

The Midwest Wine Connection

Volume 15, No. 2

October 2010

2010 staff picks

The best ... and the rest

Rob Hahn

Current "hot" varietal

Moscato. Gotta love affordable and exciting sparkling.

Current "hot" region

Spain continues to reign in this area. People are discovering more Spanish wines to try daily, and none of those wines seem to disappoint.

Next "hot" varietal

I still think Petit Sirah has a shot. Probably not enough planted right now to put it on par with the Pinot explosions but could be relatively big nonetheless.

Next "hot" region

Argentina is poised for even more exciting growth with Malbec and Torrontes.

Best wine you've recently tasted

Trincher Central Park West Vineyard Petit Verdot 2007. So much flavor and character from a lesser-known varietal.

Winemaker with whom you would like to have a drink and why

Dave Ready, Jr., who makes wine for Murphy-Goode. A native-Minnesotan, he's one of those guys who's just fun to be around. A great story teller and a fantastic winemaker.

Favorite "big" wine producer

This year I tip my hat to Gallo, which continues to find and promote good wine values from around the world. Gallo's Gascon from Argentina – both the regular and Reserve – are some of the best Malbecs I've tasted lately. They're consistent from one vintage to the next and affordable, not to mention readily available.

Most overrated wine varietal

Cabernet Sauvignon ... but it's also one of the best. So, make sense of that.

Best city to visit outside the Midwest for wine and food

Still have to cast my vote for San Fran. Perhaps that's because I haven't traveled much over the past year. But everytime I visit SF, I find a different neighborhood with loads of dining options. Love it.



An ideal fall afternoon involving wine

Sunshine. Cool temps. Leaves on the trees changing colors. A great book in one hand and a glass of Zinfandel in the other.

Best rock band making music today

John Mayer

Prediction for the Vikings' season

An up and down 10-6 season. Good enough to make the play-offs. Beyond that my predictions are halted in favor of optimism. Save a spot for me on the Vikings bandwagon.

Prediction for this Fall's elections (local and national)

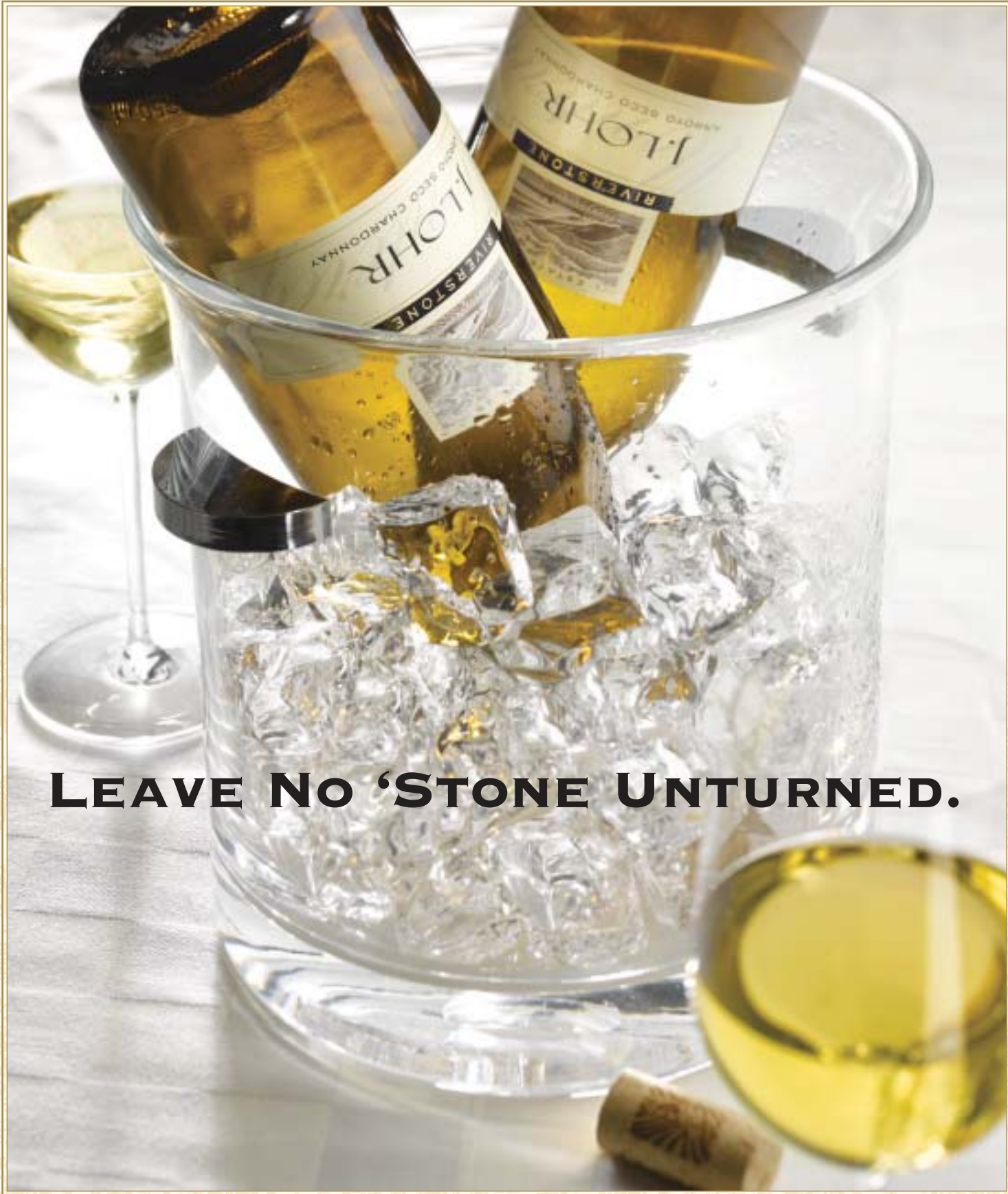
Nationally the Dems get crushed. In Minnesota, it's a much closer race. I'll leave it at that for now.

Favorite restaurant if someone else is paying

St. Paul Grill always wins. Get me a table in the bar or along the windows, so I can gaze out at Rice Park.

See Picks on page 6

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LEAVE NO 'STONE UNTURNED.

FLAVOR SECOND TO NONE

J. LOHR
VINEYARDS & WINES

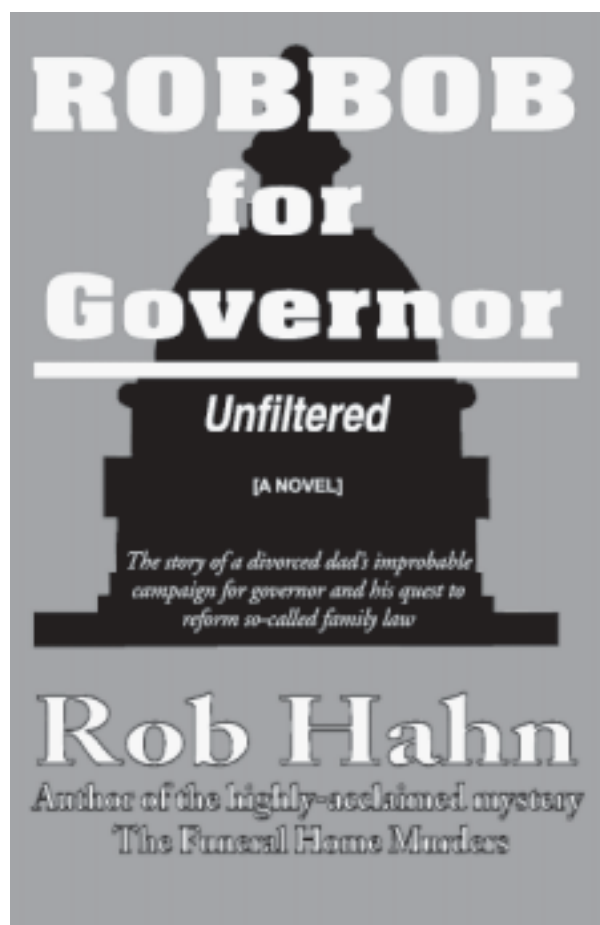
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Uncorked



Dan Sobiech

Autumn offers plenty of wine opportunities

Autumn is different for all of us. For some, it is time to wake up the echoes of past glory for their alma mater's football squad. For some it represents an election year. Now more than ever pundits abound to give their two cents and we, the public, are stuck watching a parade of ads for candidates we could care less about. For me, it represents a time when wine sampling is at an all time high.

Cold winter evenings are abound with red wines. Hot summer nights call for cold white wine, sometimes too cold to taste. But fall represents the combination of warm days and cool nights that allow for a wide array of products to share, taste and drink with friends. The farmers' markets are full of a wide variety of products to prepare the perfect meal. Now is the time to get some friends and head to your favorite wine shop and load up for a good time.

For whites I see more and more offerings available to the traditional choice of Chardonnay and Pinot Grigio. If you must drink Chardonnay, search out one with a distinct appellation like Russian River or Carneros. If you really want to get specific and are willing to spend a few dollars more, a trip to the Burgundy section should give the widest array of Chardonnay from which to choose. Give yourself a budget of \$20 per bottle, and you may never go back to drinking plain old California Chardonnay again.

Sauvignon Blanc from New Zealand is fashionable these days but ask for a recommendation, because this wine's popularity has started to bring a few clunkers to the category. For something a bit more unique try Torrontes from Argentina. This wine is gaining

momentum much the same way Malbec did when it first hit the shelves in the U.S. Torrontes is good and quite inexpensive and if you like Sauvignon Blanc from New Zealand, Torrontes is a great parallel move for a change of pace.

My choice this time of year is Riesling. All of it, from everywhere. Dry, medium-dry, sweet – I don't care; it all tastes good to me this time of year. Since many of our settlers to the Midwest came

from German origin, we are very fortunate to have a very good selection of German wines at most shops here in the middle of the country. Many of these selections lean toward the sweet- to medium-dry, but a good shop will have an offering that will go from very sweet to bone dry. If you prefer a drier style of Riesling, look to Alsace, the French region just across the border from Germany. These wines are gaining popularity especially with drinkers who shied away from Riesling, because they don't care for the sweet versions.

As the sunsets and cooler temperatures descend on your fall gatherings, the switch to red wines can be equally as exciting. Cabernet Sauvignon is King to many of you, and it is easy to understand why. Other than a corked bottle, I have never been truly disappointed by a bottle of Cabernet. Sure I might have wished I paid less from time to time, but it didn't completely taint my overall drinking experience. Like the examples of Chardonnay above, try to get more specific as to where the wine you pick is coming from; Napa, Sonoma, Paso Robles, rather than just California. Try Bordeaux, which should show you the French expression of Cabernet. Not quite as fruit forward as New World Cabernet and best enjoyed with food or strong cheeses.

My pick for reds is a selection of Zinfandels. Pick a wine from Howell Mountain in Napa, Dry Creek and Russian River Valley in Sonoma, Mendocino to the north and Sierra Foothills to the west and Paso Robles to the south. If you are a fan of Zinfandel, doing a sampling of one wine from each of these areas will give you a unique understanding as to the subtle and sometimes vast differences between the wines produced in these different regions. These wines go well with a variety of foods and offer you one last opportunity to fire up the grill and actually sit outside and enjoy one last dinner event "al fresco."

So my best advice for the season is to gather up your friends, grab a bunch of different wines and grab some firewood and a sweater. As I pen this column, I am looking forward to a weekend of cooking and imbibing with good friends at a cabin up north; the weather looks to be perfect. I can't promise it will be warm enough for one last dip in the lake, but after helping bring in the boats and docks for the season a well-deserved glass of wine will taste even better as a fire warms my cold wet feet.



Dan Sobiech writes this regular wine column for **The Midwest Wine Connection**

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2010 staff picks



Staff Picks, from page 1

Favorite restaurant if you're paying

Just enjoyed an exception meal at Trattoria da Vinci in St. Paul's Lowertown. Good ambience, friendly service and great food.

Wine you would give as a gift when you want to impress

Vintage or LBV Port. Something different that pairs so well with chocolate.

Wine you would give to a party host you don't really like

I've mellowed, so I'm not that mean anymore. I'd give a simple, inexpensive red and then drink it myself.

Best network news anchor or newscast

Well, it's not Rick Sanchez, formerly of CNN.

Favorite book you've recently read

Daniel Silva's "The Rembrandt." Gabriel Allon is back again (surprise), but this book is one of Silva's best. Another good read is from local mystery author

Brian Freeman. His latest, "The Burying Place," is probably his best work yet.

Best current "character" in the wine business

Fred Franzia. It's not just what he's contributed to the wine industry (great wines like Forest Glen, Crane Lake, Charles Shaw, aka "Two (or Three) Buck Chuck," among others), but it's also the fact that he's passed down his vision to his sons, who've now entered the wine business with labels like Motos Liberty.

Best wine idea you've seen at a restaurant

Love the "Taste" portions at Bin in Lowertown in St. Paul. Priced so affordably, you can sample so many wines and not go broke. Other restaurants should follow Bin's example.

One thing you would like to change about wine in restaurants

I really like that even more restaurants are featuring wines for half-price on certain nights. I just wish they'd promote it a little better.

Best wine \$3 or under

Say what? If you look closely for the right sale, you can still find Crane Lake for under \$3. Good wine at a great price. Can't go wrong for an everyday quaffer.

Recent favorite varietal

Wine you would buy if price is no issue
Most unique food and wine pairing you've recently enjoyed

Best concert of the last twelve months

Took my sons to see Gil Shaham at the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra last month at the Ordway. Fantastic. Also, Keane at First Avenue and lots of beer the day after the primary election was just what the political doctor ordered.

Biggest political buffoon (person or incident)

My mom, aka St. Gertrude of Winona, always says if you can't say something nice ...

Best political battle to watch

Minnesota's governor's race.

What the wine industry needs

More personalities

What the wine industry doesn't need

More consolidation. Enough's enough.

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Reviews



Santa Ema Barrel Select Carménère Reserve 2007 – Slightly earthy and well-developed. Lives up the Reserve label. Take the extra time to find this one. **90**

Terra d'Oro SHR Blend Zinfandel Amador County 2006 – Powerful stuff, to quote the Fabulous Thunderbirds. Spicy and chewy. Just what you should expect from a well-made Zin. **90**

Sonoma-Cutrer Chardonnay 2008 – If Homer were a Chard drinker, he'd say "Mmmmm, yummy Chard." **89**

Hahn SLH Estate Pinot Noir 2007 – Full-bodied and supple. Just enough light tannins to leave a bevy of flavor in

your mouth. **89**

Forest Glen Pinot Grigio 2009 – Another example of why Pinot Grigio is no longer all light and flabby. There's a boldness to this PG, grassy flavors and a fairly hefty finish. **89**

Montes Pinot Noir 2009 – Pinot Noir from Chile? Why not! Earthy, mouth-filling and fairly tannic. Well worth seeking out at your favorite store. **88**

Cambria Chardonnay Bench Break Vineyard 2007 – Rich, buttery and mouthfilling. Very, very tasty. **88**

Martin Codax Albariño 2009 – Slightly tart. A really fun wine from Spain. **88**

J. Lohr Chardonnay Riverstone 2008 – Slightly chalky with a touch of oak. A touch of acidity puts this over the top. **88**

Terra d'Oro Rose 2008 – A rose with a little backbone. Not some dainty fruit bomb. Perfect for a sunny and warm afternoon, if you can still find one. **88**

Sebeka Chenin Blanc "Steen" 2008 – It's an appreciated respite to drink a wine that's not trying to be like its competition. Here's one that stands out. Distinctly South African: a little musty with a hint a touch of fruit. **88**

Murphy-Goode Pinot Grigio 2008 – Dave Ready, Jr. proves that, yes, winemakers can make PG that's not just fruity and flabby. This has some character. **88**

Lo Tengo Torrontes 2009 – Torrontes is such a fun wine, and this is no exception. Fresh grassy aromas, slightly dry (guess that means a hint of fruit, too) and a wonderful finish. Perfect with some cheese or a light pasta dish. **88**

Zecca Mesa Viognier 2009 – A varietal that doesn't get the credit it deserves. This wine is complex but not overbearing. Mouthfilling with a hint of caramel and a dry finish. **88**

Alcance Sauvignon Blanc 2008 – Well-balanced with a welcome acid punch. A fun quaffer from Chile. **87**

Sommerau Castle Riesling Mosel 2008 – A touch of sweetness makes this Riesling not only lively but a welcome complement to most foods. **87**

Black Swan Pinot Grigio 2009 – Clean and refreshing. Good flavor. **87**

Gnarly Head Pinot Noir 2008 – Medium-bodied, slightly fruity and a welcome complement to the label's more prominent Zin and Chard. **87**



Mirassou Pinot Noir 2008 – Bright strawberry flavors jump out of this one. Light-to medium-bodied. Easy drinking. **87**

Jordan Cabernet Sauvignon 2006 – Always dependable, though this vintage seems to be lacking some needed tannins. **87**

Napa Cellars Sauvignon Blanc 2007 – A great little SB to pair with cheese and fruit. **86**

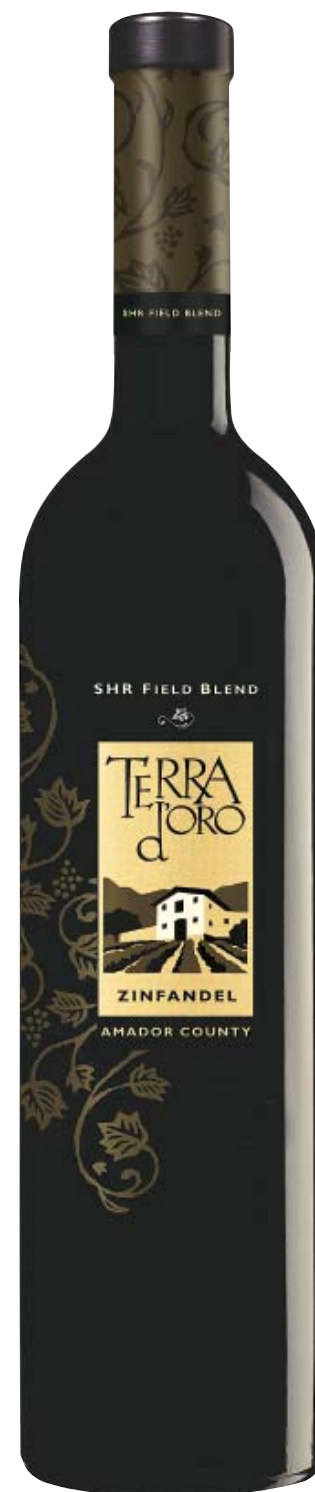
Black Swan Merlot 2009 – Cherry overtones and soft tannins. Easy drinking Merlot. **86**

Sommerau Castle Gewurz Pfalz 2008 – Good to see wine from the Pfalz region of Germany getting some shelf space. This is a simple and affordable Gewurz. Yum. **86**

Hahn Chardonnay 2008 – Fairly basic and similar to many other California Chards. Tasty but not outstanding. **86**

Barefoot Shiraz – Don't let the price (low) or lack of vintage scare you away. This is a simple, slightly fruity wine. A good value. **85**

Firestone Chardonnay 2008 – A simple basic California Chard. **85**



The
Midwest
Wine Connection

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October Sippers

A sampling of some of the best wines we have reviewed over the past few months.

**Santa Ema
Amplus One
2005**

Wonderful blend of Carménère Syrah and Carignan. Packed for of flavors and tannins. A long-lasting finish. **92**



**J. Lohr Syrah
Paso Robles
2008**

You can never grow tired of a wine like this. Hint of strawberry on the nose with a hearty, yet well-balanced finish. **91**



**Sonoma-Cutrer
Les Pierres 2006**

Chalky with hints of oak. If you didn't know better, you could easily mistake this for a Burgundy, a higher-end Burgundian at that. Fantastic. **91**



**Trincherro
Central Park
West
Vineyard
Petit Verdot
2007**

A bold wine. An inviting nose of blackberry aromas with a hint of oak. Coats the palate. **90**
t Wine Connection



Zaca Mesa Syrah 2006

Each vintage this Syrah is one of the best from California. Supple yet feisty. Earthy tannins make way for a long finish. **90**



Kaiken Malbec 2008

A bold and energetic Malbec. Medium- to full-bodied. Strong, lasting finish. We like this one. **90**



Rosenblum Cellars is recognized as one of North America's most acclaimed producers of Zinfandel and Rhône varietal wines. It is guided by commitment, craft and a mix of traditional and innovative winemaking techniques to showcase sumptuous wines from the best vineyards and regions in California.

This Urban winery has evolved from a passionate home-winemaking operation founded in 1978 into a world-class winery, with numerous gold medals and 90-plus scores. Even with very highly regarded wines, Rosenblum maintains a down-to-earth approachable attitude. According to Wine Spectator, Rosenblum is a "Mecca for Zin-Fanatics."



2010 staff picks

Dan Sobiech

Current "hot" varietal

Riesling. Even the French are on board in Alsace with putting a sweetness meter on the label to help the consumer find their way. I think people are seeing the great personality that Riesling has.

Current "hot" region

Argentina, almost to a fault. There is starting to be too much wine that tastes like it comes from the same spigot.

Next "hot" varietal

Riesling. But since the French are involved things, it will move at a slower pace

Next "hot" region

Mendocino

Best wine you've recently tasted

14 Hands Hot to Trot. A cheap red that is a great crowd pleaser!

Winemaker with whom you would like to have a drink and why

I don't have one.

Favorite "big" wine producer

Louis Jadot. They have the same label

for wines that sell for under \$10 to over \$200 in fine wine shops. Not my favorite necessarily but much respect to them for being consistent and relevant at all price points.

Favorite alternative to the above mentioned "big" producer

Piatelli wines from Argentina. Locally (Minnesota)-owned and growing every year, they embody what a winery can do when committed to quality and growth but doing so without compromising.

Most overrated wine varietal

Napa Cabernet. Deals are everywhere, and many of you have to be asking yourself why you have been paying so much money for Napa Cabernet!

Best city to visit outside the Midwest for wine and food

Las Vegas. They have it all at many different price points.

Most overrated wine and food destination

Chicago. How many steak places can one town support?



Continued on following page

Starling Castle

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2010 staff picks

An ideal fall afternoon involving wine

Lots of Burgundy, red and white. Good Friends and a decked out kitchen with a magical pantry that always seems to have just the right ingredients.

Best rock band making music today

Rush's new album is great. They still get it done with just three guys. Amazing!

Least favorite band

REM. It always has and will always be my least favorite band.

Prediction for the Vikings' season

10-6, Wild Card and a Playoff run leading to a Super Bowl appearance, only to be let down with an overtime defeat, leaving us to wonder if Brett Favre will comeback for yet one more season.

Prediction for this Fall's elections (local and national)

Locally Tom Emmer will yell the other candidates into submission. Nationally the Tea Party will steal a lot of seats.

Favorite restaurant if someone else is paying

Murray's

Favorite restaurant if you're paying

Murray's

Wine you would give as a gift when you want to impress

Graziano Petite Sirah

Wine you would give to a party host you don't really like

Dynamite Cabernet

Best network news anchor or newscast

Matt Lauer. I only say this because people say I look like him, so others say. I don't see it, but I will take it.

Best primetime tv show

30 Rock.

Favorite book you've recent read

"Where Men Win Glory, the Pat Tillman Story"

Best current "character" in the wine business

Cameron Hughs, seems to be the only guys selling expensive wine these days. Don't make a lot and

people feel like they got to have it.

Best wine idea you've seen at a restaurant

Premium wine in a barrel on the backbar. Great presentation. I have even seen one that has a cooler for white wine.

One thing you would like to change about wine in restaurants

Wine lists that don't look like grocery store shelves or the national chain restaurants.

What wine retailers could do better

Educate and sell their customers, consumers are eager to learn, feed their desire with good wine not just something you got a deal one and market up 100%.

Best consistent wine value

Piatelli Malbec. The best for the money, under \$15.

Best wine \$3 or under

Doesn't exist. \$3 wine tastes like \$3 wine, not good.

Recent favorite varietal

Torrontes. I wish there were more to try.

Wine you would buy if price is no issue

1970 Chateau Lafite. I turn 40 in October, and it would be fun to celebrate with a bottle of this.

Most unique food and wine pairing you've recently enjoyed

Brachetto d'Aqui and BBQ, sweet red sparkling wine and spicy food, a perfect match.

Best concert of the last twelve months

I had tix to Willie Nelson but he re-scheduled and I can't go on the new date.

Biggest political buffoon (person or incident)

Nikolas Sarkozy for sending the gypsies back to Romania and thinking he could actually get away with it.

Best political battle to watch

Joe Barrios vs. Forrest Claypool for Cook County Assessor of Illinois.

What the wine industry needs

More wine with personality.

What the wine industry doesn't need

More "me, too" marketing by big companies of brands that are just trying to move boxes with little regard for what is in the bottle.



2005 staff picks

A sample of what was hot five years ago

Rob Hahn

Best wine recently tasted

I thought the white and red wines from Romance (Argentina) were pretty hot.

Most exciting winemaker (wines and personality)

Chris Leamy from Montevina still has my vote. His wines are just as interesting and entertaining as his personality. A conversation with Chris won't bore you to death. Randall Grahm is a close second for the same reasons.

Most overrated wine label

Santa Margherita Pinot Grigio. Kudos to the label for helping make PG such a phenom, but there are many better Pinot Grigios for half the money.

Favorite restaurant if someone else is paying

St. Paul Grill. I love the thought of eating there between Thursday sessions of the Class AA High School Hockey tournament. Where else in Minnesota can you enjoy good food (sometimes better than good), a great atmosphere and look out the window into Rice Park with statues of F. Scott Fitzgerald and Herb Brooks in sight?

Favorite restaurant if you're paying

Fat Lorenzo's. Simple but exciting, especially when the weather allows you to sit outside and watch the planes fly overhead. The pizza and pasta are both excellent. The wine list is affordable, and there is no corkage fee. More restaurants should follow Fat's example. Way to go!

One thing you would like to change about wine in restaurants

Better pricing by-the-glass.

Best consistent wine value

Coastal Ridge, especially the Shiraz and Merlot. For about \$6-8, it's difficult to find anything that delivers on a regular basis like this label.

Wine you would buy if price were no issue

Burgundy and lots of it.

What the wine industry needs

More exciting characters who don't take themselves or their wines too seriously.

What the wine industry doesn't need

More bubblegum flavors and brands from Australia with animal names.

Most unique food and wine pairing you've recently enjoyed

Simple as it sounds and, in fact, is, I really enjoyed an L de Lyeth Merlot with a homemade cheeseburger off the grill. Very tasty.

Best concert of the last twelve months

From what I remember, Pete Yorn at the Basilica Block Party. But, hey, it was dark, I was wearing sunglasses and drinking Miller Lite.

Dan Sobiech

What the wine industry needs

Fun advertising like beer commercials. I want to see the "twins"!

What the wine industry doesn't need

More commodity labels. Thank goodness the lake of wine that was out there a few years ago has dried up, but new wines seem to keep coming and while palatable, still lack any real character. Besides after the initial roll out, I never see these wines again. Are they the same wine just in a different dress?

Most unique food and wine pairing you've recently enjoyed

Chianti Classico Riserva with a Blackberry glazed Pork Tenderloin. I had it last night for dinner and was great and easy to make.

Best concert of the last twelve months

Velvet Revolver. The Guns and Roses sound with a real singer. Rock and Roll!

Favorite wine to be enjoyed during a Notre Dame football game

Champagne. I won a big bet in the Mich. State game, and I am planning on taking USC, even if they are favored by 50. You can't bet with your heart.

Biggest political buffoon (person or incident)

Any Kennedy currently involved in government. The Bay of Pigs is over and JFK and RFK are gone. Your political muscle and charm is long gone, too.

Favorite movie of the past twelve months

Dodge Ball, or was that last year?

Thoughts on "Sideways"

I still haven't seen it.

Thoughts on the impact "Sideways" has had on Pinot Noir sales

Great! It's about time people start drinking wine with a bit of personality and elegance. Down with Cabernet!

Next "hot" varietal

I am going to go out on a limb here and say — Zinfandel. Spicy, zesty, bold, flavorful and still affordable.

Next "hot" region

Chile. The flavor profiles of the wines are similar to California while being a little drier. The wines are a great value and the variety of wines to choose from is quite large. Viva Chile!



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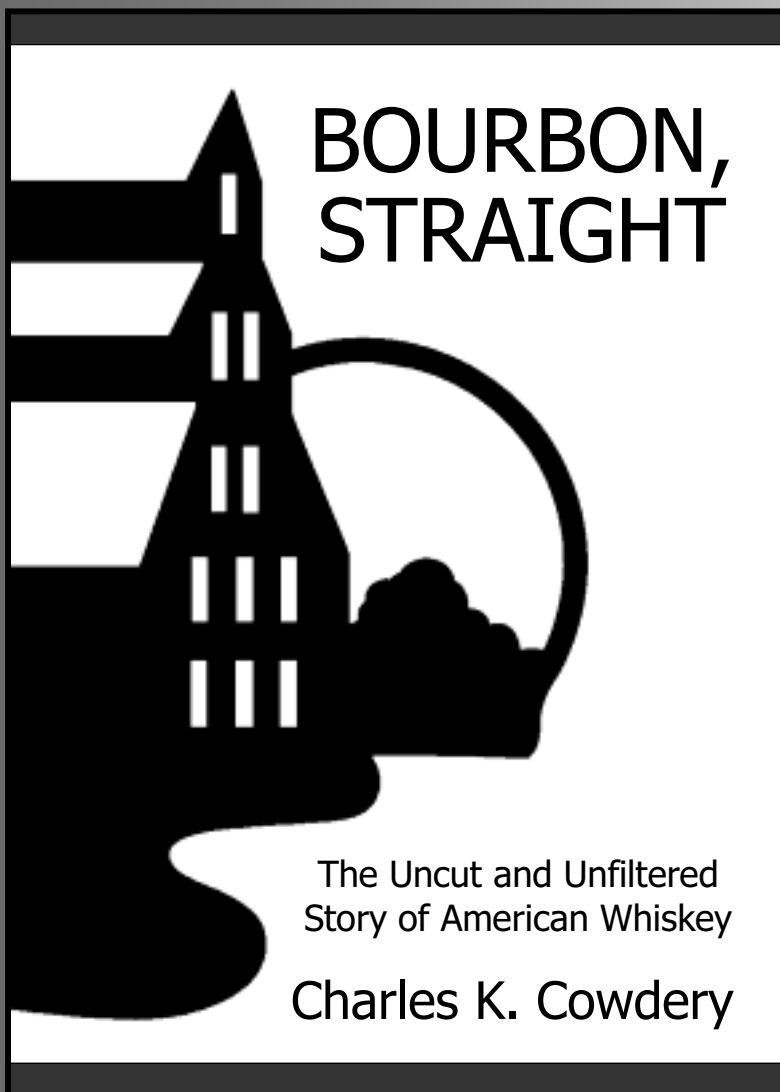
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The author, Charles Cowdery, writes about American Whiskey for *The Malt Advocate*, *WHISKY Magazine* and other publications. He wrote, produced and directed the documentary "Made and Bottled in Kentucky" for public television, and is editor and publisher of *The Bourbon Country Reader*.

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