

How about drinking wine for fun?

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Terry Thelma is an unusually passionate and articulate importer of the German and Austrian wine, and grows champagnes, into the US. After prolonged email communication, I finally had the pleasure of meeting him in Washington DC in late May. There could have been more congenial and certainly more bibulous settings than a Starbucks first thing in the morning but a paper cup of tea was enough to unleash an excellent suggestion from him, the impetus for this article. "What do you drink for fun?" he asked (meaning wine of course). "When I come back from a long buying trip what I want most is Alsace Muscat."

It's not desperately easy to come across Muscat of Alsace in the UK, I have found, but once I'd tracked down Gutwiler Lorenz's 2005 I could see exactly what he meant. This particular one anyway was just so exuberantly, almost cheekily full of life and fruit – yet so delightfully simple, like a bunch of grapes bursting in your mouth, that it was utterly undemanding. Just the thing to relax with, and no need to have the tasting notebook handy to record any of the finer nuances.

I thought I'd ask a range of wine professionals what they choose to drink for fun and started with my wine writer colleague Hugh Johnson, whose beautifully written memoir *Wine – A Life* (Chico) shows that he is a true lover of wine for drinking's sake rather than purveying's sake. "For fun? You're kidding," he began. "Champagne first, its soft, and a glass very often." I have never seen him in the same room as a beer so I obviously know him much less well than I thought. He continued. "I rather like the light bitter north west Italian Sagrantino for its quenching as it's bright, as it were, from serious wines."

I know just what he means. I also love the super-digestible bitterness of Italy's lighter reds, but I digress. On to some more wine luminaries. Still in the upper echelons of UK wine society, I wrote to **Michael Broadbent MW**, author of the world's most comprehensive record of tasting the fine and the rare *Vintage Wine* to ask him what he drank for fun. Not much, seems to be the answer. [Just see his [column](#).]

He sent me back to say that he was too busy updating the tasting notes for a new edition of *Vintage Wine* to answer my question and couldn't wait to get off the phone. I'm sure the publisher if not his wife is delighted. This, incidentally, is the man who complained because the superlative, corked-blossomed bottle of rose that was opened for him at some Spanish lodge did not have a vintage on it, so he couldn't add it to his book.

I thought it would be interesting to know what notable sommeliers drink for fun. After all, the good ones are exposed to a wide range of the finest wines consistently in their work. So what do they choose to relax with? I was not disappointed by the enthusiasm with which three at the top of the tree in three different countries replied.

The current Best Sommelier in the World, **Enrico Bernaboldi** of Le Cinq restaurant in the Hotel George V in Paris surprised me with his choice of white wine. "Personally I like very much two sorts of wine for pleasure, for drinking with friends, both of which are uncomplicated but have lots of character. I like New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc for its freshness, its green fruits aroma reminiscent of kiwi, lime and green apple but with its mellow, exotic notes that also remind me of passion fruit. It's a very immediate wine, summary with lots of colour and life. Kim Crawford's 2005 is a good example."

His red wine choice is perhaps more predictable. "On the other hand I like northern Rhône Syrah for its depth, richness and its capacity to deliver complexity and length. I like it in its youth for its black, spicy character, like wild blackberries, olives and black pepper, and also as it ages towards notes of game, black truffles, leather and jam. It's a wine with deep roots and strong personality, a charming autumn wine."

His counterpart from the 1998 world wine tasting champion, **Markus Dal Monago** of Germany is, perhaps predictably, even more precise.

"I have three wines, which I love to drink as everyday wine:

2005 Heugener, GutsMuths, Rheingau, Riesling

The name translates as 'greenhopper'. This is a crisp, light and easy-going Chassagne wine from a dynamic and young producer. The ideal wine for hot summer days, I am just sipping a glass whilst writing these lines.

2005 Schloss Vollrad Riesling, Eifel, Mosel, Riesling

A wonderful Riesling reflecting the serenity of the Rheingau and the efforts of the Schloss Vollrad team. It is their wine, luscious fruit, great oenology and wonderful for moments with sun, rain or snow.

1998 Chateau Clos, Cuvée Spéciale, Burgundy, Pinot Noir

Classic has for me what is typical for Bordeaux: elegance and freshness. A wonderful wine which ages marvellously well. At the moment 1999 is showing great. It is a wine which matches almost every situation, always keeping up with classic style

2000 San Leonardo, Macchese Guarente-Goraggi

This wine is my special treat after hard working days or to accompany difficult tasks to write. I always have some half bottles at home. Wonderful tension-driven character, which proves that you can still enjoy with characterful wines too.

Well known New York sommelier and wine importer **David Johnson**, now based at the restaurant Daniel, is a Francophile through and through: "My fav wines are usually forward, juicy, food-friendly and what I call 'wines to drink by the bucketful'. I love Low Valley reds and whites. Few wines excite my palate like a good Younger var or drier var from Gesteau Haut or Philippe Fomes. A bit less serious would be a good Saumur Blanc such as L'Yvesite from Thierry Geronzi (a wine that I love for quite a while). For quaffable drinking I love Maucotel. Also irresistible and stimulating is a good Chablis or Petit Chablis.

"For red, I find the juicy, light and refreshing Bordeaux of Cuvée Spéciale, Chiron, Anjou Rouge or top notch Bourgogne the most satisfying and versatile. Then there are more serious wines such as Puligny-Trévioux Côte de Jura. I also love the warm wines of the south such as southern Rhône, Coteaux, Roussillon and Languedoc. Because of the alcohol levels these wines are more demanding.

"It is hard to find my selections. I like too many wines to just list one or two and there are so many reasons I find appealing. If I absolutely had to say one white, it would be Chablis and one red would be Cuvée Spéciale."

But what about those who produce some of the finest wines in the world? What do they unwind with? asked the chairman of Bordeaux first growth Château Margaux, **Caroline Mentzelopoulos**, first and she replied immediately: "Easy in Charente when I am relaxing there is nothing like a St. Sève Cidre and in Greece - being on there - a well done Retsina is marvellous. Even my Greek friends think it's horrendous - in view of the heat and the food!" These simple wines were revealed, I might add, on the day that she released her 2005 vintage at the jaw-dropping record price of 350 euros a bottle - to the tune.

Just up the road in Pissac, the man in charge of super-second Château Pichon Baron, and all of AXA's wine properties around Europe, **Christian Sealy**, confessed to an ironic penchant for a wine with which AXA have no professional connection whatsoever, fine and fanciful, the lightest, driest and most fragile (and refreshing) of sheries - which must be difficult to find in Bordeaux.

For one of the Napa Valley's head honchos, **Bill Harlan** of stuporously priced Harlan Estate and Bond, Comptel qualities as fun, "or something we don't usually drink - something a friend has brought, a German Riesling perhaps - a white wine or a California Pinot Noir".

I had the chance to put my question in person to Australia's best known wine writer **James Halliday**. "My favourite red and I earned a bit of a Michael Broadbent moment, but this as buyer is never short of a world. It always used to include one of Australia's top reds in my top 100 wines - Turkey Flat or Charles Melton's - saying I know it isn't best, and, bless me, everyone's drinking them now."

I'm off for four weeks in Australia where I will, I can assure you, do my very best to tackle wine for fun.