern Europe, I then do as many have done for millennia before me when warding off the dark chill of a long winter night. I light the stove, I set the table, I pour the wine. People are coming. I take a moment here at ocean bottom, admiring the mossy green, the odd spare tire, the fisherman's hook lodged in the nearby boot. I am at long last a creature of the present and the moment feels like a perpetual now.

The best of the best wine stores;

Park City / 1550 Snowcreek Drive / 435-615-8538
Metro Salt Lake / 255 South 300 East / 801-533-6444
Cottonwood / 1863 East 7000 South / 801-942-2580
The Big Shiny New One / 280 West Harris Avenue
(about 1600 South, 300 West) / 801-412-9972

A Carol-ing we go....



With a chill in the air the palate demands sterner stuff. We want flavors that linger a little longer since we are in the midst of a contemplative season. Less daylight means more belly-button picking time. It really is that bluntly simple. The longer a wine stays on the palate, the more it occupies the mind and helps us pass the wintry time a little more quickly when we huddle about the communal table - that and the higher alcohol doesn't hurt. Not that Carol Shelton could ever be accused of making unbalanced wines. Her Zins regularly weigh in well below 15%. It could be said that she learned winemaking when balance meant something.

Carol Shelton has garnered more accolades than one person could imagine wanting. She started as a poetry student at UC Davis in the early 70s and wound up studying enology with the Ann Noble, the woman who invented the aroma wheel (wine geek wise, imagine being around for the invention of fire). She then moved on to pioneering work with varieties of yeast, helping establish the theory that different yeast strains created different flavor profiles. From there she went on to work with industry legends like Andre Tschelistcheff and Robert Mondavi. One of the early Zin pioneers along with Ravenswood, Ridge and Rosenblum, she developed relationships with some of the greatest Zinfandel growers in California. These are not trendy wines, they exhibit an all too rare balance and grace not easily found in California Zinfandel.

Two bottlings arrived from Carol Shelton this week; the **Carol Shelton "Wild Thing" Zinfandel 2007 (Code # 918175 / \$13.99)** Wild Thing is sourced from cool climate old-vine Mendocino fruit and treated to a long cool well-aerated fermentation with wild yeasts (aerating during fermentation softens the wine), the result is a treat for Zin lovers, a fat jammy palate with a long spicy finish - this is a Utah Small Winery bargain! National retail is over \$20. **Carol Shelton "Rocky Reserve" Zinfandel (Code #918176 / \$24.99)** Rockpile Vineyard is one of California's most prized sites for Zinfandel and when its combined with rockier high altitude sites like Florence Vyd and Cox Vyd, the result is a study in classic Zin terroir, a wine with cut & precision without the abusive excessive alcohol that mars so many other jammy big wines.

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On the Oregon Trail

Try not to love this



My first trip through the Willamette Valley felt as if I'd entered a land of perpetual mist and wind, it seemed like a land where babies are born with a natural layer of Gore-Tex. What better place to find Pinot Noir expressed as beautifully here as anywhere else in the world, Pinot Noir in all its sullen temperamental glory? The Willamette Valley seems to have escaped the overdevelopment and agitated glam that all too often plagues more renowned viticultural areas. The roads are long and winding and the hillsides verdant and plush, its easy to like farm country and towns like Carlton make it too easy.

With the holidays in high gear and the rush to bubbles bearing down, the pursuit of perfect bubbles draws nigh. In my humble opinion, the **Soter Brut Rose 2006 (Code # / \$44.99)** is the finest sparkling wine made in the U.S. It is a brilliant wine made in the traditional champenoise method using 50% Pinot Noir and 50% Chardonnay. The technique is impeccable. Fruit is allowed to reach maximum ripeness allowable for sparkling wine production, the wines are vinified separately with some barrel aging and the best part is the minimal dosage, 7 g/L. When fruit is picked at perfect balance there is no need for additional sweetener in the dosage. The result is one of the most ageable sparkling wines in the country. Soter also has an extraordinary range of still wine, namely the **Soter North Valley Pinot Noir 2009 (Code # 917552 / \$24.99)** and the more intensely carved **Soter Mineral Springs Ranch 2009 (Code # 917346 / \$36.99)**. Low yields, French oak aging and careful vineyard management combine to create some of Oregon's most expressive efforts.

The other new arrival to the Libation portfolio is the **Evening Land Blue Label Oregon Pinot Noir 2009 (Code # 918161 / \$19.99)**. The aromatics are lively and rich with remarkable depth and complexity; aromas of earl grey tea, ripe cherry fruit, brandy mulling spices and tones of sweet oak toast frame this incredibly alluring package. The most surprising part of the Evening Land Blue Label is its beguiling texture. Ordinarily I would expect a wine with this sort of presence and heft to weigh in at 14.5% alcohol and not the spare 13.5% here, the finish is long, silky, spicy and intense with nary a hint of tartness or astringency. This is clearly the result of careful wine-making and even more careful vineyard management.



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Riunite almost ruined it. Not to date myself, but the logo stuck in my head like an earworm "Riunite on ice that's nice" Such a shame. Lambrusco had been a fixture for almost 200 years, a regional specialty of Emilia Romagna (yes that same Emilia Romagna known for culinary treasures like Balsamic Vinegar and Reggiano Parmesan). The full name of the wine is almost operatic **Cleto Chiarli Centenario Grasperossa di Castelvetro Amabile. (Code # 918157 / \$11.99)** What the label refers to is the darkest most tannic clone of Lambrusco (Grasperossa) and the town of its origin, Castelvetro (the heart of quality Lambrusco production). This also happens to be sourced from some of the oldest Lambrusco vines in the area. Its production is simple enough, a base wine is made, a dosage is added and that's how sparkling wine gets made. This is a low alcohol off dry style, meaning that it has a hint of sweetness, but thanks to the tannin and acidity, the residual sugar is barely noticeable thanks to the grippiness on the palate. Served with a slight chill, it's also a marvelous companion for a dazzling range of foods from charcuterie to the gooiest desserts. Try as hard as I might, I found it impossible to hate this charming little sparkler. I even used it to wash down a peanut butter sandwich.

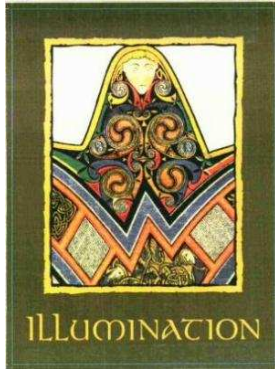
Eating Crow Again



I hate to admit it, but I am eating crow again. I hated Pinotage with the heat of a thousand suns. No more. **Warwick Old Bush Vine Estate Pinotage 2010 (Code # 918142 / \$15.99)** packs an intensely spicy grippy jammy treat — the fruit ranges toward dark, earthy notes of black jammy berries, coffee, anise and sweet toasty oak notes. The oak use is deft and never intrusive and the fruit extract is focused and sharp. This is a dark and brooding

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Light in the Dark



I am a slave to seasonal demands, as are we all. It's a throwback to our earliest years hiding in caves and swinging from the trees. It's the reason why I have a December birthday ~ how else could my parents respond to springtime in the Bay of Naples (Italy not Florida) other than to frame their baser urges with a little amour? Spring randiness followed by a winter bounty ~ it goes without saying that I brought an end to their child bearing efforts, sixth time being the charm and all. Still, I take great pride in the fact that great wine too is the result of careful spring planning (or a the impulses of a wild season). Either way frenetic activity leads to results.

The **ILLUMINATION 2010 (Code # 918168 / \$37.99)** is indeed a light in the darkness of winter as a mere sip takes me to a warmer month. This is not your granny's summer sipper. It's the result of some very careful vineyard management and winemaking. Sourced from Biodynamic vineyards, the fruit is whole-cluster pressed (literally the whole cluster is pressed, and skin contact is permitted and additional tannin from the stems and seeds makes itself apparent on the palate). This endows the wine with an extraordinarily rich and snappy texture (imagine drinking a samurai sword). That powerhouse juice then undergoes fermentations with differering yeast strains conducted in three separate vessels; cement egg, French Oak and stainless steel. I know, it sounds like the intergalactic Viagra experienced in the movie Cocoon, but the result is a magnificently aromatic wine, unusually deep and rich for type. This is not the California Sauvignon Blanc of yore when every grape dork sent this grape through a variety of fermentational somersaults only to make it taste like Chardonnay (go figure, malolactic train wreck meets oak wall). This is not that, but a summer varietal crafted for a wintry palate.

You may not recognize it as steely refreshing sauvignon blanc, I would rather you thought of it as an evolution, a development in our understanding of what we thought of as Sauvignon Blanc. Its steely backbone, framed in ripe baking spice notes, carry its dazzling range of ripe citrus and tree fruits to satisfying ends.

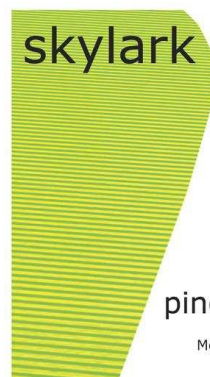
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North v. South



Depending on who you listen to in the 5th grade history class at whatever oppressive soul crushing elementary school you might have attended, you may have been led to believe that the North may or may not have had a legitimate beef with the South in regards to the Civil War. Was there a difference between the two? Of course, but it's the nature of that difference that's up for debate in some circles. Southerners still regard it as a war of northern aggression much like the French lay claim to ultimate superiority in matters of Pinot Noir and Sonoma oftimes sneers at Pinot Noir from any other area of the continental United States. I believe it's a personal thing much like sexual preference or religion or mood for that matter. **Flowers Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 2009 (Code # 917878 / \$40.99)** originates from the higher altitudes of the Sonoma Coast appellation (No Cal). Specifically, it's a royal shlep to get there, a literal over the river and through the woods journey to the glories of Grandma's perfected house and food, that takes you through magnificent ancient Redwoods and up the Pacific Coast highway to the microscopic town of Cazadero. Flowers is located on a high altitude coastal stretch where the daytime temps are warm and sultry and the night time creeps in off the ocean with a cooling breeze. As a result the wines possess a clarity and balance that's nigh unto impossible to duplicate, primary fermentations take place in cement and the wine is then brought up in French oak. Its a stunner loaded with bright spicy floral scents and slathered with fresh ripe red fruits. The vineyard has gone 100 % Biodynamic.

Kenneth Volk Santa Barbara Pinot Noir 2008 (Code # 915832 / \$21.99) is the other side of the coin. Its much hotter where this is grown, but the Volk team are very careful vineyard managers and winemakers. The geography shows; low nighttime and high daytime temperatures have created a stunningly rich wine, with loads of flavor and spice framed in new French Oak. This is sultry sweet stuff with a lengthy soft finish.



Should you need a palate freshener, and you likely will as the holiday table is rife with fatty goodies, I can't think of a fresher candidate than the **Skylark Pinot Blanc from Orsi Vineyard 2010 (Code # 908076 / \$14.99)**. There's gotta be more than Chardonnay in our white wine vocabulary and Pinot Blanc is a wonderfully crisp alternative should you desire another rich flavor in a lighter whiter register.

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Caputo Holiday



308 West 300 South
(801) 531 ~ TONY

Caputos at the holiday is a walk down memory lane for not just me but the extended members of my family. We all have vivid memories of aged cheeses, cured meats and artisanal chocolates from the world round.

New Chocolate bars from artisanal producers are dotting the shelves. My personal favorites being the **Patric Chocolate** bars from Missouri made without any added cocoa butter. These are pioneering bars, with unique distinctive flavor profiles that result from Patric's unique aging process. As always there are a range of crazy holiday happy flavors from **Chocolatier Blue** these are brilliant efforts as always with impeccable couverture. The snap in each shell gives way to brilliantly balanced filling ranging in flavors from eggnog to gingerbread to maple syrup. These are only 35 calories each and are well worth the sin (despite the five star organic butter ~ 14 gallons of milk per pound ~ that forms the backbone of this deliciousness). If its fatty pig that gets your holiday appetites riled, the **Olli Salumeria** products (my personal favorite being the Speck which is a dead ringer for Spain's famed buttery piggy goodness known as Pata Negra) ~ it's a brilliant fill for any holiday charcuterie platters.

And better still in cheese news, the fabulous Antonia Horne is now the official affineur (the person responsible for tending her moldy little babies and bringing them to funky maturity) As a result the cheese cave has never hummed along with this degree of delicious efficiency. As always, the Snowy Mountain range of cheeses are my personal favorites this time of year; especially the Strawberry Peak, a dead ringer for Epoisses if ever there was, and the brilliant baby blue, The Delano Peak which is as wine friendly a cheese as I've ever known.

Learn Learn Learn

January 9th (Downtown)

Intro to Fine Chocolate

Chocolate / \$25

January 23rd (Downtown) & 24th (15th & 15th)

Intro to Fine Cheese

Cheese / \$25 & Wine / \$15

Reserve your spots now, RSVP to:

Caputos on 15th / 801 - 486 - 6615

Caputos Downtown / 801 - 531 ~ 8669

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Party Perfect



PASO A PASO



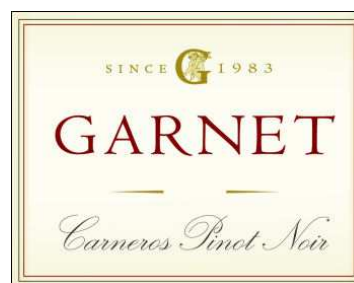
TEMPRANILLO

It's a fascinating exercise in consumer behavior. People refuse to believe that great wine can come in anything other than a corked bottle. Get over it. It's a great wine that happens to be in a box. Pride gets you nowhere. Save the \$\$.

Bodegas Borsao Campo de Borja Vina Borgia 3L (Code # 919195 / \$19.99) is sourced from an exceptional high altitude organic dry farmed vineyard in Calatayud. Remember that this wine was a screaming deal in the 1.5 L bottle at \$14.49, this is twice the volume for an extra \$5. This grippy stuff, with exceptional length and snap on the finish. Remember, we don't just like acidity for cleansing the palate, it also helps to have that dry snappy flavor (astringent stem tannin) in the mid palate. This wine delivers it in spades and stays fresh in the box for a couple weeks at least. You could (and likely have) done much much worse for much much more.

I love it when a wine I've always liked becomes a wine I must love. **Bodegas Volver Paso a Paso 2010 (Code # 916984 / \$9.99)** has always been a terrific value (an old vine dry farmed organic tempranillo vineyard from La Mancha). It always got a little time in French oak which underscores the natural sweetness of the fruit, but for some reason this wine went to a whole new level of intensity in 2010. The aromatics and palate are dazzling and vivid with notes of spicecake and black raspberry with an exceptionally silky grip on the palate that only develops and gains intensity with airing.

Under the Radar



Saintsbury's legendary Garnet Pinot Noir is now just called "Garnet". The fruit sourcing is the same, the evelage, vineyard management and winemaking have all remained in place. **Garnet Carneros Pinot Noir 2010 (Code # 504200 / \$18.99)** is one of the great Pinot Noir values in the market today. Carneros fruit is marked by bright fresh floral aromas with a lively defining acidity; this wine is a refuge for those of us fatigued by high alcohol flab.

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Delicious Idea

Plum Alley debuts this month! Named for the iconic “Plum Alley”, former home of what once was a burgeoning Chinatown in Salt Lake City, this latest creation from the mind of the owners of Copper Onion, Ryan & Colleen Lowder is an ambitious little corner of Asian influenced culinary goodness, offering a wide ranging and VERY affordable menu of Asian influenced cuisine with that distinctive Copper Onion touch. This is quick, easy delicious pre-theater fare. Did I mention I love the communal seating?

Plum Alley

111 East 300 South
Salt Lake City, UT 84111
(801) 355-0543

Special Order



As promised, each newsletter offers a wine available only by special order. **If this is something you want email me at francis.fecteau@gmail.com with your name, address, preferred store of pickup and contact #.** This offering is for the **Orin Swift Abstract 2010. Retail is \$28.99. Orders are for 1 case minimums. You may split cases with others.** For fans of massively rich, jammy extracted wines that are loaded with plush flavors and textures, the **Abstract** is made for immediate pleasure. A blend of old-vine sources of Mendocino, Napa and Sonoma fruit; Grenache is the core along with Syrah and Petite Sirah, aged for 10 months in French Oak. As you might expect, aromatics are deep ripe and rich with loads of earthy black fruit and the finish long, fine grained and sweet.

Learning



Increasing Wine Knowledge... One Sip At A Time

801.486.WINE (9463)

Utah’s newest wine education opportunity “The Wine Academy of Utah” is kicking off another semester this February, and for those of you too lazy to make it to a Caputo’s class) this is as good a spot as any to learn the basics of wine evaluation and appreciation. Owner / Operator Jim Santangelo is certified by the Wine & Spirit Education Trust (WSET) to teach their system of appraisal and analysis. **Restaurateurs take note** — Jim does have courses that focus specifically on teaching servers how to more effectively sell wine ~ wine education courses may come and go—everyone’s got one, but effective methods to teach wine sales are hard to come by. Courses are available for all levels of appreciation. Prices vary. See for more information www.wineacademyofutah.com

Mendocino Cool



I am a huge fan of Alex Macgregor (hence the tartan label) and Trinafour is his side project away from his daytime duties as winemaker at Saracina (another winery I love). The man has a touch. This wine is sourced from a 60 year old patch in the Redwood Valley (carignane used to be the dominant grape in California!) After crushing, Alex runs the juice on top of some petite sirah skins. It’s a fascinating ripassa touch that elevates this into a lovely soft velvety with riper berry fruits. The wine is unfiltered and unfinned (really chunky) so allow it to sit upright overnight and enjoy. **Trinafour Niemi Vineyard Carignane 2007 (Code # 917322 / \$15.99)**

That’s right. A website!

www.libation-online.com