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## The Science and Art of Wine

By Diana LaScala-Gruenewald

Many Lamorinda locals are savvy about tasting wine, but are unaware of the way art and science intertwine to create wine's vast panorama of flavors and textures.

Last Tuesday, an animated crowd of Lamorinda adults convened in the Community Hall of the Lafayette Library and Learning Center for the 6th session of the Science Cafe series. Previous sessions have included talks by the first woman to attempt to summit Mount Everest and by the founder of Google Lit. Tonight's topic was "The Science and Art of Wine".

Four presenters were invited to be on the panel. The first was Dr. Keith Garrison, who earned his PhD studying the genetics of wine grapes at UC Davis. Garrison presented the mystery that was the heart of his doctoral research: Despite the vastly differing flavors of pinot noir, pinot gris and pinot blanc, the grapes' DNA appears identical when examined with standard genetic analysis techniques. Garrison and his colleagues investigated moving pieces of DNA, called transposons, to begin to elucidate the hidden genetic differences between these grapes.

Shea Comfort, a local independent winemaking consultant, spoke next. Comfort believes that science and art are inseparable when creating wine. He explained that different strains of yeast and bacteria have different fermentation processes, and thus produce unique flavors. These strains can be used to engineer wine with almost any flavor or texture. Additionally, Comfort suggested that winemakers could use their knowledge of yeast biochemistry to rescue grapes that have been depleted by bad weather.

Dr. Valerie Uhl, a judge of many wine competitions and the Medical Director of Radiation and Oncology Services at Summit Medical Center, gave a powerful presentation on the health benefits of wine. Wine can reduce the risk of heart disease and increase longevity. However, Uhl emphasized that only small quantities of the beverage are beneficial. Women should drink one 5oz glass of wine every night. Men should drink two 5oz glasses. And no, Uhl reminded the audience, you can't save all your glasses for the weekend!

Monica Chappell, the Wine Merchant and Wine Club Marketing Manager for the website wine.com, was last to speak. She led the audience through the process of proper wine tasting. According to Chappell, the two most important things to do while tasting wine are slowing down and paying attention. She explained that swirling a wine glass simply adds oxygen, making the wine easier to smell. Chappell also touched on how to properly pair a wine with food. The food and the wine should share either a texture or a taste.

Upcoming events at the Lafayette Library and Learning Center include "Why Blog - How to Leverage Social Media to Find more Readers" and "Writers' Series: A Conversation with Senior Film Writer Ruthe Stein."

Wines Tasted:

1. Albert Bichot  
2009 Bourgogne,  
Vieilles Vignes, Burgandy,  
France
  2. Wente Vineyards Riva Ranch  
2009 Chardonnay,  
Monterey, California
  3. Hill Family Estate, Barrel  
Blend 2008 Red Wine, Napa  
Valley, California
  4. Chateau La Commanderie  
de Queyret 2009 Bordeaux  
Superieur, Bordeaux, France
- \*All are currently available at Wine Thieves in Lafayette

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