



Rick's Grape Skinny

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“There are thousands of wines that can take over our minds. Don't think all ecstasies are the same!”

(Rumi)

Retsina & Mavrodaphne...

It's all Greek to me!

What...you've never heard of *Retsina* or *Mavrodaphne* wine?! It's Greek to you too?! Well by golly, welcome to the very large *I've-Never-Heard-of-Retsina-or-Mavrodaphne-Wine-Club!* Hey, unless you're Greek, have a *Yia Yia* (Grandmother) or a *Pappous* (Grandfather) by virtue of whom you married or you're predisposed to eating an abundance of Greek food...it's completely understandable that you might never have heard of these two iconic Greek wines before. Heck, I didn't know what they were until I was 12! Imagine that!

Indeed, I used to hang out at a small Greek restaurant not too far from our neighborhood and I'd help my friends Nick and Polly Doukas bus tables etc....in exchange for some of their amazingly wonderful *baklava!* In between chores, we'd sit with *Yia Yia* (Grandma Doukas) at her special table, listen to her broken-English stories she'd been telling for decade – and in return for our attentiveness, she'd reward us with a sip or two of *Retsina* and *Mavrodaphne*. We despised the *Retsina* but would put up with it...or fake a sip...so we could slug down some of that sweet and fruity *Mavrodaphne!*

Retsina – a 2000 year old Greek Wine

Oh yeah...this *Retsina* is indeed an ancient wine and it's been treasured by every Greek since Plato, Socrates and Aristotle! But...it's not the longevity of *Retsina* that makes it so special. What makes this one of the most unique and distinctive wines in the universe is...drum roll please...it tastes like you're drinking a pine tree!

Yep...you read that correctly...it's a bit like sipping turpentine! But...on the positive side, it doubles as a paint thinner!

Why does Retsina Taste Like Pine Resin?

Well...long story made short (my specialty), it's fundamentally because the ancient Greek *amphorae* (clay wine vats) used to be sealed with the ancient equivalent of burlap and pine tar -- or resin as some refer to it. As a result, some of that pine-laden goo seeped into the wine and the result was wine that tasted like Pine-Sol! Many moons later, closures which precluded the need to seal vats with pine tar were developed – but the sentimental Greeks actually missed their resinated wine! In fact, they missed it so much that they ganged up on the winemakers and “politely” insisted that they restore the essence of pine in their otherwise mundane *Savatiano* grape wine...or else! So, the industry obliged the Greek wave of nostalgia and started making what's referred to as *resinated wine*. Now all the *Yia Yias* and *Pappouses* the world over are happy campers! These days, the term *Retsina* enjoys protected status like the terms Champagne and Port – but that doesn't make it any more drinkable!! That said, be brave and adventurous the next time you dine at a local tavern and order a taste...or a glass if you dare! Believe it or not, with some of the zestier Greek dishes, *Retsina* pairs quite favorably, I'm “told!”

Mavrodaphne!

Mavrodaphne was first made by Bavarian Gustav Clauss in 1850...and while it doesn't have quite the heritage and pedigree of *Retsina*, it nonetheless has a wonderfully redeeming feature: it's a fortified dessert wine...badaboom! Made from the grape of the same name, the word itself means “black laurel” ...so it's an inky dark, slightly viscous and über-delicious wine that's fortified with distilled spirits made from earlier vintage *Mavrodaphne* wine.

Yia Yia Doukas used to sit at her special table in the Pinewood restaurant and teach us tykes how to “properly” nibble Feta cheese and sip *Mavrodaphne*...an elixir I've seen described as *liquid heaven!* It's so worth asking your favorite retailer to get you a bottle...and when you do, try it straightaway or with Feta after dinner!



Toast of the Month



*“Here’s to Grape Expectations!”
(Unknown Man of Few Words!)*



The Monthly Bunch!

White Blend

Sokol Blosser Evolution 18 NV

**Fresh, Tropical, Off-dry, and Wonderful!
(Dundee/Drayton, Oregon)/\$16-\$20 –**

Wow...what a great wine...from one of Oregon’s best artisanal wineries. And when it comes to demonstrating the value of blending...this SF Chronicle Wine Competition Gold Medal winner does that in spades. Though small in stature, Sokol Blosser is otherwise huge in terms of quality, flavor and value. This “Rieslingnesque” wine is comprised of nine grape varieties -- *Müller-Thurgau, Riesling, Semillon, Pinot Gris, Gewürztraminer, Muscat Canelli, Chardonnay, Pinot Blanc, and Sylvaner* – and it’s one of the most delightful and versatile white wines you’ll ever find. The most commonly asked question about this little gem of a wine is whether the formula for using and blending nine grapes was “intended or was it just happenstance.” One taste of what many enthusiasts call “*the perfect white wine*” – and the answer to that question will be as obvious to you as the joy you experience with the first sip through the last!

www.sokolblosser.com/

Franciscan Equilibrium 2013

**Supple, Luscious and Mouthwatering!
(Napa Valley – St. Helena, CA)/\$20-\$25**

Talk about a marriage of grapes made in heaven, this majestic union of 72% *Sauvignon Blanc*, 17% *Chardonnay* and 11% *Muscat* is just that! To be sure...there are lots of succulent white blends to be had...but none in my view that quite match the unique and distinctive attributes of this perfectly balanced jewel of a wine by Winemaker, Janet Myers. From its mouthfeel to its exhilarating elegance, this is a wine that has few peers!

www.franciscan.com

Reds

Petite Sirah

UNTI Vineyards – Dry Creek Valley 2012

**Fragrance Galore, Rich, Sultry, and Succulent!
(Dry Creek Valley – Healdsburg, CA)/ \$30-\$35**

From a two-acre plot, planted a year after father and son, George and Mick Unti, founded UNTI Vineyards and Winery in 1997, these carefully tended grapes produce a wine that’s as good as wine gets! This inky-dark, tooth-staining elixir is 100% *Petite Sirah* and it was aged in 20% new French oak for 13 months. Founding partner and head winemaker, Mick Unti, typically makes less than 400 cases of this highly unfiltered and sought after wine, so if it’s one you set your sights on getting...and it should be...get your order in early in the year of release. As Mick suggests...this is a wine that “...only carnivores should drink while listening to Led Zeppelin or Social Distortion.” And he ain’t kiddin’! This wine is a mouthful and a half...but one whose powerful tannins can be tamed with a dose or two of vigorous aeration. Open it, aerate it and set it aside for an hour or so before you start chewin’ on this baby. You’ll be glad you did!

www.untivineyards.com

Red Blends

McBride Sisters Truvée Red Blend 2013

**Luscious and Luxuriant...Sunshine in a Bottle!
(Central Coast AVA – Sonoma, CA)/\$13-\$15 –**

To be sure, there are countless red blends to be had these days -- but, there are none whose unique backstory is more distinguished or compelling than the one that accompanies this succulent gem of a wine! In a nutshell, this delightful union of *Grenache* and *Syrah* was made by two sisters, Andréa and Robin McBride, who grew up 7000 miles apart in California and New Zealand. Neither knew the other existed...until fate change all that. Not long after they found each other in 1999, they joined hands and founded McBride Sisters Wines...and with the help of their other “sisters” – Winemaker, Monica Belavic, and Vineyard Director, Stasi Seay -- *Truvée* wines was born. The French word *Truvée* means “to find”...such an appropriate name wouldn’t you say!?! They also make a lightly oaked *Truvée* Chardonnay that’s an über-versatile must try!! To see and hear the sisters’ amazing story, click below.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FiXOFB-TtQ>
<http://www.truveewines.com/>