

A few weeks back I had the pleasure of attending a Wine Tasting that featured Oregon Pinot Noir. The tasting was the Kickoff Event of the new wine tasting season for this particular wine group. Before the group had their first meeting, they decided that this year was going to be different; this was going to be a year when serious learning would take place, a departure from the past emphasis on the Social. It is with that caveat in mind that we charged forward.

We chose Oregon Pinot Noir to start with because it is a United States Wine that we recognized as having Good Quality and it is an excellent companion to food. Furthermore we decided to choose no more than four wines that were in close proximity to each other, which in this case would be wines from Dundee, Oregon. Dundee is in the northern portion of the Willamette Valley. Why only four wines? Because some felt that after tasting four, the wines would become indistinguishable, and our palettes would become dull. I agreed.

The first wine that we chose for tasting was called KUDOS. This is a 2015 Pinot Noir from Willamette. Around \$19. It was young, light to fruity, with some sweetness. A very simple wine. The tasters picked up on those characteristics and we moved on to number two.

Number two was more complex. It was a 2011 Pinot Noir from Anam Cara Nicholas Estate. Around \$36. 2011 was an excellent year for Pinot from Oregon. The wine marked one of the best vintages of Oregon in recent memory. The wine carried aromas of strawberry, red cherry, spice, rose petal, and dried herbs. The tasters were doing pretty well as they picked up on some of the flavors, and so we went into food matching. Here we were advised by the winery to keep it simple. Try salmon on a cedar plank, roast chicken or duck with a light cherry sauce. Avoid garlic and tomatoes. Go easy on the seasoning. The more seasoning you apply, the more you overpower the wine.

Wine number three was my personal favorite. It was a 2014 Pinot Noir from the Four Graces Vineyard. The price was a sale price at \$18.99. The winery is quite young; it has only been in business since 2003, and has since then changed hands, having been sold to the Foley Group. (This is not a bad thing and we will visit the Foley Group in the future. The Foley Group saw a chance to purchase a quality house and add it to their own family of wineries.) At the tasting we could detect a medium-bodied wine with aromas of cherry, white pepper, and pine. On the palate one could detect flavors of cherry pie, espresso, and some sandalwood. The wine definitely had a generous finish. The recommended food pairing was a baked brie with a warm

cherry jam and fresh baked french bread. To die for. The good news did not end there. The website carried almost 30 additional recipes. I must admit that I stayed around for the reading of extra recipes.

The fourth wine was from Torii Mor. A 2014 release that was on sale for \$17.99 at Costco. The bottling we had at the tasting was a blend of 12 Pinot Noir grapes from all over the Willamette Valley, and the winemaker was keeping the ratio of each grape a trade secret. The tasters found the wine to be somewhat sweet upon entry onto the palate, and on mid palate the wine carried a velvety-fruity goodness. The finish was a sensation of pure Oregon Pinot Noir. The winery was wide open as to food pairing. There were suggestions for many – seafood, red meats, appetizers, soups . . . It appeared the winery was passing on the message that here is a wine that will go well with many, many preparations. Do not be afraid to experiment.

These were the four wines that the tasters tried and now it was time to vote. Sixteen tasters voted, and Torii Mor by a landslide. I was crushed. I'd just assumed The Four Graces would win.

WINESPEAK

This wine tasting was a success. The tasters wanted to start out the new season with a tasting experience that would give them the confidence to probe further into the world of wine. By choosing wines that were produced in close proximity to each other, and at the same time formulated by different winemakers, it gave them the opportunity experience the terroir of the Willamette Valley. Allow me to explain. The Willamette Valley is one AVA (American Viticulture Area). Within the Willamette Valley AVA are six sub AVA's. Three of the six were represented in the tasting. The first was the Chahalem Mountain which is where Anam Cara is produced. The second is Dundee Hills which gives us Torii Mor and 1/2 of The Four Graces. The last sub AVA is Yamhill Carlton which is where Kudos and the other 1/2 of Four Graces originate from. You can drive the area to visit the three AVA's and you will realize how close they are in proximity. However, if you stop and think about the wine that came from these areas, and how each of the wines carries its own characteristics, you are very close to understanding terroir.