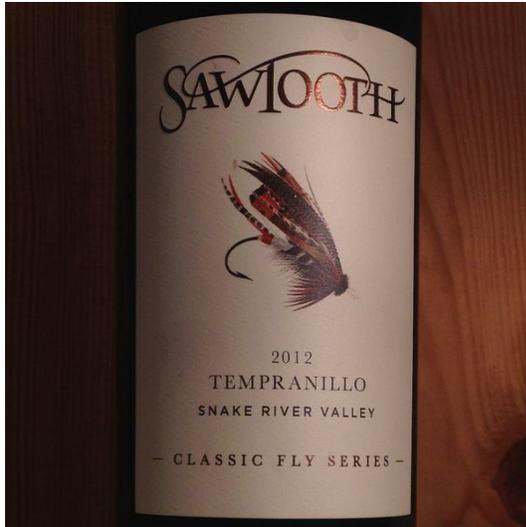


Yes, delicious wines come even from Idaho

By Gil Kulers, February 3, 2016



2012 Sawtooth Winery, Classic Fly Series, Tempranillo, Snake River Valley, Idaho. (Gil Kulers)

All 50 states make wine. Hard to believe, but true.

Now, I'm not here to tell you that it's all great. Some of the wine coming out of California is absolutely horrendous, but that's also true of some wine from North Dakota.

Here's an annoying little question for those of us who are quick to give California a free pass on a bad wine and go right back to the Golden State for their next bottle. Where's North Dakota's second chance?

I've tried dozens of artisan cheeses, locally grown heirloom vegetables and free-range whatever's from all over the country. Generally speaking, they're delicious, or at least interesting. Judging by all the chefs who list the small producers and farms on their menus, I don't think I'm alone in this assessment.

What fascinates me is that, while listing Hormel pork tenderloin or Kroger brand cheese on a menu would be a sure turn-off to restaurant goers, diners cheerfully plunk down 40 or 50 bucks on a wine that is just one out of a million bottles made (for example, 3.6 million bottles of the ever-so-popular Meiomi pinot noir were made in 2013). Meanwhile, they'll pass on a far tastier, or at least more engaging, wine from a non-California/Oregon/Washington winemaking region.

What brings on this rant about the double-standard the locavore movement has for its brothers and sisters in the wine trade? For the past month or so, I've been drinking wines from Idaho — and loving it.

I swore to Irene Squizzato, the nice lady who sent me a dozen Idaho wines, that I would not make any unnecessary potato references, and I can assure you that no potatoes were harmed during my tastings ... unless they were on my dinner plate.

(Just a little housekeeping before I move forward: Are Idaho wines available in Georgia? No. Are they available by mail order? In most cases, yes. Can you make wine from a potato? Yes. Should you? No. Sorry, Irene.)

Like California (and many other states), Idaho planted its first vines in the mid-1800s. Like California (and many other states), Idaho's nascent wine industry was derailed by the phylloxera plague of the late 1800s and Prohibition.

Unlike many other winemaking states, recovery for California's wine industry came in the late 1960s. And, while the Snake River Valley saw new vine plantings in 1970, Idaho winemakers have only recently made a push to gain a bigger regional or even a national presence. There are now 55 wineries in the Gem State. (Not the Spud State. Go figure.)



Wine grapes are grown throughout Idaho, but the stars are clustered in the Snake River Valley region in the state's southwest corner. A new subregion entirely within the Snake River Valley, called Eagle Foothills, was christened in late 2015. Lewis-Clark Valley, Idaho's third American Viticultural Area, located in the western central part of the state, should receive its federal stamp of approval this year.

What are Idaho wines like? A tough question, as they are still figuring that out. There really is no signature grape. Of the 12 I received, there were tempranillos (Spain's main red grape), syrahs and malbecs that were balanced and enjoyable. (I thoroughly enjoyed tempranillos from Sawtooth, \$30, and Cinder, \$29, wineries.) There were also a couple of rieslings and viognier from Koenig Vineyards (\$15) that I felt were outstanding.

The point here, however, is not to find the next wine of the year. My aim is to encourage you to try wines from unfamiliar wine regions and, if you've had a marginal-to-bad one, give that area a second chance.

So, whether you're skiing in Sun Valley or hiking around Amicalola Falls, drop that California cabernet like a hot potato and drink a great wine made nearby.

2012 SAWTOOTH WINERY, CLASSIC FLY SERIES, TEMPRANILLO, SNAKE RIVER VALLEY, IDAHO

\$30

Two Thumbs Up

Aromas of black cherry, cola, blackberry and smoked meat. Medium-bodied, with flavors similar to its aromas and a note of black licorice, it has measured tannins and bright acidity.

Note: Wines are rated on a scale ranging up from Thumbs Down, One Thumb Mostly Up, One Thumb Up, Two Thumbs Up, Two Thumbs Way Up and Golden Thumb Award. Prices are suggested retail prices as provided by the winery, one of its agents, a local distributor or retailer.

