

DAN THE WINE MAN

California bubbles: available and affordable

Hi there, Napa Valley winers. I wrote today's piece for Lee Enterprises, The Napa Valley Register's parent company, for national distribution. Here is the unabridged version. I'm so glad I researched and wrote this as I've historically leaned toward



DAN DAWSON

Spanish Cava and French Crémants for quality, value sparkling wines. Today's picks are world-class, affordable and local. Napa Valley's supermarkets will have most, if not all, of these

on their shelves.

Parties love a bottle of sparkling wine. Conversely, "bubbles" love a good party. Not just on holidays and big events, either. Think of a reason, any reason, to throw a party, add bubbles and you are good to go. Want a sure-fire hit of a party? Invite friends to bring a bottle of sparkling wine, open them all and set up a self-serve table.

What are you going to serve at this party? I've got your back on the bubbles and the snacks! Here are three California Sparkling Wine recommendations, each with a super-simple snack idea that will pair perfectly with that wine. I know ... I tried them all to write this piece. Tough work, eh?

In a world bubbling over with sparkling wines, I recommend California sparkling for quality, value and reliable supply. And you don't have to worry about tariffs bumping up the price. These three California sparkling wines are available throughout the U.S., so ask your wine shop or grocer's wine department if you don't see them.

Note regarding my notes: While you can go deep with descriptors, I'll focus on the sparkling wine "parent flavors" fruity, tangy, toasty and creamy. These four are not mutually exclusive in a wine so I double up on each of my picks. My snack pairings match the wine flavors (tangy bubbles-tangy snack, etc).

— **J Sparkling Wine "Cuvee 20" Russian River Valley, \$32**

This is the best "palate-perker-upper" of the lot. I call this fruity and tangy, like icy-cold Granny Smith apples, citrus spray and toothsome pineapple. J Winery is a national leader in

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TONY POER PHOTO

Donald Patz, Stuart Bewley and François Villard pour wine at Envy Winery. Patz and Villard are collaborating on a project using Bewley's sought-after grapes.

Grapes of Black and Gold

Three wine veterans share a vision for Rhône varieties in Mendocino

TONY POER

Wedged into a corner at Envy winery in Calistoga, the 20 oak casks hardly stand out from others piled halfway to the ceiling.

Napa Valley Cabernet they are not. The barrels of Syrah and white Rhône varieties from Mendocino County belong to Terminim Wines, a 2-year-old project and the brainchild of Napa's Donald Patz. To produce them, the industry veteran partnered with François Villard, a respected winemaker in France's northern Rhône Valley and a master of Syrah, Viognier, and other noble grapes grown in this ancient region.

By most production standards, it's a small stack of barrels, but the wines they contain could end up making a big statement.

Patz and Villard refer to themselves, on their bottles and in person, as *collaborateurs*. With one foot in California and another in France, Terminim is a long-distance and, indeed, multi-lingual arrangement. Communication is mainly through email and text messages, with accompanying photographs and data that allow the Rhône winemaker to make decisions Patz might not be able to on his own.

In person, Villard gets to practice his English standing around



TONY POER PHOTO

The Terminim and Villard labels.

barrels and winery equipment — and also over lunches, dinners, and plenty of tastings with the California colleagues he calls his friends.

"You know, it's kind of amazing," said Patz in a recent phone call. "Probably two or three

partners sold their popular label, Patz & Hall. Now, his two-decade relationship with one of the grape growers who helped put that brand on the map is bearing a different kind of fruit. François Villard has everything to do with it.

"When I used to go up to look at Chardonnay and Pinot Noir for Patz & Hall, I'd drive by the Syrah and think, 'Oh my God, that stuff looks gorgeous,'" Patz said, recounting trips to Alder Springs Vineyard near the Mendocino County town of Laytonville. "It's my favorite place in California for Rhône varieties. I mean, certainly other people do well with them, but I just always coveted Stu's Syrah in particular."

As it turns out, Patz had lots of company.

Alder Springs is a 6,000-acre ranch that its owner, Stuart Bewley, began to plant with grapevines in 1993. Last month, during a visit with the Terminim partners to taste through their wines in barrel at Envy, Bewley described his large property as contiguous but very spread-out, viticulturally. "Some of the vineyard blocks are miles away from each other," he said.

The patchwork of vine plantings at Alder Springs notwithstanding, there has always been a concentration of artisan winemakers vying to get their hands on the Syrah and Viognier grown there. Patz is just one of the latest.

times a year. Depending on what his schedule and availability are, François is here. And he really is involved with the winemaking. It's not like, 'Do whatever you want to do, Donald, and then you can use my name.'"

In 2016, Patz and his former

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PLEASE THE PALATE

Moscato d'Asti – spring in a glass

Rainy, cold weather getting you down? Longing for spring to come? Open up a bottle of Moscato d'Asti and transport yourself to a picnic in the spring. No matter the time of the year, no matter the temperature outside, Moscato d'Asti is fresh and is like spring in a glass.



ALLISON LEVINE

Now, your first thought might be, "but Moscato d'Asti is a sweet wine." It is OK to admit you like a little sweetness in your wine. When a little residual

sugar is balanced by bright acidity, there is nothing not to like. And Moscato d'Asti is just that. It is fun, fruity, light and refreshing but it is also a serious wine with a lot of care is put into making it.

The first written records of the Moscato Bianco grape in Piemonte, Italy were in the 1300s. Today there are 10,000

hectares planted, of which 1,400 hectares are planted on hills, across 52 municipalities in the provinces of Alessandria, Asti and Cuneo in Piemonte.

Ten years ago, no more than 2 million bottles were exported from Italy. Today, there are 18 million bottles exported to the U.S.. As 67 percent of Moscato d'Asti consumption is in the United States, we must already know that it is delicious!

The world's most popular sweet aromatic wine, Moscato is a regulated product. It is overseen by the Consorzio per la Tutela dell'Asti (Consortium for the Protection of Asti Wines). Founded in 1932 and recognized in 1934, the Consorzio has 1109 members. Of the members, there are 1,023 estates (including 116 estate wineries), 17 must producers, 16 cooperative wineries and 53 spumante producers.

There are 88 million bottles produced each year. 55 million bottles are Asti Spumante and 33 million are Moscato d'Asti.

The Consorzio provides quality control throughout the entire process for each and every one of these bottles. They do laboratory tests on the wines that have requested DOCG or DOC status. They do instrumental analysis and microbiological inspections. They prevent the counterfeit use of the name.

The Moscato grape produces beautifully aromatic wines that maintain sensory qualities from the grape to the bottle to the glass. It is a grape that ripens late. If it is picked too soon, the wine is too acidic. If it is picked too late, the wine is too sweet and flat. The ideal moment to harvest is when the acidity and the sugars are in balance.

This is far more challenging than it sounds as the producer must also preserve the fragrant aromas. The grapes are softly pressed and then undergo an incomplete alcoholic fermentation. The must can be stored at zero degrees and be preserved for two or three years. When they are



ALLISON LEVINE PHOTO

Moscato d'Asti is a popular Italian wine with a strong following in the U.S.

ready to bottle, the stored musts are fermented to the desired alcohol by volume and then separate the solids.

There are three DOCG Moscato wines. Asti Dolce DOCG, Moscato d'Asti DOCG and the new Asti Seco DOCG. Asti Dolce DOCG is what we also call Asti Spumante and was established as a DOCG in 1993. The Moscato comes from hilly areas with chalky soils and is harvested by hand to maintain whole clusters. The finished wine is a balance of sweetness and acidity with intense aromas of acacia flowers,

orange, honey and little spice.

Moscato d'Asti DOCG, which achieved DOCG status in 1993, is not a sparkling wine. It is a still wine with some residual sugar and low alcohol. It has intense aromas of lemon, peach, apricot, orange blossom and sage and delicate sweet flavors on the palate.

Asti Seco DOCG is the newest DOCG as of 2017 and is a dry, fragrant wine with a persistent perlage and delicate aromas of apple, pear, acacia, lavender and sage and a fresh mouthfeel.

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Winery

From C1

In June of 2017, he conceived of Terminim with the help of a mutual friend of his and Villard's in Napa. He asked Bewley if he planned to have either or both varieties available in the upcoming vintage. The grower told him he'd have to wait in line.

"I've got it all sold," Patz recalled hearing Bewley say over the phone. "Everybody wants more. I'm really in a great position with both of those! So I was a little disappointed. But, you know, that's the way it goes sometimes."

A short time after the call, their mutual friend, Jack Edwards, announced that Villard was coming to California for a late summer visit before harvest began in the Rhône Valley. Edwards' company imports Villard's wines into California and a handful of other states, and the two are close friends.

It gave Patz an idea. "At the beginning of August, I called up Stu again, and I said, 'I know you don't have any grapes for sale. But I'd really like to bring my friend, François Villard, up to see your vineyard. And so that at some point in the future, when you do have some available, he'll be aware of it and we can, you know, get some grapes from you!' And I heard Stu choking on the other end of the line."

Bewley was familiar with, and impressed by, Villard's wines. According to Patz, he changed his mind right then over the phone. "Sure, I've got grapes for François!" he exclaimed, to Patz's amusement.

"Man, 20 years of working together isn't good enough," he laughed, "but some Frenchy shows up and Stu's ready to go to work!"

The "Frenchy's" reputation precedes him. Villard has been written about in both The New York Times and The Los Angeles Times, and his wines have been extensively reviewed around the U.S. and internationally. Domaine Villard Côte-Rôtie and Condrieu — the northern Rhône appellations made, respectively, from Syrah and



PHOTO COURTESY OF ALDER SPRINGS

Donald Patz, François Villard and Stuart Bewley in Alder Springs Vineyard.

Viognier — are sought after by retailers, sommeliers, and collectors with a level of enthusiasm usually reserved for fine Bordeaux and Burgundy.

Villard, in the meantime, is enamored with Napa Valley and California, and Terminim isn't his first wine-making project here.

Along with Jack Edwards and Edwards' former boss, Dave Miner, he came up with the idea for La Diligence, a former second label at Miner Family Winery. The wines were based on Syrah and Marsanne, another white grape Villard works with at home in the Rhône. The plan was hatched in 2002 at a bar in Paso Robles—over margaritas and despite an almost complete language barrier—and realized two years later at

Miner's Oakville winery.

Looking back on that first foray into California wine-making and the experience Villard has built upon since the early 2000s, Patz sees a partner hitting his stride with the Alder Springs fruit.

"He actually hasn't said this to me specifically, but I kind of think that these Terminim wines are more a reflection of the kind of wines that François wanted to make in California," he said. "But that's just a broad-stroke impression."

At the Envy barrel tasting last month, Villard painted a more detailed picture of how he believes the project fits into the larger California landscape of Syrah and white Rhône blends, most often combinations

of Marsanne, Viognier, and a third variety, Roussanne. All three grapes figure into Terminim's proprietary white wine, called Cépages d'Or. It's French for "grapes of gold."

While Patz bounced from cask to cask, pulling samples of still-fermenting '18 Syrah to share with Bewley and Villard, the Frenchman raised a glass of the latter to his nose and smiled.

"If I say it's the best Syrah I've ever drunk in California?" he half-giggled. "No, but seriously, c'est très bon. It's very good. I really think Alder Springs is a great terroir. I think that, maybe on these vintages, we have the possibility of really seeing the quality of the terroir."

Just a couple of weeks earlier, on a train ride from Paris to Lyon, Villard had answered questions via email about Terminim Wines, and specifically about his and Patz's working relationship. "What really pleases me in the Terminim project is that Donald is someone who is always positive, and he still wants to realize his dreams," he wrote.

"I have carte blanche. This allows me to experience my ideas on the vinification of grapes produced 9,000 kilometers from my winery. I give my ideas and Donald accepts them with a smile."

He compared Terminim to the earlier collaboration with his friends at Miner Family and found his own reasons to be positive. Creating the Diligence wines, Villard ex-

plained, "was not a quality problem, but I wasn't a master of my subject. With Terminim, I am very proud because this wine looks like my wines" in the Rhône Valley.

Back at Envy, Patz moved excitedly among the barrels like the proverbial kid in a candy store. He waved a wine thief to get his colleagues' attention. "Now, keep up, boys!" he ordered, holding out a glass pulled from one of the Syrah barrels to pour into theirs.

Bewley swirled the jet-black wine in his glass while he reflected on what the partners had created from his grapes. "There's philosophy behind it. There's terroir that you experience with these wines. I think that when you get too ripe, you lose the terroir, and these wines are not that way."

He shared an opinion, held by many who make and sell Rhône varieties in California that, unlike Cabernet and Pinot Noir, there are too many styles of Syrah produced in this state. "Consumers aren't sure when they order a bottle of wine what they're going to get."

"But," he added, "I think that if people were tasting these types of Syrahs, they would love Syrah."

"This project is not vital, neither for Donald nor for me," Villard wrote in the email right before his train arrived in Lyon. Then he chose an interesting word: "This is one of the reasons that allows us to realize it serenely."

The Terminim wines do seem to have a "serenity" to them, in that they're elegant and don't attack the palate with tannin or alcohol. They reflect Patz's ideas for how Bewley's fruit should smell and taste in the glass. And, just a couple of vintages into the project, they demonstrate Villard's abilities — and sensibilities — as a winemaker.

"If you look at the back label of Terminim," as Patz pointed out in his call, "it says 'François Villard and Donald Patz, collaborators; or in French, *collaborateurs*.' And that's really what it is. It's sort of a shared vision."

Levine

From C1

The producers of Moscato also make Nebbiolo, Barbera and Dolcetto but when they speak about Moscato, they speak with emotion. They are protective of their lands, a UNESCO heritage site, and believe that if you want to taste the terroir of the wines, do not smell them but rather feel the sensation on your palate.

— **Caudrina**

Romano Dogliotto was the first non-industrial producer of Moscato in the 1970s. Located in the end of the Moscato zone in Castiglione, in Cuneo, and facing Neive, Caudrina has 30 hectares in total and 25 planted to Moscato. Vineyards are harvested by hand and then pressed separately. The must is tasted plot by plot to determine what to blend for the two Asti Spumante wines (La Selvatica and La Galeisa) and the Moscato d'Asti wine (La Caudrina).

Azienda Agricola Caudrina di Romano Dogliotto 2018 La Galeisa Moscato d'Asti: A single-vineyard wine, the grapes are hand-harvested

and then gently pressed. The grape juice is stored in refrigerated tanks until it is ready to be processed in an autoclave (pressurized tank). It is then fermented and bottled, and the finished product is 5.5 percent alcohol. A light straw yellow color, the wine has intense stone fruit, floral and sage aromatics. It is perfectly balanced between the sweetness and the acidity. The wine is full-bodied and round on the palate with a long, persistent mineral finish.

— **Ceretto**

Established in the 1930s, the winery is run by four cousins who make up the third generation of the Ceretto family. Federico Ceretto is the export manager, his sister Roberta is the architect, his cousin Alessandro is the winemaker and Alessandro's sister, Lisa, is the administrator. Certified organic, but practicing biodynamics, Ceretto has 250 hectares in total and approximately 40 are planted to Moscato in the commune of Santo Stefano Belbo e Calosso.

Vignaiolo di Santo Stefano Belbo Moscato d'Asti: The Ceretto family and the Scavino family founded I Vignaioli di Santa

Stefano in 1975. A hillside area, the soils are sand and white marl. The nose of the wine has notes of pineapple, sweet and sour lemon, orange rind and sage. On the palate, the wine is sweet yet balanced with the acidity. It is fresh and focused and 5 percent alcohol.

— **Coppo:** Located in the prestigious sub-zone of Canelli, Coppo was established in 1892 and is still family-owned after 125 years. One of the oldest family-run wineries in all of Italy, the historical cellars of Coppo Winery are part of the Underground Cathedrals named as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The Coppo Estate covers 52 hectares and they specialize in Barbera but have a love for the ancient and prized Moscato Bianco.

Coppo Moncalvina Moscato d'Asti 2018 Canelli: The Moscato is planted on south-facing vineyards at altitudes of 200 to 280 feet. The soils are calcareous marl. A straw yellow color, the wine has fresh aromas of green apples, flowers, peach, pear and a touch of almond skin. The wine is only 4.89 percent alcohol and has a light fizziness on the palate.

— **Marengo**

Located in on the border of Asti in Alessandria, Marengo is in Strevi, one of the three named subzones of Moscato. Dating back to 1925, Michele Marengo planted the family vineyard. His son Giuseppe began the winery in 1956 and today it is run by his daughters Michela, Patrizia, and Doretta, as well as Michela's husband Giovanni and her son Andrea Costa. They own 80 hectares, including the Scrapona vineyard, a steep hillside vineyard with marl and chalk soils, which once belonged to their grandmother.

Marengo Scrapona 2018 Moscato d'Asti DOCG: A golden yellow color, the wine has an intense nose of citrus, honey, peach, apricot and sage. The acidity is bright and fresh and the texture on the body is rich and round with a long finish.

We also tasted the Marengo Scrapona 2012 Moscato d'Asti DOCG with lovely sapidity and the Marengo Scrapona 2008 Moscato d'Asti DOCG with petrol notes, which demonstrated that Moscato d'Asti has the potential to age.

— **Michele Chiarlo** Established in 1956, Michele Chiarlo started

the winery with a focus on improving the quality of Piemontese wine. In the 1980s, Michele Chiarlo began reducing yields in order to produce more balanced wines. In the 1990s, the intent was to produce the best single-vineyard wines. Today, Michele Chiarlo, run by sons Stefano and Alberto, sources fruit from 150 hectares, 70 of which are estate owned. The four most important grapes they focus on are Nebbiolo, Barbera, Cortese and Moscato.

Michele Chiarlo Nivole Moscato d'Asti: Grown in soils of sedimentary marine origin, white soil, and sandy, the Moscato comes from the hills surrounding Canelli. The sweet, fragrant wine has vivid aromas of peach, apricot and grape-

fruit and a touch of efferescence on the palate.

Whether you are looking for a wine for aperitivo, or one to enjoy with some prosciutto and melon, or one to drink for dessert, enjoy a Moscato d'Asti. It's OK to admit you like this fun, fruity, and fresh yet serious wine. And, no matter the time of year, it will taste like spring in a glass.

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Dawson

From C1

cool-climate Sonoma County wines, especially sparkling. Look for the eye-catching, mustard-yellow swoosh of a J silk-screened on the bottle. For a matching snack, zest a lemon then squeeze its juice into a pint of light sour cream or plain yogurt. Serve with lightly salted potato chips.

— **Roederer Estate Sparkling Wine, North Coast, Brut, \$22**

Find Boonville, California on a map and you're looking at Anderson Valley. Less-known and

less-traveled than Napa and Sonoma, Anderson Valley's cool weather is ideal for making sparkling wine. To my taste, Roederer Estate makes the best. It's fruity and tangy, like a lemon sorbet (without the sweetness). Cold poached shrimp, a mainstay of the appetizer world, is a great match. But not the cocktail sauce. Instead, stir some roasted garlic and lemon juice into a cup of mayonnaise.

— **Mirabelle Sparkling Wine, North Coast, Brut, \$27**

Napa Valley's iconic Schramsberg Winery also makes Mirabelle, a delicious, great value sparkling

wine. Like the life of the party, it's easy to like and mighty friendly. The flavors are creamy and fruity, a little like a pineapple/mango smoothy. Try the Mirabelle Brut with cream cheese wontons, easy to make at home or get the Cream Cheese Rangoon at Panda Express. Go light on the sweet and sour sauce as too much will overwhelm the wine.

— **Mumm Napa Sparkling Wine Brut "Prestige," \$18**

Mumm Napa sparkling seems to be everywhere. If a store sells wine, good bet they sell Mumm. That might make you think it's mediocre, understandably,

but not the case. It's tangy, toasty, and like a good dog you can count on it being there to make you smile. The tang and toast make the Mumm an excellent match with cold-smoked salmon. Serve it on a slice of cucumber.

I'm Dan Dawson, a Napa Valley wine writer, wine consumer advocate and former wine merchant and fancy-pants sommelier. Check out my reviews and wine tasting events at DawsonWineAdvisor.com. When you visit, please check out my membership program. Contact me through my website with questions and comments.



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