



January, 2017



I originally selected my first wine, the **2013 Andrew Rich Tabula Rasa (\$18)** because I figured a wine that represents a “clean slate” would be perfect for a new year. What I did not consider, until I started my research for this piece, is the philosophical can of worms this concept promotes. The idea of the *tabula rasa* was originally put forth by Aristotle, who believed that every person was born without any preexisting knowledge, and that the basis of human knowledge is completely derived through learning and experience. Since I doubt most of you wish to delve into the philosophical debates between Platonic, stoic and religious thinkers while drinking wine (actually my favorite time), my content for this feature will be much lighter. Let us only consider the concept of a “clean slate” for the new year, as it applies to a new beginning.

The idea of “clean slate” occurred to Andrew Rich, while traveling throughout the Mediterranean coast of France. Andrew began his wine career by editing a wine column for a national magazine. This inspired him to move to Burgundy, France, and study winemaking. He returned to the US and worked for six years at Bonny Doon, under the innovative Randall Grahm. In 1997 he then moved to the Willamette Valley with the goal of making Rhone inspired wines from Grenache, Syrah and Mourvedre, like the ones he fell in love with while living in France. Unfortunately he had to wait a few years before grape contracts for those varieties, which are rare even in Washington State, became available. During that time he fell back in love with Pinot Noir, but that will be a feature for another month.

Fortunately, after his wait to acquire contracts to buy grapes in the Columbia Valley of Washington, Andrew managed to secure some fruit from superb sites. He makes several wines from these grapes, including a Chateauneuf-du-Pape inspired wine from the famous Ciel du Cheval vineyard, as well as wines made from Alder Ridge, Klipsun and Red Willow vineyards. While they may not be household names, those are all sources for previous Reserve Club selections.

To make his Tabula Rasa, Andrew starts with a base of 34% Syrah, and blends in 29% Grenache and 28% Mourvedre. Although it is not traditional, the addition of 9% Merlot helps to round out the wine, adding a little extra meat to the bone. Following in the footsteps of the wineries of southern France, the components of this wine are aged in older, neutral barrels for fourteen to sixteen months before the final blend is made and bottled.

Andrew's national sales manager, John House, who I will discuss next, believes this is the consummate pizza/pasta wine. Although I agree that it is extremely versatile, to me it is more substantial and offers more pairing potential than just simple foods. When you crack the cap you will want to decant this wine for at least a half-hour. Once you do it explodes out of the glass with a dramatic combination of blackberry and blueberry pie, bitter orange marmalade, dark chocolate, graphite and some vanilla pastry cream. In the mouth it is plump, offering gobs of black fruits, wrapped up with soft tannins. Drink this wine with grilled pork tenderloin with a dollop of black olive tapenade or think Mediterranean with a dish like mussels with a chorizo broth. Drink over the next two years.

As I approach my 28th anniversary of selling wine, I find myself using the phrase “I remember them when...” far too often. In the case of my next feature, the **2014 JW House Pinot Noir “Take Me Home” (\$25)** I can honestly say that I knew John before he knew wine. Or at least before he knew very much about wine.

John House is a local boy, growing up in Winter Park. I met him many years ago when he started attending our wine classes. It is probably ok to say now, but at the time he was only 20 years old, although we did not know that until after he came of age. From our humble classroom he became a buyer and Wholefoods on Aloma, then moved on to become a local wine rep. After only a couple of years, in an almost unprecedented move, he became the national sales manager for Chehalem Vineyards in the Willamette Valley. It is very unusual for someone of his age, and without other winery sales experience, to achieve such a position. So seven or eight years ago he and his wife, Ksenija moved to Portland, Oregon.

Since then both John and his wife have grown in the wine business. Three years ago they launched their own wine brand, Ovum, dedicated to producing dry, Alsace style white wines. They developed a cult following for their dry Rieslings, Gewurztraminer and Muscat, so most of the production is bought by top restaurants across the US. We were lucky enough to score three cases two years ago, and they are still showing well today. Then in the fall John surprised me with their first Pinot Noir, which at the time was so new it did not have a name or label. It is a beautiful expression of the elegant 2014 Willamette Valley vintage and a nice complement to the Tabula Rasa.

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They purchased the grapes for this wine from the Olenick vineyard in the Chehalem Mountain AVA, in the Willamette Valley of Oregon. This is a relatively old vineyard, with the first plantings made by Rex Hill in 1989. They are unique in that they have two different soils on the property, volcanic and sedimentary. The grapes for this wine come from a block planted on sedimentary soils, which produce wines with more delicacy and finesse. To accentuate the elegance of the grapes, they were fermented using partial whole-clusters, meaning with stems, and with indigenous, or “wild” yeast. 20% of the wine was aged in new French oak barrels for nine months, then moved to older, neutral wood for an additional nine months. This gives the wine a polished, silky feel that rounds out the palate.

You will want to decant this wine for a half-hour, or up to an hour, before serving. Upon pouring the first glass you will immediately sense the pretty red fruits, fresh strawberries, raspberries and red plums; before the more subtle shades of sage, cassia and almond paste unfold. On the palate this wine starts with a brightness, but quickly rounds out and softens, showing nice concentration into the finish. You will want to drink this wine over the next two to three years with miso-glazed salmon, pomegranate glazed pork tenderloin or roast chicken.

## **Beef Stew**

If we time this right, we might get one weekend of winter, the perfect time for a bowl of stew. If the temperature does not drop down, just crank down the AC for one evening and turn it up before bed. This recipe works great with the Tabula Rasa and pretty well with the Pinot Noir, although it is not my first choice for that wine.

**2 medium garlic cloves, minced or pressed through garlic press (about 2 teaspoons)**

**4 anchovy fillets, finely minced (about 2 teaspoons)**

**1 tablespoon tomato paste**

**1 boneless beef chuck-eye roast (about 4 pounds), trimmed of excess fat, cut into 1 1/2-inch pieces**

**2 tablespoons vegetable oil**

**1 large onion, halved and cut from pole to pole into 1/8-inch-thick slices (about 2 cups)**

**4 medium carrots, peeled and cut into 1-inch pieces (about 2 cups)**

**1/4 cup unbleached all-purpose flour**

**2 cups red wine**

**2 cups low-sodium chicken broth**

**2 bay leaves**

**4 sprigs fresh thyme**

**4 ounces salt pork, rinsed of excess salt**

**1 pound Yukon Gold potatoes, scrubbed and cut into 1-inch pieces**

**1 1/2 cups frozen pearl onions, thawed**

**2 teaspoons unflavored powdered gelatin (about 1 packet)**

**1/2 cup water**

**1 cup frozen peas, thawed**

**Table salt and ground black pepper**

1. Adjust oven rack to lower-middle position and heat oven to 300 degrees. Combine garlic and anchovies in small bowl; press with back of fork to form paste. Stir in tomato paste and set mixture aside.

2. Pat meat dry with paper towels. Do not season. Heat 1 tablespoon vegetable oil in large heavy-bottomed Dutch oven over high heat until just starting to smoke. Add half of beef and cook until well browned on all sides, about 8 minutes total, reducing heat if oil begins to smoke or fond begins to burn. Transfer beef to large plate. Repeat with remaining beef and 1 tablespoon vegetable oil, leaving second batch of meat in pot after browning.

3. Reduce heat to medium and return first batch of beef to pot. Add onion and carrots to Dutch oven and stir to combine with beef. Cook, scraping bottom of pan to loosen any browned bits, until onion is softened, 1 to 2 minutes. Add garlic mixture and cook, stirring constantly, until fragrant, about 30 seconds. Add flour and cook, stirring constantly, until no dry flour remains, about 30 seconds.

4. Slowly add wine, scraping bottom of pan to loosen any browned bits. Increase heat to high and allow wine to simmer until thickened and slightly reduced, about 2 minutes. Stir in broth, bay leaves, thyme, and salt pork. Bring to simmer, cover, transfer to oven, and cook for 1 1/2 hours.

5. Remove pot from oven; remove and discard bay leaves and salt pork. Stir in potatoes, cover, return to oven, and cook until potatoes are almost tender, about 45 minutes.

6. Using large spoon, skim any excess fat from surface of stew. Stir in pearl onions; cook over medium heat until potatoes and onions are cooked through and meat offers little resistance when poked with fork (meat should not be falling apart), about 15 minutes. Meanwhile, sprinkle gelatin over water in small bowl and allow to soften for 5 minutes.

7. Increase heat to high, stir in softened gelatin mixture and peas; simmer until gelatin is fully dissolved and stew is thickened, about 3 minutes. Season with salt and pepper to taste; serve.

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