



WINE NOTES

By Dorothy J. Gaiter and John Brecher

IN THE YEARS we have been writing our "Tastings" column, which appears on Fridays, we have received thousands of questions about wine from readers. In this column, we answer some questions that touch on common themes. We have edited the questions for space. If you have a question, drop us a note at wine@wsj.com. Be sure to include your full name, city and state.

WHAT TO DO WITH THE CORK

I'm sure you've been asked this question dozens of times. When you are in a restaurant and the waiter hands you the cork after opening the bottle of wine, what are you supposed to do with it?

—Scott Gordon, Erie, Penn.

You're right: We've been asked that so many times that we wrote an entire column on the subject a few years ago (for a copy of it, drop us a note at wine@wsj.com). Here's the bottom line: It's your cork. Do anything you want to do with it. We sniff the cork because sometimes the scent reminds us of the smells inside a winery and makes us smile. But there's no reason you need to do that. There's nothing that the smell, look or feel of the cork will tell you that's more important than the look, smell and taste of the actual wine that has just been poured into your glass for your approval. It's amazing how passionately people feel about this subject. The world seems divided into people who believe that the cork is an important window



into a wine's condition and those who feel that anyone who smells a cork might as well star in the next "Borat" movie. Our feeling is that you've paid so much for that cork that you can salt it and eat it if you like. With more and more wines being packaged in innovative ways, the next question is sure to be: What do you do when a waiter hands you a screw cap?

THE NORTON GRAPE

Our retirement club went wine tasting in Virginia this week. The featured wine was made from the Norton grape, one I had never heard of. It is a native U.S. grape that is not foxy. Have you heard of it?

—Bob Youker, Bethesda, Md.

Norton is one of the most highly regarded of uniquely American grapes. Dr. Daniel Norton developed it in the 1820s on his farm in Richmond, Va. Norton is a full-flavored red wine (sometimes called Cynthiana) that goes well with roasted meats and rich vegetable dishes. Quite a few wineries make Norton, from Horton Vineyards in Virginia to Stone Hill Winery in Missouri (in fact, Norton is the state grape of Missouri). If you see one, it's definitely worth a try. And if you'd like to know a lot more about Norton, check out the research on the Web site of Chateau Z Vineyard (chateau-z.com). For readers who are unfamiliar with the term "foxy," it's often used to describe the way many native American grapes smell and taste, a sort of fruity muskiness. It's hard to describe what "foxy" really means, but if you think about the way Concord grapes smell and taste, that's foxy.

Melanie Grayce West
contributed to this column.