

## Ahhh, the Good Life

Saturday, March 19, 2005

By ALFONSO CEVOLA

In the movie *Sideways*, Paul Giamatti's character, Miles, searches longingly for the great pinot noir – a quest that struck a surprising nerve with Americans. ACNielsen reports that from Oct. 24 – two days after the film was released – to Jan. 15, domestic pinot noir sales jumped nearly 16 percent over the same period a year earlier.

You have to wonder whether it was wine or something more that people were seeking.

**The Good Life**

[Alfonso Cevola: Learn to savor the glass half full](#)

[Larry Allums: Connecting leisure and learning](#)

**Join us:** Points contributors **Alfonso Cevola**, **Dr. Larry Allums** and other special guests will converse about wine, leisure and the philosophy of the good life Tuesday, March 22 from 7 to 8:30 p.m. The Wine Therapist, 1810 Skillman St. in East Dallas, is our host. Admission is free.

In France and Italy, as well as other European countries, wine speaks to the joy of everyday life. Robert Mondavi, of California's famous Italian-American winemaking family, put it this way: "Wine to me is passion. It's family and friends. It's warmth of heart and generosity of spirit. Wine is art. It's culture. It's the essence of civilization and the art of living."

And it's part of nearly every meal in places like Paris and Verona. But the act of breaking bread at lunch or the end of the day is all but lost in America. Oh, we fill 'er up, all right. We line up and chow down on our tacos and burritos and 64-ounce steaks. And it shows.

Our French and Italian cousins have their overindulgences, too. But they know that real satisfaction comes not from excess. Rather, it's about knowing just how high to fill the glass. It's in knowing that "just enough" can be a whole lot more fulfilling than "more, more, faster, faster."

Remember that awful moment in the film when Miles lifts the spit bucket in the tasting room and drinks from it to excess? All it gave him was a headache and a laundry bill. Not happiness, not contentment. Not from overkill. No, it is in savoring the little daily doses of life that we can warm our hearts and cultivate generosity of spirit.

On a recent trip to Paris, I was struck by how deeply entwined Old World and New are. During one meal, we shared a bottle of cider from apples grown on Omaha Beach, where so many Americans lost their lives in World War II. The wine merchant in Montparnasse who sold us our red wine has a daughter living in El Paso. And at the neighborhood grocery store in the 14th Arrondissement, we found a Tex-Mex section right next to an assortment of foie gras, Brie cheeses and French wines.

It seems the good life – happiness – is something we all want, whether we live in Paris or Plano. Our friends over there just have a head start on conviviality at the table.

On the plane back to Dallas, we pondered what to eat at home that evening. What had we missed? Was it tacos? Barbecued brisket? We weren't going to replicate that astonishing puree of watercress with just a little bit of cream or that outrageous soufflé of dark, molten chocolate. No, we might not find that in Dallas. But we just might find a steaming bowl of Korean noodle soup or a memorable mezze platter from one of our Middle Eastern neighbors.

The actual morsels may be different. But they can be savored in the same way. In little daily doses, warming our hearts, as we search for the connection to home and happiness. And, yes, wine is a part of that slow, good living, too.

In *Sideways*, Miles talks about the pinot noir grape. He says, "Pinot noir is like us. ... It's thin-skinned, temperamental, ripens early." There is a correlation between the thin-skinned temperamental grape and our local culture. Driving home from the airport, we saw impatient drivers darting in front of one another, gesturing obscenely. Of course, we saw thin-skinned and temperamental people in Paris, too. Different, but the same.

Maybe that's why some of us wine guys look upon pinot noir as the holy grail of the wine world. Because it is a temperamental grape and hard to turn into a good bottle of wine, it takes a real connoisseur to love one. The process takes time and patience.

Time, in slow portions and small slices, also refines and clarifies the experience of living. When we fill the glass half full, we increase the potential for finding that art of living Mr. Mondavi spoke of right here – in our own dining and living rooms.

As for me, what I'm waiting for is that movie about chocolate. Two women in Paris or Pisa on a last tour of the great cocoa masters. Something to go with my pinot or merlot. A little wine, a morsel of chocolate and the unending search for passion and joy in daily living.

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