

I had one heck of a year writing about wine, wine history, and places I visited. And, in between articles, I must have enjoyed hundreds of conversations – and some complaints – related to wine. Let's look at a few examples.

- Restaurants. "I'm intimidated by the wine list." No! Never, never, never be intimidated by a wine list. Granted, some wine lists are just plain huge – and confusing. However, most restaurant owners have put a great deal of thought into the presentation of the wines and how they should appear on the wine list. The wines are usually separated by red and white, and by country of origin. If you find it difficult to make a decision, call for the sommelier. His job is to offer advice and assistance in choosing a wine and to make the wine a good pairing with your food selection. Most sommeliers enjoy conversations with customers and a good sommelier will not intimidate or up-sell. He will instead try to make your dining experience one that turns you into a repeat customer.
- "The wine is too expensive." Okay. Some wines are expensive. I would not go to price first. Instead, go to food pairing and then go to price. If you are still having difficulty in making a selection, ask for the waiter or the sommelier.
- "I'm too embarrassed to send the wine back but I think it is bad" – or – "I do not like the wine so I am going to send it back." This is a tough one. If the wine is, for example, corked, or the fruit has dissipated, 999 restaurants out of 1000 will replace the wine without argument. Those are pretty good odds. Should you not like the wine that you ordered, and the wine is in

good condition, I am afraid that the odds are in favor of the house.

- Packaging. “What is all the fuss about corks vs. twist-off closures? Actually, this IS a big deal and the discussion will be around for the now and distant future. Real Cork is tree bark and as such it is organic. It is also a natural home for bacteria. This bacterium is called TCA (Trichloroanisole). TCA infects anywhere from 2-5% of all corks produced. When this happens, the wine becomes tainted, both in taste and smell. As a result, many wine producers have turned to artificial corks and/or twist-off closures. Artificial corks are okay, but twist-off closures offer the added capability of resealing the wine bottle with the assurance that the wine will remain stable for a reasonable period.

- What is the difference between Champagne and Sparkling Wine? The real difference is in *where* the wine is produced. Sparkling wine produced in the Reims/Epernay region of France is called Champagne. The term “Champagne” is protected by French Law and sparkling wine produced outside of this area cannot carry the name Champagne. It must be referred to as Sparkling wine. There is no question that Champagne is a quality product. Therefore producers outside of the Champagne region, which is the rest of the world, wish to compete with wines produced in Champagne. They are able to do so by stating on their labels that the Sparkling Wine is produced in the “Methode Champenoise.” We are indeed fortunate here in the Lowcountry. We have excellent selections of Champagne, Cava from Spain, and Spumante and Prosecco from Italy. Other examples are from California, New Mexico, Oregon, New York and the list goes on and on.

- Nouveau Beaujolais. Beaujolais is a wine produced from the Gamay grape in the Beaujolais district of Burgundy. When I entered into a discussion on “Nouveau,” I offered one fact and one opinion. The fact is Beaujolais is the Frenchman’s everyday drink, whether it is with a meal or alone. It happens to be a very good glass of wine. It is my humble opinion that Nouveau is a good marketing gimmick that draws attention to a wine that can be consumed

when it is young. This is accomplished when, after the harvest, Nouveau is released to the world-wide markets in time for it to appear in stores on the third Thursday of November. In this scenario, the wine has hardly had a chance to age. Be that as it may, distributors and retailers join in a campaign to announce that “Nouveau, C’est Arrive.” (I hope my French is correct.) Whether my opinion is right or wrong, the Nouveau Marketing will continue for as long as it meets with success.

My list of discussions goes on forever and I am glad that it does. I thoroughly enjoy the topic of wine and everything that goes with it. Sharing it with you is the most fun. Any topic that you want to discuss or explore, please advise. I would be delighted to sit down with you.

Be well and be safe in the New Year. 2013 should be interesting as more and more new wines come on the market and some very talented winemakers continue to bring new developments to the marketplace.