

# Wine Snob



## Guiding the wine Neophyte

Discovering great wine and food pairing  
Experiencing Wine Country

Contact the Wine Snob @ [VinoSnob@aol.com](mailto:VinoSnob@aol.com)

### Highly Recommended Wineries

#### **Bouchaine - Carneros - Carole & Jan**

During a recent exchange of wine with a dear friend, John Sheehan, John suggested that Bouchaine Chardonnay was perhaps his favorite. Respecting both his incredible palate & knowledge of wine, it was inevitable that the Wine Snob would include Bouchaine on his next tour. En route to Bouchaine, the views of Carneros are awesome and easily etched in memory! Upon arrival, Bouchaine personnel are beyond delightful. Carole recognized the Wine Snob from the March 98 Wine Snob tour (@ Cosentino). Accompanied by Jan, the two teamed in providing a great tasting event, engaging in fun chat and banter. The conversation was so vibrant that one would think we had been friends for years. It could have been the only stop all day, sipping chard on the deck while merely watching the grapes ripen! Tasting commenced almost immediately with the 95 Chard - WOW! One graceful transitioning palate with nice pears, some citrus, all within a luscious viscous mouth sensation. The finish was merely an extension of the delightful palate full of fruit and quite "Yummy"! The tasting continued with Gewurtraminer, Pinot Noir, Pinot Noir reserve, Cabernet Franc and then a surprise taste of the Sangiacomo Chard Reserve. One could embellish on the nuances of each wine but for brevity sake an overview will have to suffice. The two Pinots were good, yet the reserve was "Yummy". At one point Carole was describing the Pinot when she accidentally said it has "Big Cannons" while intending to say tannins. After a hearty burst of laughter and accompanied banter, we moved on with the tasting, never letting go of the cannons! Next was the Cab Franc, "Yummy" boasting big black cherries complementing a pleasant full body wine. Every Bouchaine wine had a wonderful finesse about it as each found a way to deliver a caressing tingle to each corner of the mouth. The final taste was the Sangiacomo Chard Reserve. This Chardonnay is the final word, "Wicked Yummy", lots and lots of fruit, supple and abundant, pears, apples, mild refined spice and more. Bouchaine is a tasting experience that permits the unleashing of your palate for the sake of indulgence while your eyes carry you far from the deck & into the vineyards!

***Favorite Wine*** - Sangiacomo Chardonnay Reserve

#### **Schramsberg - Calistoga - David Reimer**

What a wonderful way to start the day! If you enjoy champagne, this is a "must stop" on your schedule. The tour, accompanied by an energetic and informative talk, are a great prelude to the elegant tasting at the end. David provided tour-goers with barrels of "nice to know" information as he led the walk around the beautiful grounds including a portion of the 2 mile maze of caves. The tour culminates in majestic style in an almost gothic-type room with large candelabra and long tables made from riddling racks. As one chooses their seat, before them stands three champagne glasses anxiously awaiting the soft caress of the pearly bubbles aged to perfection. Needles to say the champagne was delicious. Offered for taste were the Blanc de Blanc, the Blanc de Noir and the Cremant (dessert style). The Blanc de Blanc was second to none but the personal favorite was the Blanc de Noir. The Blanc de Noir delivered a sweet honey suckle nose followed by elegantly choreographed strawberries that pranced through the senses! The essence of strawberries grew increasingly intense as the sweet nectar tempered in the glass! If you haven't guessed by now, yes, it was "Yummy"! There is a \$7.50 tasting fee for three half glasses, and \$15 to experience a full glass of the J. Shram (flagship product). Both fees are well worth it, but if you are tasting alone, it can be a bit much if this is your first appointment of a full schedule day.

***Favorite Wine*** - Blanc de Noir

#### **Spottswode - St. Helena - Paige**

It's 10:00am, on a chilly Napa morning sitting on the Spottswode porch sipping Sauvignon Blanc, watching the sun break through the morning clouds. The Sauvignon Blanc, a "Yummy" nectar, was the perfect accompaniment to the daybreak as Paige described the nuances of the Spottswode philosophy and winemaking methodology. Soon the glasses are empty, and the tour migrates to old stone barn left from a former ghost winery. Inside the cold barn are barrels of the 97 cabernet stacked almost to the ceiling. After delivering a fair amount of information about the 97 vintage & barrel type, Paige opens a barrel and siphons some wine for tasting! Wow! ...is the expression of each person's face as the first sip tantalizes each tongue with incredible black cherries, red cherries and a great deal more. Further flavor deciphering would only transpire if the barrel was beside me, from which to siphon several more ounces - "Wicked Yummy"! Awed by the barrel experience, Paige led us back to the porch where a bottle of the 95 Cabernet was ready for tasting. Oh yes... Cherries! Big ones, red ones, black ones, purple ones! Blackberries, chewyness and a delicious touch of oak - "Yummy"!

***Favorite Wine*** - 97 Cabernet Sauvignon (barrel taste)

**Highly Recommended Wineries (continued)****Mt. Veeder (@Franciscan)-Rutherford-Janet Pagano, Bill Love**

It's a special treat when the individual that oversees the winemaking, Janet Pagano, conducts the tasting. Mt. Veeder, often a well kept secret, offers a fabulous line of wines that consistently achieve the "Yummy" level. The environment at Franciscan appears commercialized, but the wine tasting representatives are professional and enthusiastic to enhance the tasting experience. To quote Garret Jenkins, "tasting Mt. Veeder wines is like a French sport". One should not overlook the Franciscan wines that offer good quality and value, however, Mt. Veeder wines are far superior, and well worth the extra money! Four wines were available for tasting, Zinfandel, Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon and the Mt. Veeder Reserve. The "Yummy" zin, always a personal favorite, is filled with a broad variety of fruit big and robust body of cherries apples and pears. The Merlot, although very good, was the least favorite with very nice fruit and a touch of spice. The Cab was "Yummy" offering lots of raspberries and cherries and bit of light chocolate enhancing the oak finish. Last, the Mt. Veeder Reserve fills the mouth with a perpetual silky full body laden with an abundance of fruit including all types of cherries, berries and delicious milk chocolate contributing to a Pinot Noir-like finish - "Wicked Yummy".

**Favorite Wine** - Mt. Veeder Reserve

**LaFamiglia de Robert Mondavi - Oakville - Tom Daly**

What a nice treat! Located on the side of the mountain with magnificent views, sits a new member of the Mondavi family. Although the Mondavi tour was an excellent experience & the Mondavi Reserve Cabernet is "Yummy" the Wine Snob is not ordinarily a staunch advocate of the Mondavi wines, especially the Woodbridge line. Given that disclaimer, the wine offering at LaFamiglia was quite impressive! Five of Six tasted wines were "Yummy"! And obviously, from the name of the winery, one can guess that the wines are Italian varieties and style somewhat unique to the Napa Valley. Beginning with the whites, the Pinot Grigio was splendid with an inviting nose followed by a complex and full body palate, filled with syrupy pears and apples. Next, three reds, Sangiovese reserve, Barbera & Nebbiolo. Each red achieved the European style quite impressively. The Sangiovese reserve offered lively fruit in a dynamic palate that transformed from sweet to slight spice, and then to a delightful oak finish. The Barbera wows the palate up front with peculiar fruit then flows broadly through the mouth with red cherries, some acidity & spice then mildly transcends to the oaky finale. Finally, the Barolo provides a tease through a curious bouquet. The first sip delivers dominating red cherries with an assortment of other fruit and oak dancing on the tongue! As one would expect, the Barolo is a bit tight yet and it will be best when experienced with hearty food!

**Favorite Wine** - Pinot Grigio & Barbera

**Anderson Conn Valley - St. Helena - Gus Anderson**

Gus eloquently explains that the Andersons are not wine makers, they are farmers. The model followed by the Andersons is that of the farmers in burgundy where grapes are hand picked and hand sorted. Gus has developed the Anderson Estate to be fully self-sufficient, including a frog pond, reservoir and wine cave. It is quite an impressive establishment in a country home style environment. Three dogs roam freely and greet each visitor upon arrival. The dogs tag along on the tour as well, and will chase and fetch tossed sticks! The tour of the grounds is augmented by continuous information transfer from a proud Gus. Each visitor gains a great deal of knowledge on the history and keys to Anderson success, including the tactics employed to battle the perils that threaten vineyards. The tour ends at the starting point, a picnic table under a shade tree, where Gus's wife is waiting with a case of crystal tasting glasses and two bottles of the 95 Cabernet Sauvignon. Gus pours a plentiful taste into each glass and looks for reactions. As the glasses near bottom, Gus is very generous in family style environment. There is no question that wine is "Yummy" and it was unanimous just by facial expression.

*Note: There's a limited availability Chardonnay, (Oct release) Based upon reputation alone, it is probably well worthwhile to procure a bottle or two!*

**Favorite Wine** - Cabernet Sauvignon

**Duckhorn - Napa - Nicole**

First, an apology is in order for Nicole. Illegible handwriting resulted in an incorrect name that appeared in the Wine Snob March '98 tour. Now, back to the tour: Last tour (Mar 98), was an experience that was an unparalleled tasting pleasure. Tony (asst. winemaker), was the guide, with a surprise appearance by Tom (head winemaker) as the tour passed through the lab. Obviously, the last tour at Duckhorn was the best tour ever, making it almost an impossible act to follow. Rather than capitalize on the Wine Snob for special treatment, the tour was scheduled with the general public in order to provide readers with accurate information and realistic expectations! Well, feel free to set high expectations. Nicole was the tour guide and she did a great job of providing new information and she was quite swift to move the tour into the tasting area for a fabulous finale. The tasting, as expected, was awesome! Three wines were tasted, 97 Sauvignon Blanc, 96 Paraduxx and 96 Merlot (Napa). The first words one can utter are "Wow" & "Yummy", the Sauvignon Blanc is definitely the final word on this varietal, the Paraduxx is an Italian style zin overwhelmingly Yummy, and the Merlot, Oh soooo Yummy, was full of flavor, yet smooth & ready to drink! Each is so delicious, specificity of flavor could never do them justice. Buy it and drink it!

**Favorite Wine** - Again, so good... one cannot choose! Awesome!

**deLorimier - Alexander Valley - Kymberty Wright**

Not enough can be said to give this winery ample recognition. Many wineries can boast a few great wines but few can boast all great wines! Predominantly grape growers, this small winery seems to do everything SO RIGHT! The 97 Sauvignon Blanc and the Clonal Select Chard are very "Yummy" and of course there are several bottles of each in the Wine Snob cellar! The Merlot was out of control "Yummy" with huge sumptuous, intense, awesome cherries. If only Charms® lollipops were created to render this experience! The 95 Mosaic (Bordeaux style blend) is another gem that provides an invitation to sit down to a hearty gourmet meal and enjoy the synergy of great wine and rich food! Lastly, deLorimier produces a few obscure varieties each year that only club members are privy to. They are not to be missed! During this visit the limited release Sangiovese was available. Despite being the same grape used to create Chianti, the Italian version of this varietal needs to take a back seat to this wine as nothing out of Italy bearing the name of Chianti has ever achieved the sumptuous fruit that exudes from this wine. There are very few cases made and it is only available from the winery, book your flight today!

**Favorite Wine** - Sangiovese

**Etude - Yountville - Ida**

To start the day with a tasting at Etude is a wonderful but dangerous endeavor, if the tasting practice of choice is to swallow! Ida is casual and fun, yet quite passionate about the wines she pours. Ida insists that she fill the glass to a sufficient level in order to provide an adequate nose. The conversation with Ida touched on the area of "Wine Ratings". Ida recalled a recent encounter with a group of tasters well equipped with wine expert paraphernalia and all the ratings. With each pour, the tasters swiftly shuffled through to determine what the experts had to say about the next wine they were about to taste. In an effort to help the tasters explore their own personal palate and preference, a clever Ida asked each taster, "do you like Coke or Pepsi?" After each responded with their preference, Ida then asked, "What do you think Parker prefers?" Hopefully, the message was clear that ratings are merely a guide and everyone has different tastes! Amidst great conversation and knowledge, Ida poured 4 fine wines in a very unpretentious style. Included in the selection were Pinot Blanc, Pinot Noir Rose, Cabernet Sauvignon and Pinot Noir. The Pinot Blanc 97 had a big robust Chardonnay-like nose with a vanilla cream bouquet. It further teased the palate with creamy citrus, grapefruit, pears and a bit of spicy, yet subtle oak on the finish- "Yummy". The 96 Pinot Noir exhibited a very rich burgundian style in both color & nose. The Pinot further proceeded to deliver rich burgundian characteristics as it yielded soft, yet concentrated fruit throughout the palate. A few distinctive flavors included berries, chocolate and a bit of chewy tobacco. Every sip that followed continued to impart increased opulence and fresh flavors - "Yummy"!

**Favorite Wine** - Pinot Noir

**Highly Recommended Wineries (continued)****Silver Oak - Oakville - Tom Walsh**

On the heels of Robert Parker, the Wine Snob sauntered into Silver Oak to experience 3 wonderful years of both the Alexander Valley and Napa Valley vineyards Cabernet Sauvignon (94, 95, & 96)! All six wines were quite "Yummy" however the 96 Alexander Valley displayed some amazing characteristics for such a young wine. This one is sure to be a winner when it is released in two years. The favorite was the 94 Napa that took immediate command of the palate with an abundance of generous fruit, tremendous complexities and all while still being quite young and tight. It will surely develop considerably in the coming years "Yummy"!

***Favorite Wine*** - 94 Cabernet Sauvignon -Napa Valley

**Vincent Arroyo - Calistoga - Vincent and Joy**

This is becoming a regular Wine Snob stop! And of course it is well worth it. Arroyo is a small operation that caters to knowing the customer and creating a relationship. For those that prefer good wine, the relationship is solidified quite early! Vincent pours all good wines, from the Chardonnay, Melange, Merlot, Cab & Petite Syrah. All wines are good, but the overwhelming favorite is the notable Petite Syrah. The Petite was only available out of the barrel as it sells out long before it is bottled. Out of the barrel, the Petite displayed an inordinate amount of "Yummy" fruit and other remarkable characteristics! For those who prefer a lighter style wine, the Melange is highly recommended, a blend of Gamay, Cabernet Sauvignon, Petite Syrah & Merlot. The Melange displays light, yet bright fruit, with a charming, yet hearty finish. A great wine for the holiday get togethers as food is not a required accompaniment.

***Favorite Wine*** - Petite Syrah

**Nalle - Dry Creek, Sonoma - Doug Nalle**

Doug, the one man show at Nalle winery, is an incredibly pleasant and fun man. The winery is small and unmarked to the public, however, it is self sufficient to include a basketball court, provided the barrels are not stacked to the net! Doug's wine making passion is to develop a wine that coincides with his style and palate, he wants to make wine that he likes to drink - go figure! Therefore, Doug only makes one wine, zinfandel, and he strives to share it with others (at a reasonable price of course!). He certainly achieves his quest each year with one outstanding zin after another. Despite limited production and the one man show, Doug's zin is distributed all over the world. Only nature is responsible for imposing on Doug's ability to transform his great grapes into great wine! When enjoying a bottle of Doug's wine take notice of his labels as they provide a great extension of his humor through great cartoons!

***Favorite Wine*** - Zinfandel

**Signorello - Yountville - Linda Swearingen, Ray Signorello**

The Signorello tasting was enhanced with a few moments of commentary from the general manager Ray Signorello. A smaller winery priding itself in high quality & consistency, achieved through hand picked/sorted grapes. Most commonly known for its Cabernet Sauvignon, all Signorello wines are of exceptional quality. The "Yummy" '97 Semillon offered big refreshing citrus fruit featuring bright sweet lemons. The Semillon is a nice alternative to Sauvignon Blanc with a much lower acidity, therefore a great beverage to serve without food. The 97 Chardonnay was also "Yummy" with complicated fruit blending so well it was difficult to discern specific flavors. Overall it presented a fresh palate combined with a very soft and enjoyable spice. The '95 Pinot Noir was a pleasant and "Yummy" surprise with initial apparent fresh strawberries and crisp spicy berries followed by a light smoke and tobacco finish. The '95 Cab was an appropriate closure to the tasting following the Pinot nicely. The "Yummy" full bodied Cab revealed deep rich cherries and luscious blackberries followed by a meshing of a delicate spice & chocolate segue to the touch of oak on the finish!. There was also a limited release of Syrah & Petite Syrah for sale but not for tasting. Given 4 for 4 in the "Yummy" category, a few of each were purchased and will be reviewed soon.

***Favorite Wine*** - Cabernet Sauvignon

**Cosentino - Oakville - Marie Smith**

Although they did not taste the M.Cozy, the tasting experience was delightful. Marie manages the tasting room in a professional and friendly manner. All wines were good, yet not necessarily the Wine Snob style. The 96 Napa Valley Cabernet was "Yummy" with a captivating nose as an appropriate prelude to the robust texture. The cab displayed a broader style palate followed by a long finish. The big surprises this visit were the late harvest Viognier and VinSanto dessert wines. Both of these wines were "Yummy" and the latter can serve as a great alternative to Grand Marinier (with less alcohol).

***Favorite Wine*** - Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon

**Robert Mondavi - Oakville - Lynn**

After a visit to Mondavi a few years ago, it was a Wine Snob decision that Mondavi was too commercial and not focused on the tourist that desired wine knowledge. The decision was based upon a pretentiousness in the air and lack of attentiveness to the taster in the reserve tasting room (pay for taste). Well, it was day one of the Harvest '98 tour. There were two hours before the first appointment and information on La Famiglia was needed in order to schedule a tasting. The Robert Mondavi winery was on the way and was open for business. A quick stop would not waste time and might provide useful information. Hence, a visit to the information desk. Lynn was staffing the desk and exhibited a confident and outgoing personality. Upon learning of the dissatisfaction, she was determined to influence the Wine Snob perception of Mondavi. Surprisingly, Lynn was very successful in her endeavor. She provided an excellent tour with incredible knowledge transfer. Her tour was vibrant and the experience included visuals as well as tasting Cabernet Sauvignon grapes, right off the vine! The tour resulted in a full page of notes and the tasting of some interesting wines. Although it was not included in the tour tasting, the Mondavi Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon is consistently a great wine and truly representative of what Mondavi can offer. There are several other mass production Mondavi wines that are of acceptable and consistent quality. They are not the wines ordinarily discussed in this publication, however they are clearly as good or better than other wines positioned at the same price.

***Favorite Wine*** - Cabernet Sauvignon Reserve

**Recommended Wineries****Meeker - Dry Creek Valley - Matthew**

The return to the Meeker tee-pee was again fun and casual. This unique tasting room is hosted by a non-pretentious pourer. Wines available this visit did not include any whites, however, there were 5 reds that were well worth the trip. Included in the tasting lineup were '96 Pool Sharks (zin blend), '95 Zin, 93 Cab, 95 Cab, 95 4 Kings (Bordeaux blend). The 95 zin was "Yummy", a traditional style zin with big fruit and complexity. The 95 Four Kings is a clear favorite with a generous robust style featuring lots of berries and other fruit dancing on the taste buds. This winery is probably the best value offering in the area.

***Favorite Wine*** - Four Kings

**Preston - Dry Creek Valley**

You will certainly understand the logic behind the name "dry creek". Preston sits right alongside a bone dry creek, but once inside your palate is continuous hydrated with a large variety of European style wines. They offer a Cuvee de Fumé, Viognier, Marsanne, Le Petite Faux, Faux, Mourvèdre, Zin & Cab! All are very nice wines with the "Yummy" designation assigned to the Viognier and the Faux. The Viognier is the traditional style of this Varietal and one of the better ones to come out of California, it offers lots of peaches, honeysuckle, floral flavors with a spicy oak finish! The favorite is the Faux which is more of the Côtes du Rhône style, with a medium body, full flavor of fruit and a touch of black pepper! Although the distinction of specific fruit is not obvious, the medley and balance is delightful!

***Favorite Wine*** - Faux

**Recommended Wineries (continued)**

**Cardinale / Pepi - Oakville - Ron Haskell**

Many may be aware that Cardinale is the premier wine offered from the Kendall Jackson family of wines/wineries. Formerly, the Cardinale property was a Robert Pepi winery where now the Pepi wines have been integrated into the Kendall Jackson product line. Also integrated into the product line at this winery are olives, oil, vinegar, caponata and the like. Ron, our passionate pourer and talker was excited about the new products he can now offer for sale! The Pepi wines, all Italian varietals, were half interesting and half quite awful (specifically the whites)! The Pepi 96 Sangiovese & 95 Due Baci were very nice reds and show promise for the future. A second line of wines, Lokoya, is also offered for taste at Cardinale. Lokoya is an upscale Cab line from designated vineyards, Mt Veeder, Howell Mountain & Diamond Mountain (95 vintage -retailing for \$80). The later two were "Yummy". The favorite was the Diamond Mountain for its great balance and opulent fruit, augmented with memorable spice and oak. The Howell Mountain had a double burst of fruit that engaged the senses accompanied by an endless finish that left the taster yearning for more. The Mt. Veeder, although good, had a single burst of fruit and intense flavor but overall appeared a tad thin for a California Cab. The finale included the 92 & 95 Cardinale (cab blends). The 92 & 95 were distinctly different in style & character (varietal percentages: 95-76% Cab 24% Merlot; 92-70% Cab, 25% Merlot, 5% Cab Franc). The 95 was more fruity than the 92 and therefore the favorite, deserving of a "Wicked Yummy", while the 92 was certainly "Yummy", but the less preferred style.

**Favorite Wine** - 95 Cardinale

**Alderbrook - Healdsburg**

Always a lively place, the staff was fun and the wine was good also. Unfortunately, the best wines were sold out, however the variety was pretty impressive. There are wines for all palates and for all occasions. All the wines were of satisfactory quality and the prices are generally reasonable.

**Favorite Wine** - Dorothy's Vineyard Chardonnay

**Fieldstone - Alexander Valley**

Fieldstone is a nice little find as you travel from Calistoga over to Sonoma. Fieldstone offers great variety of wines, Sauvignon Blanc, Chardonnay, Viognier, Cab, Merlot & Petite Syrah. Just about all were "Yummy" however the favorite was the Merlot but a bit pricy at \$25. Previously, the reserve cab was the favorite, but as luck would have it it was sold out till next vintage. The Viognier at Fieldstone is a "Yummy" version of this varietal with a peculiar Guwertraminer nose followed by spicy peaches, pears & lemons. The fruit simmers down on the finish with a pleasant essence of vanilla oak.

**Favorite Wine** - Merlot

**Teldeschi - Alexander Valley - Dan**

A nice new find for the Wine Snob. Dan offers a zin and a Petite Syrah that are a different style than the majority of these varietals. These wines are very big and very tannin due to a longer time in the barrel. Hence the release dates are much later than usual. Available for tasting were the 92 zin, 93 zin and 93 Petite Syrah. The 92 zin was a bit alcoholic with a big burst of fruit but almost finished immediately after the burst. The 93 zin had very nice fruit that seemed to offer two smaller bursts leading to a very nice complex finish that loitered on the palate a bit.

**Favorite Wine** - 93 Zinfandel

**DeLoach - Healdsburg - Michelle**

Although the tour was very nice and the staff hospitable, our intentions for visiting DeLoach were to experience some of their Zinfandels. Much to our dismay, zins are tasted only once per year in October (this year Oct 25). The other wines were nice, but the zins are their flagship and DeLoach would not have been on the tour schedule if it were known that the zins were unavailable. The OFS Pinot Noir was very nice (they did not taste the OFS Cab either). Despite the poor taste selection (no zins), the Cabernet Cuveé was a fun wine for a basic table wine and a fair value.

**Favorite Wine** - Cabernet Sauvignon Cuveé

**Other Wineries****Whitehall Lane - St Helena - Al Ehlow**

Whitehall Lane has gone through a major facelift. The new facility is very impressive and the staff inside is very knowledgeable. The \$4 tasting fee (where you get to keep the glass) is a bit of a discouragement, however, the \$4 and the glass can be used towards your wine purchase. Tasted were the 97 Sauvignon Blanc, 96 Merlot and the 96 Cab.

**Favorite Wine** - Merlot