

Red Feet Wine Market
HANG TIME To Oak or Not to Oak?
Thursday, February 5, 2009

PRICES ARE FOR:

1 BOTTLE–6 BOTTLES–12 BOTTLES (mixing is ok!)

Sandy Cove Sauvignon Blanc 2008 (Marlborough, New Zealand) 100% Sauvignon Blanc
\$16.50 each - \$14.85 (6) - \$14.03 (12)

Floral and grapefruit aromas lead into more grapefruit and its pith on the palate with touches of peach. Just the right amount of acidity in this refreshing medium-bodied charmer with a long finish. Lovely with lemon-touched fish or chicken.

A to Z Chardonnay 2006 (Oregon)

100% Chardonnay

\$17 each - \$15.30 (6) - \$14.45 (12)

The nose offers yeasty golden apples; the palate adds flavors of orange blossom and pineapple. The texture is round and creamy with a touch of acidity. Balanced, focused, and elegant. Fabulous with scallops.

Matchbook Chardonnay 2006 (Dunnigan Hills,

California) 100% Chardonnay

\$17 each - \$15.30 (6) - \$14.45 (12)

This wine is barrel fermented and aged, and shows it with deep color and aromas of toasted nuts, vanilla, and honey. Rich and round in the mouth, it offers big flavors of baked apple, hazelnut, and Asian pear. Try with spicy Jamaican chicken.

Glatzer Blaufränkisch 2006 (Carnuntum, Austria)

100% Blaufränkisch

\$16.50 each - \$14.85 (6) - \$14.03 (12)

Plum and spice, white pepper and gingersnaps start the parade. Dried herb flavors are joined by mulberry, cherry, and boysenberry, finishing with juicy acidity. Great food wine—loves poultry and pork!

Volver 2005 (La Mancha, Spain)

100% Tempranillo

\$20 each - \$18 (6) - \$17 (12)

A complex set of aromas—cola, cherry, herb, clove, vanilla, tobacco, and camphor—let you know you're in for a ride. In the glass, the wine changes by the moment!

Black fruit, blueberries, clove, cigar box, wrapped in vanilla'd oak and supported by fine tannins. Big, intense, and long. Needs big food like lamb, beef, and bison.

Lockwood Cabernet Sauvignon 2006 (Monterey,

California) 99.7% Cabernet, 0.3% Malbec

\$14 each - \$12.60 (6) - \$11.90 (12)

Sweet wood, raisins, and black fruit aromas introduce black fruit and black pepper flavors. Good acidity and tannin levels make this both a food wine and a hearty stand-alone sipper. Will even improve with time.

See you next week for HANG TIME!

Our subject will be Romantic Sips.

EXPLORE THE WORLD IN YOUR GLASS

To Oak or Not to Oak?

The issue of oak is often a touchy one for both winemakers and consumers. What kind? Use it for all or some of the wine? When? How long? What do people mean when they talk about wood and wine?

First, they usually mean oak, though some other woods are used. Oak is hard, supple and watertight and has a natural affinity for wine. Secondly, they usually mean either French or American oak. French oak comes from four major regions; it is dense and fine-grained, smooth and subtle. American oak is stronger, with larger pores, more astringency, and more pronounced flavors, especially vanilla. Either type of oak may be made into a barrel, and the most common size is 225 liters (59 gal.). The inside of a barrel is toasted to varying degrees, adding another layer of flavor. The newer the barrel, the more flavor it imparts. As barrels age, their pores become clogged by deposits from earlier uses and their supply of flavor compounds is exhausted. The smaller the barrel, the greater its effect. The higher surface-to-volume ratio in small containers means that more of the wine comes in contact with wood.

Wood makes its appearance at two critical stages in winemaking: fermentation and ageing. When fermenting grape juice comes into contact with oak, chemicals in the oak are released into the wine. This is especially true for white wines, because they are fermented without their skins and seeds; reds contain a great deal of solid matter, preventing juice from having as much contact with the wood. These oak tannins and other chemicals affect the stability, clarity, and flavors of the wines. Many wines undergo a second, bacterial fermentation; this is common for Chardonnay (producing a buttery flavor) and all reds. This malolactic fermentation is often done in oak barrels; it gives toasty, vanilla and tropical flavors to whites and clove, spice, or smoky flavors to reds.

Oak barrels are also used to age wines, both red and white. Because oak is porous, a small quantity of air slowly enters the barrel, increasing the complexity of the flavors and causing them to blend together. Wine must contain enough acidity and fruit flavor for this to be an advantage—if these qualities are missing, the result is a flabby, overly woody product completely lacking balance, power, or charm. When the oak regimen (age and size of barrel, length of time) is appropriate, the result is a softening of the harshness and bitterness of the wine, an introduction of secondary and tertiary flavors, a deepening of color, and a foundation for ageing. Wines that are aged in oak are ready for bottle ageing both before and after release to the public; some will continue to improve in the bottle for a decade.

Today we'll start with the kind of wine that rarely sees wood—a New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc. Wood contact would remove floral aromas and freshness. We'll contrast an unoaked Chardonnay with one that is barrel aged. We'll compare two reds, one without oak, one with quite a bit. We'll finish with a wine that is almost always oaked. As you taste, look for differences in the mouthfeel (roundness) of the wine. See if you can find the toasty, spicy notes associated with oak. Decide what flavor profile you like, and let it guide your wine selections.