

The Oeno File

LuxuryWeb Magazine

dedicated to the art of living well.

Story by Manos Angelakis
Bottle and label photos courtesy of the producers



Coravin Model 2

I recently acquired an item that will become an indispensable tool.

The Coravin Model 2 is a device that will allow me to sample wines, especially red wines, without having to open a bottle. That means that I can check a wine repeatedly, as it is aging.

I happen to like well aged red wines. There are a few red wines that are better when young; but in general, if a wine is allowed to age in a cool, dark cellar it becomes better overall, as the flavors get better integrated and the tannins subside.

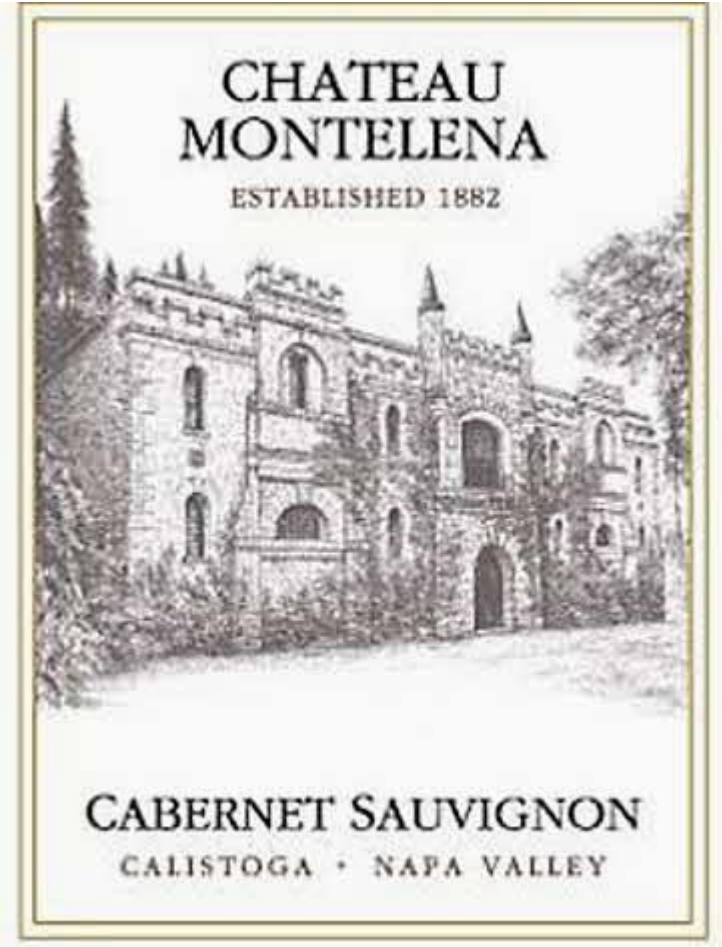
Up to now, I would have to acquire a number of bottles; sometimes an entire case of a wine I want to age. When you don't have large cellar space -- I live in a condo apartment -- you end up with too many boxes and bottles and too little space to store them.

The way the Coravin works is that you insert a long needle through the cork, you inject a neutral gas in the bottle, and you get a small amount of wine, about 1/3 to 1/2 glass. When the needle is withdrawn the cork closes behind it; the inert gas prevents oxidation as no air is allowed to enter the bottle, and you can re-taste the wine if you wish at a later date. You can taste what's in a bottle numerous times without having to finish the bottle once you open it. This way, good wine does not go to waste (but my wife will probably be upset because we use a lot of the wines I taste in our kitchen).

I used the Coravin to sample a number of wines that were sent to me from both famous producers, like Chateau Montelena Estate in California and Donnafugata in Sicily, and not-as-well-known producers like Ravage also from California and Bodegas Emilio Moro from Sancho Martin and Valderramiro in Spain.

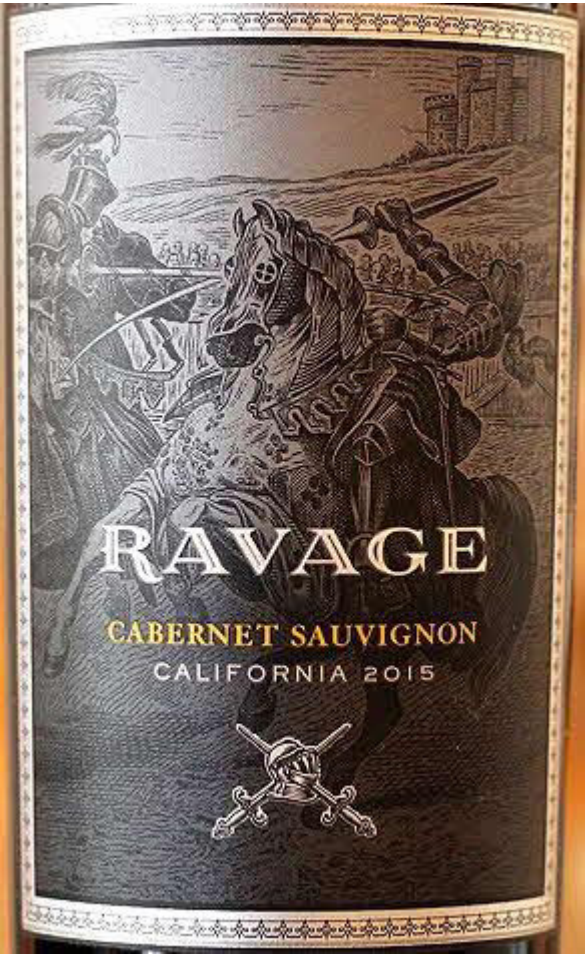
The Coravin can also be used in screw-capped wines as you can get plastic screw-caps with a membrane that can be punctured by the needle. The original metal screw-cap gets removed and the plastic, membrane-topped-cap gets installed. It will only keep wines from oxidizing for 3 months and that is enough time to allow a screw-capped bottle to be drunk slowly. Anyway, screw-capped bottles are supposed to be consumed within a year or less from bottling, because the modern screw-cap is only used for wines that have short lives. That's why mostly whites and rosés are screw-capped. Red wines that need aging are still capped with cork because cork allows for micro-oxidation that smooths the wine and tames the tannins.

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The 2013 **Montelena Estate Cabernet Sauvignon** is a remarkable Napa Valley wine. Of course, Chateau Montelena is well known to the public for their Chardonnay, one of the two California wines that surpassed French grand cru bottles in the 1976 Judgment of Paris -- a blind tasting by numerous French wine writers and critics, where an English wine importer pitted Grand Cru wines from Bordeaux chateaus against wines from American wineries, and 2 American wines -- a Cabernet Sauvignon from Stag’s Leap and a Chardonnay from Chateau Montelena -- were deemed better and garnered more overall points than equivalent Grand Crus!

The Montelena “Cabernet Sauvignon” is actually a blend of 97% Cabernet Sauvignon, 1.5% Cabernet Franc and 1.5% Petit Verdot; clean and fresh with a long finish featuring rounded tannins and dominant fruit. I would rate it at 95/100 points. The mid-palate offers a considerable predominance of black fruit, strawberries, cedar and espresso coffee. Very drinkable indeed and will only improve with time.



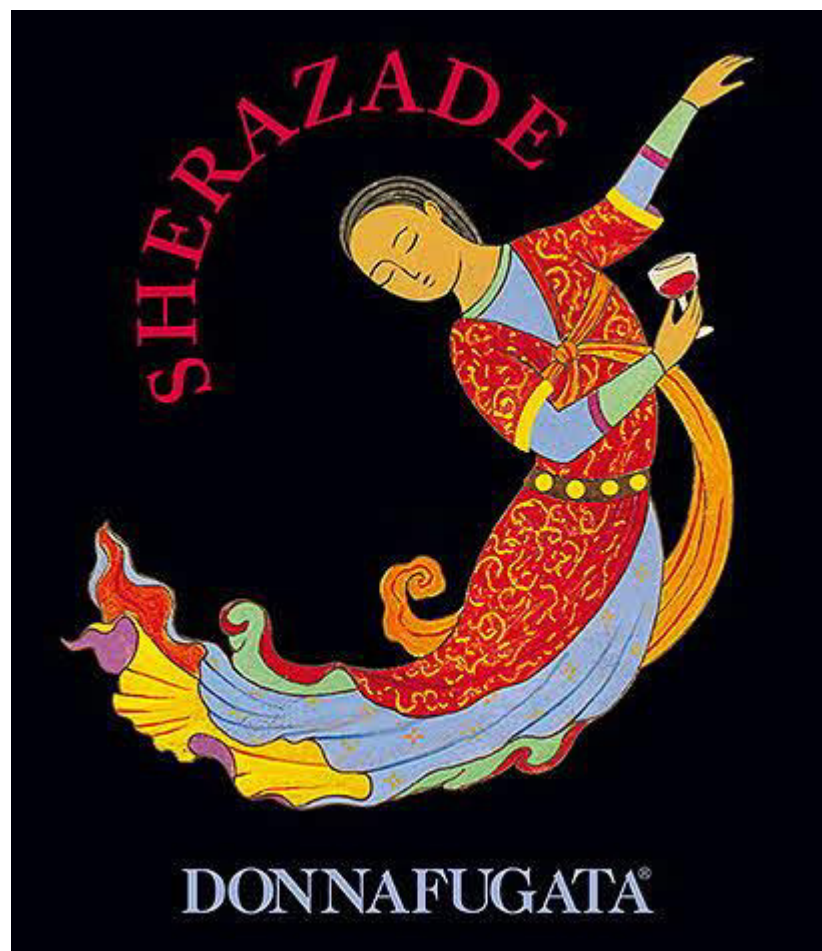
2015 **Ravage**, is a blend of 76% Cabernet Sauvignon, 10% Merlot, 10% Zinfandel, 3% Syrah and 1% other reds. It is a pleasant wine, though not as clean or as long as the Montelena Cab. Dark berries predominate on the palate with hints of vanilla, cigar-box and mocha. It is well structured, with rather soft tannins. Has a little less alcohol (13.5%) than the Montelena (14.1%).

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Emilio Moro's 2011 **Sanchomartin** and 2011 **Valderramiro** are two exceptional Spanish wines made from an indigenous Spanish varietal, Tinto Fino. Actually Tinto Fino is a Tempranillo clone that adapts very well to a local microclimates and so it has different names in each area where it grows; it is known as Tinto Fino in Ribera del Duero, Cencibel in La Mancha and Valdepenas, and Ull de Llebre in Catalonia.

Both wines are exceptional and very well rated by wine publications around the world garnering for example 94 points in Wine Spectator, 97 points in Wine Enthusiast, 93 points in Decanter, and 93 and 94 points at Guía Peñín to name but a few. I liked this Tempranillos very much and if I was rating them I would award them 94 or 95 points. Both are considerably floral with black fruit, oak, cocoa, tobacco, and cedar on the palate. Both are long aged in small oak French or American barrels and then cellared for a number of years in bottle.. They are small production wines, 2,500 bottles per vintage for Sanchomartin (first planted in 1964) and 7,000 bottles for Valderramiro (planted in 1924); both have a long and well balanced finish with considerable acidity that works very well with fatty meats and game in red or brown sauces.



Donnafugata is one of the best Sicilian wine producers (see [Sicilian Wines](#)). In the US it is better known for whites, but some of the reds they produce are also very well received. **Sherazade**, is made from the Sicilian varietal Nero d'Avola. It is vinified in stainless steel and sees no oak, therefore is a bit lighter and fresher, more aromatic and fruity compared to the other reds. Dazzling clean acidity elevates this wine to levels usually only reserved for French or Chilean Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon blends. Fresh black cherry fruit and fragrant spice aromas guide the palate into hints of dark chocolate, with lush cherry and blackberry flavors. It is also considerably inexpensive, selling in the US for under \$20, depending on the region.

To your health!