

Get ready to raise a fall glass to France's Beaujolais nouveau

By MICHAEL HUBER, For The Press | Posted: Sunday, November 15, 2009 |

Two things in the culinary world never seem to get much respect - Emeril Lagasse and Beaujolais nouveau, a late November arrival on the wine scene.

Many food professionals consider Emeril a lightweight who arrived on the scene at the right time and knew how to market himself to the public. He went from chef to showman in just a few years. But the reality is that Emeril the entertainer managed to introduce the American public to a bunch of culinary delights that they might never have met on their own.

So, too, the Beaujolais nouveau is considered by many wine professionals to be a lightweight in a field of more-worthy-but-lesser-known contenders. A wine shunned by serious oenophiles, Beaujolais nouveau has a history and provenance all its own.

If sampling Emeril's light cuisine has kicked up the American palate a notch, tasting the Beaujolais nouveau has been a catalyst for many to move up to more complex flavors in their wine selections.

Whatever you think of Emeril or the Beaujolais nouveau, they have both garnered millions of dollars for their efforts.

The controversy continues. Is the Beaujolais nouveau simply marketing genius or beloved tradition, as many people all around the world await its release each year. The Beaujolais nouveau has, in fact, introduced the masses to red wine in its basic form and helped to throw out the rule of red wine only with red meat.

Beaujolais nouveau is a dry red wine, intended to be drunk immediately after a quick fermentation. Spending only a few weeks in the bottle, it offers little of the tannic acids many first-time wine drinkers dislike.

Due to its food-friendly nature, this simple, fruity wine is a perfect accompaniment to the traditional Thanksgiving table. It pairs well with both white and dark turkey meat as well as the many other flavors found at holiday festivities.

Again this year, many Americans will sit down to the Thanksgiving turkey with a cool bottle of Beaujolais nouveau, knowing full well the pairing will work just fine.

Michael Bray, the owner of Passion Vines, an upscale wine store in the Somers Point Plaza shopping center, speaks passionately about the Beaujolais nouveau.

"What I love about the tradition is that it is a great opportunity to introduce people to a grape variety (Gamay) and wine region that is not well known by most consumers. There are so many great producers from Beaujolais to experience, and no better time than now," he says.

"The wine itself is rather simple - light-bodied and fruity. It's intended for immediate drinking and served best at 56 degrees."

When asked which foods he thinks go best with the fruity, young Beaujolais, Bray says, "It pairs great with turkey, chicken and even some red meat - perhaps a burger"

Adam Stromfeld, the owner of Joe Canal's Discount Liquor in Egg Harbor Township, says the Beaujolais nouveau, while still popular, is not the big seller it once was.

"It's still a major player in wine sales, but it's not the phenomenon it was a few years ago," Stromfeld says. "I've dropped my case order by 25 percent in the last few years."

Despite that, Stromfeld says customers will see an added benefit this year.

"There's only one delivery from France this year, as opposed to two," he says. "That should keep prices well under \$10 a bottle."

Beaujolais Nouveau Facts:

n Beaujolais nouveau is released at the same time all around the world, 12:01 a.m. on the third Thursday each November (this year, Nov. 19)

n One third of all the wine produced in Beaujolais and Beaujolais Village appellations are bottled as Beaujolais nouveau

n The 2009 yield will be well below average due to dry conditions

n Producers are describing it as the best wine in the last five years

n Wines from individual producers will vary in quality

n Expect fruity flavors like strawberry, raspberry, banana and pear

n 65 million bottles will be consumed this year

n Cost per bottle will be \$7.99 to \$9.99

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