



WINE NOTES

By Dorothy J. Gaiter and John Brecher

MAKING THE LIST

My son is involved in the start-up of a small restaurant in the Los Angeles area and would like to create a small wine list. What would you recommend as a starting point? I was thinking of no more than 12 to 18 different wines since they do not have unlimited storage.

—*Michael B. Edwards, Berkeley, Calif.*

Wine lists do not have to be large to be good. Sure, sometimes a telephone book-sized wine list includes many unusual treasures. Anyone who has visited Berni's Steak House in Tampa, Fla., or Crabtree's Kettle House in Chappaqua, N.Y., knows this. But we have been handed far too many big, fat lists that included very little that was interesting and new. It's frustrating to go through page after page of a weighty wine list and keep saying, "Been there. Done that."

On the other hand, we've sometimes visited restaurants with small lists that offer all sorts of interesting, new tastes. Just the other day, we dropped into a restaurant in New York City called the Mermaid Inn that offered only 29 wines by the bottle—13 red, 13 white and three sparkling. But the breadth of the selection was impressive and offered a fine sampling of tastes from around the world, things like Cunoise from the Rhône Valley of France, Zweigelt from Austria and Pinot Gris from Oregon. We had a white wine we'd never seen before:

2006 Viña Godeval from the Valdeorras area of the Galicia region of Spain (\$35). It was made from the Godello grape and if you've never heard of the Godello grape, trust us, you're not alone. The wine was fragrant and crisp and great with seafood.

With so many interesting wines available at good prices from all over the world these days—and with winemakers everywhere eager to see their products on restaurant wine lists—there's no excuse for a boring list, no matter how long or short it is. Our advice is to make sure that the list is highly international and includes a wide variety of grape types. The Mermaid Inn by-the-bottle list, for instance, included only three wines from California. We understand that many

people think they only want a Merlot or Chardonnay from California, but offer them something else at a good price and they'll try it.

Make sure that the list changes regularly. If it's a short list, it can get tired quickly, so pricing the wine fairly is critical. Not only is this the right thing to do and not only does it mean that diners will enjoy their meals more because they'll be drinking wine, but the restaurant will sell more wine and be able to change the list more frequently.

REUSING PLASTIC CORKS

Are plastic corks recyclable?

—*Jeff Hogan, Cambridge, Mass.*

For such a simple question, the answer is surprisingly complex. The very basic answer is that plastic corks from the major U.S. manufacturers are recyclable, in principle. Plastic products are numbered depending on various factors, such as what they are made from, and the corks made by the three biggest domestic players are No. 4 ("low-density polyethylene") or No. 7 ("other"), and they are recyclable. But, realistically, the answer is probably no. We called Eugene, Ore., and San Francisco, two cities with sophisticated recycling programs, and they do not recycle plastic corks, essentially because the corks are simply too small, considering the tons of material they must sort every day. The corks generally end up in a landfill. It's possible that your city has recycling that is so sophisticated that it will take plastic corks and recycle them, but the only way to know is to call your local facility and ask. Otherwise, consider reusing your corks. We'd heard of crafts, slingshot ammo and fishing bobbers before, and we recently found out that one brand of synthetic corks can even be used as a pencil eraser. Recyclable or not, our problem with plastic corks is that we find some of them really difficult to extract from bottles and we—and many readers we have heard from—have sent broken corkscrews to the landfill as a result.

Melanie Grayer West contributed to this column. You can contact us at wine@wsl.com