

FROM THE GRAPEVINE

BY [JOEL M. FISHER](#) with Sara Fisher Chapin



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As the weather finally starts to cool and wine drinkers turn from chilled whites to reds, I've been hopping from wine event to wine event. The best part of these experiences – besides living my passion, of course – is the pleasure of unearthing a few gems along the way. I'd like to share those with you now.

I recently participated in *Bon Appetit's* Tasting Panel. The magazine hosts these events across the country, with the goal of exposing a variety of wine to a variety of industry professionals and gauging their reaction. The Los Angeles program is co-hosted by Anthony Diaz Blue and his Blue Lifestyle organization, as well as by *Patterson's Beverage Journal*. Participants are invited by Anthony. At this event, more than 40 wines from all over the world were being poured

Of what we sampled that day at **Simon Restaurant** in West Hollywood, I liked the **Godwin Family Vineyards 2004 Chardonnay** (\$28), rating it a 15 out of 20. This Russian River Valley chardonnay was pure Californian, strong and oaky. My next notable white was the amusingly named **Nth Degree 2004 Chardonnay** (\$40) from Livermore Valley. I rated this lean, balanced yet flinty white an 18.

Of the reds, I found **Stephen's Cellar 1999 Pinot Noir** (\$35) to be of note, giving it 18.5 points. This wine, which comes from York Mountain, carried a big nose, a medium body, good fruit and a nice finish. **Marimar Estate's 2003 Pinot Noir, Christina Selection** (\$45) proved to be a pleasant discovery. Showing all the right fresh fruits one expects from a Pinot, this balanced wine earned an 18.7. The other Marimar Pinot Noir I tried was even better, meriting a full 19 points. The *2004 Pinot Noir, Dona Margarita Vineyard* (\$45) rolled beautifully over the tongue.

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My next round of discoveries came from a major tasting held by **Veritas**, a wine import company, in the penthouse at 9460 Wilshire Boulevard. Amidst plush surroundings, we tasted some glorious French wines.

We started with Mersaults, chardonnays that come from their namesake region in Burgundy. Roland Thevenin's *2003 Mersault* was unpretentious –fruity and straightforward. Even better was Francois Mikulski's *2004 Mersault* (\$39).

The Alsatian selections from **Domaine Stirn** included a *2003 Pinot Blend* (\$13.50) which proved nicely fruity and of medium body. In contrast, their *2002 Muscat Tradition* (\$14) was drenched in floral notes and velvety textures.

Of the Bordeaux selections, I found the **Chateau Mouton's** *2000 Bordeaux Superieur* (\$20) to be a steal. Although not a Gran Cru, this wine showed nice bright red fruit on the palate. More dynamic was the **Carruades de Lafitte** *2000 Bordeaux* (\$59). I thought this bottle well worth the splurge – it showed guts, managing to beautifully balance rich spices and ripe red currents, while boasting velvet-smooth tannins. Last but not least, my favorite bottle at the event came from one of my all-time favorite houses: **Lynch Bages**. Their nice structured *2003 Bordeaux* was light on tannins, showed deep ruby, and was fragrant with currants and a touch of oak.

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I swung through Napa recently, and visited some wineries I've never before explored. **Macauley Winery** truly opened its doors to me, and I had the privilege of tasting its expanding wine list side by side with Mac Macauley himself. We began with his *2001 Cabernet Sauvignon* (\$58), a 91% Cabernet and 8% Merlot blend. This was the winery's first vintage and is still drinking well. Nicely rounded and with a medium body, this 14.5% alcohol bottle burst with fruit.

The *2002 Cabernet Sauvignon* (\$58) is pure Cabernet – chewy, complex, and rich with dark fruits. I loved it. Also noteworthy was the *2003 Zinfandel* (\$28), with grapes coming from Chiles Valley. This spicy wine presented nice tannins and finish.

My last stop in Napa was the home of writer and winemaker Jeff Morgan. Morgan has partnered with Keith Rudd, of **Rudd Vineyards and Winery**, to create a stunning – and kosher, no less – *2004 Cabernet* (\$85). The grapes come from Larkmead, and have created a fruit-forward, well-balanced Cab. I bought a couple bottles to take home (of his 6,000 bottle production), and discovered it is also available at **Bella Vino** in Westlake Village. Jeff also makes *Soloro Rosa*, a zesty Sangiovese made from Lodi and Atlas Peak-area grapes. I sampled the 2006 (\$15), which you can find locally at **Wally's** and **Bristol Farms**.

Morgan's *2005 ZMOR Gewurtztraminer* (\$35) is something really different. Made with 100% Martinelli Valley grapes, the wine is bone dry and barrel fermented. It's complex, plush, and shows unusual notes of apricot and lychee. I'll definitely keep my eye out for this bottle.

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One last note: If you haven't checked out **Tiger Lily** in Los Feliz Village, I strongly recommend it. Executive Chef Edward Brik – a graduate of the Culinary Institute of America, and an alumnus of Spago and a headline restaurant in Reims, France – is doing great things with an adventurous menu and wine list.

So, enjoy the fall. Enjoy cozying up with a warming red, or even a toasty port. But most of all, remember to drink what you like and like what you drink.

As always, happy drinking!

Joel M. Fisher Ph.D writes a monthly column for the [Chefs de Cuisine Association of California](#) and has been the wine instructor these past five years for the Culinary Arts Department, [Art Institute of California-Los Angeles](#). He is Director of Public Affairs for Avalon Hollywood, and as a partner in [WineVineandDine](#) conducts wine tastings, wine dinners, and wine-and-food pairings throughout Southern California. His email address is joel@winevineanddine.com Sara Fisher Chapin is a freelance writer with more than a decade of experience writing for various publications and media.