



July 2015

Grapevine

Price Chopper Plaza 1355 New Scotland Road Slingerlands, NY 12159
518.439.5535 slingerlandswine@yahoo.com www.slingerlandswine.com

Store Hours: Mon – Sat, 9 – 9 & Sun, 12 – 6

Sniff, Sip, Savor: A Look at 90s Rated Wines

Ode to a delicate Pinot Noir, buttery Chardonnay or powerhouse Cab. Tasting notes by revered wine critics often sound like poetry, a literary feast for the senses to be devoured while one tilts and swirls the glass to observe color and body, sniffs to detect aroma, tastes by sucking in air to aerate and release the wine's flavors, then swallows to note texture and finish.

That sounds like a lot of rules, you say. Why not just sip and enjoy? Certainly, that is how the majority of us taste wine most or all of the time. Wine critics, however, who score wines according to a numerical scale, use certain criteria for ratings and the accompanying tasting notes. If you look at them as a filter that makes your own purchases and tasting experiences easier and more pleasurable, than they are worth consideration.

Among the most well known publications in the US are Robert Parker's *The Wine Advocate*, *Wine Spectator*, *Wine Enthusiast Magazine*, *Wine & Spirits Magazine* and *International Wine Cellar*. Taking into consideration differences between critics and publications and using a scale of 50 to 100 points, most consider wines above a rating of 80 to be average to above average; 85 and above is good and drinkable now; 90 to 94 indicates a wine is outstanding; and 95 to 100 is awarded to excellent wines with the ability to improve with age. Most tastings are conducted blind.

Wine ratings in the US were first popularized by Robert Parker, who



launched his publication in 1978. He believed that wine consumers need an impartial resource without industry sponsorship. Today, Parker's *The Wine Advocate*, is among the most recognized and respected publications, and his 100-point scale is considered the standard. The **2011 Bodegas Senorio de Barahonda Yecla** is a blend of Monastrell and Syrah, which Parker calls rich, dense and chewy. \$12.99 92 RP

Wine Spectator started out as a San Diego newspaper born in 1976 that was sold three years later to its current owner, while *Wine Enthusiast Magazine* is part of a larger wine marketing company located outside of Manhattan. Like others, they have their procedures for wine tastings and reviews, and they have their followers, consumers and professionals alike. Their Top 100 wines lists published each year are eagerly awaited by readers. The **2013 Rombauer Chardonnay** is complex and layered, with notes of vanilla and peach. \$32.99 93 WS. The **2012 Catena Malbec**

is aromatic of tobacco, spice and molasses with a palate of black fruit and earth. \$16.99 91 WE, while the **2013 Francis Ford Coppola Votre Santé Pinot Noir** is elegant and medium bodied with aromas of a pine forest. \$9.99 91 WE

Considered by many to be on par with Robert Parker's wine reviews and his publication's newsletter like format, Stephen Tanzer began publishing reviews in *International Wine Cellar* in 1985. Though Tanzer's rating system differs somewhat from Parker's, their emphasis on reviews sets them apart from other publications that also feature lifestyle components. With all Tanzer's archives acquired in 2014 by Antonio Galloni's *Vinous* website, Tanzer continues to publish reviews on his blog *Winophilia*. He writes that the **2012 Tasca d'Almerita Lamùri Nero d'Avola** is an elegant Sicilian red with richness and silken tannins. \$13.69 91 ST

Formerly a tasting staff member for *The Wine Advocate*, Antonio Galloni's *Vinous* is a respected online source of wine reviews

and ratings, and Italian wines are among his specialties. Italy's 2010 vintage of Brunello was considered stellar, thanks to ideal weather that year. In his review of the **2010 Caparzo Brunello di Montalcino**, Galloni called it lifted and fresh, with softness that makes it drinkable now or worthy of cellaring for ten years. \$32.49 93 AG

There are critics of the rating system, including Joshua Greene, Editor-in-Chief of *Wine & Spirits Magazine* which does publish ratings. To underscore his conviction that they are not useful, Greene publishes one issue each year without ratings. Others not in favor quip that ratings have created a homogenization of wine production because winemakers tailor their winemaking to the likes of others to achieve a comparably high score.

The best way to find your wine critic compass is to taste the wines and read the reviews to see how often you agree or disagree. Peruse our 90s Club section and attend the 90s tastings. Give yourself permission to experiment and use the critics ratings as a guide to your own scale. And as always, stop in and share with us your personal wine ratings. ♦

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Customer wine pick of the month
Chris Ayres: 2014 Mulderbosch Sauvignon Blanc (SA) \$12.99 (reg \$14.99) Elderflower aromas are balanced by notes of fresh figs and zesty grapefruit.

Wine Tastings Fri, 4-7 & Sat, 2-5

Fri 7/10: Wines from the 90s Club: 90s-rated wines from the front page of the July newsletter.

Sat 7/11, 7/18 & 8/1: New Arrivals: Our latest finds.

Tues 7/14: Wines for Bastille Day: A few French stunners to celebrate French Independence Day.

Fri 7/17: July Staff Picks: Try our current favorites.

Fri 7/24: Wines for Opening Day at Saratoga: The Track opens today. We'll have wines for six weeks of Track days.

Sat 7/25: Tour de France: Victory wines for the winner!

Fri 7/31: Summer Lovin': Whites, Rosés and Reds for Summer.

News & Events

Seasons change and so do faces. With Ted's exit, Max and Ian have become fixtures at the store with Sheila. Carol decided to come back from her around-the-US tour; so she, Karen, Bill, Damian and Graham round out the cast of characters.

With Bastille Day on July 14th and the final day of the Tour de France on July 25th, we'll have tastings to celebrate these ohlala French festive days. Saratoga Racing opens Friday, July 24th and goes until September 7th, so we'll kick it off with a special tasting.

Look for a new display of wines for these Summer 2015 celebration days, and take advantage of our 90s tasting on July 10th. We hope to see you at the tastings!

Raspberry Ricotta Cake

Courtesy of Food & Wine Magazine, via friend and customer, Gina Kucinski

Nonstick vegetable oil spray
1½ cups all-purpose flour
1 cup sugar
2 tsp baking powder
¾ tsp kosher salt
3 large eggs
1½ cups ricotta
½ tsp vanilla extract
½ cup (1 stick) unsalted butter, melted
1 cup fresh or frozen raspberries, divided



Preheat oven to 350°. Line a 9"-diameter cake pan with parchment paper and lightly coat with nonstick spray. Whisk flour, sugar, baking powder, and salt in a large bowl.

Whisk eggs, ricotta, and vanilla in a medium bowl until smooth; fold into dry ingredients just until blended. Then fold in butter, followed by ¾ cup raspberries, taking care not to crush berries.

Scrape batter into prepared pan and scatter remaining ¼ cup raspberries over top. Bake cake until golden brown and a tester inserted into the center comes out clean, 50–60 minutes. Let cool at least 20 minutes before unmolding.

Do Ahead: Cake can be made 2 days ahead. Store tightly wrapped at room temperature.

Cucumber Mint Fizz

Makes eight drinks

This refreshing cocktail takes advantage of summer cucumbers.

1 1/2 cups Crop Organic Cucumber Vodka
2 English cucumbers; 1 peeled and coarsely chopped, 1 left whole
1/4 cup mint leaves, plus 8 for garnish
1 lime, cut into 8 wedges
2 750 ml bottles sparkling water
1/2 to 1 cup simple syrup



Put vodka, chopped cucumber and 1/4 cup mint leaves in a glass jar. Refrigerate 1 hour. Strain; discard cucumber. Can be refrigerated for up to 2 days.

Using a vegetable peeler, shave the remaining cucumber lengthwise into wide strips; discard seeds.

Fill eight tumblers with ice. Add 3 cucumber strips and 3 tablespoons infused vodka to each glass. Squeeze, then drop, a lime wedge into each. Top with sparkling water; stir in 1 to 2 tablespoons syrup and garnish with a mint leaf. Toast friends to warm summer days.

July 2015 Staff Wine Picks

Sheila: 2013 Stags' Leap Napa Valley Chardonnay (Napa Valley) **\$19.99** (reg \$27.99) A delicious intersection of richness and minerality that benefits from classical viticulture and winemaking. *Steamed lobster with drawn butter

Max: 2013 Mas de Gourgonnier Les Baux de Provence (Provence) **\$11.99** (reg \$13.99) A blend of Cabernet Sauvignon, Carignan, Cinsault, Grenache and Mourvedre. Robust with dark berries and anise *Grilled flank steak

Ian: 2010 Equus (Spain) **\$12.99** (reg \$14.99) An 85/10/5 blend of Tempranillo, Cabernet Sauvignon and Syrah, it is oak aged for nine months and several months in bottle. Lively and rich with coffee notes. *Blue cheese burgers

Bill: 2011 Domaine Saint Gayan Rasteau (France) **\$17.99** (reg \$20.99) A 65/25/10 blend of Grenache, Mourvedre and Syrah that sees a long fermentation and is aged in cement. *Grilled lamb chops with herbes de Provence and olives

Damian: 2014 Funcken Hausen Malbec Blend (Mendoza) **\$13.69** (reg \$15.99) *1 liter This blend of 50/35/15 Malbec, Bonarda and Syrah is light and bright with ripe fruit and lush tannins. *Extra thick bone-in pork chops on the grill

Graham: 2010 Monte Antico (Toscana) **\$9.99** (reg \$11.99) An 85/10/5 blend of Sangiovese, Merlot and Cabernet aged for one year in oak and six months in bottle. Full-bodied and lush with bold fruit. *Platter of prosciutto and Italian cheeses