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Mr. Know-It-All

One of my missions is to do away with the aura of omniscience that so often adorns wine writers. I did a fine job of it at a dinner the other night.

We were at a restaurant with a good wine list and some people I had never met before. Naturally it fell upon me to order the wines. It's not a chore that I mind a bit! In fact, this restaurant's list was on its web site so I could do some preliminary scouting, thereby avoiding the antisocial burial of nose in list at the table.

I had checked off a few good choices in my mind, including an excellent grand cru Chablis for a very good price and a Rioja from [López de Heredia](#). Alas, when in the restaurant I looked at the actual list I knew right away I had been victimized once again by the out-of-date web list. Ladies and gentlemen of the restaurant industry, if you are going to post your wine list, and we are thrilled when you do so, please keep it up to date!

Oh well. So I had to study the list again, and naturally the great deals in older vintages were no longer there. But what's this? A 2001 Le Clos [Blanc de Vougeot](#) from Domaine de la Vougeraie? We must have that! It's a rare curiosity that I've [tried once before](#), a white from the heart of red Burgundy territory, adjacent to the grand cru vineyard Clos de Vougeot.

The sommelier smiled as she took my order, and I settled in with an air of expectation, only to see her back in a few minutes with a crestfallen look on her face. "We had some wine people in earlier tonight and the chef delivered our last two bottles to their table," she said. Curses, foiled again.

Desperate for something to drink, we settled amicably for a dry Germany riesling, the 2006 Grey Slate from Dönnhoff, which was delicious. (My report on 2007 German spätleses, by the way, will be in next Wednesday's newspaper.) We followed that up with a decent Chablis, though not the one that initially caught my eye.

Here's where things got interesting – by which I mean embarrassing. The Rioja was no longer on the list, nor the '04 Bachelet Gevrey-Chambertin, which I imagined would have been delicious. But it did have a 2007 pinot noir from [Copain](#), whose wines I wrote about in my recent article on California [pinot noir](#).

Eagerly, I ordered it. It did seem as if it would be a little young, but it wasn't one of the single-vineyard wines. Rather, it was an Anderson Valley blend called Tous Ensemble, which I thought would be fresh and enticing, demonstrating a side of California pinot noir that has been hard to see in recent years.

The restaurant did have the bottle, thankfully. As the sommelier poured a sip to taste, I found myself engrossed in conversation and gave the bottle only a cursory look. It was Copain, all right. I sampled the wine, and it was sound though it hardly tasted as I

remembered. Oh well. We'll see what everybody else thinks.

Everybody loved the wine. I was a little disappointed in it, though, and turned my attention to the next bottle – ah, a 2001 Léoville-Barton. We'll end the meal on a classic St.-Julien note.

Meanwhile, the sommelier asked us if we wanted another bottle of the Copain pinot noir. I said I didn't think so, and a fellow at the other end of the table said, "You mean the syrah?" The sommelier said, "That wasn't syrah, that was a pinot noir." And the fellow said, "Really? I thought the bottle said syrah."

So she went to fetch the bottle and sure enough, it was Copain's Tous Ensemble syrah. Now, I knew it didn't taste right, but when you think you're drinking a specific wine, it's hard to entertain the idea that the wine in question is something different. But still, I felt chagrined. Here I was supposed to be the wine expert, and I had assumed a syrah was just a weird-tasting pinot noir. Yes, indeed, there's a certain amount of irony here for anybody who followed the great pinot noir debate after my article came out.

In any case, we all had a good laugh. I had done my part in lifting the aura of omniscience. And without the expectation of pinot noir, I had to admit it was a pretty good syrah.