

In Wildness is the Preservation of the World

Of course you can take it, I don't need it, *here* is where the sky is blue, *here* is where the birds sing!" Denholm Elliott, as Mr. Emerson in the movie version of EM Forster's "A Room with a View", thumps his chest and barks at his traveling companions, ladies carping about their lack of a room with a view, that they can take his room.

It's line that has played in my head for twenty years (and I am a young-ish man). It's in my head as I am on the road, driving north to parts known and unknown, contemplating my past, my present, my future and the endless "what ifs" populating my imagination. Maintaining my usual internal dialogue of self doubt takes some effort. Summer was officially over and done on July 25th and an endless succession of stressors followed; a long gray line of nasty exes, nastier competitors and an all around dizzying array of small souls had left me gibbering and I too needed to find the place where the sky was still blue and the birds still singing.

But on this first day north, there was rain and it was fine, really.... *fine*, calming even. I spent the afternoon walking the rain soaked streets of Healdsburg, California, enjoying the calm quiet drizzle en route to my final destination of Hopland. I drank coffee with cream. I sat in a parking lot outside the Oakville Grocery, eating lunch, listening to the dulcet tones of John Sterling calling that afternoon's Yankee game. It was solitude and anonymity and the adolescent glee of escape from responsibility and I would not be found until I was damn good and ready. I kept breathing. It was enough and it was all I wanted. I looked for bottles unknown and unfamiliar ~ a man needs new flavors after all and I again headed north.

Showers alternated with sun the remainder of the afternoon and by the time I reached Hopland, the sun had broken through and set in a rose colored mist. My final reward was a night of solitude, a jetted tub, a glass of bubbles (**Jeriko Brut 2001 \$23 – which is really starting to integrate and show terrific elegance**) and my trusty iPod; no cellphone, no internet and then finally, blissful disconnectedness, peace and quiet.

I needed respite not from a place but from an endless mind-numbing, skull fracturing white noise static of voices, beeps, whistles and rings. I needed to be curious, surprised, pleased – delighted, even. I cannot encounter the Calvinistic notion that this is something over which I have no effect; much as it did in Boy's school, the notion of "building character" still sends a shiver down my spine. Life is not an afternoon to be spent in a dentist's chair and the search for blue sky and singing birds is perpetual. I will find my moments. And for all the itch to be elsewhere and away, in a few scant days it came to me that the plagues of home are not indigenous to home. Small souls, second rate service and bad food are everywhere, yet here I was far from home; calm, serene, happy. The next day was spent tromping around the vineyard and barrel rooms, digging in the dirt, watching the planting of native vines, tasting my way through successive releases still in barrel, watching people so connected to their ever-improving sense of craft, that I was better for just being around them. Fast forward two days later.

I am staring at the moon – it's blazing full and I am dead center in the Old Hill Ranch. There is a chill in the night air but I walk about in the vines bare-chested anyway. The smells of the vineyard are inseparable from the perfume in the glass (**Bucklin "Old Hill Ranch" Cabernet Sauvignon 2005 ~ \$25**). Chopin plays on the cottage's small stereo and I can't think of anyone other than Dinu Lipatti painting the background colors for this tail end of my journey. It makes me remember the heart in my chest still beats, its God's answer to Job, this night, and if there is a soundtrack to life, mine is beautiful.

It is quiet here at Old Hill and there is a moonlit glow to the night sky. Autumn is in the air and every now and again acorns drop on the deck with a knock. The acorns used to make me jump, but time spent in wildness such as this is soul-mending, there is an essential and serene necessity to it (go read your Thoreau again, he's very very right, that time spent in wild places means salvation) and I can't imagine California, or my universe for that matter, without this place.

Tomorrow I return, fight traffic and the what-not, but for now I am content to hear the coyotes scream and yip in the distant night. Things will be fine tomorrow, but for now, I am here. The place chirps and squeaks with life all through the night, and were this to be my last twenty minutes, ever, I think to myself, I could have done much much worse.



308 West 300 South
(801) 531 - TONY

There's a reason Sicilians outlive most of us and I suspect it's the Olive Oil (that and the back breaking manual labor involved in farming such rough country). Caputo's is featuring **Castello di Resuttana** a DOP from Val di Mazara Sicily. Reg. \$35/750ml Now \$17.95. Its an extra virgin oil with rich, spicy heady flavors found in much more expensive Tuscan oils. Judging from my last Physical and cholesterol readings, its doing more than adding grace notes to my every meal. Surprisingly enough, my scorn for California Olive Oil is now at an end ~ **Balzana** is an Extra Virgin oil produced by the California Certified Organic Figueroa Farms of Santa Ynez just above Santa Barbara. It is a magnificent condiment oil ~ \$18.95 / 500 ml.

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 francis.fecteau@gmail.com

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

Virtuous Green

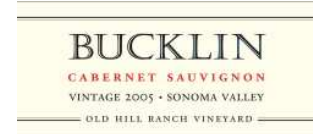
Green is good. It makes better wine. There's no arguing it. Vines are happier, soil is richer, fruit is more concentrated and more vigorous, wines are more sound and longer lived. Organic is no longer a synonym for dirty overpriced undersized carrots at the produce bin and Biodynamics, ascientific kookiness aside, is a potent and sound method of vineyard management and farming.

Organic refers to the non-use of certain elements in vineyard management and winemaking, in other words, a list of things **not** to do and **not** to use such as pesticides and copper sulfate. **Biodynamics** is a more proactive approach wherein certain practices such as animal horns filled with manure being buried at selected intervals throughout the vineyard, or the use of specific cover crops between rows to fix nutrients in the soil or (a personal favorite) the grafting and planting of new rootstock or vines taking place during a full moon cycle. Kooky? Sure. Results? Plenty.

Danny Fetzer, proprietor of Jeriko Estate, once said, "How can you talk about terroir when you put all that shit in your soil?" (and it was clear he wasn't referring to good shit). Mendocino's foremost practitioner of Organic / Biodynamic farming, Jeriko is certified both nationally and internationally ~ not a simple feat. It is a significant commitment, not undertaken lightly or without strong evidence of positive results. With biodynamics, even the least of practices set into action larger positive effects and never have I seen a man so happy and content as he tended a thousand new native vine sprouts behind the winery. When you can smell the differences in plots of Pinot Noir, it becomes difficult to argue. Days later I would see more.

Such provinces of deeply held belief and practice are inspiring; Will Bucklin, genius farmer and winemaker, bleary eyed from an exhausting harvest, insisted that people embrace these kinds of farming ethics for the **right reasons** and not, he said, for the simple need of additional marketing advantage. He put it very simply, "the plants like it" ~and that's the point. Will's devotion to Old Hill is unique, rarely is one winemaker so devoted to a solitary patch of land. Old Hill illustrates the biodynamic hallmark of "vineyard-as-ecosystem", from the aromas of flowering plant life & earth evident in every glass, to Will's gigantic, custom blended, pile of fermenting compost. Old Hill is alive, and Will knows it.

"Dude...check it out!," he said, and with that he thrust a pitchfork into the pile and raised a crusty steam burping cap of muck. "Stick your hand in there, its wild!". Wild indeed and very warm. Two days later I would see the fruit coming in from the third pass of harvest (Will's meticulousness at work) and the results were there; 150+ year old vineyard and it was churning out vigorous, happy healthy **gorgeous** fruit, better than I'd ever seen. Nothing like several hundred pounds of horseshit, grape must and straw, steaming and fermenting away, to make you realize that you are in the presence of inspired genius.



Two of my favorite wines of the year, **Bucklin Compagni Portis Vineyard Gewurtztraminer 2006 (\$12)** is a fresh spicy dry gewurtz with a dollop of Riesling from an old dry farmed organic vineyard. Perhaps the most seductive cool climate Cab I've tasted in some time, **Bucklin Old Hill Ranch Cabernet Sauvignon 2005 (\$25)** shows concentrated black fruits and earth, impeccable balance and that unmistakable Old Hill perfume.



Eurotrash went green long ago. These two are impeccable examples of terroir driven hands-off winemaking. **Schloss Gobelsburg, "Gobelsburger" Gruner Veltliner 2006 (\$14)** is bracingly fresh with minerals, citrus, quinine and anise framing its crisp texture. The brilliant **Emilio Moro Ribera del Duero 2004 (\$33)** from the Duero's indigenous Tempranillo, Tinto Fino, is polished, rich, aromatic and lush with blackberry fruit and a silky minerality. Moro is now the standard setter for the region.



The **Jeriko Estate Pinot Noir 2005 (\$14.99)** shows stunning perfume of anise, floral notes and fresh raspberries, The **Jeriko Estate Syrah Rose 2006 (\$9.99)** is a switch from the usual pinot to a more spicy presentation that uses Grenache and Syrah to add substance, the **Jeriko Estate Chardonnay 2004 (\$11.99)** shows its characteristic brightness and freshness and is a testament to the delights of minimal oak and ML and the **Jeriko Estate Syrah (\$9.99)** offers its customary bang for the buck, showing smoke, black pepper and black fruits in a moderately oaked format. Jeriko Estate proves that biodynamically grown and organically produced wines are among the food friendliest (and just plain old delicious) wines out there. And most thankfully, special discount pricing makes the entire lineup a tremendous value along with the newest arrival the **Jeriko Estate Brut 2001 (\$23) now in Utah for half off national retail !!!!** (THIS IS THE ONLY BIODYNAMIC AND ORGANIC SPARKLING WINE MADE IN THE U.S.) Actually a blanc de blanc (100% chardonnay) its showing brilliantly too, terrific integration and richness, lots of good toasty ripe fruit character.

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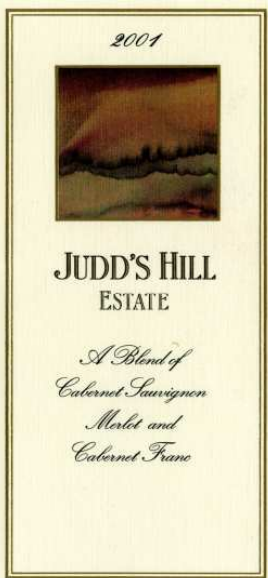
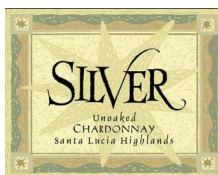
A Salt Lake City guide to all things juicy and delicious in the world of wine.

Graciousness Vinified

Mer Soleil and Conundrum personify, for me, what it is for a wine to be gracious. These wines are perpetually generous in their flavors if not downright exuberant. The parent ranch, Mer Soleil, in the Santa Lucia highlands produces the finest Chardonnay, Viognier, Semillon, Sauvignon Blanc and Muscat in all of California and that gorgeous sun and balance and grace is in every drop. When we gather 'round our tables this week, lets hoist a glass of generous flavors and give thanks that we are surrounded by such good fortune.

Mer Soleil is perhaps the latest picked chardonnay in California. This results in a white wine of exceptional power, finesse and balance ~ thanks to high daytime temps and cool nights that allow such graceful development. **Mer Soleil (\$29—national retail is \$42)** receives partial malolactic fermentation, barrel fermentation and oak aging (all in French oak) to create a richer expression of chardonnay, **Silver** receives no such oak treatment, nor any malolactic. Its fermented in cement, resulting in a wine of terrific richness and vivacity, again, a raging deal (**\$29 ~ national retail is \$42**)

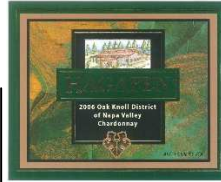
Conundrum (\$20 ~ national is \$24) is my own viticultural failsafe. A blend of Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc, Semillon, Muscat and Viognier, it is a spicebox of a wine & it pairs well with most anything with its rich exuberant tropical flavors and aromas. The coolest part? A screwtop.



Give Thanks ~ Buy this wine

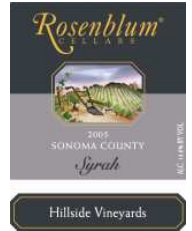
Its my earliest fondest memory of the wine business, my first visit to the Judd's Hill family home, and the barrel room that lay beneath. There, Art Finkelstein dunked a wine thief into a barrel and retrieved some of the most stunning wine I'd ever tasted at that point. It was the debut vintage, 1997, of the Judd's Hill Estate, their flagship red. This was not the ubiquitous Napa boozed up high alcohol gooey cookie cutter fruit bomb that flowed from the valley in a forgettable sticky stream of residual sugar. This was balanced, intense, textured, layered; it was loaded with Napa power, yet possessed an almost Bordelaise sense of balance and terroir, Route 29 meets Margaux. The 2001 is now here, its as brilliant as ever, and thanks to a generous offering from the family Finkelstein, this cellar worthy wine is showing beautifully now and offers a rare opportunity; one of California's greatest reds (I do not say this lightly) drinking at its peak, or capable of further aging. This is a deeply moving, thoughtful effort; unique, idiosyncratic and brilliant. Its flavor profile shows the autumnal notes of a wine with a little bottle age, the deep earthy dark plumminess of a brilliant blend of Cabernet, Cabernet Franc and Merlot and a long, bright life filled finish. If you couldn't tell, I love this stuff, **Judds Hill Estate 2001 WAS \$75, IS \$38.99 until its gone (and there's lots, so drink now and often)**

Encourage Good Works



Ernie Weir's **Hagafen Oak Knoll Chardonnay 2006 (\$14)** is the greatest organic single vineyard chardonnay you've never heard of. Spicy, appley rich, textured and balanced with a bright, yet toasty finish. Kosher too! A must for Turkey.

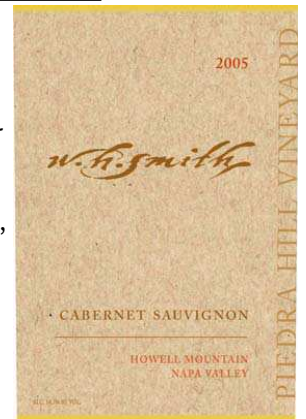
This is one of California's **greatest Syrah programs**. The **2005 Rosenblum Hillside Syrah (\$22)** is the finest release of this bottling yet. Inky dark, deeply perfumed, loaded with rich blackberry fruit & spice, this dazzles with power & finesse. It was on my counter for 3 days before showing any fade, costs \$20, drinks like \$50.



I am proud to announce the arrival of one of California's hottest new properties. **75 Wine Co Amber Knolls Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon (\$20)**. The pioneering Beckstoffer family of Napa fame has taken Cabernet production to a new level in Mendocino's Lake County. This pure elegant beauty shows Rutherford finesse for half the price. Watch out for Lake County!



Piedra Hill Cabernet Sauvignon 2005 (\$33) is the new benchmark in Howell Mountain Cabernet, and is the most subtle and expressive (and unusual) Cabernet I've tasted in 10 years. It has terrific extract and length on the palate, with a showy display of cherry liqueur flavors, sweet green herbs, anise, black fruits and chocolate & the tannins are silky sweet. Great winemaker keeps making brilliant trendsetting wine. Go figure.



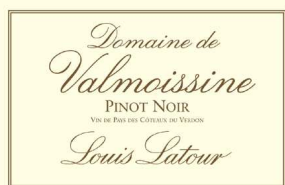
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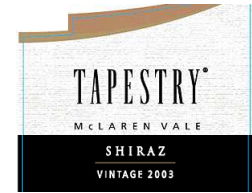
It's a softness for the Holidays ~



Call it a white rhino, but really good pinot noir for less than \$50 is getting harder and harder to find. **Kenneth Volk, Santa Maria Valley, Pinot Noir 2004 (\$25)** nicely fills a very desperate need. For those that remember, Kenneth Volk put Wild Horse Vineyards on the map, with terrific quality wines from California's Central Coast for reasonable prices. This cuvee is a blend of his old reserve vineyards from the Wild Horse days along with Santa Barbara fruit from his acquisition of the old Byron property in Santa Maria. This pinot possesses terrific richness and balance with tones of raspberry fruit, anise and jasmine framed by deft hints of oak which underscore the fruit's natural sweetness. Impeccable balance that doesn't fall prey to the raspberry cola syrupiness that plagues so many of its peers.



On the other side of the ocean, **Latour Domaine de Valmoissine Pinot Noir 2005 (\$14)** is the best release of this wine in several years. The fruit is terrifically fresh, bright and lively with an additional oomph of ripeness which had been missing from previous vintages. A great intro to Burgundy style.



Surprise!

It pays to keep the mind open. **Tapestry McLaren Vale Shiraz 2005 (\$20)** is brilliant. Disproving my disdain for de rigeur high alcohol Aussie fruit bombs, it resisted oxidation on my counter-top for 4 days, gaining in concentration, power and finesse. Deeply, rich & balanced with explosive black pepper, earth, black fruit. Well worth the \$20, A STUNNER!



Adam Kreisel found a reason to stay in Salt Lake City, and I, a devoted fan of his brilliant food sense, heaved a deep sigh of relief. **Acme Burger Co.**, (275 S 200 W, Salt Lake City, UT 84101) is a welcome addition to Salt Lake City and a triumphant return to action for one of Utah's most brilliant food sensibilities. Adam possesses that most elusive of all kitchen talents, a sense of touch, which in my lexicon, refers to the ability to elegantly layer and integrate flavors without the heavy handedness found in the cooking of so many of his peers. The wine list is modest, but impeccably assembled, featuring a variety of food friendly-global selections available by the splash, glass and bottle. This a post-modern spin on the burger, a reflection on satisfying yet adventurous cuisine, with ostrich, lamb and Wagyu beef options (when was the last time you had a burger medium-rare?). Best part? Open throughout the day for anytime eating.

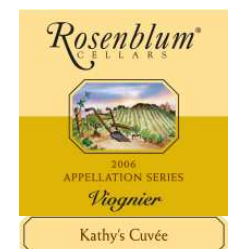
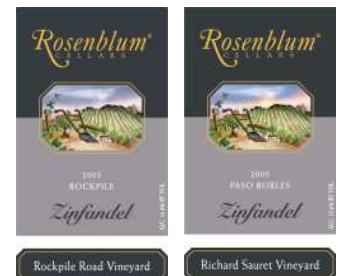
It's the Exuberance that gets you ~

Rosenblum "Kathy's Cuvee" Viognier 2006 (\$15) is a discrete 14.5% alcohol compared to last years shameless 15.6%. **This year** is livelier, sassier & brighter with all the peach and honeysuckle you could hope to get slapped with; its got balance, its got grace, *it talks dirty*. A young Audrey Hepburn with a very naughty streak. 2005 brought with it a more evenly tempered year. No heat spikes during critical harvest times and the result are two splendidly rich, powerful, expressive Zinfandels. The **2005 Rosenblum "Richard Sauret Vineyard" Zinfandel (\$25)** shows loads of black fruit and briary spice that are the hallmarks of Paso Zinfandel fruit. The **2005 Rosenblum "Rockpile Road Vineyard" Zinfandel (\$33)** shows more delineation and acidity. Clarity finesse, Zinfandel power.



Contemporary American Food, Bar-B-Q & Gelato

Spin Café is a most welcome and unpretentious addition to Heber's main drag (220 N Main St, Heber City, UT 84032, (435) 654-0251). One warm dusty late fall afternoon driving from Park City to Sundance, I stopped for a quick lunch and was met with simple refreshing cuisine, most remarkable of all was the barbecue, but the menu went much deeper, with satisfying, contrasts of flavors and elements. The wine list is modest and reasonably priced, with a strong influence from the owners past experience with Mediterranean cuisine, but the Euro pairings work with the American food. Did I say the gelato was the best I've had since Venice? There's Italian blood here, clearly...



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