

Paper Mache for 9-4-26 by David Read

When I began my journey into wine tasting, or more like wine binging many decades ago, it was through the portal of Boone's Farm, Annie Green Springs and Cold Duck, that joyous sparkling concoction with a name based on a German legend involving Prince Clemens Wenceslaus of Saxony ordering the mixing of champagne with unfinished bottles of wine. The wine produced was given the name *Kalte Ente* meaning "cold duck", but I digress. It wasn't until years later and after too many sessions with the porcelain god, that I learned moderation and the joys of tasting and drinking more thoughtfully.

On a recent trip to Murphy's, the small town at the center of Calaveras County wine country with its 25 wine tasting rooms, friends and I began to develop a comprehensive list of our favorite terms and phrases related to the experience. I often pop off with "late harvest, upper slopes," or "a very wet year" as if I really knew what that meant. Of course, these comments must follow time dedicated to "volatizing the esters" which is a fancy reference to swishing the red wine around in the glass before you drink it.

There's no doubt that wine has developed a vocabulary all its own, much of it apparently designed to intimidate those of us who thought wine came in four basic varieties: red, white, pink and the bubbly stuff you drink at a celebration. A serious wine taster does not simply smell wine. They examine its "nose." The wine may have notes of cassis, tobacco, cedar, graphite, forest floor, pencil shavings, dried herbs, cigar box or crushed stone. Crushed stone? I have spent a lifetime successfully avoiding tasting rocks, so I'm not sure how I'm supposed to recognize that one. Then there's "barnyard," an actual wine descriptor. I grew up around enough farms to know that if something smells like a barnyard, my first instinct is not to pay \$75 for a bottle of it.

Wine can also be "jammy," "chewy," "flinty," "buttery," "leathery," "earthy," "dusty," "herbaceous" or "muscular." A muscular wine, I assume, is one that can open its own bottle. Then we get to "mouthfeel," a term that always sounds vaguely like something you should discuss privately with your dentist. Wines can have a silky mouthfeel, a velvety mouthfeel or a round mouthfeel. They may possess "firm tannins," "good structure" or "a long finish."

I understand the long finish. That's when you realize there's still half a bottle left and decide it would be irresponsible to waste it. My favorite part of wine tasting is watching people search desperately for the flavor they have just been told is there.

"Do you detect the subtle notes of elderberry, anise and toasted oak?"

Sip. Swirl. Furrow brow.

"Oh yes. Definitely."

No, you don't. You taste wine. And there is absolutely nothing wrong with that.

Speaking of oak...that's a study in and of itself. We have often heard about American Oak versus French Oak for finishing various varietals and vintages. On this recent trip, we learned about Hungarian Oak. Really? And it carries hints of licorice we were told. I'm not making this up. Who knew? And I'm not especially fond of licorice in any form, let alone flavoring my wine.

I enjoy wine, and I admire people who genuinely understand its subtleties. There is an extraordinary amount of history, agriculture, chemistry and craftsmanship behind a good bottle. But perhaps we should occasionally dispense with the jargon. "Were the varieties co-fermented or fermented separately and then blended?" "Did this go through malolactic fermentation?"

Who cares? Mine tastes like grapes, and I'd like another glass.