

Hit Me

In my next life I'll return as an opera singer, a guttural, snarling, nasty, lustful, baritone. I know that I condemn myself to a life of unrequited love, forever upstaged by some whiny tenor who always gets a better chance at the girl, but that slight drop in register carries with it all the mystery and sadness of the world. In it is the entirety of love and suffering, color and blight, damnation and life. The baritone always dares greatness; most always fails spectacularly, and then flames out in a blaze of dubious glory (with his invariably slutty and tragically whorish partner, the mezzo soprano). Live hard, die young and leave clean underwear ~ isn't that the anthem? At least I wouldn't be surrounded by small souls and I'd still get to be bad...very bad; and better still it would be on a very grand scale, it would be BIG (and the sex would be *filthy* good). I've never had much use for idle virtue.

Some people cut themselves for the sensation, the stimulation; I sympathize after being surrounded by the bleak and the soulless all through the holidays (the darkest pit of it spent in an Opera house in a large city, surrounded by people who couldn't be bothered by the events on stage. Only by the grace of the music did I not make the headlines for having hurled someone from the balcony to the cheap seats below).

A year has ended, another has arrived, and the arbitrary marker of new and old drives me to reflect on what's to come, what's gone and what still gets my attention-without-fail, what still moves me, what still touches me. The Opera has been going non-stop, all through December and on into January, the voices shouting from my apartment, my ipod, my car stereo (~ it's sonic garlic really, warding off the dull and shallow, leaving me to my contemplations) and the wines this month have been dark and brooding, a month for Syrah if ever there was. Black wines, that's what I want; dark, brooding, road tar black wines.

I finally tasted the legendary **Bodegas Numanthia "Termanthia"** this month. I haven't spoken of it for three reasons - One? Its \$200 + a bottle, Two? A scant 1,500 bottles are in the U.S., and Three? Imagine being punched in the face during sex (not many will admit just how much they like it). Suffice it to say that it's rare and my rent is late. Contemplate the value of \$200 for a moment; an hour of a bad lawyer's time, an average meal with mediocre wine for two in a large city, maybe 3 dental X rays, an hour with a fat hooker, maybe a round trip flight to Dubuque? Nothing against Iowa, but when a wine spits at me ~ blood and iron, birth and death, when I know it will outlive me, when it makes me a party to the primal bubbling molten swell of Creation, all in one fell swoop, well...the rest of the world just seems irrelevant; bad lawyers, dental X Rays, fat hookers and all.

I crave because I need, and with the coming year, I need a thrill, I need sensation, I want to be excited. The poor immigrants populating the neighborhoods of my past understood this; scrimping and saving for a night at the Opera, much as they would to pay their fuel bills or feed their families. I admired it in my librarian father, whistling away his Saturday afternoons among the bookstacks to Strauss, Puccini, Beethoven or Rachmaninoff. Sustenance creeps in from the strangest places. I've lived for months on a night of kindness (yes, the naked kind), and then fueled myself through the ensuing drought on a steady diet of cheap gin, Tom Waits records and filterless cigarettes. Dark nights make for amazing textures.

A very warm and wise man once told me "some of us believe in Creation, that we are descended from the angels; others believe in Evolution, that we are ascended from the apes. I believe that classical music brings us a little further from the apes and a little closer to the angels". And so it is, still bubbling in my brain: wine, women, song, cheap gin, cigarettes, Tom Waits records, and maybe, if I'm lucky, just a familiar voice in the dark at the right moment. The business of living is business enough. Me? I just lucked out and found my way for a moment, and for that I am grateful.

chocolatier • blue

chocolates of the season

They have a Faberge sheen, almost too beautiful to eat", I commented to Matt as he beamed over the selection of truffles from upstart **Chocolatier Blue**, based in Alpine Utah. Unfortunately I ate one. They were not **too** beautiful to eat, they were too beautiful to **stop** eating. The second Matt removed the box cover, the aroma made me weak in the knees, part of me wanted to crush one into my skin and just *smear it...everywhere*. Each truffle is a blast of pure, delineated, intense flavor coupled with impeccably tempered chocolate; richness coupled with intensity, yet never heavy, cloying or goeey. These are remarkable creations, from the crème brulee & caramelized brown sugar, to the "seasonal pies" with pie crust to the passion fruit hearts, these are show stopping efforts from a remarkable artist/craftsman who stops at nothing in a search for the finest organic ingredients available. Caputo's is the sole retail outlet in Utah for both consumers and on-premise alike. Call 801-519-5754 for details.

Your feedback is welcome and wanted - any thoughts on how I might improve this newsletter are welcome. I want to hear it all — the good, the bad and the ugly. Questions, concerns, thoughts, experiences, both fair and foul, francis.fecteau@gmail.com

e-libation

A Salt Lake City guide to all things juicy and delicious in the world of wine.

Not like the other kids...

(generous grapes for ungenerous times)

Mum once told me, "Franco (a shorthand nickname for Francis), you aren't like the other kids on the playground." Don't know what exactly she meant by that. Part of me thought she was being a terrific bitch, part of me thought she was just calling it like she saw it. Either way I respected the woman, very very very smart; smartest woman I've ever known. And, at the very least, there was a sublime wisdom at work.

There is a reason I spend as much time writing as I do; I don't speak "human" very well, at least not out loud. I flirt badly and speak worse. As a result I spend inordinate amounts of time alone. My pensive nature doesn't lend itself well to frequent contact with others, thus, I am clumsy "out loud". So, savants like myself try to communicate through a medium that overcomes their talentlessness. Me? I write; writing gives me a chance to sleep on it, reconsider, backspace, delete, *polish*, and maybe, just maybe, feel a little normal. Or I pull a cork. Great wine can occasionally buy forgiveness for, or understanding of, one's shortcomings ~ its hard to feel bilious, angry or mean spirited toward someone when they hand you a glass of something remarkable. And when the short days and interminable nights of January (will January never end?) drive me to distraction, I welcome anything that pulls the focus. This month its been the tar black wines borne of Syrah (and Grenache...next page). And when a long deep dark finish pulls focus from the interminable chill of January, well then, I say "success".

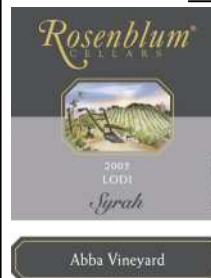
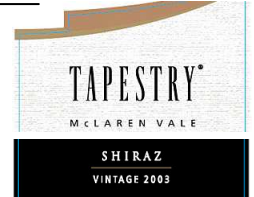
I really really really love Syrah, Shiraz, Petite. Whatever the hell we want to confuse it as, it all translates to a wintry wine for a wintry mood. The wines are thick and brawny and deliver quite a wallop for a relatively modest price (the great Syrahs of the northern Rhone's Hermitage aside), especially necessary in January when the pocketbook needs a little kindness after the excesses of the holidays. The history of the grape is actually quite old, dating back some 4000 years, predating ancient Rome. Some assert that it traces its origins to the ancient Persian city of Shiraz (name sound familiar?). Well, myths aside, good solid archeological research tells us that its origins are in southern France.

Syrah and Shiraz aren't the same. There are two variants; Midi and Durif. Syrah (Midi) was cross bred with a grape called Peloursin and Petite Syrah (Durif) was born in the mid 19th century. The flavor profiles are dramatically different. (Australia is a great source of confusion ~ both Syrah and Petite Syrah masquerade under the name Shiraz; tasting a great deal of both one can discern between the two). Both are capable of incredible depth, richness and intensity; Syrah has a broader range of expression, showing colors, flavors and aromas that range from red to black fruits of varying degrees of ripeness, scents of barnyard (a polite way to say horseshit), meat, smoke, spices like coriander, cardamom and black pepper. Its range of flavors and aromatics is broad, whereas Petite Syrah tends to be more monolithic, showing intense black fruit and cassis flavors with extremely firm tannins. Traditionally, both get rigorous oak treatments to temper the extreme textural notes. Either way, both provide toothstaining intensity (when responsibly handled) and richness, leaving a lingering mouthfeel, like few other grapes do, consistently overdelivering for a modest price.



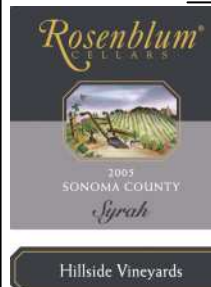
A grapey little blast of flavor, this is an ideal intro to the joys of Petite Syrah. **Rosenblum Heritage Clones Petite Syrah 2006 (\$16)** offers old vine depth and intensity for a modest price. This is a perennially brilliant wine from some of Contra Costa's oldest vineyards, certified organic and sustainable.

Don't let the label fool you ~ the dark oxidation resistant heart of Syrah beats here. **Tapestry McLaren Vale Shiraz 2005 (\$20)** No overdone goopiness, almost French in its restraint. Power and balance.



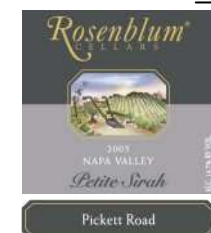
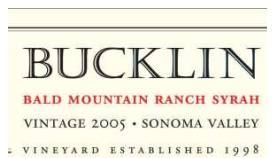
Lodi? Yes Lodi, and brilliant Syrah at that. This is deep, dark stuff with a sappy mineral French undertone that's hard to resist, marrying it to opulent ripe boysenberry tones, that take days to open. The flavors linger and brood for minutes in the mouth **Rosenblum Cellars "Abba Vineyard" Syrah 2005 (\$22)**

Unfiltered, unfinned, unrepentantly, unapologetically dark & rich, a texture akin to motor oil, its an important chapter in Syrah, from the arid plains of La Mancha. **Finca Sandoval 2004 (\$44)** Not for the faint of heart (or weak willed)



A brilliant cool climate old vine syrah from Sonoma country. Gorgeous high tones of dark mineral (think lead pencil & slate) with a gorgeous overlay of espresso, chocolate and jammy blackberries aromas and flavors framed by bright acid **Rosenblum Cellars "Abba Vineyard" Syrah 2005 (\$22)**

Summer in the Rhone, Edith Piaf in a bottle, so French I want to smoke. Perfumy as hell, a lengthy, expressive counterpoint to the excesses of Syrah. Think California Hermitage. **Bucklin Bald Mountain Ranch Syrah 2005 (\$24)**



Excess. Lots of it. Pornographic excess of black fruit, dark chocolate, espresso. Very polished, moreso than one expects in Petite Syrah. This is generous stuff, and sexy. Pour it on a loved one. **Rosenblum Cellars "Pickett Road" Petite Syrah 2005 (\$32)**

e-libation

A Salt Lake City guide to all things juicy and delicious in the world of wine.

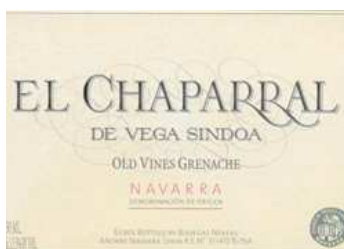
Warding off the chill

It's January, a bone chilling episode, a time when the world seems like its never been warm, ever, and if the globe is warming, it isn't warming enough here (not to worry, I now own Prius). As happy as I've been to see snow, and lots of it, I am entering that stretch of winter when I need to be warm for a minute. I've begun counting down to "Pitchers and Catchers" (baseball fans know), when my year begins anew, and so I desperately seek any tools or mental manipulations at my disposal, struggling to maintain that internal warmth that will carry me to a more temperate time of year. That being said, for some strange reason, while Syrah holds a certain sway over my soul this time of year, I find myself drawn to Spain. I am goofy for Grenache, titillated by Tempranillo, mollified by Monastrell (aka Mourvedre - when famed Spanish wine importer Jorge Ordenez was discussing the finer points of old vines in Jumilla, he snarled that "it was fucking Monastrell before it was ever called Mourvedre...French Pigs!"). These offerings brought me back, again and again, to the sunbaked stretches of Spain where I was lucky enough to have spent my last Spring. You can smell it in these wines; the sunbaked earth and the smells of sweet sage and black olive, buttressed by earth tones and black fruit, yet elevated by that sense of lightness and brightness that only high altitude and vine stress can deliver to the fruit. These wines exude generosity, brightness and warmth; an ideal formula to ward off January's bone rattling chill.



Bodegas Luzon "Altos de Luzon" 2005 (\$17) a Jumilla powerhouse, this Monastrell, Cabernet, and Tempranillo blend is suave, seductive and rich with plush, juicy, vanilla scented black fruit, notes of black olive and sweet sage. Thankfully, moderate oak focuses the fruit on creating a deeply intense finish usually found in much more expensive offerings (comes off like spendy Cab! Really!).

Bodegas Zabrin "Atteca" 2006 Old Vine Garnacha (\$17). This wine is a stunner. From the high desolate plains of Calatayud and produced from 120 year old vines, this is richly scented and flavored with blueberry, cassis, mocha and spices and an intense, long, sappy, mineral driven finish. It takes days to unfold, offering a fresh thrill every hour. Chateaufort du Pape is nice, but the Spanish own Grenache. With a French label this would be triple the price.



El Chapparral 2006 (\$13) - 100% Old Vine Garnacha, is the cool weather analogue to the Atteca. Suave raspberry, cherry and strawberry jam notes and a beguiling cool climate "lift" to the flavors, make this especially alluring. I've used this as a ringer to fool my snotty wine friends. They invariably guess it to be much more - and it tastes like it. And when you say "El Chapparral" somewhere Ricardo Montalbon nods approvingly. Fun.

Comfort Wine (for comfort foods)

Truly great everyday reds; **Boroli "Anna" Langhe Rosso 2005 (\$14)** is Nebbiolo "little fog" (with a dollop of Cabernet and Barbera for color and body) at a value price. Loaded with fresh ripe red fruits, sweet herbs, anise and floral notes it shows terrific brightness, verve and finesse. Like any fine Nebbiolo hearted wine, it takes a day or two to unveil its charms. **La Valentina Montepulciano D'Abruzzo (\$14)** is a densely packed, richly fruited Montepulciano, showing deep dark black fruits, laced with some oak toast and dark chocolate shadings. Lovely stuff. One note of caution, these are FOOD WINES, meaning they really start to sing when served with native cuisine. If all else fails, go ask Matt or Troy at Caputo's to cut you some Creminelli, find a native cheese, a handful of olives, maybe a small tube of truffle paste and wash it all down with these two. Paint the picture. Joy couldn't be much cheaper...or simpler.



JUDD'S HILL

NAPA VALLEY

Come Play

They are sweet talented people and they make great wine. Better still they are coming to town for a series of consumer events, all of them reasonably priced.

Spencer's, February 12th, 630 pm, Call 238-4748 for details. Four Courses.

Biaggi's, February 13th, 630 pm, Call 456-1217 for details. Three courses.

A perfect warm up for Valentine's Day.

e-libation

A Salt Lake City guide to all things juicy and delicious in the world of wine.

What of excess?

It is said that the path of excess leads to the palace of wisdom. A brain rattling hangover can certainly drive one to reflect on one's own myriad screwups throughout a decade or so, but I am more concerned with the "excess" of character that drives fascination, that drives passion.

The examples in 2007 were many. There were the Eguren brothers (of Bodegas Termanthia fame) standing in the twilight chill of Toro, kicking at the hardscrabble piss poor soil, tugging at errant shoots, looking as though they needed to order an execution and then deliberating where to bury the body. Later that night, they would join the Moro brothers (Bodegas Emilio Moro, Ribera del Duero, Hemingway's preferred Spanish Red) in song after a meal of buckshot flecked squab and tripe with beans. We drank powerful black wines that night, topped off with Cuban tobacco. I recall June in the Veneto, watching Franco Adami, a genteel dandy of a man, and as I would find out a passionate lover of dirt, tear off his tailor-made shirt to the wife-beater beneath, and run through the vineyards of Stefano Inama, pulling at leaves and digging through the dirt as if he was looking for a lost bone, only to breathlessly pronounce, through a haze of sweat, that the soil was iron-poor in certain plots. I remember watching Will Bucklin wander through Old Hill at midnight, accompanied by two cats, one dog and me, inspecting the vines for sunburn and watching enormous barn owls disappear into the moonlit night. And there was Danny Fetzer, sweating and clucking over 1,000 native vines taking root behind his tool shed. When the maker is so attentive, and so connected, it's difficult not to see the marvels that result, great wines that offer a glimpse of something greater with every sip.

Here, I'd like to celebrate wines that bring that extra dimension, and so far 2008 is off to a very good start.

Eat, Drink, Cook...Lessons



308 West 300 South
(801) 531 - TONY

JANUARY 24th

Focused Tasting: Intro to Fine Cheeses & Wine Pairing

Cheese snob lessons; no cooking involved. Sample and discuss some of the world's finest and rarest cheeses. Learn the basics of exceptional cheese and the secrets to pairing them with wines. Includes a \$5 cheese gift certificate.

Class: \$25 Wine Pairings: \$15

JANUARY 31st

Risotto: Cold Weather Recipes to Warm the Soul

Learn the secrets of preparing perfect risotto at home. Get out of the cold and into Caputo's for some of Italy's most comforting risotto traditions, featuring provincial recipes like Umbrian Black Truffle Risotto and many more. Class includes meal & \$5 gift certificate.

Class: \$40 Wine Pairings: \$15

The Alvear Pedro Ximenez de Anada 2004 (\$22) one of the finest dessert wines I've ever tasted, is viscous and thick, best served with a chill & the profile is stunning; dried stone fruit (peach, apricot, nectarine) roasted nuts, honey, ripe citrus, a real striptease of a wine - PX Sherry is usually a multiple vintage, cloying sweet syrupy coffee fudge flavored affair for dullards. A welcome innovation from a family that's been making sherry for 300 years, I guess after 3 centuries you might want to try something new?



Quinto do Crasto Old Vine Reserva 2005 (\$29) is the greatest 95 point wine you've never heard of, and chances are you've walked by wines from Portugal more than once; well, stop it. It's one of the grooviest wine sections in the store, albeit small. Made by the legendary Port house of the same name, this is from the 70 year old + plots of indigenous Port varietals such as Touriga Nacional, Touriga Franca, Tinta Roriz. When Port is capable of such intense color and power, it's not hard to extrapolate that such varietals are also capable of making remarkable non-fortified wines. This has all the magic words; unfiltered, unfinned and old vines, things that make wine geeks sigh and shiver. The resulting wine is a finesseful powerhouse, showing a breathtaking range of expressive power; from blueberry jam to cocoa to anise to hints of black olive and sweet herb. And...the Portuguese still make wine the old fashioned Lucille Ball way, barefooted in cement vats.

Tinta de toro has the highest level of polyphenols among the tempranillo family. What does this mean to winegeeks? It means very, dark, very rich, very supple wines (when properly handled). **The Vinas del Cenit Venta Mazzaron 2004 (\$15)** is supple, dark and rich, densely packed with layers of jammy red fruits and notes of espresso and sweet cocoa. Made by a New Zealander living in Zamora, just outside Toro, this stainless steel fermented, oak aged wine is from old vine sources and were it from Toro proper? It would be triple the price.



The best of the best

wine stores;
Park City
1901 Sidewinder Ave
435-649-7254
Metro Salt Lake
255 South 300 East
801-533-6444
Cottonwood
1863 East 7000 South
801-942-2580

Subscription to **E-libation** is voluntary & free. Let me know if you no longer wish to receive it OR feel free to pass along. All I need is an email to add friends to the broadcast!