

# Wine Waves

## Further Following The Grape From Vineyards To Ship To Glass

By Cele & Lynn Seldon

When it's time to toast with a glass of wine at sea, your vintage of choice has likely logged many miles before it was poured for your pleasure. How wine makes its way to ships and into glasses, and the widely varied ways it's enjoyed at sea and in ports during a cruise vacation, makes for two toast-worthy tales for anyone who enjoys the fruit of the vine.

The first installment of this tasty series (*Cruise Travel*, March/April 2016) highlighted how Oceania Cruises and Carnival Cruise Line get wine to their ships, on their wine lists, and into guest glasses. This part further explores wine at sea—and ashore.

Of course, before wine is produced, bottled, and shipped, grapes have to be grown and picked. This occurs around the world year-round and in every hemisphere, including classic Old World grape-growing and

Quentin Bayonne/Celebrity Cruises



Celebrity Cruises

More than 200 certified sommeliers guide guest choices on Celebrity Cruises; on Solstice-Class vessels, main-dining-room selections are made from the dramatic two-story-tall wine "towers."

wine-producing regions in France, Germany, Spain, Portugal, Italy, Greece, and beyond, as well as numerous New World winemaking wonders in the United States, Argentina, Chile, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, and more.

Once it's produced and bottled, wine makes its way to ships in various ways. Typically, however, cruise lines work with distributors and other specialized companies and services to purchase, store, and deliver wine to ships when they are in ports for restocking. Of course, wines are also occasionally purchased when ships dock in winemaking regions, as well as for special events at sea—like when winemakers and others from the wine industry join a cruise and share the fruits of their labor with lucky passengers.

**S**pecial wines can also be found at sea on many lines. For instance, in Remy—the gourmet French restaurant onboard Disney Cruise Line's *Disney Fantasy* and *Disney Dream*—the unique wine list includes a 1947 Chateau Cheval Blanc, which is a wine requested by the food critic in Disney's animated movie hit, *Ratatouille*. (Remy is the leading character in the film.) It's considered one of the best vintages in the world, and a single bottle may retail for more than \$25,000. The restaurant's wine list also includes a 1961 Chateau Latour, which is mentioned in the film when a chef offers another chef a glass of the wine in hopes he'll learn his cooking secrets.

Disney obviously isn't kidding around when it comes to wine. Remy actually features two special wine lists: one has nearly 200 selections of mostly French wines from nearly every region in that country; and the other, called "Remy's Vault," is an exclusive list of fewer than two-dozen rare wines from around the world (including that '47 Cheval Blanc and '61 Latour) that is surely one of the most unique wine lists in any restaurant at sea—or on terra firma. Additionally, in



Excursions to vineyards are a regular part of wine-themed sailings onboard Silversea Cruises.

Silversea Cruises

Palo, the line's upscale Italian-inspired restaurant, the wine list is almost exclusively Italian and features a wide selection of "super Tuscans" (many priced at more than \$100 a bottle). Over in the Meridian lounge, a one-ounce sip of Remy Martin Louis XIII Rare Cask cognac, aged in centuries-old casks, is served in an elegant Baccarat crystal decanter—for \$1,250!

Celebrity Cruises isn't kidding around when it comes to wine at sea either. Its wine program across the fleet, overseen by more than 200 certified sommeliers, provides guests with a choice of more than 500 wines onboard (and 35-plus by the glass), several special value-packed wine packages, popular Cellar Masters wine bars with Enomatic wine dispensing systems, Wine Appreciation 101 sessions, and the fascinating Riedel Comparative Wine Crystal Workshop that shows passengers how wine glasses can improve the enjoyment of wine.

In addition, the two-story wine "towers" (in the main dining rooms onboard the line's Solstice-Class ships) have become an iconic symbol of wine at sea. Since *Wine Spectator* started awarding cruise-ship restaurants with Restaurant Wine List Awards in 2013, Celebrity restaurants have won more awards than any other line.

Holland America Line's new *Koningsdam*, which just debuted in April, features a unique wine-oriented offering at BLEND. Formulated in collaboration with Chateau St. Michelle, Washington State's oldest and most acclaimed winery, the intimate BLEND By Chateau St. Michelle purpose-built venue enables guests to blend their own wine and enjoy it at dinner or in the privacy of their staterooms.

"At the core of every Holland America Line cruise is our desire to offer unique, immersive, and innovative experiences," says Orlando Ashford, president of Holland America Line. "And BLEND By Chateau St. Michelle is all of those things and more. The BLEND experience on *Koningsdam* is designed to appeal to everyone, and it will be exciting for our guests to create an exclusive wine tailored to their personal taste that they can enjoy onboard."

BLEND has a tasting table that accommodates up to 10 participants who create their own blend from a selection of five barrels of single-barrel red wine. In addition to the blending process, passengers learn about wine from the ship's wine expert, who leads the blending session.

The session starts with a welcome video from Bob Bertheau, Chateau St. Michelle's winemaker, and guests then sample five unique wines, make tasting notes, and blend their own wine in a graduated cylinder. Next, they then create their own labels for even more personalization. BLEND sessions are held daily for a fee, and reservations are required.

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MSC Cruises

Of course, many fine Italian wines are served on MSC Cruises, befitting its Mediterranean heritage.



Holland America Line

**BLEND, a new concept on HAL's *Koningsdam*, lets passengers blend their own personal wine.**

## Wine Waves

*Continued*

Cruise lines also “bring” wineries and their wines to ships in other ways. For instance, Scott Thomasen, sales director of air, sea, and export markets with Vino Del Sol (a leading U.S.-based wine importer and distributor), has worked with Celebrity and other lines for years, supplying his company’s unique wines and even going onboard for special wine-focused events. He says, “I am very proud of my work with the cruise lines, as they showcase Vino Del Sol’s wonderful wine producers’ fantastic efforts in the most incredible settings imaginable.”

“Over the years,” he continues, “I’ve been lucky enough to have worked with a number of lines we do business with via wine-themed cruises, in which I’ve been able to share not only my stories, but—more importantly—specially selected wines. My most recent cruise with Celebrity was on an Alaska run, where I was able to make lifelong friends with the guests, enjoy a beautiful route, and get to work with the always-amazing onboard staff.”

Thomasen hosted various tastings and other events in several venues while onboard and praised Celebrity’s trained sommeliers. “My just-completed wine cruise with Celebrity reminded me not only what a standout wine and food program the line has developed, but also what a great time can be had at sea while sharing great wines. I can’t wait for the next one!” If he’s not onboard, Thomasen recommends looking for several of Vino Del Sol’s selections, including Zolo Unoaked Chardonnay, ZaHa Malbec, and Tapiz Joven Malbec—all from Argentina. His company’s Black Cabra Merlot is also at sea on Azamara Club Cruises, a sister line of Celebrity’s.

Several cruise lines also work directly with wineries and their winemakers to create exclusive wines just for their guests. For example, it was recently announced that a new range of Cunard house wines have been created and blended especially for the line by Celliers Jean D’Alibert, one of the oldest and most quality-focused wineries in the

Languedoc region of France. The offerings include Cunard Private labels for Chardonnay/Viognier white, Grenache/Syrah rose, and Cabernet Sauvignon red, as well as the 175th Anniversary Cunard Private Reserve Grenache/Syrah/Mourvedre red blend.

Cunard’s well-versed teams of sommeliers point out to passengers interested in the wines that—as with all of Cunard’s wines—the new house wines are stored appropriately. That means chilled rooms for sparkling and white wines, with red wines in separate temperature-controlled spaces—all on lower decks to minimize movement. Each dining location requisitions their wines from main storage on a daily basis and continues to store them in appropriate conditions. Wines for the *Queen Mary 2* are typically loaded in New York and Southampton, though longer voyages and world cruises mean wines are shipped in containers to selected ports around the world.

According to Toni Neumeister, vice president of food and beverage operation and hotel procurement at Crystal Cruises, the line is also focused on the entire wine experience at sea, from proper delivery, handling, and storage to special Vintage Room experiences for wine enthusiasts that feature intimate

wine-pairing dinners for four to 14 people. Neumeister and his team of sommeliers and other culinary experts even held a “Wine Summit” in northern California in 2014, tasting wines and planning future wine-focused offerings for the expanding luxury line.

When a cruise line has Italian roots, wine lovers should expect excellent bottles of vino and grand wine experiences. At Costa Cruises, the popular “Italy’s Finest” program of bringing iconic Italian food and beverage brands onboard certainly includes Italian wines. Ferrari brand wines are featured on all Costa ships, adding the famed Ferrari label from northern Italy’s Trentino region to bars and restaurants across the fleet.

The *Costa neoRomantica* and *Costa Diadema* offer the Enoteca Verona and Enoteca Gran Duca Di Toscana wine bars, respectively. “Enoteca” is an Italian word for “wine repository,” and these popular bars typically feature 80-plus labels from more than 50 Italian wineries—which can be paired with high-quality cheeses and meats. In addition, Costa’s new flagship, *Costa Diadema*, also features a prosecco bar called Bar Bollicine.

Indeed, the number of wine bars at sea is growing. For instance, Norwegian Cruise Line’s new *Norwegian Escape* features a partnership with the Michael Mondavi family called The Cellars: A Michael Mondavi Family Wine Bar. It’s already a popular place where guests engage in hands-on, interactive, and educational wine-oriented activities—including the Wine Aroma Seminar, Wine & Chocolate Pairing, the Riedel Glasses Workshop, and a Wine, Tapas, and Water Pairing featuring Pellegrino water and Garces Group and Folio wines. Plus the new CELLAR MASTER @ SEA program on NCL’s custom-designed iPad platform includes the ship’s wine cellar and Bottle Flow wine list, guided wine flights, wine trivia, Wine University, and videos of wineries. In addition, passengers will be able to interact with winemakers onboard selected sailings.



Costa Cruises

Scores of wines are paired with cheeses and meats in Enoteca Verona on the *Costa neoRomantica*.

A team of experts creates the wine lists and selects the wines carried onboard MSC Cruises, another line with a long Italian heritage. Their operation includes conducting wine-market surveys, working directly with wineries, sampling (along with ship sommeliers), surveying wine sales, analyzing guest comments and requests, and evaluating the operational and logistical aspects of wine shipping and storage on land and at sea.

Wine-related activities onboard the *MSC Divina* provide a good example of the line's passion for vino. As part of MSC's partnership with Blend Craft Wine, offerings include "Boutique Wine Tastings" that feature vintages only available at the wineries. Winemaker experiences at "Wine-Waves"—where guests create, bottle, and label their own blend of wine—are paired with winemaker dinners. The "World Series Of Wine" program recreates the famous 1976 European wine competition highlighted in the feature film *Bottle Shock* and includes a wine tasting and a screening of the movie. MSC wine lists have unique categories like "Adventurous Whites," and in the line's Eatly Steakhouses, several Italian wines are served by the glass or in smaller 17-ounce bottles that are a perfect size for couples.

Those who know their wine pricing may be able to spot occasional bargains when at sea or onshore in or near winemaking regions. For instance, Larry Martin, founder and president of Food & Wine Trails, recently learned on a Silversea Cruises' sailing that the line doesn't gouge when it comes to wine pricing. "They price their wines at 10 percent over wholesale," says Martin, meaning that Silversea "cruisers can buy some relatively rare wines onboard at prices cheaper than or at the price they can find online."

Martin most definitely knows wine—and cruise travel. His company has produced more than 100 wine cruises since launching its first one in 1989 with five Napa and Sonoma winemakers and *Bon Appetit* editor Anthony Dias Blue. These cruises—which are often, but not always, onboard Oceania Cruises' ships—are hosted by winery owners or winemakers and include hard-to-find wines for tastings and dinners, private shore tours to top wine estates, and much more. The company also offers wine cruises with Silversea, Regent Seven Seas Cruises, Paul Gauguin Cruises, and Uniworld Boutique River Cruises.

Food & Wine Trails takes experiencing wine at sea, on rivers, and in ports to another level. For example, a past cruise featuring California's famed Chateau Montelena offered a 25-year retrospective of its Napa Valley Cabernet Reserve. This summer a cruise with Napa's Conn Valley Winery owner Todd Anderson will feature a blind



Ingrid Fietbok-Kremer/Norwegian Cruise Line

Educational wine-oriented activities are popular in The Cellars on NCL's new *Norwegian Escape*.

tasting of their Estate Reserve Cabernet, Right Bank, and Eloge wines compared to top Bordeaux varietals from France. Lucky participants will be able to compare wines from the company's 2009 "great" vintage and those from the 2011 vintage, which the press labeled as "bad."



Crystal Cruises

A master sommelier shares his knowledge with guests during a wine tasting onboard the *Crystal Symphony*.

Martin points out that the wine cruises are usually more expensive than a typical voyage purchased directly from the cruise line. "On all Oceania Cruises [wine-theme sailings], the normal \$300 to \$350 per-person program surcharge is offset by free prepaid gratuities and a \$100 shipboard credit. In some cases—like the November 2016 Uniworld Rhone River cruise for Eric Ross and Riverbench wineries—the per-person cruise cost is hundreds of dollars cheaper than what the cruise line offers on its website."

For 2016, the Food & Wine Trails' list of world-class winery cruise hosts includes the Hess Collection, Schramsburg Vineyards, and Robert Biale Vineyards, among many. There will also be four Zinfandel Advocates & Producers (ZAP) winery owners on four seven-day Rhone River cruises on the *Uniworld Catherine*. These cruises will include the ZAP "University Of Zin" wine program with a welcome party, two seminars, group dinners, private events hosted by leading winemakers, and more as the ship journeys to five wine appellations in the heart of France's Rhone Valley.

Some lines also operate their own "wine cruises." For instance, this year SeaDream Yacht Club features Wine Voyages designed by the line's new wine director, Ida Donheim. The Mediterranean cruises will feature a selection from the world's most well-known wineries, exclusive and rare wine tastings, and world-class cuisine and wine pairings at a Winemaker's Dinner, in which a local grower or winery shares treasures from their own cellars. Other activities will include shore excursions to boutique vineyards, casual onboard tastings that highlight local producers from regions visited, and in-depth tastings that focus on a specific topic, grape, or region. Ideal for both beginners and oenophiles, the Wine Voyages are expertly curated by Donheim, a seasoned chef and sommelier.

Of course, many rivers and, thus river cruises, course through world-class wine regions in Europe. Viking River Cruises, for example, offers special onboard wine tastings, local wines with meals, vineyard and chateau visits and tastings, and more on its cruises in France, Germany, Portugal, and beyond. In fact its "Chateaux, Rivers & Wine" sailings in France's fabled Bordeaux region are more popular than ever.

Given all of these options from vineyards to ship to glass, enjoying fine wines at sea is easier—and better—than ever. And cruise travelers are saying cheers to that! **[CT]**