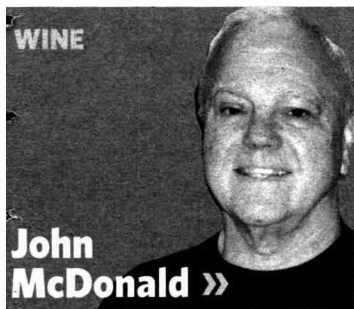


We need to put quality-price rapport into perspective



I did not plan to lead with this, but I must recommend the 2009 LaCroix Figeac magnums priced three/\$160; six 750s for the same price. I hope you will purchase the 1.5s because they will come together sooner.

LaCroix Figeac is located across the street from Chateau Figeac, owned by Dutrilh-Rocher Belleville Figeac and operated by the Derenoncourt family, whom I recently reviewed here. This is a bargain. Blackberry, raspberry, olives and cherry compete for your nose. This is a Brigitte Bardot wine - voluptuous, in a word. On the palate, blue and black berries plus some pencil lead, great concentration and fruit, yet it is balanced and fresh. WS 91-94; RP 91-93; McD 93.

WA loves Cuvee de Pena Pyrenees Orientales Roussillon. At \$132/case delivered and a 90-point rating by David Schildknecht, what's not to love? The nose is cherry, plum and raspberry aromas. They are picked up through the palate where gravel, pie spice, black tea and smoke enhance. Here's why I read Schildknecht. He's definitely not a front runner. "Buy it by the case, or buy it by the bag-in-box; delight and - if you dare reveal its price - amaze your

guests over at least the next couple of years, though quite possibly longer. (And we wine snobs need to stick this into some blind tastings to put quality-price rapport into perspective, and perhaps some prejudices to rest.)"

WS and WA writers will wreck Walla Walla wallet wonders. Once again the media is driving terrific bargain wine prices through the roof. Whenever we scribblers start touting small-production "cult wine" releases, prices go through the roof. Long-timers will know I implore they follow the wonderkind wine growers and makers to find these products before folks with wide readership publish their 95-point reviews. To that end here's a heads-up on Reynvaan Family Vineyards.

Were you following Christopher Baron, Cayuse winemaker, recommended here four years ago and a nearby neighbor, you would have known he was collaborating with Reynvaan on its past few releases. Anyone who has sampled Bionic Frog will immediately recognize the Baron touch. The Syrah he produces is decidedly Cote Roti style. As these prices escalate, keep in mind you can buy real Cote Roti \$40-70.

The aromatics of Reynvaan's Unnamed Syrah 2008 are splendid. Blending 10 percent Viognier provides a remarkable floral bouquet. Syrah gives the bacon, wild game, smokey notes. Unlike many Cote Roti imitators that often tend toward the heavy side, the Reynvaan Syrah is elegant; it has that violet-game nexus and a very long, pleasing finish filled with black cherry

and plum notes. The other 2008 Syrahs are named The Contender, 95 points, and The Rocks, 95 points. Sadly, I did not sample either yet.

What's the big whoop? you ask. You can't get any of the 2008. True indeed, but the crafty, well-informed oenophiles reading here may be able to snooker the table by joining the Reynvaan Family Vineyard mailing list. The 2009s, which are to be released very soon, are the best yet. I want you to trust me on this. In the future those joining this list will be similar to those who joined any great name early: the only people buying great wine from the vineyard at a fair price. As a barometer, in a recent auction, a two-bottle lot of 94-point 2004 Bionic Frog (476 cases made) went off for \$499. Unnamed is rated 96-97 by most, and the production is 300 cases.

Antonio Galloni writes: Vietti Barolo Lazzarito 2007 rates a 96-plus. There were concerns about the next release under the auspices of son Luca last year, when Alfredo died. In fact, they are better than ever. Definitely not for immediate consumption. Expect maturity in 2020. I expect the wine to close up during this period as is typical. At \$120/bottle, too much a gamble and too long a wait. I recommend the Pio Casere Ornató 2006; rate it 93 points. It is findable around \$650/case or if you want grrrrreat, the 2000 is going for \$1,650/case and right in its drinking window.

Here's hoping your Labor Day was labor free!

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