

SANIBEL SHELL SHOCKED

Sanibel – a Wine Taster's Paradise

By Art Stevens

Sanibel has so much stuff going on that it's sometimes hard to choose one activity over another. But one activity recently came to my attention that put it at the top of my list – wine tasting. After all, where else can you go to get free booze?

For some reason I was mistaken for a wine connoisseur and invited to a wine tasting event. I was surprised because I know so little about wine that I always thought it came in three colors: red, white and black.

I accepted the invitation and practiced becoming a wine expert for a week. I googled websites on the art of wine tasting. I asked cultured friends how to tell the difference between good and bad wines. I learned about the five criteria of a good wine: color, swirl, smell, taste and savor. And I prepared my palate by gargling with Listerine. I was ready.

I arrived at the wine tasting event prepared to comingle with some serious wine experts. I entered mumbling some words from a wine taster's lexicon, such as clarity, varietal character, integration and expressiveness. This was a difficult impersonation for me because I normally used my tasting skills on peanut butter and jelly sandwiches.

I was welcomed by a wine guide who immediately led me to a row of reds. I was asked to judge some new reds that had come in from various wine capitals of the world.

The wine guide urged me to start with a Biloxi pinot noir to wet my palate. My palate didn't need much wetting and after sniffing the pinot noir, shaking it in the glass and sipping it I was

about to blurt out that I'd like another one when the suave guide led me to the next sample. It was a Bronx cabernet.

I went through the same exercise and felt a comforting warmth as the wine made its journey through my vital organs. "Interesting wine," I said, "but not fully developed." I had read that in a James Bond novel.

The guide was impressed. "Right on the money," he said. "Now you must try this Boise malbec." Onward I ventured. It, too, went down smoothly. "A bit narcissistic, don't you think?" I said describing the wine in gibberish winespeak. "Almost premeditated yet fully in control."

Aren't these the typical responses of wine connoisseurs? I was on a roll. And I impressed the wine guide. "You have this wine pegged nicely," he said. "It's attempting to mature before our very eyes but at the same time not demonstrate the ostentatiousness that four more years in the barrel will create."

What in the world was he talking about? At this point I didn't much care. I continued to walk down the line sampling different reds. At least I think they were red. At a certain point my eyes began to blur and determining colors became more difficult.

I found myself saying such things as "robust but not brilliant", "this red must have an older brother somewhere," and "perspicacious but beyond adolescence."

The wine guide then steered me to some more exotic reds made in such other wine capitals as Buffalo, Fargo and Cheyenne. He said "Before you leave here today you must try this Buffalo zinfandel and the Fargo shiraz.

I was having a ball. I would sip, evaluate, eat a cracker and sip some more. I don't know how much time passed but I felt

some strong arms gently leading me to the door while I continued muttering such inanities as “forgotten but not forsaken”, “withering but not spontaneous”, and “brittle but daringly despondent.”

I remember hearing the voice of the wine guide before I staggered to my car. He said “you have a brilliant palate. You must visit us again soon.”

I realized I was in no position to drive and went right for the back seat. I was still mumbling descriptions of the thirty or so wines I had tasted and passed out. Instead of counting sheep I found myself counting a parade of red wine bottles.