

Dan's Papers

Dan's Papers November 18, 2011 HOUSE AND HOME GUIDE danshamptons.com Page 38

Bringing Wine Tasting into the Home

By Stacy Dermont

Nothing beats winery hopping with friends on a crisp autumn afternoon. But sometimes it rains. Here's a sure-fire cure for those afternoons when it's too wet to winery hop – a home wine tasting kit! The Tasting Room (tastingroom.com) has just launched over FIFTY different wine tasting kits of six mini-bottles each. I ordered up two samplers to try.

One was a Mario Batali Selection, "Wine Lovers' Road Trip." I follow everything that this fat bastard does – "The Chew," Eataly, "Spain...on the Road Again." (Would that I could drop 30 pounds like he did recently.) Featured are six wines that I trust Batali had a hand in selecting – it's such an idiosyncratic mise: Patz & Hall 2009 Sonoma Coast

Chardonnay, Papapietro Perry 2008 Pinot Noir, John Duval Wines 2007 Shiraz from Australia, Amavi Cellars 2008 Walla Walla Valley Syrah, Dry Creek 2007 Old Vine Zinfandel, Glen Carlou 2008 Grand Classique.

My other sampler was Michael Chiarello's Holiday Pinots. How cool is this? Six different California Pinot Noirs to compare and contrast, selected by an award-winning Napa Valley chef, vintner and cookbook author. Chiarello's picks were from: Domaine Carneros, Fess Parker Winery and Vineyards, Papapietro Perry Winery, Patz & Hall, Laetitia Vineyard & Winery, Lucas & Lewellen Vineyards.

Each little bottle is fully labeled. The neat, black boxes they come in make for great gift giving. But



Samples from the Tasting Room

the bottles are so small and cute – fabu stocking stuffers! And it's all recyclable – love that.

So I pulled out all the stops to set up our at-home wine tasting – all the clean wine glasses in the house, water, cheeses, nuts, olives, crackers. My husband nixed all the food, saying that a wine tasting is not about pairings. We agreed that there was no need for any sort of spit receptacle. At-home wine tasting bonus: you can do it in the nude. I'm just sayin'....Clothes-on, these samplers would be great fun for a group to tackle. Each bottle contains 50 ML of wine, which, theoretically, could be split more than two ways.

Each kit comes with a handy card for jotting down your favorites and – for a limited time – this card also offers \$25 off your next order. (They sell the grown-up size bottles online too.)

Our ultra scientific tastings revealed: Among the Pinot sampler, the Lucas & Lewellen '08 was our favorite. Its rich color made it an immediate standout, but its tart, plummy flavor won our hearts. Our #2 Pinot was Domaine Carneros '08. Light bodied yet big and smooth. Notably, these were the two least expensive wines in the mix.

Batali's sampler confirmed that he is a man of big appetites. These are some BIG reds and the single Chardonnay is BIG on flavor, oaky. Though Batali's sampler is named "Wine Lovers' Road Trip" we agreed that we wouldn't go too far out of our way for any of these wines. We did find the Dry Creek Vineyard '07 Old Vine Zinfandel interesting, particularly its peppery note. Perhaps these wines would pair well with rich Italian food, they're certainly not quaffing wines.

Everyone is entitled to his or her opinion – at least six opinions per box, in fact. I've already ordered a monthly sampler for the wine lover on my Christmas list.

Sadly – for the rest of the world – the Tasting Room does not yet offer samplers of Long Island wines. I could put together a great sampler of Long Island wines, couldn't you?

Home wine tasting kits and regular-size bottles of wine available from www.tastingroom.com.

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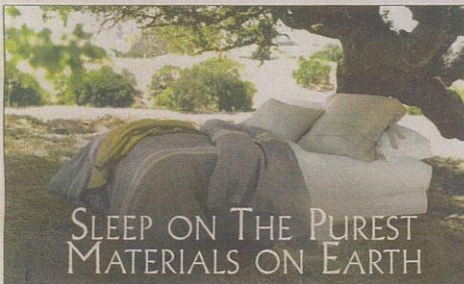
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