

To California

Where wine is both boom and bust.

It is the best of times, it is the worst of times. Words many a California wine maker and marketer are saying to themselves as they read the latest article about "Two Buck Chuck" by Bronco and contemplate how to respond to the flurry of daily emails from brokers and distributors asking for special allowances to compete with the latest California discount deals springing up from coast to coast.

I knew Chuck Shaw when he operated the Charles Shaw Winery in Napa and had the pleasure of dining with him at the winery in the company of various chain F&B VPs drawn to better understand his pioneering efforts with gamay grapes, the rootstock he privately declared he personally brought back without license over several trips to France. Chuck was an investment banker from Chicago, turned wine entrepreneur; another wealthy, well-traveled WASP determined to turn a large fortune into a small fortune by buying a winery and expecting to multiply his capital many times over. I liked him a lot: He had the passion, but not a winning strategy.

Kobrand represented him to the trade and they did a good job, but he was leading a one man crusade to glorify his California Beaujolais Nouveau. Beringer emulated his style and with their resources, quickly stole the spotlight: Then Chuck became involved in a difficult divorce and, with wine sales not meeting expectations, he was forced to close the winery. So that is the origin of "Two Buck Chuck".

Today, California produces some of the finest wines for the money in the world. The state's viticulture and viniculture industry has become a true science, increasingly guided by a new set of wine heroes. Many of the California cult wines are in a league with the best in Europe and, from this perspective, these are the best of times.

At the same time, there is a general oversupply of Chardonnay and other varietals. Every winery feels pressured to lower prices, discount, and do whatever necessary to reduce inventories. To make matters worse, Australia has landed some amazingly good values like Yellow Tail that sells to the retailer for \$4 per 750ml. And let's not forget "Two Buck Chuck" at \$1.99 to the consumer in California and \$2.99 elsewhere. A Tale of Two Cities it is most certainly.

The big public wineries heavily promote and deal, in part because they must maintain their stock price and larger inventories. The smaller wineries, especially family-owned wineries, are not worried about their stock price, only protecting their hard-fought brand positioning in the market. So they are holding pat. There is a late report, though, that several cult wineries, whose sales were thought to have an inelastic relationship to price, are quietly lowering prices.

A good example of a large winery committed to holding the line on pricing regardless of the effect on its stock is Robert Mondavi. As a result, their stock price has suffered significantly, but they are holding steady. On the other side of the Mayacamas is Rodney Strong Vineyards in Sonoma County. They are resisting any new discounts and holding their pricing, believing they continue to represent a superior value to the consumer. Let's hope better times are almost upon us, one and all.

Fred Tibbitts, president of Fred Tibbitts & Associates, is the foremost wine by the glass consultant for chain hotels.



The Globetrotting Wine Guy

VINING & DINING

"In my 28 years in the Hospitality industry I thought I had become very knowledgeable about wine," says Fernando Salazar, corporate director of F&B for Omni Hotels. "What an awakening I received at Trinchero Family Estates' Vine To Dine educational program."

He and 14 other Omni Hospitality executives attended a three-day program at the winery. Split into two teams that competed with each other, the first challenge was the Wheel of Aroma. After a lively and informative discussion of wine aromas, off-aromas, and developing an aroma vocabulary, they sat around the Aroma Wheel (a la the Wheel of Fortune) and took turns spinning it. When it stopped, a vial at that location was picked up for aroma identification. After a few seconds a member of the other team took a try. This was followed by a truly blind wine tasting. Lights out. Dark wine glasses. A dramatic lesson in the importance of sight and smell to the enjoyment of wine. An al fresco lunch became a lesson in the pairing of wines and food, including explanations of why these pairings were made. Taste balance, texture, and flavor are the keys. Learning how to utilize the basic tastes of sweet, sour, salt, bitter, and umami (the recently discovered fifth taste) to bring food into



balance with wine provides amazing results.

"This was the most outstanding wine educational experience I have ever had," says Salazar. "We have used much of what we learned in the training of our staff, emphasizing that wine education can be fun. Our servers have become much more comfortable in presenting and discussing wines with guests. Wine sales per cover have increased, and it is common for guests to compliment us on the knowledgeability of

our servers.

Barry Wiss is the senior director of education and hospitality for Trinchero Family Estates. He adds, "Whether its training your staff or serving your guests, if you can relate to someone's passion and then feed that passion, its a win-win situation. For further information on our educational programs, please ask your local Trinchero Family Estates representative." —Dave Steadman

*Trinchero Family Estates
Bill Barry, 800-945-8466 x8887
Trincherofamilyestates.com*

UNDER THE COVERS



Recipes from Home

David Page and Barbara Shinn,
Foreword by Calvin Trillin
Workman, May 2001, 430 pages, hardcover, \$30

David Page came to New York via some of San Francisco's top restaurants (Masa's Postrio, and Foto) yet was raised in Wisconsin. Page's partner and wife, Barbara Shinn, hails from Ohio. Loving the simple integrity of America's culinary roots, they offer this ode to American home cooking. Organized like Grandma's kitchen with chapters on soups, chowders, stocks; salads, relishes, slaws; vegetables, grains and beans; fish and shellfish; birds; meats; cheese; breads and muffins; and sweets, you'll find fresh interpretations of scalloped potatoes, macaroni and cheese, roast chicken, homemade pickles, chocolate pudding, and cookies "that would make anyone's front porch a neighborhood Mecca" (*Gourmet*).

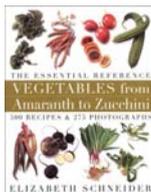
PARTNERS IN SUCCESS

WYNDHAM WINE FESTS

"We have 100 properties we visit once a month to put on wine training meetings for management and service staff," says Dieter Kadoke, VP of F&B for Wyndham Hotels and Resorts. "Our aim is to take the mystique out of wine, to make our people comfortable about discussing wine with our guests in a nonintimidating way. The more our guests learn about wine, the more they order."

Seasonal festivals run for three months each, three times a year. These festivals have unusual themes and feature seasonal foods and a selection of wines by the glass and bottle that are not on the regular 40-bottle wine list. These festivals bounce wine sales by 25 to 30 percent.

"When we introduced wines from Trincherio Family Estates for one of these festivals, guest reaction was so favorable that we added some of them to our core wine list and have brought in other Trincherio wines for subsequent festivals," adds Kadoke. "Servers report comments like 'this is a great any time wine,' 'very pleasing,' and 'as the meal goes on this wine gets even better.' These are the only festival wines that have made enough of an impression, not only to be brought back for future festivals, but to be added to our core list." Sauvignon Blanc and Chardonnay from the Trincherio Family Selections are fruit-forward, quaffable, perfectly balanced wines. Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot are flavorful, complex, and elegant. Trincherio Mario's Reserve Chardonnay is made in a rich, complex Burgundian style, and Trincherio Mario's Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon has Bordeaux-style cap management and lengthy aging in a combination of new French and American oak barrels. —DS



Vegetables from Amaranth to Zucchini: The Essential Reference; 500 Recipes 275

Photographs

Elizabeth Schneider

William Morrow & Co, December, 2001, 800 pages, hardcover, \$60

A magnum opus of the vegetable kingdom, each vegetable entry includes the Latin name; varieties and species; color photographs; history, and tips on selecting, storing, and preparing—including quotes from outside experts. It clarifies questions one might have, for example, about the bok choy family (try and figure out the difference between yu choy and choy sum if you are not an expert in Asian produce). Next, there are well-chosen recipes. Finally, the book includes detailed descriptions of dishes collected by interviewing a wide range of the best chefs. Throughout, Schneider is informative, interesting, opinionated, and frank. If a vegetable's a dud, she says so.



... And Beyond

From sea to shining sea, regional wines are extending Wine America.

Most wine consumers from abroad consider California to be the extent of the U.S. wine industry. They have no idea wine is cultivated to some degree in every state of the Union. But, what is even more telling is that the majority of Americans know little more than their overseas counterparts with regard to the primary U.S. wine growing regions. The fact is that wine has been cultivated in America since the arrival of the Pilgrims in the Massachusetts Bay Colony, as well as in the Virginia Colony, and of course with the Jesuit priests in California. The first winery in New York state was in the Hudson Valley, not the Finger Lakes region, as most might imagine.

While it is true that California produces more premium wine than any other state, California is not all she wrote. New York, Washington, Oregon, Virginia, and Pennsylvania all produce premium wine. The real story is the explosion of small family wineries from coast to coast, encouraging people to try a glass of the pride of their home state. Across the land, wineries are utilizing the latest viticultural and vinicultural techniques to produce better and better wine.

New York

New York State with the Finger Lakes, Hudson Valley, and several appellations on Long Island combine to make New York State one of the top wine-producing states in the Union. According to the *Wine Spectator* in June of 2000, "Long Island has emerged as the regional wine leader in the Eastern United States." The North Fork and the South Fork are New York's hottest appellations, and their top-rated wines have become darlings of Manhattan's finest restaurants.

I was a participant at the Hotel School at Cornell University a few years ago in a blind tasting of European, California, and New York Hamptons and North Fork wines. We were told one of the wines was Lafite Rothschild and dared to identify it. I picked a North Fork wine to be Lafite, yet I was confident without reservation of my vote. When the wines were stripped of their brown bag covers and the truth known, I was shocked. And, that was the point of the tasting: New York has developed some really fine wines, such as those from Bedell Cellars, Palmer Vineyards, Pindar Vineyards, and Schneider Vineyards, that compete nicely with their counterparts from Europe and California. The best ones are made in small quantities, but the same holds true for California and the rest of the world. If you're ever bored, do your own blind tasting of some of the gems from the East End of Long Island with a couple of name brands from California and Europe. You might be pleasantly surprised.

Washington

Washington State is a standout with stars such as Barnard Griffin, DeLille Cellars, L'Ecole No 41, Leonetti Cellar, Woodward Canyon Winery, Columbia Winery and Covey Run Winery. The largest wine company is Stimson Lane, by far the largest producer in Washington with its primary label being Chateau St. Michelle. Even Stimson Lane produces vineyard-specific wines that compete with the best in the state. For several years, Seattle hosted the World Vinifera Conference, which convened some of the world's top wine authorities, wine educators, and industry professionals for a wine and food fest at the city's top restaurants and hotels. Today "A Taste of Washington" tours the country, bringing with it some of the best examples of what's hot in Washington.

Oregon

Oregon is the Burgundy of America, producing some of the finest American examples of Pinot Noir, Pinot Gris, and Chardonnay. One of the foremost wineries in Oregon is King Estate. Its Pinot Noir and Pinot Gris are legendary. The top-growing regions are the North and South Willamette Valleys, Umpqua Valley, and The Rogue Valley with nearly 200 wineries in production.

When you're away from home, look at the wine list and see what is available from that state: You never know, it might be the best glass of wine you've ever tried. —FT