

Howling at the Moon

I won't write about Love this month no I won't. It won't matter that I spent unexpected evenings talking about wine and passion and movies and art and the nature of Love. It won't matter that I felt the stirrings of strong attraction and love at work, subtly altering my senses and distorting my vision. That's what you want, that's what you expect, I don't care. I won't do the predictable -- offering encomia about what the heart wants and its reasons why -- Bahhumbug, you'll get enough of that this month from all sorts of places and why should I satisfy your baser urges?

I would like to celebrate February for reasons other than love, for no other excuse than spring's seeming early arrival. And after a bad-dream January of soul-shredding cold and muck and awful people, February feels like paradise. Every mid-February, ancient Romans chased off the foul cloak of winter running naked through the streets and slapping wearers of clothes with strips of animal skin (well, that and animal sacrifices, drunkenness, public lewdness and the usual stuff of bacchanalia). The encyclopedia describes it as "Lupercalia" or, "the Chasing of the Wolf", aka the first Valentine's Day, and that its purpose was to expiate and purify the new life of Spring. (And maybe explaining a little, the hormonal irrationality that appears with the first hints of that discordant season)

January was a sullen, sour month; a painful, filthy exercise in tolerance, a month when the elements conspire to bring one's darkest and worst to the surface. When February finally broke I wanted to make up for all the smells, tastes, flavors and aromas I'd missed. I wanted to awaken every dormant nerve ending and foment rebellion against January's foul, blinding, smothering presence without being arrested or beaten for running naked through the streets hitting people with strips of animal, engaging in public lewdness or sacrificing any animals (other than the occasional steak on my grill). This month's wines are not for the faint of heart, they are meant to recharge the senses; to make you tingle and drool and laugh and sweat and restore the lust to a wild season.



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Food is a substitute, a replacement, an inducement, a comfort, a pacifier. Eating for some is fuel, eating for the rest of us is as necessary as an orgasm (even for a do-it-yourselfer like me). I can't separate Food and Sex. There is a primitive pull to the comfort it offers, something seductive about the play of aromas and flavors on the brain, the causing of tingles and drooling. Sure, we prettied it up over the last millennia or so, but let's face facts. We pursue the wild foodstuffs because they make us tingle & shiver and we want the focus of our affections to tingle & shiver with us, we "want some", its part of our mating waltz ~ peacocks dance and flare feathers, we eat. And with Caputo's out my back door a mere 50 yards away, my baser instincts have become harder to resist.

Matt Caputo prefers I call them "Tapenades and Spreads" but that's Matt being gentle, clinical, erring safe. This time of year, I call them "Valentine Spreadables" (the combinations are IMHO deliberately aphrodisiacal). All of them are flavored with fresh (never frozen) Italian Truffles and the results are dazzling; Black Truffle & Wild Mushroom Spread (fresh Black Umbrian Winter truffles sautéed with Hen of the Woods & yellow foot chanterelles), White Truffles and Wild Mushroom, Black Truffle and Artichoke, Black Truffle and Black Olive.

I tore through an assortment of them in a matter of days, tearing apart my cupboards, smearing these unctuous concoctions on crackers, vegetables, dropping them in soups, licking them off the back of a wooden spoon and finally I resorted to bare hands, reveling in the decadent truffle funk and earth and richness. Prices range from \$7 for their legendary pesto to \$9.95/12.95 for the truffled combinations. If the priests in my high school were correct, and self indulgence indeed causes blindness, pass the dark glasses. Buy a bunch and smear it on someone you love.



Adami Prosecco NV (\$13) is the finest of its kind from classified hillsides in Valdobbiadene. Prosecco is a mass produced wine (made from the grape of the same name) with artificially induced CO2 ~ from a sparkling wine production method known as the Charmat Bulk Process. Sometimes this makes Prosecco's mousse (bubbliciousness) a little coarse, in turn causing the wine to flatten out quickly and turn bitter. Adami shows a deceptively elegant mousse, and adds a little Chardonnay to the mix, creating seductive aromas of honeysuckle & freesia with a silky tropical palate. Laymen's terms? it tastes expensive & French, a Valentine's solution if ever there was one. And at \$13 maybe love can come cheap.

The best of the best wine stores:

- Park City**
1901 Sidewinder Avenue
435-649-7254
- Metro Salt Lake**
255 South 300 East
801-533-6444
- Cottonwood**
1863 East 7000 South
801-942-2580

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, let me know at fcfecteau@hotmail.com / francis.fecteau@gmail.com

e-libation

February

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

True Love

(I swear it's the real thing this time)

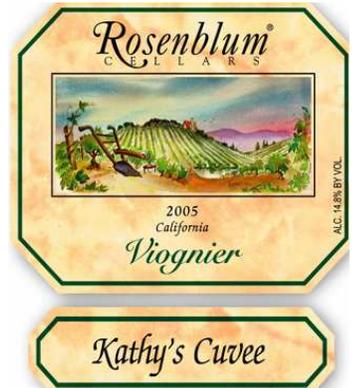
ALTAMURA

Wow. It took some doing, but I finally got Frank to cave in. He only made 2 barrels of the stuff (about 50 cases) and its one of those things winemakers are reluctant to mention. They all have a secret stash that takes a little, well, ass kissing, to get it. (In this case, it almost had to be pried loose from his dead white fingers). **Altamura Nebbiolo 2001 (\$68)** is in my humble opinion, the finest Cal-Ital in the country. Nebbiolo is the primary grape of Italy's great Barolos and this one stands shoulder to shoulder with the finest of their kind, *except its better* and I don't say that lightly. There are only 60 or so bottles in Utah, but this gem shows all the structure of the great classified bottlings yet adds a richness, a plumpness that usually eludes its Italian Brethren.

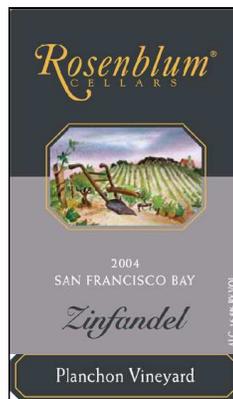
The new release of **Altamura Sangiovese 2003 (\$32)**, reminds me why Altamura's proverbial milkshake really is better...Cal Itals put him on the map and this is a classic example of Brunello structure, power and flavor that happens to hail from California's bucolic Wooden Valley. Its like biting into a pornographic German Chocolate Cake with elements of blackberry liqueur, dark chocolate, violets and a long lengthy astroglide finish that shows a silky grip all the way down.

Oh the power of aroma. Who of us has not been driven insane with desire because of it? Perfumes? Sure, but Viognier always gets a vote from me.

Rosenblum Kathy's Cuvee Viognier 2005 (\$15) is a decadent tropical indulgence that unfolds with layers of ripe peach, citrus, orange blossom and honeysuckle; the flavors are expansive and lingering. Just the thing to accompany an early burst of Spring Fever, and a perfect beginning to an indulgent evening.



Irresistible Attraction & Drooling Appeal



More fun than I've had with my clothes on in some years. This rich, purple-black, tooth staining wine will leave you giggling gleefully with a mouthful of plums, sweet chocolate and black fruit. A late season burst of heat gave Zinfandel extra oomph in 2004 ~ the alcohol is 16.5%. The finish is lengthy and expansive, yet defined and balanced. This wine is hard to forget. Its almost perfect, but it is so viscerally appealing, that, like an ex you kept going back to, it is nigh unto irresistible **Rosenblum Planchon Vineyard Zinfandel 2004 (\$24)**.

Necessary Physical Reactions

(We don't really have a choice do we?)

It was a truffle, a hidden gem sniffed out by pigs, a notion that arose from a late night drinking. "Why don't you write about wines that...y'know", my friend gestured, indicated, "you know...," Judging from the hand gestures, he was either trying get me to steal third, nudge a bunt up the first base line or indicate some act of a carnal nature. "Ahhhhh" I replied, and tossed off a series of euphemisms that some might find vulgar. "Yes, exactly".

Well, yes Virginia, there are wines that cause or induce certain welcome physiological reactions. Wine after all demands a physical reaction, thanks to the artfulness required to balance sugar, acid and alcohol. It's found in a smacking of the lips, a drooling, a flush of the skin from the alcoholic warmth (and sometimes one's genitalia do jump into the driver's seat shoving our finer sensibilities to the pavement). All the signs are there, the increasing heart rate, the sweaty palms, the drooling, the palpitations and I divided them, ahem...accordingly. Regardless, they are wines that will shake your sensibilities and have the power to jolt you toward something unexpected. We are all animals even though we no longer run naked through the streets swatting people with strips of raw animal skin. Not to give you any ideas after all...

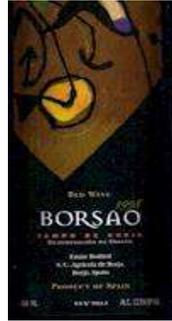


Ring in the Year of the Boar 2007 at the MANDARIN RESTAURANT in Bountiful, Utah for their 29th Annual Chinese New Year Celebration. 348 East 900 North/Exit 317 from I-15, just 10 miles north of Salt Lake City. This two-week celebration is from Monday February 19th thru Saturday March 3rd 2007 beginning at 5:00 p.m. The lively and colorful Traditional Lion Dance will be performed by an 8- person troop with a spectacular performance at 6:30 p.m. on Wednesday February 21st. Reservations are accepted for 8 or more people Monday thru Saturday. Parties less than 8 can call ahead and have their name placed on the waiting list. 801-298-2406

e-libation

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

We do not need to spend a fortune to woo. Sometimes we can't, but it's still the most convivial thing in the world to share great wines with friends and lovers. There's character, length, brightness and intensity. It's much like good Pinot Noir, but darker and well...sluttier. This is old vine Grenache (not as old vine as Tres Picos) and tank fermented. It's as bright fresh and zingy as you could ask for, with loads of bright zesty raspberry, blackberry and spice flavors and aromas. **Borsao, Campo de Borja 2005, (\$7)**. It's a cheap date with serious bang for the buck. It's hard to believe this much finish is this cheap.



Paolo Saracco Moscato D'Asti (\$16) is a Valentine's Day "sweet nothing" to whisper in someone's glass. Its tropical essences will linger with a presence that will leave your companions smiling sweetly either at the beginning or end of any indulgence. This is the finest of its kind and what better thing can you do for a sweetie then give them the romance of Italy one sparkling glass at a time?



Suzy Selby makes great plush, beautiful, luxurious Chardonnay, the very epitome of seamlessness, balance and silk. Silk on the palate is a swoon sensation, the tongue likes it (ice cream anyone?) and wines like this coat & linger. Her Chardonnay shows is sultrier than ever, with flavors of pineapple, nutmeg, orange blossom. With the Small Winery Exemption it's a better deal than ever, **Selby Chardonnay '05 (\$22)** And at long last, **Selby Russian River Pinot Noir '05 (\$29)** has made a return to Utah. Its classic stuff, racy high toned raspberry fruit with classic smoke and black fruit notes. Can't miss.



Sweaty Palms & Fevered Brow

Every now and again, a pleasant surprise comes to my door unannounced. I received a call from Ernie Weir, proprietor of **HaGafen Cellars** in Napa Valley and he needed help with his wines in Utah. Because of their Kosher status, people didn't what they were or who made them or why they should drink them. And until now, they've been trapped in Wine Store purgatory in a section I refer to as "freaky fruity" ~ well, there's nothing freaky or unusual about these wines.

HaGafen sources wines from premiere vineyard sites all around Napa such as Oak Knoll and Stag's Leap District. This is artisanal winemaking at its best, small lots, low yields, hillside fruit; all of which yield concentrated, singular and distinctive fruit profiles. Thanks to a Small Winery Exemption, the prices dropped across the board, from \$5 to \$10 a bottle, beginning in February. The Whites show impeccable balance and acidity, the reds have marvelous concentration and flavor without being overbearing. Don't be scared ~ Kosher production doesn't affect any important decisions in the winemaker's art and these wines are fashioned with impeccable pedigree in every critical aspect of production. The proof is in the bottle. What a shonde (horrible mistake) to miss these!

HaGafen Sauvignon Blanc ~ \$11.95

HaGafen Oak Knoll Chardonnay ~ \$15.95

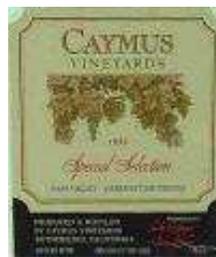
HaGafen Potter Valley Riesling ~ \$12.95

HaGafen Estate Bottled Pinot Noir ~ \$25.95

HaGafen Estate Bottled Merlot ~ \$22.95

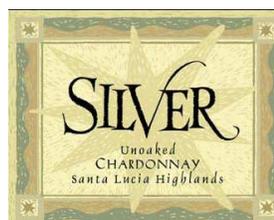
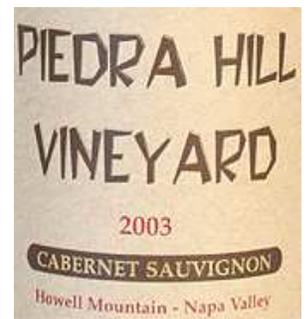
HaGafen Estate Bottled Cabernet Sauvignon ~ \$34.95

HaGafen Estate Bottled Syrah ~ \$24.95



CS Lewis said self sacrifice was the highest form of love. Yes, it's expensive, but it's phenomenal. Less oak than usual, the fruit is stunningly concentrated w/ explosive layers of black fruit, sweet dark chocolate and spice box and a mile long finish. And for you score whores? The Press loves it. **Caymus Special Selection Cabernet Sauvignon 2004 (\$125)** It really is spectacular.

Another new arrival, **Piedra Hill Cabernet 2004 (\$34)** is the most seductive thing to come off of Howell Mountain EVER. From Cab pioneer WH Smith (remember La Jota), this is finesseful and long, with layers of black fruit, anise, sweet herbs framed with sweet touches of the finest French oak. Even with moderate alcohol, this sort of concentration is nothing short of viticultural wizardry. A brilliant effort.



Mer Soleil "Silver" (\$33) is a glorious follow up to the Mer Soleil legend, using the same fruit, it sees no oak and no malolactic fermentation. The resulting wine is brilliantly fresh, pure and bright, as close to eating fruit from the vine as you can get. And friendly with food? Fuhgeddaboutit.