



Monthly Wine Club

## April 2010

I was leafing through a wine reference book that I have had on my shelf for years, but have never bothered to look at. (It must have been a gift.) A section that caught my eye asked the question, “Why do we drink wine”? Always looking for answers to my passions, I read the following:

“Technically, alcohol is a depressant, acting on the

nervous system in a similar way to some tranquilizers, and in moderate amounts creating a feeling of contentment and cheerfulness. So why do we not drink spirits exclusively? Because there are other reasons for dinking wine – magic, for example. In earlier times people did not understand the process of fermentation, and believed that when they drank wine, gods had taken over their bodies.” Well, what’s wrong with feeling content and cheerful?

Furthermore, I am sure I’m not the only one, who after tasting a great wine, has raised my eyes to the heavens and praised the divine for the organoleptic wonder I just experienced. And then there is the dismay of loved ones over my remembering the magic of a wine, but not the occasion for which it was consumed. I’m not sure our two wines this month will evoke a religious experience, but (in moderate amounts if you can) their flavors and food compatibility should bring you contentment and cheerfulness—and for such a small price to pay!



*Domaine Roger & Christophe Moreux  
Chavignol, France*



*2007 Montefalco Rosso D.O.C.*

*Raína*

*Montefalco, Italy*

Recently, in an article in the NY Times, the author invited the reader to say the word **Sancerre**. He wrote, “Just say ‘Sancerre’ quietly and you’ll get an initial sense of the built-in appeal of this white wine from the Loire Valley. The soft sibilance, the internal alliteration, the smooth completion, whether you give it the clipped French pronunciation or simply ease off the word American-style — it’s a beautiful sound, suggestive of beautiful wines.” Sancerre is the name of a wine appellation (AOC) as well as a city, located in the Loire Valley. It is part of the “central vineyards” of the Loire Valley, so named not because they are in the center of the Loire, but rather because they are nearly in the center of France. Together with neighboring Pouilly-Fumé, the region makes up the easternmost extension of the Loire Valley. The area is more than 300 miles from the Atlantic Coast, and is actually closer to the Champagne wine region than it is to the middle-Loire city of Tours, and the Vouvray and Chinon AOCs. The distance from the Atlantic gives this region more of a continental climate than typical of the rest of the Loire, with short, hot summers and long, cold winters. The most dominating geographical influence of Sancerre is the nearby Loire River, which flows northward past the city of Sancerre, before it curves westward at Orleans, and makes its path to the ocean. In 1936, Sancerre white was given AOC status; reds were classified in 1959. The AOC area has expanded fourfold over the years. The AOC covers the communes of Bannay, Bué, Crésancy, Menetou-Râtel, Ménétréol, Montigny, Saint Satur, Sainte-Gemme, Sancerre, Sury-en-Vaux, Thauvenay, Veaugues, Verdigny, and Vinon. Only Sauvignon Blanc and Pinot Noir may be used, and more than anywhere else, Sancerre makes Sauvignon Blancs that reflect the place more than the grape. A true Sancerre is characteristically restrained rather than exuberant, perfumed with citrus and chalk rather than bold fruit. The aromas and flavors are of lime, grapefruit, lemon, flowers and sometimes of herbs, and minerality. The styles of Sancerre will vary somewhat depending on what part of the wine region the grapes were produced. A series of small valleys cut through the hills, each with their own soils and microclimate, leading to a local obsession with terroir. Domaine Roger et Christophe Moreux has been a family estate for generations. It is one of the oldest families in Sancerre, since the 16th century. The Domaine is located in Chavignol, a small village within Sancerre, where one of France’s greatest cheeses is made: “Crottin de Chavignol”, a goat cheese, also protected by an AOC. Domaine Moreux is a member of *Vignerons Indépendants*, a prestigious group of elite,

independent wine growers whose wines are certified for authenticity and exceptional quality. Moreux owns and farms 23 acres of prime Sauvignon Blanc and Pinot Noir, and has a total production of only 5,000 cases per year. The grapes for their Sancerre come from 15-to 30-year-old vines planted on the renowned calcareous clay soils of "Les Terres Blanches". After the grapes were hand-harvested, they were immediately pressed and fermented in temperature-controlled stainless-steel tanks. Once fermentation was complete, the wine matured in stainless-steel for 6 to 8 months before being bottled. The 2008 Domaine Moreux has a striking bouquet full of grapefruit, passion fruit, fig, herb, melon, and minerals. These delicious aromatics follow onto the palate, and are complemented by a mineral-rich finish. The wine is balanced, flavorful, and completely dry. Sancerre is considered the ultimate seafood wine. Try this wine with pan-seared sea scallops on a bed of pea puree seasoned with lime, butter and mint, or with its AOC cousin, the aforementioned Crottin de Chavignol, or any other goat cheese.

**The 2008 Domaine Roger & Christophe Moreux Sancerre is \$20.99/bottle, \$226.70/case.**



Located just east of Tuscany, Umbria, known as the "green heart of Italy," is a land of gently-rolling hills with well-preserved medieval fortress towns. It is a land-locked agricultural haven producing wines, meats, cheeses, vegetables and olive oil, but its true culinary jewels are its truffles. Umbria, named for an ancient group of peoples known as the Umbri, includes the popular town of Assisi along with towns, cities and villages such as Perugia (the capital), Orvieto, Todi, Spoleto and Norcia. Along with the Etruscans, the Umbri inhabited the region and made the most of its natural resources. Viticulture in Umbria dates back to the time of the Etruscans, who began the great tradition in Orvieto. Orvieto, the wine, later became, and continues to be, one of the most popular wines of the region. Even though there are geological and climactic similarities, Umbria's wine production is just one-third of its Tuscan neighbor. Umbria has numerous curiosities among its vines and wines, though few of the local rarities ever leave the region. The hills around Montefalco, to the south of Perugia in the heart of Umbria, represent the richest and most varied grape-growing and winemaking district in the region. The viticultural tradition of the district originated in the Middle Ages through the work of the Benedictines, who put wasteland into cultivation and planted some of the most ancient and typical Umbrian varieties. In 2002, young viticulturalist, Francesco Mariani and his partner Andrea Mattioli, acquired an old 40-acre farm in Turri, a suburb of Montefalco. At an altitude of 800-1000 feet, the farm buildings were refurbished as a state-of-the-art winery, and 33 acres were planted to the classic Montefalco varieties: Sagrantino, Sangiovese and Merlot. The vineyards are positioned with south-east exposure, and are comprised of soils rich in limestone, with a strong presence of stones. This allows excellent water drainage, an important condition for quality grapes. The vineyards are planted at a high density, over 2,000 vines per acre, which naturally reduces yields. Consulting enologist Tiziano Vistali, with extensive experience in the region, assists in making the wines, which are 100% estate-grown. The 2007 Raina Montefalco Rosso is a blend of 70% Sangiovese, 15% Merlot, and 15% Sagrantino. The grapes were hand-harvested, and fermentation took place in stainless-steel for 20 days, following a 25-day maceration. Once fermentation was complete, the wine was aged for 14 months in French *tonneaux*, 6 months in stainless-steel, and then 6 months in the bottle. Only 864 cases were produced. The 2007 Rosso is an excellent wine with food, complex and elegant on its own, with good balance and a refreshing medium-weight body. The nose offers an attractive dusty mineral character, along with hints of mint and pine. As the wine opens, aromas of dry currants, dark chocolate and crushed forest leaves appear, and the taste of terroir remains. In the mouth, flavors of red cherries and plums have good clarity, good acid-fruit balance, and no apparent oak. The mouth-feel is rich with fine-grained lingering tannins. The wine is enjoyable now, but will continue to improve over the next few years. Excellent food and wine are just as much a part of the Umbria's charm as its forests, frescoes, and castles. The traditional dishes of each city or village are inextricably bound with the local wines and the identity of the place itself. The undisputed king of traditional Umbrian cuisine is the pig, around which a true culture has developed. It is cooked in a wood-fired oven, flavoured with herbs, fennel, and garlic, or roasted on the spit, known as "porchetta." A glass of Montefalco Rosso and a plate of "porchetta" accompanied by some freshly baked bread with Umbrian olive oil should send your organoleptic sensors into a state of Italian bliss!

**The 2007 Raina Montefalco Rosso is \$19.99/bottle, \$215.90/case.**