



ON WINE

(More specifically, my taste in wine)

“WAS I A GOOD YEAR?” asked Pseudolus, a Roman slave, played by Zero Mostel, in *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum* on stage and in a film. He was studying a label on an ancient wine bottle. He obviously didn’t have the sensitive palate and taste buds of James Bond, whom we are told, could discern the year the wine was vintaged. Do such talents exist? It does in the movies, I guess. I vividly remember the classic scene in the 1982 film, *Trail of the Pink Panther* in which Spike Mulligan, who played the character of the father of Inspector Clouseau, walked by a large wooden vat in which three naked nubile women were happily stomping grapes. He sadly shook his head and said, “I miss FiFi since she left.” Shortly afterwards while sharing a glass of wine with a lady interviewing him, tasted it critically, and announced, “It doesn’t taste the same without FiFi.” I do not possess such a remarkable discerning taste in wine.

I have had a sometime world-wide reputation (in the AAPA) for brewing a poor man’s wine which I

called *Mule Ass Wine*, so named because of its kick. It was made with Kroger’s grape juice, sugar, and bread yeast. Fermentation was a slow process requiring six months in winter and six weeks in summer. There was a quantum improvement in taste when I started using Champagne yeast. I had two five gallon carboys, and could not make enough of it so it could age properly. It seemed to reach a peak of flavor in about a year, and I rarely had enough to wait that long before drinking it. Then I discovered that Senior Carlo Rossi made wine much better tasting and cheaper than I could make it.



Vineyards are rapidly replacing tobacco fields in Kentucky because tobacco, as a cash crop, is being phased out. There are about a

hundred small vineyards and wineries in the state. Many grapes are grown on steep hillsides, similar to European vineyards.

Friends who took vacation tours of Europe returned praising local wines. They quickly sought the same labels in the US and discovered they didn't resemble the delicious wines they drank in France and Germany. They were disappointed that they did not taste nearly as good.

I have sampled many wines, in particular inexpensive jug wines, searching for something I liked. I settled on two white wines — Carlo Rossi *Rhine* and Livingston *French Colombard*, and a favorite red blend, a Carlo Rossi *Sangria*, which satisfied my semi-critical taste.

I am suspicious of those who claim esoteric knowledge of wines. One of the best movie essays I have seen on wines is John Cleese's *Wine for the Uninformed*, who set up taste tests his neighbors and friends attended. He sampled many wines, from inexpensive jug wines to imports costing \$200 a bottle. The less expensive wines won all the contests. Of one of the more expensive imports, Brendon Frazier, a neighbor, commented, "It should be put back in the horse!"

I have refilled bottles bearing premium labels with my Carlo Rossi *Rhine*, and have served guests at gatherings, and have had people say, "We need to write down the name of this wine. We *must* get some of this!" They surely would have turned up their noses at it if they had seen me refill the bottle from a jug.

I heard of an old Kentucky red-neck bootlegger who once made an outstanding batch of moonshine. People came from miles around to purchase it, and all marveled at how great it tasted. Soon his supply dwindled down to a few gallons and friends urged him to make another batch, using the same outstanding recipe, but he admitted that he had been drunk when he mixed the ingredients of the brew, and he couldn't remember exactly what he had put into it. One friend told him, "You ought to send a gallon of it to the University of Kentucky Department of Agriculture. They can analyze it and tell you what's in it and in what quantity." So he did, and after a couple of months he got a letter from the lab saying, "We're sorry to inform you sir, but your horse has diabetes!"



Whippoorwill E-Comment is the personal journal of J. Hill Hamon, a Kentucky red-neck, who confesses to having a plebeian taste in wine.
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