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Jennifer Simonetti-Bryan

Define This Wine

It's good to be master... of wine, that is.
And it's equally good to learn from one. by *Todd Goergen*

I RECENTLY HAD the pleasure of doing a blind tasting of Italian varietals with Jennifer Simonetti-Bryan. Last year she became the fourth woman in the US to earn the "Master of Wine" title, which requires passing a slew of rigorous exams on identifying the precise origin, composition and age of wines—and defending those deductions with sound reasoning. The "MW" is an impressive and hard-won label, and it's not uncommon to encounter masters who can pinpoint vineyard, blend and age of a selection completely blind.

Before the tasting, my wife, Emma, and I enjoyed a glass of Charles Heidsieck NV Champagne (\$45). Impressively, Simonetti-Bryan (who is a spirits expert for Rémy Cointreau USA) used her saber to open the bottle—a technique that involves striking the neck at a 45-degree angle with the curved blade. (Please don't try this at home.)

Then we got down to business. Explaining that all three of the wines to be tasted were from the same country, Simonetti-Bryan asked me to identify that country and give reasons for my choice. Using the process of elimination, I correctly chose Italy. The rest? Not as easy. Below are the notes I took, followed by Simonetti-Bryan's observations.

WINE 1: Barone Ricasoli Castello di Brolio 2001 (\$54). Very complex; forward tannins (like Chianti); well-rounded with a soft finish.

JENNIFER SIMONETTI-BRYAN: Rich fruit, hint of vanilla, silky tannins.

WINE 2: Vietti Barbaresco Masseria 2005 (\$103). Tasted smoother, more tannic and, interestingly, the youngest of the three.

JSB: A single-vineyard cru Barbaresco—rich, ripe cherry with notes of tea leaves and rose petals.

WINE 3: Masi Amarone Mazzano 2001 (\$149). Reminiscent of a Châteauneuf-du-Pape—lots of minerals, spicy and complex.

JSB: A single-vineyard cru Amarone from a vineyard that has been noted for its quality since the 12th century. Hints of dark chocolate-covered cherries with full body and warming finish.

I didn't correctly identify a single wine (my knowledge is deepest in Bordeaux and Napa), so I consoled myself with an extraordinary glass of Cointreau Noir (\$60). Who says learning can't be fun?

All wines available at Manhattan Wine Xchange, 1035 Third Avenue, 212-832-2700.

TOAST POINTS

Julian Niccolini, co-owner of the Four Seasons restaurant, recommends some seasonally spectacular wines.

Charles & Charles Rosé 2008 (\$15). This brand-new rosé (created in Washington), light pink and all Syrah, is sure to be *the* beach wine this summer. Available at Best Cellars, 1291 Lexington Avenue, 212-426-4200.

Semper Pinot Noir Ellenbach Vineyard 2007 (\$85) and Semper Pinot Noir Goldridge Vineyard 2007 (\$85). These new Pinot Noirs are the passion project of Tuck Beckstoffer, the prodigal son of one of the greatest grape-growing families in California. A must for any serious collector, they are poured by the glass at the Four Seasons. Call 707-200-4418; semperwines.com.

Tenuta Sant'Antonio Nanfrè Valpolicella 2007 (\$14.99). A perfect lighter-bodied red with sour-cherry fruit and herbal notes. Enjoy it with rustic foods like salami, pasta and roast chicken. Available at Vintage Grape and Grog, 1479 Third Avenue, 212-535-6800.

Willi Schaefer Graacher Himmelreich Riesling Kabinett 2007 (\$24). 2007 was a gorgeous vintage for German Riesling—perhaps the best of the decade. This balanced white is a fantastic representation of the varietal and the vintage—at a value. Available at Crush Wine & Spirits, 153 East 57th Street, 212-980-9463.

