

ROTARIAN'S WINE APPRECIATION FELLOWSHIP

December 25, 2013

Dear Members,

Every year we do a Holiday Issue of this newsletter because this is a special time of the year for many reasons. We hope everyone is enjoying a Merry Christmas, Happy Holiday, Happy Hanukkah, Happy Kwanza, Happy Festivus and we hope that all will enjoy a Happy, Healthy and Prosperous New Year!

One of the special things that happen at this time are all the "Best of the Year" lists that one sees published. This is also true in the wine business where the "experts" have been rating all the wines released during this year and now take a second look at them to come up with their "best". As we have said before, a rating is simply some wine "experts" idea of how a particular wine scores relative to that person's opinion of the characteristics of the ideal wine that would receive a perfect score in that wine category, using whatever scale they want to use.

Robert Parker, who publishes the "The Wine Advocate" and who is considered to be one of the most respected wine experts in the world, uses a 100-point scale that is widely used in the wine world and is sometimes called the "Parker Scale":

The "Wine Spectator" uses this 100-point scale in its ratings. They discuss their scale stating: "Ratings reflect how highly our editors regard each wine relative to other wines in its category and are based on potential quality-how good the wine will be when at its peak. The score summarizes a wine's overall quality; the tasting note describes the wine's style and character." The wine scores reflect the following:

95-100 points	Classic: a great wine
90-94	Outstanding: a wine of superior character and style
85-89	Very Good: a wine with special qualities
80-84	Good: a solid, well-made wine
70-79	Average: a drinkable wine that may have minor flaws
60-69	Below average: drinkable but not recommended
50-59	Poor, undrinkable: not recommended

The main objective of looking at wine scores is to help us determine value. You want to find wines that are worth the price you pay for them, in your opinion. You would like to be able to find a wine to complement the food you are enjoying, at a reasonable price. You can find "deals" or at least value, if you know your wines.

The "Wine Spectator" just came out with their Top 100 Wines Of 2013. Their editors blind tasted thousands of wines and those that received scores of 90 points or higher became candidates for their Top 100. They used four criteria to determine the final selections: "quality (as represented by score); value (as reflected by release price); availability (measured by case production, or, for international wines, the number of cases imported {into the US}); and an X-factor they call excitement." They used no equations but the selections reflected their "judgment and enthusiasm about the wines ---." We might disagree as to what wines should have been listed in the Top 100, but I have always found these wines to be very good and certainly interesting. Try them!

You can get the list on their web site: www.winespectator.com or more specifically: http://2013.top100.winespectator.com/list/?utm_source=SilverpopMailing&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Laura+Zandi+Full+Top+100+List+Available+11_18_2013+%28SND%29. Click on each wine and you can get the tasting notes. You can also purchase their December 31, 2013 issue of the "Wine Spectator" for tasting notes and a whole lot more information.

Here is the Top 10:

Rank	Year	Name of Wine	Score	Price
1	2004	Cune Rioja Imperial Gran Reserva	95	\$63

2	2010	Château Canon-La Gaffelière St.-Emilion	96	\$103
3	2010	Domaine Serene Pinot Noir Willamette Valley Evenstad Reserve	95	\$65
4	2010	Hewitt Cabernet Sauvignon Rutherford	95	\$92
5	2010	Kongsgaard Chardonnay Napa Valley	95	\$75
6	2008	Giuseppe Mascarello & Figlio Barolo Monprivato	95	\$110
7	2010	Domaine du Pégaü Châteauneuf-du-Pape Cuvée Réservee	97	\$120
8	2010	Château de Beaucastel Châteauneuf-du-Pape	96	\$120
9	2010	Lewis Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley Reserve	96	\$135
10	2010	Quilceda Creek Cabernet Sauvignon Columbia Valley	95	\$135

RI Convention in Sydney, Australia

We are once again planning some special events at the International Convention and we hope you are planning on attending. Chris Joscelyne is coordinating all our events and so far he has planned the following:

We have some excellent events organized for the Sydney RI Convention:

There will be a cooking school on Saturday where Australian food is prepared to pair with some good Aussie wines. This is still being set up so the details will be published in the next newsletter.

SUNDAY 1 JUNE 7:30pm

Rotarian James Gamvros will be our host at his Aesop's Restaurant in Macquarie Street Sydney for an authentic Greek banquet accompanied by Australian wines. This will be a fun fellowship night that will be a wonderful way to start our Sydney convention experience. 160 guests. Cost A\$74.00 per person including the banquet and the n wines.

TUESDAY 3 JUNE 7:30pm

The venue is the Australian Ballroom at The Menzies Hotel where our Wine LoversqBanquet will feature delicious Australian food produce and superb Australian wines. This night will feature some wonderful wines and a keynote speaker from the Australian wine industry. 190 guests. Cost A\$115.00 per person including dinner and the premium Australian wines.

WEDNESDAY 4 JUNE 7:30pm

We will take the free train from the city across the Sydney Harbour Bridge to the Kirribilli Club at Lavender Bay, overlooking Sydney Harbour. We will enjoy a first class buffet and Australian wines as we look out on the harbour lights of Sydney. 120 guests. Cost A\$88.00 per person including the buffet, Australian wines and Australian beers.

THURSDAY 5 / FRIDAY 6 JUNE

A two-day bus excursion to Australia's iconic wine region, the Hunter Valley. We will visit several vineyards and taste a wide variety of wines for which the region is famous. Final itinerary and costing expected soon. We may also offer an alternative tour to the Mudgee wine region around Orange.

Booking details and costs will be circulated in January. Please ensure you are registered to attend the RI Convention prior to booking our events, as there can be no refunds once you book online. All bookings will be managed by Eventbrite and we will accept MasterCard, Visa or PayPal.

Note: Sydney is an expensive city, similar to New York, London and Tokyo, so the prices that Chris has negotiated are good deals. Note also that the above prices are in Australian Dollars and the current exchange rate is about: A\$1.00 = US\$0.91

Chris Joscelyne, RAAF Events Coordinator - Australia

Wine in Lebanon . from Ron Farra

by Tim Atkin

Part salesman, part winemaker, part impresario, Serge Hochar is standing on the steps of **Château Musar**, arms extended in greeting. Hochar gives %good quote+, as we journalists like to say, saluting everyone with a flurry of words and that familiar, gap-toothed smile. %Our motto is to be happy,+he says by way of introduction. %Wine is not serious. If you take it seriously, you must leave now.+

Hochar's run down, cobwebbed winery in Ghazir, 15 miles north of Beirut, is an appropriate place to begin our overview of the Lebanese wine scene. Not just because Hochar makes one of the world's most controversial reds, but because he is also Lebanon's best-known wine personality. If **Rafik Hariri**, the prime minister who was assassinated in 2005, was %Mr. Lebanon+, then Hochar is surely %Mr. Lebanese Wine+, internationally recognized, discussed and fêted. How many winemakers can you think of who have been celebrated in a **Guardian editorial**, as Hochar was in 2006 during Lebanon's most recent war with Israel?

He has told his story a thousand times, but Hochar still welcomes new listeners. %started making wine in 1959 without a clue, thinking that wine makes itself,+he says. Two years studying oenology in Bordeaux and his first acquaintance with the wines of St Julien changed all that. %decided that was the style of wine I wanted to make.+ Whether he has succeeded is open to question. Château Musar is a blend of Cinsault, Carignan and Cabernet Sauvignon and bears about as much resemblance to the wines of the Médoc as Pinot Noir does to Pinotage. Nor is Hochar, a man who believes that %wine is emotion+, overly bothered about cellar hygiene or wine faults. His reds are sometimes dismissed as being too high in volatile acidity or full of brettanomyces, but he welcomes the criticism. %dike brett,+he laughs, %and I believe that volatile acidity helps my wines to age+.

Whatever you think of Château Musar's wines . and there's no denying that they are at once idiosyncratic, occasionally brilliant and generally popular with wine drinkers . they are capable of bottle development. The 1961 and 1974 reds are both very complex, closer to **Pinot Noir** than claret perhaps, while his white wine can age like a top white Rioja. Anyone who has been lucky enough to drink the 1993 or the 1989, will agree. %What I do,+Hochar insists, %do it my way.+

The problem with the bright lights of the Serge show is that they tend to overshadow the rest of the Lebanese wine industry. Outside Lebanon, many wine drinkers have heard of **Château Musar**; very few have heard of **Ixsir**, **Domaine des Tourelles** or **Massaya**, all of whom are just as good. Even Lebanese enthusiasts such as **Michael Karam**, a Beirut-based wine journalist and author of *The Wines of Lebanon*, describes Musar as a %double-edged sword+. At the most recent count, there were 39 other wineries in Lebanon.

Part of Musar's appeal, overstated by some, is that it has been intermittently produced in a war zone. It's a plucky tale. During the country's 15-year civil war between 1975 and 1990, only one harvest (the 1976) wasn't picked. In 1984, it took two trucks of grapes six days to make the 35-mile journey from the Bekaa Valley to the winery, but they were still crushed, fermented and turned into wine. That 2006 Guardian editorial praised Hochar's %triumph over adversity+.

Château Musar isn't the only winery that has to cope with the endemically unstable politics of the Middle East. Lebanon is more or less peaceful for the time being, but a Hezbollah backed coup is still a possibility, while the conflict in neighbouring Syria, not to mention a wave of refugees, have had an impact, too. As recently as May this

year, there was fighting in Beirut after two anti-Syrian Sunni Muslim clerics were killed at an army checkpoint near Tripoli. Relations between the Sunni and Shiite Muslim communities, which each make up around a third of Lebanon's population, are very strained.

Even at the best of times, Lebanon is a tinderbox primed with high explosive. This is an article about wine, rather than politics, but the two are entwined like a vine around a trellis wire. The former is always made in the long, looming shadow of the latter. Since the country gained independence in 1943, it has endured many years of conflict, war and political unrest, as well as invasion and occupation by Israel and what is euphemistically called a three-decade Syrian presence. That is unlikely to be the last of it. As David Hirst argues in his excellent book, *Beware of small states: Lebanon, Battleground of the Middle East*, Lebanon was almost designed to be the everlasting battleground for others' political, strategic and ideological conflicts, conflicts which sometimes escalate into their proxy wars. Its internal composition . there are 19 different religious communities . makes Lebanon the sectarian state par excellence.

It might seem remarkable that wine is produced here at all, in a state that is predominantly made up of theoretically teetotal Muslims, but Lebanon is the most liberal of the Arab nations, with a capital city (Beirut) that is extremely cosmopolitan: more Mediterranean than Middle Eastern. Significantly, wine consumption halves during Ramadan, the Islamic month of fasting, suggesting that some Muslims are happy to drink wine the rest of the year.

But let's step back from the present for now and examine a few key moments in Lebanon's past. Wine has been made here since at least 5000BC, although it was the Phoenicians, the great sea traders of the Mediterranean, who first introduced Lebanese wines to a wider public. They shipped something called Byblin (named after the port of Byblos) as far as Gibraltar, using a film of olive oil to protect it from oxidation. The Romans made wine here, too: a fact that is attested by the beautiful Temple of Bacchus at Baalbek.

Lebanon continued to be a significant wine-producing country until 1516, when, as part of Greater Syria, the Principality of Lebanon was incorporated into the Ottoman Empire. Viticulture all but died out until 1857, when a group of Jesuit monks founded Château Ksara in the Bekaa Valley, importing Cinsault cuttings from Algeria. They probably weren't aware of it at the time, but those monks had just founded the modern Lebanese wine industry, developing a winery that still exists today, receiving 70,000 visitors a year.

At the end of the First World War, Lebanon became a French protectorate and remained so until independence in 1943. Lebanese wine production increased to satisfy the thirst of the locals as well as the 30,000 French soldiers and officials who were running the country. Lebanon remains distinctly Francophone, if not always Francophile. Many Lebanese speak French as a second language and Beirut is still known, somewhat optimistically, as the Paris of the Middle East.

In wine terms, too, the French connection is strong. Several of the leading winemakers, from Faouzi Issa at Domaine des Tourelles to Joe Touma at Château St Thomas, studied in France, while there are number of French oenologists either working or consulting for Lebanese wineries: Fabrice Guiberteau at Château Kefraya, James Palgé at Château Ksara, Jean-Michel Ferrandez at Domaine Wardy, Hubert de Bouard at Ixsir and Stéphane Deroncourt at Château Marsyas. In addition, the Brunier family from Châteauneuf du Pape and the Hébrard family from St Emilion part own Massaya.

Lebanon's grape varieties also reflect the French influence. There are patches of two native grapes, Merwah and Obaideh, used to make Château Musar white as well as arak, but the overwhelming majority of Lebanon's 2,500 hectares are planted with French varieties. Exact statistics don't exist . there hasn't been a census since 1932 . but the dominant varieties are Cinsault, Carignan and Cabernet Sauvignon, with lesser amounts of Merlot, Syrah, Mourvèdre, Grenache, Tempranillo, Pinot Noir, Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc, Semillon, Viognier, Muscat, Riesling and Clairette. Ever the maverick, Habib Karam of Karam Winery, a leading pilot with Middle Eastern Airlines, has even planted Graciano and Touriga Nacional in the southern region of Jezzine.

Lebanon is not a large country . think Wales in size, if in no other respect . at 150 miles long and 60 wide, but it is remarkably varied in terms of altitude and topography. Driving around the country takes time, partly because of

poor roads and checkpoints, but also because of two north-south mountain ranges, **Mount Lebanon** in the west and the **Anti-Lebanon Mountains** to the east. Between the two lies the famous **Bekaa Valley**.

The Lebanese climate is Mediterranean, with long, dry and often very hot summers, 3,200 hours of sunshine and cooler, wetter winters, with snow in some places. But everything is relative. When I visited in late November, it was still 28°C during the day, while in summer the diurnal swings can be even more dramatic. With so little rain and sparse irrigation water, yields are often low.

The key to growing grapes in such a warm place is altitude (up to 1400m) in Batroun, close to the coast, and altitude again (up to 1200m) and the moderating influence of Mount Lebanon in the Bekaa. It's a long way from France, as Fabrice Guiberteau of **Château Kefraya** points out: "I worked in Morocco before I came here and that definitely helped. You have to lose all your French ideas overnight."

Grapes are grown in other parts of the country. Mount Lebanon in the west (Metn and Aley), Jezzine in the south and, most exciting of all, **Batroun** in the north. But the Bekaa Valley is by far the leading viticultural area. It produces 6 million of Lebanese 7.2 million bottles and is home to many of the established wineries. Here on this high plateau, whose floor lies at 900m, most of the country's grapes, as well as a fair bit of wheat and hashish are grown. The soils are suitably diverse: limestone, clay/loam, stones, gravel and even, in places, blood red terra rossa. No wonder this fertile valley has been prized for agriculture since Roman times. Today, the majority of the grapes are grown in the southern part of the valley, although there are some vineyards close to **Baalbek**, a Hezbollah stronghold that have somehow survived. The so-called Party of God has almost as little time for alcohol as it does for the Israelis.

For all its historical roots, the modern Lebanese wine industry is a very recent creation. When the civil war ended in 1990, there were only five wineries: Châteaux Ksara and Kefraya, Domaine des Tourelles, Nakad and, naturally, Château Musar. To add another 35 in 22 years, especially given Lebanon's geopolitical instability, is remarkable. Every time you look, another two or three wineries have sprung up. To start with, they were often arak or fruit juice producers that moved into (or back into) wine, such as Château St Thomas, **Heritage**, Massaya, **Château Ka** and **Domaine Wardy**, but more recently they have tended to be bespoke, wine-focused operations.

The largest producers are **Châteaux Ksara**, **Kefraya** and **Musar**, which make around two-thirds of Lebanese wine. The other wineries are mostly medium or (more often) small operations, although Ixsir, a US \$10m project launched in 2008 by the automobile magnate, Carlos Ghosn, looks as if it has the ambition to join the big three, buying grapes from growers all over the country to maximise production as well as make the most of the country's different wine regions.

And what of the wines? Can they be termed fine? The answer is yes and no. The average quality of Lebanese wine is good to very good, but, as yet, there are few superstars. My top five would be Massaya, Domaine des Tourelles, Ixsir, Château Ka and Domaine Wardy, although they are being challenged by a number of other wineries and Château Musar remains defiantly, even gloriously sui generis. It's worth remembering that Lebanon is a very young wine producing country in some respects, still learning how to blend, use oak and express their terroirs.

Akram Kassaly, the owner of Château Ka, says that: "Lebanon is just starting to get a good image as a wine-producing country. Most of the winemakers are moving away from Cinsault, which is our traditional red grape, to noble varieties such as Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Syrah. This is a climate in which you can grow extraordinary grapes." Not everyone agrees with him about Cinsault. Serge Hochar thinks it's the most interesting grape in Lebanon, contributing silkiness to blends and the irrepressible Dargham Touma (Dr D to his friends) of Vin Héritage says it "counteracts the tannins in Cabernet and Syrah."

Lebanon's white wines are not as interesting as its reds, although it's worth keeping an eye out for both the Riesling and Chardonnay from **Batroun Mountains**, made by UC-Davis trained winemaker Assaad Hark, as well as Source Blanche from Château Ka, Karam Winery's Cloud Nine and especially Ixsir's Blanc Altitudes, a blend of Sauvignon Blanc, Semillon and Viognier.

For all that, Lebanon's future as a fine wine producer will be based on its reds, particularly its blends. There are one or two good varietal wines around (including a Pinot Noir from Château St Thomas and Domaine des Tourelles Syrah du Liban Grande Cuvée), but nearly all of my favourite reds are assemblages using two or more of the following grapes: Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Cabernet Franc, Syrah, Cinsault, Carignan, Grenache and Mourvèdre. Combining something of Bordeaux's sophistication with the heat and spice of the Mediterranean is what Lebanon does best. Let's hope that politics, which has a habit of interfering unexpectedly in these parts, allows it to continue to do so.

<http://www.timatkin.com/corktalk?682#.Uq6KLH8ayK0>

Wine Quote of the Month:

Quickly, bring me a beaker of wine so that I may whet my mind and say something clever+. Aristophanes, in The Knights+4th century B.C.

Calendar of Events:

In this section we want to publicize any upcoming events that either the RWAF or local chapters are planning. An annual calendar will be maintained on the new website.

June 1-4, 2014: Rotary International Convention in Sydney, Portugal. Register early! Early registration ends on 15 January 2014. Go to the RI website or directly to: impromo@rotary.org.

Recommended Value Wines:

As we continue to do, we will list about ten value wines with each newsletter. These are wines from around the world that are readily available in many markets, are rated by some expert+as being at least 88 points (out of 100) and which cost \$20 USD or less. We would appreciate any additions suggested by any member. We feel that no matter what type of wine you enjoy, you ought to be able to find a good one at a reasonable price.

Year	Name of Wine	Specific Designation	Type	Cost	Rating	Rater
2010	Saint Hallett	Gamekeeper, Barossa Valley	Red Blend	\$9	90	WS
2010	Vina Zaco	Tempranillo	Rioja	\$11	90	WS
2009	Beronia	Tempranillo	Rioja	\$10	90	WA
2012	Pine Ridge	California	Chenin Blanc/Viognier	\$10	90	WA
2010	Norton	Mendoza, Argentina	Malbec	\$11	90	WS
2011	A to Z	Oregon	Pinot Noir	\$15	90	WS
2011	Patrick Puze	Chablis, Terroir de De Couveutte	White Burgundy	\$18	89	WA
2012	Chateau de Chemilly	Chablis, 1er Cru	White Burgundy	\$16	89	CCH
2008	Bodegas Emilio Moro	Tempranillo	Ribera del Duero	\$17	90	WA
2009	Muga	Tempranillo Blend	Rioja	\$20	91	WA

A Few Special Wines:

Year	Name of Wine	Specific Designation	Type	Cost	Rating	Rater
2010	Domain de Senechaux	Chateauneuf du Pape	Southern Rhone	\$47	95	WA
2009	Ch. Haut-Bages Liberal	Pauillac	Bordeaux	\$45	92	WA

WS = Wine Spectator+
 WA = Wine Advocate+ (Robert Parker)
 WE = Wine Enthusiast+
 CCH = Not yet rated, my score

We will always appreciate your comments and suggestions. You are receiving these newsletters because you are members of the RWAF and publishing a newsletter is one of the duties of a Rotary Fellowship. If you would like to

discontinue receiving these newsletters, please so indicate by return email and you will be removed from our address list.

Thank you for the continued opportunity to serve.

Conrad C. Heede, PDG
President
RWF