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As seen on... **KOEPPEL ON WINE**



October 24, 2007

This is the list you print out and fix upon the refrigerator door with a magnet to remind you to pick up a bottle or two at the store. These wines are inexpensive and tend to offer immediate pleasure, some as aperitifs, others to match with food, and some versatile enough for all purposes.

...the principle with these refrigerator door wines is pure enjoyment, but if we're lucky they'll be more complicated and provide more personality than their station in life and price would imply.

O.K., call me crazy, but I'm going to recommend this wine for Thanksgiving dinner. Oak Knoll has been making wine from the native Niagara grape for 30 years or so, and it's nice to see a "regular" winery pay attention to an American grape, just because, you know, it's fun. Niagara is a hybrid of the stalwart Concord grape and the Cassady grape, which is apparently so obscure that Oz Clark does not have an entry for it in his invaluable Encyclopedia of Grapes (Harcourt, 2001).

Anyway, American grapes are of the labrusca species, as opposed to the European vinifera. Labrusca grapes are distinguished by a scent that's usually described as "foxy," which means that the wines smell like a combination of huckleberry, moss and furniture polish. And you know, when you get used to it, it works.

Oak Knoll's current release of Niagara is non-vintage and utilizes grapes from the Willamette Valley and from Washington State. It's low in alcohol, about 11.5 percent, and noticeably sweet at the beginning. It offers a bouquet of pear and melon, quince and huckleberry with a decided wild, floral, macerated "foxy" note that's both unusual and pleasant. In the mouth, the wine is smooth and mellow, very spicy, concentrating on the pear and quince flavors and some (again) wild, macerated element. Acid is bright and bold, and it drains the sweetness from the wine so that from mid-palate back, it's completely dry. My point is, that for a \$7 wine from an American grape, this shows a lot of personality and balance.

I offered LL a taste, saying that it would pair well with veal or ham (especially with a traditional brown sugar and clove glaze), and her response was, "Sure, but it would be great with the Thanksgiving turkey."

At the price, what can you lose?



*Oak Knoll Winery
Niagara (non-vintage)
100% Niagara grapes
Oregon
About \$7
Very good*