

USER LOGIN NO ACCOUNT? SIGN UP HERE



- CL HOME
- EAT MY CHARLOTTE BLOG
- RESTAURANTS
- FOOD FEATURE STORIES
- EATS & BITES CERTIFICATES
- FOOD-RELATED EVENTS
- CAROLINA BARBECUE
- EAT ETHNIC

CONTRIBUTORS



- MUSIC
- NEWS
- ARTS
- FOOD AND DRINK
- FILM
- SEX AND LOVE

**NO SERVICE FEE**  
WEDNESDAY JUNE 10<sup>th</sup>  
LIVE NATION  
ON SALE ONE DAY ONLY!  
WEDNESDAY JUNE 10  
FROM 12:01 AM  
THROUGH 11:59 PM!  
\*SUBJECT TO AVAILABILITY. PARTICIPATING SHOWS. PARKING AND OTHER FEES MAY APPLY. LAWN AND RESERVED SEATS AT LIVE NATION OWNED AND OPERATED AMPHITHEATRES.  
verizon wireless  
AMPHITHEATRE charlotte  
UPTOWN AMPHITHEATRE AT THE MUSIC FACTORY

- FACEBOOK
- MYSPACE
- TWITTER
- NEWSLETTER SIGN UP

- SLASHFOOD
- SERIOUS EATS
- AMATEUR GOURMET
- THE PIONEER WOMAN COOKS
- COOK TO BANG
- FOOD GAWKER
- BAKING BITES
- CULINARY IN THE DESERT
- ALL RECIPES
- EPICURIOUS
- CHOWHOUND
- THE FOOD NETWORK
- PETER REINHART
- JOHNSON AND WALES

Food & Drink: Corkscrew

## Practice makes perfect

By Taylor Eason

Published 06.09.09

Like the violin I misused as a tot, wine requires practice. I don't read many books about it, although I definitely should; I don't study it much anymore, although that might make me sound smarter. But I drink. A lot. Not to alcoholic levels -- though the thought has fluttered in my throbbing, hungover head -- but enough to become intimate with countless grapes. It's important since habitual tasting trains the tongue to decipher chardonnay or riesling and, with practice, you can discover what makes music in your mouth.



Each month for the past eight years, I've invited an eclectic group to practice their drinking in my home. We blind taste 12-15 bottles at one sitting and the attendees have mostly an untrained yet keen interest in wine. From this base camp I've personally converted dozens into wine geekdom; some have even moved on to California winemaking. Sure, I could taste the wines alone -- Husband and I make regular progress through the bottle stash -- but how much fun would that be?

Not much, but it's not just fun. Tasting with this group allows me to uncover what average consumers enjoy so I can tailor my writing. More often than not, they prefer the really fruity, new-world-style wines. Like California Chardonnay.

For a recent tasting, I saved up four single-vineyard wines from the same producer (Patz & Hall), same varietal (chardonnay), same vintage (2006) but from different vineyards. This "appellation vertical" tasting -- as I coined it -- allowed me to teach "terroir," an elusive yet critically important tenet in wine appreciation. It explains the grape's soil and climate blend and why fruit from one vineyard can taste completely different in another.

I knew the wines wouldn't suck. Patz & Hall -- a smallish, esteemed, wallet-crunching winery based in Napa -- makes first-rate stuff. To craft these chardonnays, they bought fruit from well-respected growers all over California and used almost identical winemaking techniques. All things were equal except the grapes, so this line-up fit my terroir bill. The vineyards represented were Zio Tony Ranch in Russian River, Alder Springs in Mendocino, Dutton Ranch in Russian River and Hudson Vineyard in Carneros.

For chardonnay, everything from the grape clone to the forest which birthed the oak barrel influences the juice in the bottle. But as any winemaker will tell you, good wine starts in the vineyard. This grape requires a cooler climate to develop all the peach, pear and apple flavors inherent in the variety, and these four vineyards enjoy less heat than most. But it's the soil and location that makes these wines distinct. For instance, Zio Tony's reddish, sandy soils are rich with deep iron deposits, yielding fruit that struggles for water and thus develops personality, complexity and minerality. By contrast, the Hudson Vineyard has loam soil and an unusually cool, hillside location which allows the grapes to ripen longer on the vines, building up more flavor and sugars. The only variation in the winemaking? Zio Tony's fruit sees 10 percent more new French oak. But they taste drastically different from one another.

The group agreed. In fact, they were somewhat flabbergasted by the vast diversity in the wines. Did everyone love all of them? No, but now they know the influence of terroir on chardonnay. With wine, as with all other things, practice makes perfect.

### Wine Recommendation

**Patz & Hall 2006 Chardonnay Zio Tony Ranch (California)** Layered with flavor and full-bodied with toasted coconut, soft vanilla, pear, creamy peach custard, refreshing acidity, iron-like minerality and a chalky aftertaste. Sw=2. \$60. \*\*\*\* 1/2.

**Patz & Hall 2006 Chardonnay Hudson Vineyard (California)** Lean, medium-bodied and bright with green apple napped in butter and pumpkin-pie spices. Fantastic, lingering acidity that complements the roasted hazelnuts, fresh peaches and caramel flavors. Sw=2. \$45. \*\*\*\* 1/2.

Sweetness (Sw) rating: 1-10. Star rating: 1-5. To comment on this story, go to [your website here]. Reach Taylor at [taylor.eason@cln.com](mailto:taylor.eason@cln.com), on Twitter @[taylorreason](https://twitter.com/taylorreason), and on Facebook.

[Previous Story](#)

### YOUR COMMENT

Comment input field

Preview Comment

**MIX & MATCH**  
STARTING AT \$20/SET  
Over 6,028 BIKINIS  
CLUBWEAR • SHOES • JEWELRY  
EARTH ANGEL  
Coliseum Shopping Center  
3728 Independence Blvd.  
Charlotte, NC 28205  
(704) 532-8368 | Mon-Sat:  
10am-8pm

### TOOLS

- Save this story
- Email this story to a friend
- Print this story
- SHARE:
- deLicio.us
- digg
- Facebook
- Reddit

### MORE BY THIS AUTHOR

**Australia's McLaren Vale wines: The bold and the beautiful**  
Humble beginnings birth beautiful things. Obama. The Simpsons. Angelina Jolie. And McLaren Vale, a t...

**Expert advice on cleaning up wine stains**  
Stains are the mundane bane of many red wine drinkers. Inevitably, juice dribbles down the shirt, dr...

**Wine: A grill's best friend**  
This time of year, states north of Florida lead the good life. Just in time for the Memorial Day hol...

[More by this author](#)

### PREVIOUSLY

**Australia's McLaren Vale wines: The bold and the beautiful**  
Humble beginnings birth beautiful things. Obama. The Simpsons. Angelina Jolie. And McLaren Vale, a t...

**Expert advice on cleaning up wine stains**  
Stains are the mundane bane of many red wine drinkers. Inevitably, juice dribbles down the shirt, dr...

**Wine: A grill's best friend**  
This time of year, states north of Florida lead the good life. Just in time for the Memorial Day hol...

[More from this category](#)

### MORE FOOD & DRINK

**Big View Diner has a grand vision**  
Big View Diner rises from the corner of a busy intersection in south Charlotte. You can't miss i...