

Drinking Beaujolais; That Other November Tradition

After enduring the last few weeks of political ads, you may want to join me in that other popular November tradition; drinking large quantities of wine.

Really. As you may know, at one minute past midnight on the third Thursday of each November (this Thursday!), the new crop of Beaujolais Nouveau is released to the world in a marketing frenzy formerly associated with products like Pet Rocks.

Depending on who you ask, Beaujolais is either a light, fruity wine that bridges the gap between rosés and reds, or overpriced vinegar massaged to legitimacy by French advertising executives.

My sentiments lie somewhere in between. I always buy a bottle for Thanksgiving just to say I've tried it. It goes fairly well with turkey, and most white wine drinkers can choke some down with a minimum of sputtering.

I prefer to pour everyone else's glass first and drink my share directly from the bottle – I don't know why, but it always tastes better that way. I get some odd looks in restaurants, however.

Beaujolais [pronounced BOE-zjoh-lay] is sometimes described as the only white wine in the world that happens to be red. It's served slightly chilled (not right out of the refrigerator, you oaf!), and it does not improve with age.

In fact, if you find a bottle of 2002 Beaujolais Nouveau in the bargain bin, be assured that the contents are probably more suited for removing shellac than for drinking – it's never tastes better than the day it is bottled.

There's a saying that's popular in Lyon, France that goes: "There are three rivers that run through Lyon; the Saone, the Rhone and the Beaujolais."

Believe it or not, that's a real thigh-slapper in France. There's no such river; it refers to the vast quantities of Beaujolais wine that's produced in the area, over 90 million liters per year.

Most articles about Beaujolais go into excruciating detail about gamay grapes, carbonic maceration and the 10 crus (appellations). If you're new at this, all you really need to know is to buy a bottle of DuBoeuf (a very reliable vintner) Beaujolais Nouveau.

If you need a historical incentive to add wine to your Thanksgiving menu, bear in mind that the Pilgrims began making it shortly after they landed at Plymouth. They used their wine to celebrate the first Thanksgiving with a friendly local native tribe in 1621.

Lesser known is the fact that within 20 years the Pilgrims were conducting systematic raids on those same Native Americans, and they celebrated their successes with thanksgiving feasts as well. During these feasts, the decapitated heads of natives were allegedly kicked through the streets. Try not to dwell on it – bad for the digestion.

Although I doubt he was a big Beaujolais drinker, Benjamin Franklin once argued that the glorious location of the elbow is positive proof that God desires us to drink wine. Had God placed the elbow either lower or higher on the arm, we would not be able to lift our wine glasses directly to our mouths. It's hard to argue with logic like this.

But I digress. You'll be glad to know that the preliminary reports on the 2006 vintage are excellent, almost on par with 2005 and 1976 – two banner years for Beaujolais Nouveau.

This being crunch week, you may notice TV, magazine and newspaper ads featuring the new slogan adopted just last year; "It's Beaujolais Nouveau Time." I suspect that this slogan was chosen over another equally clever finalist; "Buy Our Stuff."

Buy their stuff – it will broaden your oenological horizons. I'll close with a quote by the renowned wine expert W.C. Fields: "I cook with wine; sometimes I even add it to the food."