

Entertainment

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(O7A)

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Zinfandels: crisp, clean, elegant and about \$6

It was really not very long ago that the drinking of off-white wines (roses, as they were called) was considered bad form by wine enthusiasts. And for good reason; they tended, all of them, to be light, rather sweet and insipid things.

Things began to change less than a decade ago when California winemakers began to make off-whites from premium varietal grapes and labeled them so. Usually the word rose was not used but the idea was the same.

There developed a trend to use lightly pressed red grapes, allowing only a minimum of skin contact (where a wine's color comes) to produce a light, slightly sweet wine of some distinction. Pinot Noir, Cabernet and especially Zinfandel were used.

THEN, in the late 1970s, when wine drinking became increasingly popular and white wines replaced the cocktail, the movement accelerated. And there was another reason.

The movement to increased wine consumption in our nation has been mostly a white one, leaving a decreasing demand for most red wines, especially Zinfandel. The volume of that grape in the ground, already producing, had to be dealt with. And so it was, using huge quantities to produce what has become a national varietal favorite, White Zinfandel wine.

To the winemaker, the advantages are tremendous. He can sell the product readily at a sound profit; it consumes his grapes, and he can produce it cheaply. Indeed, its popularity has



wine
Richard Watson

probably kept hundreds of acres of Zinfandel grapes from being replaced with white grapes today.

ALL OF THE ABOVE is an extended way of announcing that the 1984 crop of White Zinfandel is rapidly appearing on local wine shelves and has been for the last month or so. As of early December, when this column was written,

there are at least 10 of them to date, and more will follow, probably by the time you read this.

Again, just a couple of months ago these were still grapes. Most were harvested in September, crushed and fermented within a few days. They were in their bottles by Oct. 1 and shipped by Nov. 1.

No slow aging, no use of expensive oak to add complexity, no taking up precious and expensive storage space, no inventory taxes paid to the state of California. And selling for about \$6 a bottle, as most of them do, they represent good turnaround for the winemakers.

IT IS DIFFICULT to compare White Zinfandel; the similarities are greater than the differences. All tend to be fruity, slightly sweet and low in alcohol. However, recent trials with all 10 of those just issued revealed these attributes.

The two issues from Beringer, one under their own name with a Napa appellation, is the crispest, cleanest and most elegant of the whole group. Its companion, under the Los Hermanos label, comes only in a 1.5-liter bottle at the same price as the parent issue.

The jug is a transparent thing, lacking in flavors and essence, a simple quaff. Low in alcohol and character but most affordable. (It has a superior companion, an '84 White Cabernet, one with excellent fruit and color.)

To issue a White Zinfandel is Sutter Home. They have made and will sell one million cases of the stuff. It is a sweet, orangey thing, made to appeal to the most inexperienced wine drinker. I am thankful that my sample of this was free so I did not seem to encourage them into making more of this next year.

From the Sierra foothills region in eastern California, home of some of its finest Zinfandel grapes, come four issues.

Santino, Shenandoah, Stevenor and Amador Foothill all produce sound wines, any of which is worth the investment. Of the group, the last was perhaps the most satisfying for fruit, the Santino for overall scope. The Shenandoah has the highest alcohol content, at 12.5, of any.

Finally, there are issues from DeLoach (Sonoma) and McDowell (Mendocino). Both are lovely wines, both showing a bit more class than the foothill-based issues.

All are about \$6 per bottle and are good replacements for white table wines, and any, except Sutter Home, would grace a holiday table with distinction.

what's at the movies

AMADEUS (PG), Superb rendition of Mozart's life with Tom Hulce and F. Murray Abraham. Directed by Milos Forman.

BEVERLY HILLS COP (R), Eddie Murphy is funny, but Detroit comes off second best in this cop show.

BREAKIN' 2 (PG), The TKO crew from "Breakin'" does it again.

BROTHER FROM ANOTHER PLANET (Unrated) but probably PG-13. Humorous and clever, as black extraterrestrial space escapes and lands in Harlem. Marred by murky conclusion.

CHOOSE ME (R), Comedy about radio talk shows and other things, with Genevieve Bujold, Keith Carradine and Lesley Ann Warren.

A CHRISTMAS STORY (PG), Set in early 1940s. Young boy dreams of owning Red Ryder rifle.

CITY HEAT (PG), Clint Eastwood and Burt Reynolds combine forces as a cop and private eye in this free-wheeling film set in 1933 Kansas City.

THE COTTON CLUB (R), Splashy but disappointing epic about Harlem nightclub during Prohibition. Richard Gere, Diane Lane, Gregory Hines and good supporting cast. Directed by Francis Ford Coppola.

DUNE (PG-13), Cast of thousands in epic flick based on Frank Herbert's sci-fi classic. Okay but disappointing.

FLAMINGO KID (Rating unavailable), High school graduate's summer vacation before college. A very busy summer, with Matt Dillon, Richard Crenna and Jessica Walter.

THE GODS MUST BE CRAZY (PG), Nomadic tribesman discovers Coke bottle and believes it's a magic talisman. Comedy from South Africa.

JOHNNY DANGEROUSLY (PG-13), Honest John Kelly joins the underworld and becomes Johnny Dangerously. With Michael Keaton, Joe Piscopo, Maureen Stapleton and Dom DeLuise.

MICKI AND MAUDE (PG-13), Dudley Moore winds up in trouble with Amy Irving and Ann Reinking. Directed by Blake Edwards.

OH, GOD! YOU DEVIL (PG), George Burns is back for his third try as God. He does a pretty good job for an amateur. Enjoyable comedy.

PINOCCIO (G), Disney's animated feature about a wooden puppet who dreams of becoming a real boy.

PLACES IN THE HEART (PG), Sally Field as young widow, in Depression Texas years, faced with supporting herself and two young children.

PROTOCOL (Rating unavailable), Goldie Hawn as Washington, D.C., cocktail waitress who gains international attention with Chris Sarandon.

MOVIE RATING GUIDE

- G General audiences. All ages admitted.
- PG Parental guidance suggested. Some material may not be suitable for pre-teens.
- G-13 Parents are strongly cautioned to give special guidance for attendance of children under 13. Some material may be inappropriate for young children.
- R Restricted. Under 18 requires accompanying parent or guardian.
- X No one under 18 admitted.

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