

THE WINE GUY

Aspen event's big tent full of surprises

The Food and Wine Magazine Classic at Aspen, the 24th edition of which was held June 15 to 18, is, for me at least, all about discovery.



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Of course, with about 300 wineries coming from all over the world to pour thousands of bottles of wine in the Grand Tasting Tent; participate in dozens of receptions, seminars and winemaker dinners; and conduct countless special tastings, one is bound to come across myriad opportunities for vinous adventure.

The Spanish Tent, a separate section within the Grand Tasting Tent, is always a great place to hunt for new wines. Two wineries in particular are worth highlighting. El Coto de Rioja, which planted its first vintage in 1970, is a relative newcomer, considering the country's long history of viticulture. Rioja was Spain's premier wine region for centuries but had seen its significance slip in recent decades. But wineries such as El Coto have contributed to a revitalization that respects Spanish winemaking traditions while moving toward modern practices. The wines — 2004 Blanco (100 percent viura), 2005 Rosado (50 percent tempranillo, 50 percent garnacha tinta), 2002 Crianza (100 percent tempranillo), and 200 Coto de Imaz Reserva (100 percent tempranillo) — all are very good values.

Baron de Ley is an even newer Rioja winery, having been founded in 1985. The specialty here is red wine, although a Blanco and Rosado also are produced. The 2000 Reserva and 1996 Gran Reserva, both 100 percent tempranillo, are fine examples of contemporary Rioja. The winery's 2003 Finca Monasterio, an impressive blend of 60 percent tempranillo and 40 percent other varieties, is made exclusively from grapes grown in the vineyards surrounding the 16th century Benedictine Monastery on the property.

Walking through another

tion for his own wines. He has been especially recognized for his expertise with zinfandel and Rhone varietals and for his focus on single-vineyard bottlings. These skills were apparent in the samples of the 2004 Arrowhead Vineyard Sonoma Zinfandel, 2002 "A La Cave" Napa Valley Syrah, 2003 Ventana Vineyards Monterey Syrah and 2003 Rockpile Syrah.

I also came across a couple of wineries from California's Paso Robles region that I unfortunately missed on my tasting visit there last fall. Twenty-five-year-old Martin & Weyrich, a premier producer of Italian varietals from such grapes as sangiovese, pinot grigio and nebbiolo, impressed me with its 2005 Moscato Allegro, produced in a style reminiscent of the slightly sweet and lightly effervescent Moscato d'Asti of Italy's Piemonte region.

Anglim Winery is a small, family-owned winery founded in 2002 and focused on producing vineyard-designated Viognier, Roussanne, Grenache, Rosé and Syrah. After tasting the full-flavored Roussanne, Viognier and Syrah, I have decided this winery merits significantly more investigation.

The most fun in exploring the Grand Tasting Tent is the "surprise find."

This year it happened at a table hosted by Old Bridge Cellars, an importer of Australian wines. I was absolutely blown

away by the wines of Chambers Rosewood Vineyards of Rutherglen in the Victoria region of southeastern Australia. Chambers has been a family-owned winery since 1858 and is a master at making nonvintage (blended) fortified dessert wines from muscat and muscadelle grapes. This type of wine is one of the great gifts of Australia to the wine world and Chambers, arguably is its best practitioner. The serendipity of coming across these wines was the highlight of my time in the tent.

I tasted the Muscat, Muscadelle-Tokay, Grand Muscat, Grand Muscadelle-Tokay, Rare Muscat and Rare Muscadelle-Tokay. The regular blends average six to 10 years old; the grand blends include wines more than 80 years old, and the rare blends include wines over 100 years old. The wines 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.

You should be able to find all of these wines in the Colorado Springs area, with the possible exceptions of Anglim and Rosewood. The Chambers wines are distributed in Colorado but are very expensive and produced in such small quantities that they may be hard to get.

In my next column, I'll share more incredible tasting experiences from Aspen, this time outside of the Grand Tasting Tent.

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