

## HOW ABOUT A LITTLE BREAK?

Explore seasonal red wines, local and national winter beers, and cold weather cocktails with Professionals in the City at The Barking Dog at 4723 Elm St. in Bethesda on Jan. 10. With your drinks, you will enjoy a selection of passed and plated appetizers. Tickets are \$40 if purchased before 5 p.m. Friday.

**SCOTT GREENBERG** *Vine Guy*

# New Year's resolution: Enjoy the good stuff

At the end of each calendar year, my dear friend Kevin hosts a "predictions luncheon" for 10 "regulars" and two guests. We usually gather in the back room of a local steakhouse to share our thoughts on the previous events of the year and to make predictions, both light-hearted and serious, for the upcoming year. The group buys lunch for the person who makes the most accurate predictions from the previous year.

While the predictions vary widely, the one thing that is consistent from year to year is the plethora of wonderful wine that everyone brings to share with the group. These are wines that most of us think to enjoy only on special occasions — such as this luncheon. And then it hits me: I should be enjoying and sharing better wines — even great wines — throughout the year.

Don't get me wrong. One of the marvelous perks of this job is that Cindy and I get to taste a lot of wonderful, beautifully made wines throughout the year. But it's usually in a clinical setting, and we're



just "tasting" it, not "drinking" it. I usually spend most of my time analyzing the wine for flaws and perfections and writing copious notes about structure, balance, fruit and finish. And when I do actually sit down to enjoy a glass of wine, I usually think more about the food than the juice.

So this year, my New Year's resolution is to enjoy — I mean really, thoroughly enjoy — great wines without taking notes or looking for imperfections. Just to relax and take pleasure in the wine. I already got a pretty good jump on the year, thanks to Kevin and the rest of the gang. Here's what I hope to drink more of in 2008. Retail prices are approximate.



**2004 Beringer Private Reserve Chardonnay, Napa Valley, Calif. (\$40)**  
**Circle Wine and Liquor in D.C.**  
 Lemon zest, pears and buttered toast jump from the glass and beg you to start sipping — and I'm glad I did. I was rewarded with well-delineated flavors of pear, pineapple, tropical fruits and roasted nuts, all held together in perfect balance by the crisp acidity. The perfect accompaniment to pan-roasted rockfish.

**2005 Aubert Chardonnay, Ritchie Vineyard, Sonoma Coast, Calif. (\$149)**  
**Online**  
 If you're on this vineyard's mailing list, then you are lucky indeed, because the list offering price is just about half of retail price tags. Even so, this extraordinary wine is worth trying at least once. Notes of lemon zest, pumpkin spices and minerals mingle on the beguiling nose. Roasted pears, pineapple, Fuji apples and citrus fruit all congregate on the palate for a thrill ride and continue on

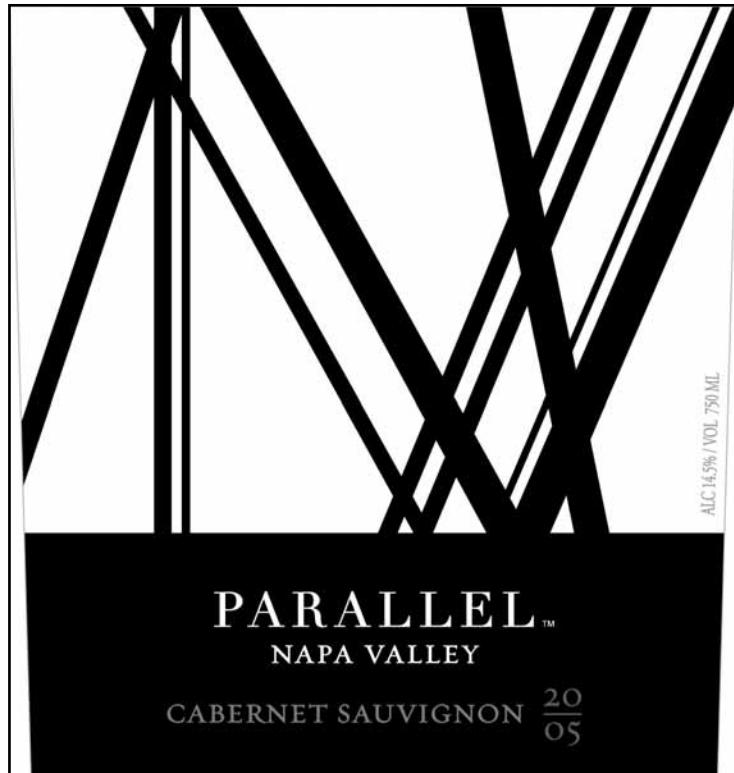
the mesmerizing finish for a full minute. I would splurge on poached lobster with this beauty.

**2004 Peter Michael Le Moulin Rouge Pinot Noir, Pisoni Vineyard, Santa Lucia Highlands, Calif. (\$130)**  
**Schneider's of Capitol Hill in D.C.**

Wow — this is not a pinot noir for the faint of heart. Packed with loads of concentrated fruit — including black cherries, ripe strawberries and red plums — and hints of cinnamon, orange peel and graphite, this wine seduces and clubs your tongue at the same time. The long, luxurious finish would stand up well to flavorful fare such as Peking duck or even cedar-plank salmon.

**2004 Cepparello "Isole e Olena," Tuscany, Italy (\$60)**  
**MacArthur Beverages in D.C.**  
 Lest you think all of my choices hail from California, this 100 percent sangiovese beauty claims Italy as its place of birth. Scents of black cherries and violets play off of each other on the aromatic bouquet, while elegant flavors of rich plum, black raspberries and red licorice glide over the tongue on the back of soft tannins. A wine of depth and balance, it would be best enjoyed with a lightly sauced Bolognese pasta dish.

**2003 Chateau Beychevelle, St. Julien, Bordeaux, France (\$60)**  
**Calvert Woodley in D.C.**  
 Surprisingly approachable for such a young Bordeaux wine, it still couldn't hurt to throw it in a decanter an hour or two ahead of its intended serving time. It also taught me that it's just fine to drink these wines on the younger side, especially when they reward you with flavors of black fruit, toasty oak and rich earthiness. The notes of vanilla and coffee on the plush



finish would saddle up nicely with a cheese course.

**2005 Parallel Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley, Calif. (\$60)**  
**Vienna Vintner in Vienna**  
 One of my favorites of the day, this cabernet, made by renowned wine artiste Philippe Melka, may very well be one of the best values from Napa Valley. The complex bouquet features dazzling scents of blackberry, cassis, sweet earth and rose petals. Full-throttled flavors of blackberry, black cherry and hints of vanilla are well-balanced over the entire palate. Prominent notes of coffee and mint-chocolate cookies slide in on the lengthy finish. This is a cabernet in search of a bone-in ribeye steak — medium rare.

I know that this is one New Year's resolution I am looking forward to keeping. I hope that you have a chance to splurge on some remarkable wines in 2008.



Do you have a favorite royalty of wine? E-mail me at [scott@vineguy.com](mailto:scott@vineguy.com).

