

## ASPEN EVENT OFFERS MANY OPPORTUNITIES FOR DISCOVERY

by Rich Mauro

The *Food and Wine Magazine Classic* at Aspen, the 24th edition of which was held this past June, is, for me at least, all about discovery.

One place where the adventure comes to you is in the Grand Tasting Pavilion where the most fun is the delight of happening upon something completely unexpected.

This year it happened at a table hosted by Old Bridge Cellars. I was absolutely blown away by the fortified dessert wines of Chambers Rosewood Vineyards, a 148-year old family owned winery of Rutherglen in the Victoria region of Southeastern Australia.

I tasted their Muscat, Muscadelle-Tokay, Grand Muscat, Grand Muscadelle-Tokay, Rare Muscat and Rare Muscadelle-Tokay. The regular blends average 6-10 years old; the Grand blends include wines over 80 years old; and the Rare blends include wines over 100 years old. They were across the board amazingly complex, powerful, concentrated and unctuous. Although the Grand and Rare wines understandably are very expensive, the regular blends are outstanding values.

Other highlights from the Grand Tasting Tent:

El Coto (Rioja). 2004 Bianco, 2005 Rosado, 2002 Crianza, and 2000 Coto de Imaz Reserva

Baron de Ley (Rioja). 2000 Reserva, 1996 Gran Reserva and 2003 Finca Monasterio

JC Cellars. 2004 Arrowhead Vineyard Sonoma Zinfandel, 2002 "A La Cave" Napa Valley Syrah, 2003 Ventana Vineyards Monterey Syrah and 2003 Rockpile Syrah.

As fun as the Grand Tasting Tent can be, much of the action at the Classic happens outside of the tent. Some producers use the Classic as a prime opportunity to make a big splash with the introduction of new products.

One example of this was Champagne Salon. Didier Depond, president of the elite house, unveiled the 1996 Salon Le Mesnil at an exclusive reserve tasting. Salon makes only vintage Champagne, only 100 percent Chardonnay, only from the grand cru "Le Mesnil-sur-Oger" vineyard. And the 1996 is only the 37th vintage in its century-old existence. It was medium-bodied, with lively citrus and, green apple flavors, a creamy texture,

and an extremely fine mousse.

Mr. Depond also brought along a powerful, yet balanced Brut and deeply fruited Rose from Champagne Delamotte, a sister house to Salon. Although Delamotte was established in 1760, I would say it is one of Champagne's best-kept secrets.

There also are unique opportunities for special tastings.

TREANA. Winemaker Austin Hope hosted a vertical Tasting of Treana Red (Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, and Syrah from Paso Robles) and White (Marsanne/Viognier blend from Mer Soleil vineyard in Monterey County). Tasting through every vintage of both wines, dating back to 1996 for the Red and 1997 for the White, I was most impressed with how well they all had developed.

INNISKILLIN. The renowned Canadian producer of Icewine treated



invitees to the 2004 Cabernet Franc, 2004 Vidal Oak Aged, 2004 Riesling, and a 2004 Sparkling Vidal. Inniskillin's Icewines are intensely sweet and flavorful but balanced with crisp acidity, which gives a clean finish.

SPAIN. In what has become something of an annual tradition for me, I sat down with Katrin Naelapaa, Director, Wines from Spain, to talk about and taste new trends in Spanish wine, in this case the emergence of lesser-known regions and the revitalization of the country's best-known region.

Representing the lesser-known regions was a fresh, fruity wine called Quatro Pasos from Bierzo in the northwest just above Portugal. Martin Codax (best known for fine Albarinos from Rias Baixas) has produced this from an indigenous (and biodynamically farmed) grape called Mencia.

From the region of Cigales, which lies just to the west of the Ribera del Duero in north central Spain, we tasted an aromatic, concentrated Finca Museum 2001

Real Reserva from old vine Tinto Fino, the local variant of Tempranillo.

Representing contemporary Rioja was an Ondalan 2002 Reserva, which Ms. Naelapaa said was notable for the 30 percent Graciano that added a brightness of fruit and acidity to the Tempranillo.

G.H. MUMM. Mumm, which is now owned by Pernod Ricard, presented its current portfolio. I've tasted Mumm's wines several times over the last 25 years and these were the best top to bottom:

Mumm de Cramant, rare single vineyard Champagne;

Grand Cru, blend of five best grand cru vineyards;

Cordon Rouge, the company's most recognizable wine;

Brut Rosé, Pinot Noir and Chardonnay blend;

Carte Classique, refreshingly slightly sweet;

Joyesse, "demi-sec" style dessert wine. MOËT HENNESSY USA. A luncheon tasting showcased eight wineries from this importer's impressive international portfolio. And what an impressive line up it was.

Casa Lapostolle (Chile) 2003 Clos Apalta (Carmenère, Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon)

Cloudy Bay (New Zealand) 2005 Sauvignon Blanc and 2003 Te Koko Vineyard Sauvignon Blanc

étoile (from Napa's Domaine Chandon) Brut and Rosé

Green Point (Australia) 2004 Reserve Shiraz and 2004 Reserve Chardonnay

Newton (Napa) 2003 Unfiltered Chardonnay and 2001 The Puzzle, (50/50 Merlot/Cabernet Sauvignon)

Terrazas des Los Andes (Argentina) 2002 Afincado Vineyard Malbec 2002 Cheval des Andes (Argentinean Cabernet Sauvignon, Malbec, Petite Verdot)

Dominio de Valdepeña (Spain) 2002 Petite Verdot (100%), 2000 Emeritus (Cabernet Sauvignon, Syrah and Petite Verdot)

These are just some of the amazing, diverse discoveries that were available at this year's Classic. I already can't wait until next year.

The 25th anniversary edition of the Food & Wine Magazine Classic is scheduled for June 15, 16, 17, 2007. For more information, visit the web at [www.foodandwine.com/ext/classic](http://www.foodandwine.com/ext/classic)