

FEBRUARY WINES, 2008

All wines we taste and review are current releases and can be found and purchased locally, at the winery or on the web

A FIRE IN THE FIREPLACE, A GLASS OF PORT AND THOU!

Find yourself staring out at a **COLD, WET** or **GRAY** day **OUTSIDE**? Well, the 'wyne-doctor' has the perfect prescription for “**GREY**” – and it looks lusciously ruby-red, or autumn-red-orange-gold –
– a glass of one of the **BODY-AND-SOUL-WARMING PORTS** that were tasted by the panel last month and that you'll find listed below.

Yes, **Port** – Portugal's (and now California's) own special nectar – its gift of warmth to those who enjoy snuggling up with a good book, a good friend, or a favorite dog or cat. A fireplace, though desired, is optional.

AND FOOD? OH YES – BUT THIS WINE IS FOR AFTER DINNER. DEPENDING ON IF IT'S A RUBY-RED PORT OR A TAWNY, IT CRIES OUT FOR:

- *Cheeses like Stilton, Bleu, Dry Jack, aged Gouda.*
- *Any sort of CHOCOLATE! Any dessert featuring nuts and fruit. Cheesecake, crème brûlée, and almost anything decadent that makes you smile!*

THE PORTS!

LISTED IN THE ORDER TASTED – TASTING REVIEWS FOLLOW

Wine A	■ 2004 MILL CREEK “Left of Starboard”	Dry Creek Valley	\$27 / 500 ml
Wine B	■ 2004 SONOMA VALLEY PORTWORKS “Aris”	Clarksburg	\$30 / 375 ml
Wine C	■ KACHINA VINEYARDS Non-Vintage	Dry Creek / Alexander Valley	\$30 / 500 ml
Wine D	■ SONOMA VALLEY PORTWORKS “Maduro”	Australia	\$27 / 500 ml
Wine E	■ 2005 DOW “Senhora Da Ribeira”	Portugal	\$60 / 750 ml
Wine F	■ SMITH WOODSON 10-year Tawny	Portugal	\$31 / 750 ml

➤ *The prices listed are winery or producer-suggested retail prices.* ↩

Port reminders . . .

- 1. When looking at bottle prices, note the size of the bottle ('ml'). Most ports are sold in smaller bottles – “standard” wine bottle size is 750 ml.*
- 2. Since the wine is “fortified” with a high-proof spirit to stop fermentation and retain residual sugars for sweetness, alcohol levels range between 18% - 20% per volume.*

Ports are so individual and unique that choosing a “FAVORITE” doesn't really work. The 10-year Tawny was a unanimous show-stopper, but we would have to say that each of these Ports found its own way to be infinitely enjoyable. Pleasure was all that remained.

**AS ALWAYS,
ENJOY THE REVIEWS – ENJOY THE JOURNEY!**



WINE "A"

2004 MILL CREEK "Left of Starboard"

Zinfandel Port

\$27 / 500 ml

19% alc

Owned by Bill and Yvonne Kreck, Mill Creek is a third generation wine family. The first vintage was released in 1974, but it wasn't until 2004 that Jeremy Kreck took over as winemaker and decided to add port to the winery's portfolio. By the time it was released, new laws had taken effect that prohibited the use of the name "Port" for American wines, hence the name: "Left of Starboard". Made from 100% Zinfandel from Dry Creek Valley, 192 cases of this wine were produced.

PANEL EVALUATIONS AND COMMENTS

- Donna** *Lovely color, aromas of walnuts. Balanced, warm and flavorful port with a heavier, Madeira-like (baked / acidity) quality in the medium-short finish. I'd love to have it with walnuts, raisins, broiled figs and blue cheese.*
- Jim A** *A nice ruby port, mostly well-balanced – a little more on the sweet side than I like, but it's very drinkable. It would be great for a cold day sailing on the Bay. Good with mild cheese, a bowl of nuts.*
- Mary** *I really enjoyed this wine. It had a touch of mustiness in the nose and it was fruity and light for a port. It was balanced and I would probably have it with a cheese plate – blue cheese would be a good pairing.*
- James H** *Aromas that hinted at zinfandel – almost musty. Very zinfandel-like flavors – like liquid raisins. The finish was fairly long and very pleasant – not dominated by sugar.*
- Ingrid** *Berry aromas that carried into very nice flavors of spice and deep berry. It's a port that goes down easily and would be good with a hearty cheddar cheese.*
- Rob** *Luscious aromas. This is a very viscous and creamy port – almost the texture of cherry cough syrup, in a good way. I see this more with cheese than chocolate, simply because it's already has a texture much like a dark chocolate truffle.*
- Bill** *This is an excellent wine. Fruity, vanilla aromas, well-balanced, moderate intensity, all the good characteristics of a late bottled vintage port followed through to the finish.*
- Von** *Very nice port! Toasty caramel nose led to a lighter style, balanced, port with just the right amount of sweetness and viscosity. It would be great with a savory / sweet dessert – or just sipped on its own as dessert.*

GUEST PANELIST:

- Linda** *Very interesting port – almost a hint of tartness in the nose, but the texture was creamy but light and there were raisins and figs in the taste and it had a long finish. I'd even use it to top vanilla ice cream.*



WINE “B”

2004 SONOMA VALLEY PORTWORKS “Aris”

Petite Sirah Port

\$30 – 375 ml bottle

18.1% alc

Owner and winemaker Bill Reading loves port and unlike any other winery in Sonoma County, Sonoma Valley Portworks, located in Petaluma, specializes in producing only Port wine. This 100% Petite Sirah port is made in-house and is unique in that it is gently pressed by foot. Also, instead of brandy, this port is fortified with 140 proof 2003 Cabernet Sauvignon, distilled and aged 12 months in neutral barrels. 400 small-bottle cases were produced.

PANEL EVALUATIONS AND COMMENTS

- Donna** *Wonderful aromas of raisins that carried through to the taste. This is a bigger, sweeter style of port that would go well with raisins, walnuts, apples, figs and blue cheese.*
- Jim A** *A big, mouth-filling heavier style of port – almost like a Tawny, with characteristics of older vintages, making it very thick, with a very ripe / almost pruney character to it. I can imagine it going well poured over vanilla ice cream.*
- Mary** *The nose is huge and fruity and so is the wine. It's a bigger, heavier style of port – more in your face – that needs something to go with it. It also seemed a little hot.*
- James H** *Very interesting, more alcohol-noticeable aromas – almost Scotch-like. The flavors were similar to Amaretto – almond lovers will love this port.*
- Ingrid** *A really fruity, more alcoholic style of port. Everything about this was “big” -- aromas, very viscous, noticeable alcohol and a long finish. Best on its own, without food.*
- Rob** *This is a really big port that can be nice if paired correctly. It's a bit more “Brandy-like” and I think it could use some chocolate to smooth some of the edges. Long, nice finish.*
- Bill** *A unique port with fruit and brandy-like aromas and an all-around lighter style, with characteristics that I couldn't recognize as being like any vintage or late bottled ports.*
- Von** *More raisin and fruit than caramel aromas. Rich, burnt-caramel comes out in the flavors, then fades to raisins, then back to more burnt-caramel. I thought this was a nice port – An interesting and pleasant not in your face style.*

GUEST PANELIST:

- Linda** *Beautiful color! Very rich and sweet port with hazelnuts in the flavor. I'd buy this port. It would be good over ice cream and just nice for dessert on its own.*



WINE "C"

KACHINA VINEYARDS Non-vintage Port

70% Syrah / 30% Cabernet Sauvignon

\$30 – 500 ml bottle

18% alc

Owner / winemaker Greg Chambers and his wife Nancy, named their small family winery after Hopi Indian Kachinas – intermediary spirits through whom the Hopis ask for favorable weather, bountiful crops, and a peaceful and prosperous life. Only 40 cases of this unique blend are produced each year, with Dry Creek Valley Syrah grapes making up 70% of the blend, and Cabernet Sauvignon from the Alexander Valley making up 30%. Choosing to make a “non-vintage” port, Greg blended wine from various vintages for layers of flavor and texture.

PANEL EVALUATIONS AND COMMENTS

- Donna** *Lovely purple color! Had an almost phenol aroma but the flavors and mouthfeel were great – red berry, raspberry – soft at first, then bigger. A very interesting port. Pair with chocolate – and then some more chocolate!*
- Jim A** *A very well-balanced port. Not too sweet, with good complexity. I could sip it endlessly. A handful of almonds would make it a meal.*
- Mary** *The nose on this port was more herbal than fruity. The flavors, to me, were medicinal, very sweet rather than fruity and I didn't particularly care for it.*
- James H** *Has a woody, dusty, almost truffle-like nose. Very dense and creamy. The finish is long and very clean. No particular flavors dominate, making it a very mysterious and delightful port that should age beautifully for 10 + years.*
- Ingrid** *Cherry aromas which continue through to the flavor. I enjoyed this port! It would be nice with chocolate and would balance out and complement a sweet, rich chocolate mousse*
- Rob** *Not a big fan of this one. The color is exquisite, but the aromas are lacking, the acidity is high and I find the flavors don't pay off.*
- Bill** *Excellent color – reminded me of a vintage port. I found the aroma to be lacking and the acidity was low compared to the sweetness.*
- Von** *The aromas were wonderful – fruit, vanilla – downright seductive – a wanted to just sit there and smell it. For taste, there was a “wow” hit of fruit and flavor which lingered throughout – it had good balance, viscosity and again, that great fruit. I'd pair it with big-flavor, fruity desserts like a cherry tart, nuts, and cheesecake.*

GUEST PANELIST:

- Linda** *Beautiful rich color! The color set my expectations high for fruit and a long finish. The richness was there but the finish disappeared too quickly.*



WINE “D”

SONOMA VALLEY PORTWORKS “Maduro”
Australian Non-Vintage Tawny

\$27 – 500 ml bottle
18.5% alc

Two wines from the same producer? Yes. In this case they are so entirely different, they both deserved a place in the same tasting. A blend of three distinctive ports, this non-vintage tawny is made entirely from Australian fruit – 60% from Rutherglen (Victoria), aged 8 and 10 years, and 40% from Barossa Valley (South Australia), aged 18 years. All three ports are made from shiraz (syrah) and grenache grapes, aged in Australia, then hand selected and bottled by Sonoma Valley Portworks.

PANEL EVALUATIONS AND COMMENTS

- Donna** *Most appealing facts to this port were the smooth mouthfeel and complexity and variety of flavors. If the excessive impression of brandy could be lessened, this port would be even better. It can become a bit much without food. Pair with cheesecake or walnuts.*
- Jim A** *I'm not a big fan of Tawnies and this one, to me, since it was distinctly light-bodied, seemed like it should have been consumed years ago.*
- Mary** *Great color, with aromas of fruit and hazelnut. I liked this wine though felt it was a little hot. It was very fruity but not overly sweet, and tasting of raisins, nuts and prunes and reminding me of holiday desserts. I'd like to try it with an apple or apricot pie.*
- James H** *The alcohol overpowers this and the oxidation reminds me more of sherry than of port. The finish however, is pleasant – clean and sweet – like caramel.*
- Ingrid** *A nice, well-balanced Tawny with hints of mixed nuts – cashews, almonds, Brazil nuts. Though it was Brandy-like, it was full bodied with a long finish.*
- Rob** *Great nose of butterscotch and caramel fudge. This was a luscious, warm and intense Tawny – toasted hazelnuts. Think of a warm fire on a cold night. This would be great alone – doesn't need food, but if you have some dark chocolate...*
- Bill** *Excellent nose – oxidized like a Tawny. I liked this wine. A moderately intense Tawny with full mouth feel, and the aromas, balance and flavors all extended to the aftertaste.*
- Von** *Caramel, white raisins and vanilla make up the aromas. A well-balanced Tawny with a tongue-coating mouthfeel, and flavors that lean to fruit and caramel – then linger, and linger.... I want food with this! Crème Brulée, Nutty desserts, cheesecake. Very nice.*

GUEST PANELIST:

- Linda** *A lovely, nutty warm-your-insides port. Flavors of aged raisins, not too sweet, and a long nutty, luscious finish. I like this wine and would definitely buy it*



WINE “E”

2005 DOW “Senhora Da Ribeira”
Single Quinta Vintage Port

Portugal
\$60 – 750 ml bottle
20% alc

This traditional Single Quinta (vineyard) port comes from the Duoro Valley, and one of Dow's two primary vineyards, “Senhora Da Ribeira” (“Lady of the River”). Unlike wood-aged ports which, when bottled, are ready to drink, bottle-aged ports like this one are barrel-aged for two years, then bottled unfiltered, with the intent that they can age in the bottle for decades. Principal grape varieties used in Dow ports are Tinta Barroca, Tinta Roriz, Tinta Cao, Touriga France and Touriga Nacional.

PANEL EVALUATIONS AND COMMENTS

- Donna** *Very interesting nose of raspberry, eucalyptus, wood, smoke, dark plums. Flavors of raisins and a little burnt caramel at the end of the finish. I want food with this port – it is big! Pair with chocolate, nuts, raisins, cheesecake, blue cheese.*
- Jim A** *Beautiful color! Delicious, well-balanced, great fruit, full and rich mouthfeel. A wonderful experience, and a port that should be drunk alone – without food.*
- Mary** *Inky, gorgeous color. Enjoyed this one. I think it has a great fruit / sweetness balance and would be great with chocolate or alone. It would make the end of a meal special.*
- James H** *Dense, woody aromas! The port itself is very dense and sweet. The alcohol is well-integrated and doesn't stand out. The texture is creamy – reminiscent of liquid dark berries. Raspberry cheesecake would be great with this!*
- Ingrid** *Gorgeous blueberry color and deep raspberry flavor. Also has a rich, full-bodied mouthfeel and a long finish. Serve this Ruby Port with Stilton or a hearty Gouda. Nice finish for a meal!*
- Rob** *This wine is really too sweet for me. There are some nice fruit flavors but the balance seems off. Perhaps it could be paired with milk chocolate, or something that would counteract the sweetness.*
- Bill** *Excellent color, excellent balance and an overall excellent vintage style port. Also has agreeable tannins, which provide another taste element. Finish was long and carried the excellent nose, fruit, acid, tannin and body with it.*
- Von** *Beautiful dense color. Aromas of raisins and plums – it smells “rich”. A well-balanced, complex and very interesting wine. It has a nice, not overly viscous mouthfeel. Good for sipping, but it really wants some Stilton or Blue cheese, a fruit / nut dessert or chocolate – either milk or bittersweet... for the touch of pepper in the finish.*

GUEST PANELIST:

- Linda** *Another gorgeous color – and another wine I would buy. Strangely the fruit disappeared, then cherry appeared in a long finish. Cheesecake would be great with this one.*



WINE “F”

SMITH WOODHOUSE

Non-Vintage Port

10-year Tawny

Portugal

\$31 – 750 ml bottle

20% alc

The Duoro Valley, famous for the vineyards that produce some of the best of Portugal's ports, is located in northeastern Portugal. This tawny is a blend of older lots for complexity and depth, and younger wines for balance. The port was then aged at least 10 years in large oak casks before being bottled and released. The grape varieties that go into this wine are mostly Tinta Barroca and Touriga Nacional, with some Touriga Nacional and unknown old mixed plantings.

PANEL EVALUATIONS AND COMMENTS

- Donna** *Lovely tawny topaz color with peach highlights – beautiful to look at. Well balanced, toasted nut flavors – almond, hazelnut, walnut – caramel, raisins and prunes. Pair with crème caramel, chocolate mousse. I could swim in a vat of this!*
- Jim A** *A nice Tawny! Nice long finish. No distractions, just all-round delicious. Would complement a dessert of fruit and whipped cream.*
- Mary** *I like it. Smooth and cream, well-balanced, smooth, fruity, toasty nuts. I think it would be great to end a meal, enjoying it just on its own, as a dessert.*
- James H** *Delightful! Balanced and very well integrated. Nutty flavors with no obvious alcohol. Very calm finish. I could spend an evening with this. Paris with Bach.*
- Ingrid** *Topaz color, caramel aroma and rich, viscous mouthfeel. A very well balanced, delicate Tawny that would complement a smoky cheese quite well.*
- Rob** *Gorgeous color – dark amber. It warms from the moment I sip it – fruit, caramel, nuts – all there. It's just a bit hot, but it would be wonderful poured over peaches – or with crème brûlée. Yummy – gotta love Tawny.*
- Bill** *I didn't like this wine. The nose was too delicate and the tannins were out of balance.*
- Von** *Imperial Topaz color – gorgeous! Delicate caramel, and peach aromas. Complex and delicious. Balanced, with a tongue-caressing, rich mouthfeel. Great with cheesecake or crème brûlée – or just sip it alone as dessert. I like just about everything about this! A “wow” port! Makes me want to sip more, and more, and more....*

GUEST PANELIST:

- Linda** *First taste was deceiving. Initially I didn't like it and then I let the wine fill my mouth and I ended up enjoying the finish of this not-too-sweet, sip-with-cheese dessert. I'd buy this one.*

AND FINALLY...

A SPECIAL THANK YOU TO...

THE ONGOING SUPPORTERS WHO HAVE GIVEN THE PANEL THE NECESSARY BOOST TO KEEP IT FLYING!

Linda and *Donna*, owners of **PELICAN GALLERY** in Petaluma who continue to so graciously offer their beautiful gallery for our tastings. Linda is our much appreciated, ongoing guest panel member.

**SEE YOU NEXT MONTH FOR MORE
WINES TO EXPLORE,
MORE WINES TO ENJOY!**

