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More great new wines from Hospice du Rhone

Dennis Schaefer

June 19, 2008 7:20 AM

One of the beauties of Hospice du Rhone, the popular event held in May in Paso Robles that spotlights great Rhone and Rhone-style wines from around the world, is you're exposed to a wide variety of producers, some of which are familiar, some not. I've discovered many smaller producers at the annual Hospice du Rhone events and, though their production is limited, they are worth seeking out. If you can't find them locally, try online.

- Alta Maria (www.altamaria.com): Alta Maria is a collaboration between winemaker Paul Wilkins (formerly of Alban) and winegrower James Ontiveros (Native 9). Just now being released is their 2006 Nielson Vineyard grenache that has a splash of mourvedre from Bien Nacido Vineyard mixed in. It's quite an exemplary grenache: gutsy, bold and sturdy. But the real treat is how much substance it has, which gives it substantial length on the palate. Only 120 cases made.

- Skylark (www.skylarkwine.com): Another collaboration here, this time between John Lancaster and Robert Perkins, the wine directors at the famed restaurant Boulevard in San Francisco. Having built up many relationships in their time in the wine biz, their next logical step was to source grapes and make their own wine. The 2004 Skylark grenache, from Mendocino County grapes, has ripe raspberries flavors busting out all over and great staying power on the finish. The 2004 Skylark syrah, from Sonoma County grapes, has telltale cool-climate bacon fat as a condiment to the deep, dark plum and berry fruit flavors.

- Tercero (www.tercerowines.com): This is the brand new label of Larry Schaffer (his day job is



Winemaker Larry Schaffer pours his Tercero wines at Hospice du Rhone.
DENNIS SCHAEFER PHOTO





at Fess Parker Winery) and his wife, Christie. Quite impressive is the 2006 grenache blanc from Camp Four Vineyard, which has a floral and honeyed mouth entry, then gets additional flavor complexity from a waxy, nutty component. It's a perfect white for food or just sipping on the patio. You see very few mourvedres bottled as a varietal but the Tercero 2006 mourvedre has dark plum fruit conserve, with a hint of typical leather and animal undertones; it's a smooth operator and ready to enjoy right now. The 2006 Camp Four grenache is a jumpy, jivey and juicy red wine that's a fine quaffer, while the 2006 Watch Hill Vineyard grenache is deeper, harder, faster and more complex with great fruit concentration. Perhaps the top of the Tercero line is the 2006 Cuvee Christie, a grenache, syrah, mourvedre blend that has plenty of flavor action with additional dark fruit underpinnings but also shows restraint and balance to become a complete red wine.



- Point Concepcion (www.pointconcepcionwine.com): This is peripatetic Peter Cargasacchi's wine label and the one wine I tasted was a classic cool-climate syrah from the 2005 vintage, called Cuvee Jalama. The thing about cool-climate syrah is that it seems to allow all the potential flavors of syrah to develop, and the grapes from his vineyard are about the coolest in the county. Well-tempered dark fruit flavors hit the sweet spot on mid palate, then mellow out on the finish.



- Paul Lato (www.pauillatowines.com): Paul Lato is passionate about his wines, which was even obvious to folks who approached his booth to taste his wines for the first time. His 2006 Larner Vineyard syrah is a tour de force: big, rich, full-bodied and hugely concentrated, but still showing balance and restraint for such a powerful wine. The 2006 Bien Nacido Vineyard syrah has dark fruit flavors that run even stronger and deeper than his Larner! A huge wine that, once again, walks the tightrope of perfect balance. Production is extremely limited, but his wines can often be found locally on lists at Chef Rick's, Wine Cask and The Hungry Cat. Get on the mailing list at the Web site.



- McPrice Myers (www.mcpricemyers.com): I usually don't mention someone's appearance as a prerequisite for winemaking, but I dig the fact that McPrice Myers, with his stout, wine barrel body build and chiseled goatee, could be mistaken for some bad-ass Harley biker dude. His 2006 L'Ange Rouge grenache has bright, ripe, red fruits but, at the same time, has darker, deeper fruits that show scintillating resilience. The 2006 Larner Vineyard grenache/syrah is totally different; it's bright, sunny and fruit laden -- so yummy it's almost like the cotton candy of wine! The 2006 Beautiful Earth, mostly syrah, is jumpy and in the moment, with blueberry, boysenberry and plum fruit. It's so easy to quaff; I love the vivacity and liveliness of this red. The 2006 Les Gallets is primarily syrah, rich and full-bodied with blueberry and blackberry fruit, slathered with plenty of new oak, which the fruit easily stands up to. It has fantastic saturated fruit flavors and a lengthy finish.

- Herman Story (www.hermanstorywines.com): Winemaker Russell From named his label after his grandfather, Herman Story. There was a line all day (both days) to taste the wines he was pouring at his booth. Two grenaches I tasted were both right on the money. His lesser 2006 Santa Barbara County grenache has all the jammy and chewy red fruit flavors in spades; juicy and fruity, it still has a presence and liveliness in the mouth. His 2006 Larner Vineyard grenache goes the ante one further. Great red fruits initially but then the depth charge of dark fruits kicks in, plus all the spiciness of nutmeg, ginger and toast.

- Adelaida (www.adelaida.com): Winemaker Terry Culton keeps things interesting with his 2005 Version, a Rhone-style red blend that really highlights his highly refined blending skills. It's completely accessible with a juicy mouth feel and deep dish flavors that are sustained to the finish. By the way, I recently tasted (from my cellar) the Adelaida 2003 syrah reserve, from Glenrose Vineyard, and it was outstanding. The Adelaida red wines age very well.

Wine expert Dennis Schaefer's column appears every other week in the Food section. E-mail him at life@newspress.com.

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