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An article in our local newspaper on wine tasting and expectations caught my attention. The article stated that wine tastes different to those who are given information on the product before or after a wine tasting. Two scientists wanted to find out how information influences the sensory experience by testing their hypothesis that a wine critic's opinion affects the sense of taste. A 92 "Parker point" wine was used for their experiment. Test subjects were divided into five groups: one was told about Parker's positive appraisal before the tasting; the second group also received the information beforehand, but was told that the wine had only scored 72 Parker Points and was thus average. Two more groups received the positive or negative information after they had tasted the wine but before they had rated it themselves. The final group was not given any information at all and served as the control group. The analysis of the test results revealed that the test people who had been given the ratings with 92 or 72 points before the tasting rated the wine differently to those who weren't given the Parker rating until afterwards. In the first two groups, the test people who had been given negative information rated the wine considerably worse than those who proceeded on the assumption that the wine was good. Those who knew beforehand that the wine had been given 92 Parker Points also found the wine better than those who only discovered the rating after they had tried the wine. The article ends stating, "Psychosocial factors are bound to play a role: indeed, the scientists do not exclude the possibility that avid wine drinkers and connoisseurs might change their opinion, and therefore their rating, afterwards to save face. For now, the scientists have a practical tip for restaurants and hosts: always stress the quality of the wine before it is tasted!" Our two wines this month are delicious.....

*2009 Château de Montfaucon
"Comtesse Madeleine"
Côtes du Rhône Blanc
Montfaucon, France*



*2006 Antica Fattoria La Parrina
"Muraccio"
Albinia, Italy*

The history of Château de Montfaucon dates back to the 11th century, when the castle's first tower was built on a tall knoll directly across the Rhône River from Châteauneuf-du-Pape. The Rhône River was the border between the French Kingdom and the Holy Roman German Empire, and Montfaucon was one of a line of castles and fortresses constructed to guard the border, and later to tax ships carrying goods up and down the river. The de Pertuis family had come to Avignon from Piemonte in Italy following the Popes, and acquired the Château de Montfaucon in 1766. Joseph Gabriel de Pertuis became the Baron de Montfaucon, and his son, Eugene, served as Mayor of Avignon, and member of the parliament from 1826 to 1830. Eugene married a Scottish lady, Agatha Clavering, and they had a son named Louis (Baron Louis de Montfaucon), and a daughter, Wilhelmine. In 1910, Baron Louis died, and since he never married or had children, left the Château and the estate to his young niece Madeleine. On her marriage Madeleine became Comtesse de Pins, and today her grandson, Rodolphe de Pins (Rudi), is the winemaker. The eponymous 15th-century castle, set high upon a hill above the village with impressive panoramic views of the Châteauneuf-du-Pape region across the river, is still used as the de Pins' family home. The original winery, where wine was made in various quantities for over two hundred years, was built just below the castle and is used today as an aging room. For much of the 20th century, the family was selling their estate grapes to co-ops, but Rudi had grander ambitions. Following studies at UC Davis, and stints at the renown Henschke Estate in Barossa, and Vieux Telegraphe in Châteauneuf du Pape, Rudi resurrected the Château de Montfaucon name, built a new winery, and began production of his Rhône wines in 1995. Château de Montfaucon's vineyards are spread out between Montfaucon and the two neighboring towns, Roquemaure and St Genies de Comolas. By planting new vineyards and by buying old ones, the original 44.5 acres of vineyards have grown to 111. Their vines are up to 90 years-old with an average age of 40 years. All the vineyards are farmed sustainably and at low yields.

One of the strengths of Montfaucon is the diversity of soils and exposure (mainly calcareous pebblestone on silty sandy soil, soil with clay, and sandy soil) combined with a large selection of Rhône grape varieties (Grenache, Syrah, Carignan, Mourvèdre, Cinsault, Counoise, Viognier, Marsanne, Clairette, Bourboulenc, Picpoul). The 2009 Château de Montfaucon “Comtesse Madeleine” is a blend of 40% Viognier, 30% Marsanne, 10% Clairette, 10% Bourboulenc, and 10% Picpoul. Rudi says, “The Comtesse Madeleine was the niece of the Baron Louis and ran Château de Montfaucon by herself for over 60 years. This wine is named in her honor and displays the strong, distinctive personality that she exhibited.” The grapes were hand-harvested into 20kg baskets and whole-cluster pressed immediately. After settling for 16 hours, the wine was racked into neutral French oak barrels where the fermentation took place naturally without temperature control, to respect the natural expression of the vineyard. The wine was made with minimal intervention and was aged for 6 months in neutral barrels before bottling. The nose of the 2009 Comtesse Madeleine is very expressive with orange blossoms and flowers followed by honey, citrus, apricots, honeydew melon and grapefruit. The palate is rich and complex with intense notes of quince, honey and apricot. The finish ends with a great display of minerality. Try this wine with a variety of seafood dishes such as oven-roasted halibut with a beurre blanc sauce, morels and peas, or have it as an aperitif with mild cheeses.

The 2009 Château de Montfaucon “Comtesse Madeleine” is \$19.99/bottle, \$215.90/case.



The Maremma is a huge and, in the south, quite untamed area of southwestern Tuscany and northern Lazio. The region is characterized by extensive forests, spectacular hill country and lightly populated coastal regions, including salt marshes and estuaries inhabited by unusual flora and fauna. There are numerous small towns and villages that preserve Tuscan customs and a way of life that have become much harder to find in other parts of Tuscany and Lazio. Antica Fattoria La Parrina is a 1,112-acre estate stretching over foothills along the Tyrrhenian coast of the Maremma. The estate took shape at the beginning of the 19th century following the marriage of a daughter of the Strozzi family to a nobleman of the Giuntini family. It has remained in the hands of the Giuntini family ever since, with the Marquess Franca Spinola as the current owner. Despite her honorable age, she is still very involved in different activities on the estate, especially during the time of harvest and vinification. *Parrina* is also a *Denominazione di Origine Controllata* (DOC) comprising parts of the commune of Orbetello in the province of Grosseto. The DOC was awarded in 1971, and extends to 272.6 acres, with about 20 wine producers, the largest of which, by far, is Antica Fattoria La Parrina. The DOC originally allowed only the use of Italian varieties such as Trebbiano, Sangiovese, and Ansonica, but an amendment in 1986 recognized emerging trends in allowing the use of Chardonnay, Cabernet Sauvignon, and Merlot. About 50% of the wine production is white, 35% red, and 15% rosato (rosé, or pink). The name *Parrina* is derived from the Castilian word *parra*, meaning vine or pergola. The area was first called by that name in the 17th century by a group of pirates of Spanish origin, who settled in the district. Some argue that the name of the area is derived from a group of friars, Parrini, who established their monastery in the territory around the 12th century. Today, Antica Fattoria Parrina is considered an historical estate respecting the old agricultural traditions of South Maremma. It is comprised of 161 acres of vineyards, agriturismo apartments, a restaurant, a hunting reserve, a Mediterranean plant nursery, an artisan cheese dairy, an organic vegetable farm and fruit orchards. They started producing their DOC wines in 1971. The climate in the Maremma, influenced by sea winds, hot summers, rainy autumns, and spring weather trends, is ideal for the perfect ripening of grapes until harvest time in early autumn. The 2006 “Muraccio” from La Parrina is a blend of 80% Sangiovese, 10% Cabernet Sauvignon, and 10% Merlot. The wine was made following traditional Tuscan methodology, fermenting in stainless-steel, and then aging for a minimum of ten months in French oak barrels and tonneaux, followed by 4 months aging in bottle. The 2006 “Muraccio” has beautiful aromas of a super Tuscan offering blueberries, red fruit jam, tobacco and herbs. In the mouth, the wine has medium weight, dried fruits and herbs and well-integrated tannins. Maremma cooking is simple but very genuine and flavorful, based on peasant traditions. The meat in Maremma cooking is of three main types: wild boar, lamb and the famous Maremma beef. The wild boar is stewed, as in *cinghiale alla maremmana*, but it also used a great deal to make excellent cured meats such as prosciutto and culatello. Maremma cows are typically allowed to graze wild and provide a lean, flavorful meat: the most famous dish being *buttera*, a steak at least 3 fingers high, grilled over the coals and seasoned with salt, pepper and olive oil. As for the lamb, the most original Maremma recipe is, without doubt, *buglione*. Research these recipes and prepare a meal for your loved ones. You’ll be in organoleptic bliss if you have a glass of Muraccio waiting at the table when you sit down to eat.

The 2006 Antica Fattoria La Parrina “Muraccio” is \$20.99/bottle, \$226.70/case.