

July 30, 2008

## Obscure grapes have found their champion

Tom Hudson, the proprietor of Wilmington's Domaine Hudson Wine Bar & Eatery, on Washington Street, is becoming my early warning system for weird wines.

Well, maybe they aren't really weird -- just mostly unknown and different.

Who else would send me a note after an article last year in which I reviewed a few gruner veltliners from Austria chiding me that, "GV is sooo yesterday." Hudson recommended instead that I try "big brother" roter veltliner.

Or another time he e-mailed me to ask if I had tried txakoli, a white wine from Spain that's easier to drink than it is to pronounce.

So several weeks later, I finally found myself at the Hudson bar with a glass of txakoli in my hand. I knew by the time that I sat down that txakoli (pronounced CHOCK-o-lee, I think), also known as txakolina, is the Basque spelling of a white wine from Spain's northern coast near San Sebastian. It comes mostly from a grape called hondarribi zuri.

"I think of it as the Spanish version of Portugal's vinho verde," Hudson said. The wine he poured was indeed a refreshing summertime cooler -- low in alcohol, high in acidity, slightly effervescent, with herbal fruitiness, yet not tart. To me, it tasted sort of like a cider made from grapes.

"The colder it's served, the better," Hudson said. It had been very popular when he was pouring it by the glass, he explained, and he had sold two or three cases a week that way.

We also tasted a rosado or rosé version of txakoli -- "even funkier," he proclaimed -- which had a light saltiness to it and reminded me of a hot-weather rosy Rhone.

From his wine list, we also tried a very nice elbing white German wine from the grape of the same name. It had characteristics similar to a riesling -- minerally slate and a citrus orange peel -- and in some ways was more food friendly than riesling.

We did not try some of the other interesting, if weird, wines from the Domaine Hudson list, such as a white table blend of xarel-lo, a primary component of Spain's sparkling cava, and chardonnay. Or the picpoul from southern France. Or the two bobals from the Utiel-Requena region of Spain.

I also decided not to take up Hudson's offer to crack a bottle of roter veltliner. He's become such a roter roter.

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