

Baby it's cold outside

I am half a bottle of Fernet “in” (Fernet Branca is Jaegermeister for grown-ups, that is, anyone not riding a skateboard) when I fire off an abusive email to my favorite Frenchmen.

“Hey Douchebags,” I write, “I do not care where you are or why. What I do care about is the assload of vino in my house that remains unopened and undrunk, waiting for an occasion. I am not accustomed to delaying my immediate gratification where wine is concerned. You are causing me great dismay by your absence. Thought I would let you know just how much you are pissing me off. Appear soon or the 3 Liter of **2005 Latour Corton Grancey** gets it.”

Within minutes, the phone rings (3 am) and I am promised Rabbit with Mustard and a variety of other organ clogging treats (I know rabbits are cute; but they are also delicious). At 4 am, snow begins to fall in a soft, sweet whispering silence and a quiet comes to the world. It's a great comfort knowing there are people in my Universe with their priorities in order.

I have sought solace in many a strange place; bottles, pills, powders, books, tunes (both jaunty and solemn), women (a rare occasion), God, Chicken Soup and even the odd Grilled Cheese. I am sure I am leaving out something (there's a Barrel of Monkeys in there somewhere with the epic Coltrane “Blue Train” album playing in the background), but I write this after stumbling through a small forest of green and brown glass, corks, and the odd Fresca can skittering across my cold cement floor. I'm determined to not write the usual clichéd encomiums written by others on occasions of Holiday and Year's End; such laundry lists, reviews and greatest hits are lazy and onanistic (a good word to look up). It's a dull chilly corner of Writer Hell responsible for such deliberate inconsequence (with all due respect Dick Clark, one more time and I will shove you in front of the next bus). There are better pastimes for snowy months than this ritualized year-end scab-picking.

I don't want elation or congratulation offered for escaping the consequences of my own poor choices. I know there will be more for me than standing atop the refrigerator in my rented apartment, waving my Paid Off Student Loan Letter at the moon. I prefer to plan and plot and write and dream through the almost-forced reflections of these wintry months because these wee hours are best spent in constructive places. My windows shall be alive with more than the dull blue flicker of a television set and the provincial meanderings of small minded hacks won't drag me into their sad fatigue. Is it wrong to want Christmas lights year-round?

The Fernet drainage hits 3/4, “**La Boheme**” plays (at a seasonally appropriate volume), my neighbors are annoyed and a favorite moment approaches near the end of a gorgeous duet (and I mean just stupid swooning beautiful) as Rodolfo and Mimi sing “*ci lasceremo alla stagion dei fior*”, *we'll part when the flowers bloom again*. They decide that postponing their breakup till Spring will make their eventual parting much easier; and so come Spring they part, hoping that the new season will lure them from their romantic anxieties with the sights and scents of flowers in bloom and sun-warmed skin (not so hard to understand is it?), but in the meantime, their decision to part locks them in a grateful present at having discovered the heart of the matter. All in all it makes terrific sense; there is never anything wrong with needing a little help in warding off the chill and press of cold dark months, never. It's proof of a common binding need. Baby, its cold outside.

Fast forward, I find myself searching through a pile of Christmas films, even ones that just *feel* Christmasy, looking for any totem I can get my hands on to relieve the swell of anxiety and fear brought on by this particular holiday season. If it wasn't a fearful headline it was panicky business news; hear a message enough and the brain gives in. Fear becomes baseless belief, faith without question, without reason. “Just one good thing”, I whisper under my breath, a little Hope, it's an act of resistance. Strains of “**Baby it's Cold Outside**” play in the background, it's Zoey Deschanel wrinkling her perfect little nose, buoyantly singing in “**Elf**”. The odd sweet duet chases, like good songs should, the nostalgic longing that felt so much like fear. Right then and there, I feel my old singing self, a dopey paperboy made quarter-pitching-numbers-running weasel altar boy and then before I knew it a hapless college boy, then, all home again. I start humming the song under my breath. I walk down the aisle, humming still, and one aisle over as I pass, another patron picks up the tune in a slight breathy whistle. Lightness spreads.

I've spent too much time missing a family long gone (still do), but things change, happy progressions happen and of late I find myself surrounded by a new one, happily. There's nothing wrong with wanting like-minded company, and more so there's nothing more pleasant than finding it in the collective glow of one's tribe. I confess its more than looking for an excuse to not drink alone (as much as Burgundy and properly cooked rabbits may always get my attention); its that even though I may not be able to see Corton from my house, I still know how to get there ~ and once in a while, I just want someone else to see it too. There is all the time in the world for regret, nostalgia and recriminations, for feeling the pangs of people missed, things done and not done (the more “skilled” of us manage that task throughout the year without all the Auld Lang Syne), but this time of year I know enough to be grateful for the moment, be generous with the present and keep my eyes straight ahead.

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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

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and delicious in the world of wine.

Really, I'd better scurry....



308 West 300 South
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Let's take on a New Year with the vigor of the newly evangelized. We may not be able to give the gift of good taste, but we can give things that taste good ~ from Caputo's...

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Papillon, Red Table Wine, Napa Valley 2005 (\$55) is not for the faint of heart. It is a very serious first effort by Dave Phinny of Orin Swift wines to create a Bordeaux Blend, that is, a wine that uses all five of Bordeaux's traditional varietals; Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Cabernet Franc, Malbec and Petit Verdot. The bottle is a lethal weapon, heavy as an artillery shell. Upon first impression, the wine is as tough as the tattooed knuckles on the label but it quickly softens with air time, developing some serious charm. This is a remarkable stylistic departure from the usually buoyant jammy appeal of the Prisoner, built for contemplation with its deep, earthy aromatics of truffle, lead pencil and fresh black fruits laced with anise; it speaks of Pauillac, a Cabernet predominant appellation of Bordeaux. All in all a compelling first effort.

You've heard me expound on the **The Prisoner Napa Valley Red Wine 2007 (\$35)** before. This new vintage is the same opulent juicy immediately pleasurable icon as always, except my palate tells me that it's a little more than its 2006 predecessor. Heat through the 2007 vintage was more even and consistent, producing a fuller bodied, deeper richer experience with better supporting acidity. The blend is (in descending order) Zinfandel, Cabernet Sauvignon, Syrah, Petite Sirah, Charbono and Grenache. Not designed for aging like its new bigger bad-brother the Papillon, it does offer immediate gratification while waiting around for the Butterfly to land.

Well, maybe just a half a drink more...



Contradictions challenge the comprehension. Think of a "koan" the Buddhist tool of mental self-discipline that challenges the intellect through seeming irrationality. Think of a "Clio" (Jumilla's first luxury red) at 1/3 the price, or a "Super Borsao"?, a Single ANCIENT Vineyard Grenache? These are concepts that usually escape the comprehension of the average pocketbook before they ever get a chance to hit the palate. Win win win. These are three wines that transcend my intellectual wine dork and go straight to the dopey happy-go-lucky paperboy-place where I used to live. These are cheap, and they are a thrill to behold. You might think a glass or two one evening is enough; well, these will nudge you into your naughty place, asking for just a half a drink more. The **Hijos de Juan Gil 2006 (\$17)** is 100% Monastrell from old vine sources in Jumilla. What doesn't go to Clio is here, and it's a smokey, blueberry jam~lavender~scented pie-of-a-wine. Bodegas El Nido "Clio" at 1/3 the price. **Borsao Crianza Seleccion 2005 (\$16)** just burst on to my palate with a shameless display of powerhouse structure and fragrant ripe red raspberry fruit loaded with spices. This is serious minded stuff, old vine high altitude Cabernet topping off ripe old vine tempranillo from Calatayud. Calatayud has been home to a wine trade for over two millenia. **Bodegas Atteca "Atteca" (\$17)** is back, at long last, and the 2007 is a thriller, a warm ripe opulent pig of a wine, as always, showing concentration and intensity only possible through 120 years of dry farming. The soil is amazingly expressive in these ancient Grenache plots, it's a high desert plateau with iron rich slate and gravel soils that also show a bracing minerality in the finished wine.

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and delicious in the world of wine.

The Neighbors might think...

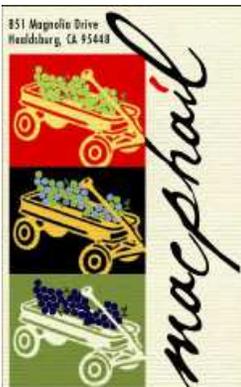
It's a little early to be writing valentines, but for a brief, flashbulb moment this Holiday Season I very much wanted to write one. There was Pinot Noir involved (always good), the Paris Bistro (Pitter~Pats abounded), and lots of talk.

As it happens, the moment appears to have faded away, or for all I know may never have been; Christmas and my rosy imagination, it seems, got the better of my more sensible self. Even so, it's nice to know in this Yule blush, that I'm still excitable and tongue-tied under pressure. I still stutter. Thankfully, writing enables me to salvage a moment of Walter Mitty-ish grace (it's okay to google Walter Mitty) from the clutches of my social incompetence.

Since then, Christmas has bit me squarely in the ass - I don't know if it's the transformative powers of Rye Whiskey in the egg nog or the 15 some-odd viewings of "Elf", but I trace some of this current Jingle Glow to that one electric Pinot Noir. Proust has his unnaturally deep sense-memory connection over lousy cookies; mine it seems, takes a few more prurient, lascivious detours (but unlike Proust, I'll get there in fewer words). Let's just say that I have an excitable mouth, that Pinot Noir has got me in a mood and winter's got me in the moment. It's a season for rose colored glasses and were I to write a valentine this Holiday season, the flavors outlined on this page should provide most anyone with enough amorous material to close the deal. I'm all for the victory of imagination over sensibility after all, and heaven knows I'll keep trying.

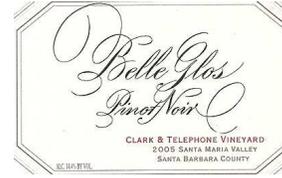
W.H. Smith

Just as his Cabernets defined Napa for a generation past, these 2007 Pinot Noirs will define Sonoma precision and power for the future. Great winemakers always make great wine, but every now and again, great winemakers meet perfect vintages. These wines are opulent, balanced, concentrated and perfumy. Sourced from high altitude cool climate fruit, these expand for hours in a glass, demonstrating fine balance, ageability and a sweet immediate pleasure. Fruit quality was terrific in 2007, offering a high skin-to-fruit ratio that led to concentrated Pinot Noir with better color, intensity and aromatics. **W.H. Smith "Sonoma Coast", 2007 (\$23)** this blend of single vineyard, mostly cool climate sources is loaded with silky spicy raspberry fruit. **W.H. Smith "Hellenthal", 2007 (\$35)** the lowest alcohol of the bunch, took a day and a half to open, it offered bright red fruit and floral notes, framed with baking spice and a cool high altitude tingle. **W.H. Smith "Marimar Estate", 2007 (\$35)** was far more plush than expected, showing ripe sweet raspberry notes accented with sweet green herbs. **W.H. Smith "Maritime", 2007 (\$40)** This is the W.H. Smith "tete de cuvee" using only the best barrels from each single vineyard selection. Plush, powerful, defined and expressive~ there are about 84 bottles in Utah of approximately 175 cases made. Rare and worth the search.



Fortunately I have not lost my persistence, and only women seem to be immune to my powers of persuasion. While this may spell ill for my social life, it means great bounty for wine lovers everywhere. **Macphail Family Wines** are my latest find, after a year and a half of calling and begging and pleading, they finally gave in. Things are tough for great winemakers. The latest trend? Vineyard owners require winemakers to submit samples of their work before they are allowed to buy fruit; I can't just "buy fruit" anymore, now I have to prove something? Well, James Macphail's Pinot Noir skills have made the grade with every pedigreed vineyard in California. The aromatics alone make these worth the entry fee.

Macphail "Anderson Valley" Pinot Noir 2006 (\$36) is actually a declassified version of Anderson Valleys noted "Toulouse Vineyard", and to parrot a tired phrase, very very French. The flavors tend toward bright fresh red fruits with an almost electric acidity. The **Macphail "Pratt Vineyard" Sonoma Coast, Pinot Noir 2006 (\$46)** is a winemaking tour de force that left me babbling like Porky Pig. When a winemaker says to you "it's about the vineyard, I had nothing to do with it", it's catnip to me, and like the wines, irresistible. Obviously a very very special vineyard.



Each of these bottlings was created to reflect a unique terroir and its effects on Pinot Noir. These are benchmark wines. **These are shameless, opulent hedonistic affairs**, treated with unfiltered, unfinned Burgundian care and finished with a minimal amount of French oak. And God Bless Joey Wagner, for writing a back label that just sticks with the facts in the best winedork way. These are richly expressive hands-off efforts that capture lighting in a bottle. There is NOTHING shy about these wines. The **Belle Glos "Sonoma Coast" 2006 (\$23)** ~Sourced from contract fruit within the Sonoma Coast Appellation, a terrific cool climate expression~ **Belle Glos "Clark & Telephone Vyd" 2007 (\$38)** ~Sourced from Wagner Family holdings in Santa Barbara, this is the warmest and ripest of the bunch, showing a warm spicy raspberry streak ~ **Belle Glos "Los Alturas Vineyard" 2007 (\$49)** ~Strikes an expressive balance between North (Sonoma Coast) and South (Clark & Telephone) plush, truffley and well-defined black fruits ~**Belle Glos "Taylor Lane Vineyard" 2007 (\$49)** ~My personal favorite of the bunch, from the coolest, highest altitude vineyard of the four, shows remarkable depth, intensity, precision and brightness. This is always the longest lived and most structured of the bunch. Collectible sure, happily accessible now? These are a guarantee of immediate pleasure.

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Say, what's in this drink?

It's a wine joke; "What's the difference between gonorrhea and Syrah?" Answer: "You can get rid of gonorrhea". Ba dum bum...drum roll. Funny? Hell yes. A shame? Hell yes, and if you are surrounded by folks "in the business", it's a surefire laugh. Have I mentioned yet, just how much I love this grape? I know I'm supposed to pretend its hard times and start gathering my privations about me, but its nice to know I can cheat and still feel rich.

Thanks to a movie that shall remain nameless, Pinot Noir prices have been steadily rising for several years. Fewer and fewer people can afford to buy Pinot Noir fruit on contract; and if they grow it and sell it, they get top dollar. This translates to an ever increasing tide of expensive forgettable cookie cutter samey-same Pinot Noir (the previous page being a sure exception of course).

Syrah isn't as fussy as Pinot Noir, nor does it require the same degree of close attention in the vineyard. Thanks to these simple economic realities, there are a flood of amazing Syrah based wines coming from every viable patch of dirt in California. Growers who find it untenable to keep pumping out \$60 / bottle Pinot Noir are looking for other things to make. As a result, Syrah is seeing a resurgence

Armed with a few simple facts; Syrah is easy to understand. The parent grape is called "Midi" or Syrah. This grape Midi/Syrah was cross bred with a grape called Peloursin in the mid 19th century, creating a variation on Syrah which was named "Durif" after the nurseryman who came up with the idea. Durif came to be know as "Petite Syrah".

The differences are marked. Much of what comes out of Australia marked as Shiraz is Durif. There is a small portion of "Shiraz" that is the actual-no-kidding-real-deal Syrah known as Midi. Taste Petite Syrah next to a range of Aussie offerings and the monolithic blackberry punch makes it clear that the two are indeed related. Taste Australia next to the really stinky horseshit inflected stuff from Hermitage in the Northern Rhone and the differences become rather marked. Granted, some of this is attributable to soil and environs, but the expression on the palate really confirms the similarities.

Right now Syrah is offering the absolute best bang for the buck in domestically produced wines. They are at a more than fair market value. From the brilliantly delineated efforts of Saracina, to the richly textured palate and aromatics of Clos Mimi's Petite Rousse and (of course the frenchiest of the bunch) Will Bucklin's inimitable Bald Mountain Ranch Syrah, they are stunning and expressive, offering a tremendous terroir driven experience.

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

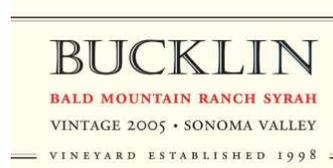
Here's an idea, taste your way through the climate variations in Syrah. Educate your palate. Taste your way from North to South, moving from coolest to warmest appellation. Pay particular attention to what's happening in the mouth ~ are the sides of the mouth tingling, indicating acidity? Is the roof of the mouth or gumline feeling astringency indicating possibly excessive oak use? Or do I just feel a nice rich tongue coating experience with an intensity of sweet fruit down the dead center of the tongue (that's what we call "paydirt" - a fine indicator of terrific winemaking).

Coollest Climate



Shows just how ripe Syrah can get, even in a cool climate. Intense, full body, bright racy acidity. A real bruiser. **Saracina Mendocino Syrah 2004 (\$28)**

Still Very Cool



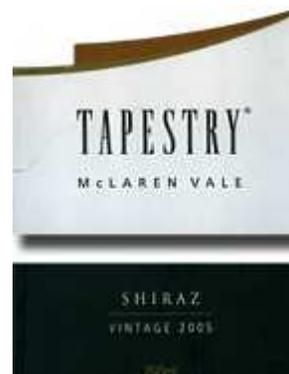
A more feminine side to Syrah with warmer fruit characters despite being a full point in alcohol lower than Saracina. **Bucklin Bald Mtn Syrah 2005 (\$24)**

Warm Warm Warm



The most deceptive of the group. Palate is warm and rich. It's mouthfilling stuff with surprising acidity. The ripest pick of the bunch. **Clos Mimi Petite Rousse Syrah 2006 (\$20)**

Aussie Oy



A fun contrast. A black, purple bruiser with surprising acidity and structure. Refuses to oxidize. Dense black fruit and peppery notes. **Tapestry McLaren Vale Shiraz 2006 (\$20)**

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I wish I knew how
to break the spell



This is without fail the best vintage of this wine since 2001. Avignonesi "Desiderio" Tuscany 2005 (\$58) is an opulent expression of Merlot from the hillsides of Cortona blended with a dollop of Cabernet. The result masquerades as Grand Cru Pomerol (expensive French merlot) wearing Prada loafers (only this one smells better). Lush expressive stuff, possessed of a lead pencil minerality framed by fragrant, rich black fruit. Fools Bordeaux snobs everytime.

The newly arrived **Aia Vecchia Lagone 2006 (\$17)** is a poor man's Sassicaia, a plush lush Bolgheri Red that blends Cabernet Franc, Merlot and Sangiovese into a cashmere rich, deep dark blend that makes for compelling drinking, loaded with truffley black fruits, lead pencil and spice.

I ought to say no, no, no...

There will be plenty of time to deny yourself pleasure and indulgences over the coming year. Thrift is returning to fashion after all, but there are a range of great gift ideas at your friendly neighborhood wine store. I speak of the Party Jug, the Big Bottle, Le Grand Boucle. Quantity has a quality all its own (Path of Excess leads to the Palace of Wisdom and all that) and now a variety of super premium wines are available in these big, age-worthy editions.

Collectors Items or "Party Makers" now available include some of the finest wines on the Planet; **Caymus Special Selection Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon 2005, Caymus, Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon 2005 & 2006, Mer Soleil Ste Lucia Highlands Chardonnay 2006, Belle Glos Single Vineyard Pinot Noirs 2007 (en route), Orin Swift "The Prisoner" 2007.** If someone has been a really good boy or girl, these may not be such a bad idea.

Fact of the matter is, supermarket plonk aside, great wines age better in larger bottles thanks to a slower rate of oxygen exchange over a greater volume of wine (better juice doesn't hurt either), they always taste barrel sample fresh. Oh, and champagne tastes better too, fresher and livelier. These are hand bottled efforts with custom glass sizes which accounts for the slightly greater expense per volume. But, enter a party with a magnum of Belle Glos Pinot Noir or Mer Soleil Chardonnay and wait for a chorus of Oohs and Ahhhs.

The Neighbors

I am a firm believer in "Trickle-Up" Economics (the other kind doesn't work). Support the neighborhood joint and stimulate your local economy. Keeping dollars local, keeps creative food and wine folks near, and through all those genuine efforts, Salt Lake becomes a bigger better city.

faustina

A neighborhood joint is a necessary thing, we all have our place where "everyone knows our name" and I have always been a sucker for the little guys. Faustina recently returned to my radar screen on a recent visit. It's a warm inviting place with a menu that places fresh local seasonal ingredients at a premium with a fresh fusion style. They pull it off grandly, balancing comfort food with creative flourishes right alongside some surprisingly artful elements. A seasonally rotating international wine menu shows a reasonably priced and clever by-the-glass selection too, and menu pricing is astonishingly affordable for such elegant cuisine ~ a recent dinner was \$25 for 3 courses! Like my Small Wineries, neighborhood joints are working harder to maintain their place in your hungry thoughts ~ its hard not to



Greg Neville, a devoted Italo-phile, always brings a game effort to the table. Few people I know love Italian food more. (I must admit to a certain fascination when OCD meets lustful gluttony). Its always a terrifically solid experience at Lugano from start to finish. The staff is impeccable, always ever-present without being overbearing and incredibly knowledgeable as well; the food is consistently (and so for the better part of a decade) bulletproof and the wine list is merely an extension of Greg's already omnivorous approach to all things Food and Wine. The list is diverse with its primarily Italian and American focus, and reasonably priced with a terrific by-the-glass selection that changes seasonally (he supplements it regularly with hard-to-find special order wines)

Greg, a Slow Food supporter, is devoted to local producers and purveyors and the freshness of ingredients is reflected in a true expression of Italian style and flavor. The Dinner Menu is incredibly reasonably priced with no entrée over \$26 and the desserts are breathtaking - he's got an angel in the Pantry.

One of my favorite parts about Lugano? Greg, food preacher that he is, always has a good excuse to eat up his sleeve; Slow Food, Wine Dinners with his favorite friends from Wine Country, Meatball Mondays. Try not to be convinced.