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Although I do not often write about the topic in detail, wine producers are a leader in the global goal of lowering carbon emissions and reducing man's impact on the land through the use of chemicals. Unlike many field crops, where farmers have a short window to raise their crops, wineries get to take a much longer view, often stretching across multiple generations. While this is much more common in Europe, outside of our purview for this club, this month we will look at two wineries who are completely invested in producing great wines with a minimal impact on the environment.

There is a lot of misinformation about wines made with organically-grown grapes, so this month I hope to set the record straight. The first thing to understand is that there is a difference between *USDA certified organic wine*, those *made using organically grown grapes*, and versions produced using *biodynamic* and *sustainable* farming practices. This is a huge topic, but I am going to boil it down as succinctly as possible.

First, it is important to understand that conventional farming focuses on maximizing crop yield through a prescribed process of vine nutrition via fertilizer and avoiding issues for the vines with fungicides, pesticides and herbicides. Most treatments are applied prophylactically, meaning in advance of any issues. For example, if it rains in July, the farmer would spray a commercial fungicide to prevent rot on the vines. This would be done regardless of whether any rot is detected. This is far-and-away the most common type of farming done, representing roughly 90% of all grapes grown in the US.

According to the Organic Vineyard Alliance (www.organicvineyardalliance.com) a *USDA certified organic wine* must be made with grapes grown following certified organic practices, which involves annual inspection. This means the grapes are grown without the use of any synthetic fertilizers, herbicides, fungicides or pesticides. It does not prohibit versions that are natural/organic. In the cellar, the winery may use cultured yeast, but they are not allowed to use sulfur at any stage of the production. This differs from a *natural* wine where they cannot use anything other than indigenous, also known as *wild*, yeast.

A wine *made using organically grown grapes*, such as our Bousquet Gaia, follows the same farming practices as certified organic wine, but they are allowed to use up to 100 ppm of sulfur in the production. Most red wines have between 30-50 ppm of sulfur, and dry white wines tend to be slightly higher, 50-70 ppm. Sweet wines, and those with very low pH, do require more sulfur to remain shelf stable. While we are on the topic of sulfur, it should be noted that there has never been a study that conclusively links low levels of sulfur ingestion to any problem other than triggering an attack in asthmatics.

Biodynamic farming is a process of grape-growing that incorporates the writings of Dr. Rudolf Steiner, an Austrian philosopher/social reformer from the mid-19th century. Among many other things, Steiner was a harsh critic of the effect of the industrial revolution on society. Biodynamic farming applies his writings to assume that the vineyard begins at the core of the earth, extends to the stars, and encompasses all the living things within the "biosphere" of the farm. What is most important to know is that biodynamics does not allow any man-made chemicals on the vine, but does allow sulfur up to 100 ppm. Most biodynamic producers only apply sulfur at bottling, if at all.

Finally, *sustainable farming*, which is the process used by Left Coast Cellars, allows for man-made chemicals, but only in response to problems, not preventatively. *Certified Sustainable* farming involves an inspection process and incorporates practices to limit the use of man-made chemicals, the winery carbon footprint and often local environmental threats, such as being "salmon safe" for producers in the Pacific Northwest. There is no restriction on the use of sulfur in these wines up to 300 ppm. While this may seem a somewhat vague designation, sustainability allows wineries in marginal growing regions to demonstrate they are consciously trying to minimize their impact on their environment.

My first selection for this month, the **2015 Domaine Bousquet Gaia (\$20)**, is owned by a French family that arrived from in Argentina from Carcassonne, France, in 1990. They wanted to grow grapes using only organic protocols, and they identified the dry climate of the Valle de Uco in Argentina as the perfect place. Since then, they built a modern winery and are now producing some of the most award-winning wines, made from organic grapes, in the world.

As you can imagine, with such a huge commitment to organic farming, the Bousquet family feels a great connection to the earth. All of their vineyards lie in the Tupungato region of the Valle de Uco, roughly 3 hours south of the city of Mendoza. At nearly 4000 feet above sea level, the climate is very dry and the soil is primarily sand, weathered from hundreds of millions of years from the nearby Andes Mountains. The poor soils also naturally restrict the vines from producing much fruit, which ramps up the concentration of the wines.

They name their reserve wine "Gaia," after the Greek mythology personification of earth. The grapes for this wine also come from their Tupungato vineyards, but the blend is 50% Malbec, 45% Syrah and 5% Cabernet Sauvignon. The grapes

are all picked and fermented separately, then aged in neutral French oak barrels for 10 months. The final blend is made right before bottling.

When you open this wine you will also want to give it a few minutes in the decanter before serving. Once you do, it offers you a complex nose of fresh red cherries, dried dates, cooked currants, subtle burnt caramel and vanilla pastry cream. On the palate it is quite dense, with the fruit moving across the palate in a thick wave, framed by sweet notes of oak and spice. This wine has an impressively long finish for \$20, and will cellar nicely for up to five years. Drink this wine with braised beef dishes or a slow-roasted pork shoulder.

My second selection, the **2015 Left Coast Cellars Pinot Noir “Cali’s Cuvee” (\$24)**, is from a Willamette Valley, Oregon producer totally focused on minimizing their impact on the environment. The winery was established by the Pfaff family in 2003, on what were former apple groves. This is one of the largest contiguous estates in Oregon, and this allows them to create a unique biosphere where they also produce honey. Bees are particularly sensitive to chemicals in their environment and are the symbol of natural farming.

Their estate lies relatively far south in the upper Willamette Valley, which is important because they lie within the Van Duzer corridor. This is a divide in the coastal mountain range that imparts a greater impact of ocean breezes on the area. As a result, their vineyards are cooler and windier than their neighbors to the north. The vineyards are farmed using LIVE certification practices (Low Impact Viticulture and Enology), the estate is certified Salmon Safe and they participate in the new SALUD program which provides healthcare to their farm works. In addition, they are the recipient of the second-largest grant in Oregon for solar power, which runs 90% of their electric needs. They also only use irrigation water from their high-elevation retention ponds.

The winemaking, directed by Joe Wright, accentuates the quality of the fruit with minimal producer fingerprints. Cali’s Cuvee, which is named for the owner’s daughter, is a Pinot Noir made from selections from all of their six vineyards, and a mix of eight different clones. Grapes are fermented in open-top, stainless steel fermentors and the wine is aged for nine months in French oak barrels, with about 10% being new.

When you are ready to drink this wine, give it a splash in the decanter for a few minutes to release the bouquet and allow the acids to soften. Once you do, this wine reveals the relatively savory, cool climate driven side of Pinot Noir, with aromas of tart cherry, underripe strawberry, rhubarb, rooibos tea and toasted walnuts. On the palate, it shows good concentration but a bit of restraint, as the moderate acidity and tannins pull on the fruit. This wine is a lovely example of the true nature of Willamette Pinot Noir, and one that works great with salmon patties, pork tenderloin or an Alsatian bacon tart.

Smoked Salmon Cakes

I will admit this is a recycled recipe, from the New World Red Club, November 2013 and the Explorer Club in May, 2015, but it is a favorite of mine. This recipe is perfect for the savory side of Pinot Noir and is surprisingly nice with the Gaia too.

I grew up eating salmon cakes made with canned fish so when I discovered this recipe it was a revelation. If you buy salmon with the skin on then get 1 1/3 pound to make sure you have enough after trimming. Also be careful not to over process the salmon in the food processor.

3 tablespoons plus 3/4 cup panko bread crumbs
1 tablespoon chopped fresh dill
4 ounces finely chopped smoked salmon
1 tablespoon chopped capers
2 tablespoons mayonnaise
4 teaspoons lemon juice
1 scallion, sliced thin
1 small shallot, minced
1 teaspoon Dijon mustard
1/2 teaspoon salt
1/4 teaspoon pepper
pinch cayenne pepper
1 (1 pound) skinless salmon fillet, cut into 1-inch pieces
1/2 cup vegetable oil

1. Combine 3 tablespoons panko, dill, capers, smoked salmon, mayonnaise, lemon juice, scallion, shallot, mustard, salt, pepper, and cayenne in bowl. Working in 3 batches, pulse salmon in food processor until coarsely chopped into 1/4-inch pieces, about 2 pulses, transferring each batch to bowl with panko mixture. Gently mix until uniformly combined.

2. Place remaining 3/4 cup panko in pie plate. Using 1/3-cup measure, scoop level amount of salmon mixture and transfer to baking sheet; repeat to make 8 cakes. Carefully coat each cake in bread crumbs, gently patting into disk measuring 2 3/4 inches in diameter and 1 inch high. Return coated cakes to baking sheet.

3. Heat oil in 12-inch skillet over medium-high heat until shimmering. Place salmon cakes in skillet and cook without moving until golden brown, about 2 minutes. Carefully flip cakes and cook until second side is golden brown, 2 to 3 minutes. Transfer cakes to paper towel-lined plate to drain 1 minute. Serve.