

Label expands wine knowledge



wine
Richard Watson

SOME LABELS will carry extra terms designed to denote quality.

The term "estate bottled" generally means that the grapes were grown on the property of the winery. That suggests control by the winemaker over the agricultural development of the grapes, and may or may not be important.

Terms such as "vintage selection" mean only that the winemaker likes the product a great deal and that you will pay more for it because of that. Caveat emptor.

The alcohol level also will be reported. If it is not, it can be safely assumed that it falls in the normal 11.5-16 percent range. It is called "table wine" only if it falls within these parameters.

If the wine is vintage dated, and most wines are these days, it means 95 percent of the wine in the bottle was grown in that year. This assures the purchaser of freshness, or whatever, in the wine and allows for those extended

discussions as to which year is the better one, in which wine enthusiasts love to engage.

FINALLY, there are the verbs in very small print defining the source of the wine. When such phrases as "made by," "produced by," "vinted by," and the like are used, it means the winery was chiefly responsible for the wine in that bottle.

When terms like "cellared by," "perfected by," and "bottled by" are the strongest statements made, one knows that the wines were made and fermented elsewhere, the only thing done by the winery being final blend and bottling.

And there are the occasional, but increasing, side panels that tell the inside story of the wine, more or less. Ridge Vineyards perhaps is best at this but many wineries now do an excellent commentary on harvesting, the conditions, bottling and aging strategies employed.



Jessica Lange is Jewell Ivy, a farm woman who fights to save her home, in "Country."



the movies
Dan Greenberg

Pace of 'Country' moves too slowly, with cliched story

(Opens Friday, Oct. 19)

It is difficult to assess a production so well-mounted that the film is pleasing to see but so slow-paced, cliched and dramatically weak that the audience leaves discontented and bored.

If getting there is half the fun, then you may enjoy "Country," but be prepared for a slow trip on a questionable plot. "Country" was developed and co-produced by Oscar-winner Jessica Lange ("Frances," "Tootsie") who stars as Jewell Ivy. Her character is the personification of every hard-working woman, particularly the farm women, whose caring, external softness belies her internal strength and courage, age-old source of family vigor.

Jewell struggles to save her ancestral farm from foreclosure and her family from personality problems. The unusual twist is that this is a 1982 story, not 1932.

Her imperturbable husband Gil (Sam Shepard — "The Right Stuff") suffers a dramatically questionable personality shift and his character crumbles virtually overnight when threatened by FHA foreclosure on the farm.

JEWELL IS supportive and, at least initially, so is her father, Otis Stewart (Wilford Brimley — "Tender Mercies," "The Natural"), her children Marlene and Carlisle (Theresa Graham and Levi L. Knebel) and County FHA Supervisor Tom McMullen (Matt Clark). They all try to deal intelligently with the problem.

In an incredible reversal of dramatic logic, everyone starts to blame Gil, including Gil himself. It just doesn't wash as the real villain is the government and its bureaucrats whose policies lead to the foreclosure attempt.

But shadowy government policy is difficult to blame, particularly when represented as a one-dimensional cliché, FHA District Director Waymon Fordyce (Alex Harvey). So everyone dumps on dear old dad.

This gives the film a misplaced feminist overtone since Gil is not the villain, government policy is. That's an interesting thought for an election year and one wonders why they pulled such a punch.

Naturally, Gil's rapid personality change (guilt at work) leaves Jewell holding the family together, with a message that strains credulity while simultaneously presenting an excellent portrait of motherhood and feminine grace.

THAT PARADOX, as well as the film's transparent conclusion, no matter how well-grounded in legality, just doesn't work.

One cannot fault Lange's acting, or the rest of the cast for that matter. The other actors' characterizations are extremely sensitive, convincing and well-photographed by David Walsh ("Private Benjamin," "Unfaithfully Yours"). Walsh captures the visual essence of rural America and the quality of farm life in pleasant, warm tones.

Co-producer and scenarist William D. Wittliff, co-author of "The Black Stallion" screenplay, bears the greatest responsibility for "Country's" flaws since the script's weakness is glaring. Certainly the sensitive work of Director Richard Pearce ("Heartland") has drawn excellent portraits from the cast, particularly Lange's Jewell, Knebel's teenage son, Carlisle, and Brimley's old man, Otis.

Sam Shepard is all dressed up, ready to go to town and negotiate with the FHA. His quite obviously uncomfortable suit, contrasted with knee-high boots, is an image that remains. As a good farmer, he first waters his stock, sloughing through the mud to do so. A very convincing and touching view of farm life.

IN SPITE OF such fine images and the visually rewarding landscapes, "Country" is too slow. There's no need for seemingly indefinite views of the countryside with nothing happening. It may be reasonable to think that a slow film will communicate the slow pace of farm life, but it doesn't. There needs to be something more, particularly in the way of dramatic credibility.



Sam Shepard is Jewell's husband Gil, who blames himself for the foreclosure on the farm.

To enhance the pleasure of drinking wine as well as provide useful information, the label on a bottle of wine can be good reading.

Wine is not only a taste experience, and visual as well, it is also cognitive. Knowing what is being drunk broadens one's scope.

Because most wines consumed these days are American, well-used California label as an example. With some modifications most European labels carry the same essential information, however.

Most noteworthy is the name of the grape used to make the wine. If it carries 75 percent or more of a variety, the chances are that it will use that name. Thus, a bottle of pinot noir will contain at least that amount of that grape.

Whatever else is used is up to the discretion of the winemaker and his blending art. If, on the other hand, a generic name (e.g., burgundy, white wine) or a proprietary one (A Thousand Flowers) is used, the blend may be anything grown as a grape. With these there is no hint from the name as to the nature of the contents, except color.

THE NAME of the winery producing the bottle is perhaps of next importance.

Every American winery is bonded and this name, or its d.b.a. (doing business as), must appear, along with its origin. If a "second" name is used, e.g., Liberty School by the Caymus Vine-

yards, the parent name need not also appear.

The source of the grapes, the appellation, is also important. A winery located in Santa Cruz may use Napa grapes, thereby allowing the name Napa to appear as the appellation. The grapes, not the winery, used is what is involved here.

A general rule regarding appellations is that the smaller the geographical region designated, the dearer the grapes and the more prestigious the wine. (This is absolute nonsense, of course, but we'll go along with it for present purposes.)

In general, grapes from, say, Winery Lake Vineyard are considered more defined and desirable than those from Napa Valley, while the latter are preferred to a blend of North Coast or California vines.

The reasoning is that each macro and micro-climate has its special areas of grapes best suited to it. A chardonnay from Edna Valley, a pinot noir from the Carneros, a zinfandel from Dry Creek, all have geography behind them.

On the other hand, San Luis Obispo does not produce great cabernets, nor does Monterey, and grapes from these regions might well be labelled by a broader reference base to disguise their humble origins. Appellation is important, but only if one grasps some of the subtleties of California grape growth.

what's at the movies

ALL OF ME (PG). Carl Reiner's latest, greatest comedy, with Steve Martin and Lily Tomlin.

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

BODY ROCK (PG-13). The flash, style and excitement of today's pop culture, with funk Lorenzo Lamas.

THE BOSTONIANS (Unrated). Classy, beautifully mounted production of Henry James novel stars Christopher Reeve, Vanessa Redgrave and Jessica Tandy. Detailed characterization of 19th century triangle is centered on early feminist movement.

CAREFUL, HE MIGHT HEAR YOU (PG). Australian film exploring the bitter struggle between two sisters to gain possession of young boy whose mother died in childbirth.

COUNTRY (PG). Unsatisfying, melodramatic tale of hard times down on the farm, with Jessica Lange and Sam Shepard.

THE EVIL THAT MEN DO (R). Charles Bronson in story of man's vengeance when the system fails.

GHOSTBUSTERS (PG). Billy Murray, Dan Aykroyd and Harold Ramis as parapsychology research students trying to rid New York of menacing ghosts.

IRRECONCILABLE DIFFERENCES (PG). Drew Barrymore, Shelley Long and Ryan O'Neal in engaging story of family problems.

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

THE PRODIGAL (PG). Contemporary allegory about an American family faced with spiritual and emotional conflicts. John Hammond, Hope Lange, John Cullum and Arliss Howard.

PURPLE RAIN (R). Another rock music film with family problems mixed in. Features Prince and Apollonia Kotero.

REVENGE OF THE NEERDS (R). Tasteless, colorless college comedy.

TEACHERS (R). Comedy about teacher versus the

school system, starring Nick Nolte, Jobeth Williams and Judd Hirsch.

THE WOMAN IN RED (PG-13). Pleasant summer

comedy about a middle-aged man and his sexual fantasies. Gene Wilder, Glinda Radner, Joseph Bologna star in film written and directed by Wilder.



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