



wine

Richard Watson

Lesser known wines merit attention

It wasn't so long ago that Mendocino County, a beautiful area of craggy mountains and luxurious redwoods, produced only blending and jug wines. The name wasn't esteemed. Napa meant magic. Sonoma, to the south, was better than respectable.

And as recently as 20 years ago there were few wineries. The area was known as isolated, beautiful and devoid of viticultural excellence.

Then, in mid 1960s and early 1970s, a series of events occurred to change this. In 1964 the Pareducci winery switched from being a roadside producer of bulk

wines to a maker of fine varieties.

When, in 1968, the Bernard Feltzer family established a winery north of Ukiah and began promoting the mendocino appellation, the trend had set in. Mendocino thereafter meant quality wine.

OTHER WINERIES followed. Wiebel and Cresta Blanca (Giuld owned) came up from Livermore and in the early 1970s both the Husch and Edmeades Vineyards opened in the Anderson Valley near Philo to the west of Ukiah. Since then, in the mid '70s, both Dashch Vineyards and Navarro Vineyards have been producing from An-

deron Valley grapes. Fortunately, at least two of the wineries, and the best of the lot, are generously available in Michigan today. Pareducci offers a large selection of reasonable priced wines and Feltzer is widely esteemed for its reds, especially Zinfandel.

Try particularly the Ricetti Vineyard release to use as a benchmark of what a big yet elegant Zinfandel should taste like. Allow breathing time on these. They are bit full of thought juices. Other Feltzer Zinfandels are worth trying but less distinguished.

Also in Michigan, but less interesting, are the

occasionally available Wiebel and rarely found Cresta Blanca Labels. The former is best known for the wide range of moderately priced sparkling wines it produces.

AT THIS WRITING, rumors are strong that both older Philo wineries, Husch and Edmeades, are due in the state soon. When they become available both will be worth trying.

The former is especially esteemed for its Pinot Noir, the latter for its Cabernet Sauvignon and White Riesling. The Philo area, it should be noted, is considerably cooler than the rest of Mendocino

and does especially well with the "cooler" grapes.

If one buys by the label, and we all do, it is well to note the appellation of the grapes in the bottle. Napa, of course, is to be esteemed, as is Sonoma County.

But Mendocino (only 12,000 acres) and, noted last issue, Monterey (nearly 50,000 acres) are both worthy of consideration, especially for red wines. They tend to cost less so far than Napa wines, but the micro-climates of California are many and varied — explore the lesser known along with the older dependables.

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