



2013 Winery of Good Hope Chenin Blanc "Vinum" \$19 per bottle

It is really exciting to have the South African Vinum wines back in the store, which to be clear, are not in any way related to those from California. This version is made by the dynamic Alex Dale, who is one of the international superstars of the South African wine scene. I have known Alex for at least ten years but it was during a dinner in the fall of 2007 that I came to recognize him as a brother in arms. Although we entered the wine business from opposite sides we have met in the middle at the apex where quality comes first and compromise is never an option. When you taste this wine you will see exactly what I mean.

Unlike many in the wine business Alex was actually born into the trade. His family tree is full of English wine merchants, importers and traders but he actually began by pursuing a degree in literature at the University of Dijon. Located on the outskirts of the Burgundy region of France. The call of the vines proved too great and he ended up spending ten years in the region first as a cellar rat and eventually as a full fledged winemaker. His period in the region corresponded with my first visit and although it is unlikely we actually met, his haunts were the same cellars I was visiting. In fact, one of my travel companions on that trip is now one of his business partners at the Winery of Good Hope.

When Alex first arrived in South Africa in 1996, he was overwhelmed by the quality of the wines made from Chenin Blanc, even though the vines were virtually ignored. These were the days following the end of apartheid, and grape growers were trying to understand the global wine market. Many were eager to tear out their old vines of Chenin Blanc, and plant the more popular Chardonnay and Cabernet Sauvignon. When Alex would find a particularly spectacular vineyard, focusing his search to the Helderberg Mountain area of Stellenbosch, he would pay a premium to the grower to preserve the vines, and farm them his way. Twenty years later he now farms several vineyards of gnarly, fifty+ year old vines, all facing the cool False Bay to the south. Most of these vines are also dry farmed, meaning no irrigation, so their roots stretch deep into the granite soils. This is what contributes such amazing minerality to the final wines.

To preserve the pure varietal character, all of the grapes are hand sorted and only the perfect bunches are used. After destemming and gentle pressing, the juice is allowed to settle over night. Then 30% was fermented in French oak barrels, with a quarter being new. The remaining portion was fermented in stainless steel, with an extended period of lees contact. After two months of aging, the two parts were combined and bottled.

When you drink this wine, I am going to encourage you to decant it for a few minutes before serving. This is a gorgeously complex example that has been bottled up for a few years, and it needs to unfold. After about 20 minutes it gives you a complex combination of dried apple, charred pineapple, cantaloupe and a classic Chenin Blanc note of wet wool. In the mouth it has a lot of texture, that hints to a little sweetness, then the minerality and high acidity sweep in and dry this wine up into the finish. This wine works great with a wide range of dishes, but try with the curried chicken recipe.

2014 Chamonix Rouge (\$20 per bottle)

When the Dutch arrived in South Africa in 1652, and established the Cape Colony, it was primarily settled as a provisioning point between Europe and their colonies in the East Indies. Less well known is in 1688, 176 French Huguenots arrived, and the Dutch government granted them land 70 miles north of Cape Town in an area called Olifantshoek. The name means "elephant corner" because it was a remote valley where the large animals would go to calve. In the days before animal conservation, the French found it hard to farm with mother elephants birthing their offspring and quickly wiped out the animal population, at which point the area became known as Franschhoek. More than 350 years later the region still has a distinctly French feel, tucked behind the Hottentots Mountains and a short distance from the Stellenbosch wine region. In fact you will sometimes see it referred to as a sub-zone of Stellenbosch.

Due to the location with mountains separating it from False Bay, Franschhoek is a nearly perfect place to grow grapes. Because of the regions high elevation, it is hot during the days of the growing season, but in the evening receives cool breezes that blow down from the mountains. The soils are also decomposed sandstone, laying on a bed of clay, which helps preserve moisture in the ground for the vines. In the early 1990's, German entrepreneur Chris Hellinger discovered the farm, which is part of one of the original Huguenot estates, La Clotte. The setting reminded him of his favorite ski village, so he named it Chamonix, pronounced *shom-on-ee*. He set about restoring the estate, establishing a game farm and building a series of lodges. Of course he also planted 75 acres of vines, which lie at some of the highest elevations of any vineyards on the Cape. To preserve the natural beauty of the area, all farming is done using an organic regiment.

The Chamonix Rouge is winemaker Thinus Neethling's homage to the bistro reds of the great Belle Epoch era. Made to be robust, but easy drinking, it is the perfect wine for almost any meal. The 2014 is a blend of 35% Cabernet Sauvignon, 34% Merlot, 20% Petit Verdot and 11% Malbec. All of the grapes are hand harvested and fermented using indigenous yeast for fourteen days on the skins. The wine is then aged in older French oak barrels for 18 months before bottling.

When you are ready to serve this wine, decant it for a half hour to allow the bouquet to develop. Once you do it will yield a Bordeaux-like bouquet of black currants and blackberries, with subtle shades of vanilla, tamarind paste, fresh hewn cedar and chocolate mint. In the mouth this wine is medium weight, with the fruit pushing forward almost immediately,

then framed by a touch of acidity and tannin into the finish. Drink this wine over the next two years with almost any dish, but it works particularly well with the pasta, mushroom and Camembert dish below.

Curried Chicken

My family are not the biggest fans of curry, but this dish is a mild example that is inspired by a classic low country dish, Country Captain. It is an easy, one pot, weeknight dinner that delivers a lot of flavor with little effort. It works really well with the Vinum Chenin Blanc as well as almost any Riesling or Viognier you may have.

3 tablespoons unsalted butter
2 tablespoons curry powder
2 onions, chopped
1 jalapeño chile, stemmed, seeded, and minced
Salt and pepper
3 garlic cloves, minced
1 tablespoon minced fresh ginger
2 (10- to 12-ounce) bone-in split chicken breasts, trimmed
1 1/2 cups water
8 ounces Yukon Gold potatoes, peeled and cut into 1/2-inch chunks
1/2 head cauliflower (1 pound), cored and cut into 1-inch florets
1 cup frozen peas
1/4 cup minced fresh cilantro
3/4 cup plain whole-milk yogurt

1. Melt butter in Dutch oven over medium heat. Add curry powder and cook until fragrant, about 10 seconds. Add onions, jalapeño, 1 1/4 teaspoons salt, and 1/4 teaspoon pepper and cook until vegetables are softened, about 5 minutes. Stir in garlic and ginger and cook until fragrant, about 30 seconds.

2. Add chicken and water to pot. Increase heat to medium-high and bring mixture to boil. Reduce heat to low, cover, and simmer until chicken registers 160 degrees, 22 to 24 minutes, flipping chicken halfway through cooking. Transfer chicken to plate and let cool for 5 minutes. Once chicken has cooled, use two forks to shred meat into approximate 2-inch pieces; discard skin and bones.

3. Meanwhile, stir potatoes and 1/4 teaspoon salt into curry, cover, and cook until potatoes are slightly tender, about 8 minutes. Stir in cauliflower and continue to cook, covered, until potatoes are fully cooked and cauliflower is tender, about 15 minutes longer, stirring occasionally.

4. Stir in peas, cilantro, and shredded chicken and cook until curry is warmed through, about 1 minute. Off heat, stir in yogurt. Season with salt and pepper to taste, and serve.

Pasta with Mushrooms, Peas, and Camembert

The Chamonix Rouge is such an interesting, medium weight red wine that I wanted a dish that would allow the earthier, fruit components to shine. After trying a couple of pork tenderloin recipes that were fine but a bit mundane, I stumbled on this interesting and easy-to-prepare dish. It is important to leave the rind on the Camembert because the slightly earthy/funky quality fades into the background but provides a lot to the finished product.

1 pound farfalle pasta, or campanelle
2 tablespoons unsalted butter
2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
3-4 large shallots, chopped fine (about 1 cup)
3 medium cloves garlic, minced or pressed through garlic press (about 1 tablespoon)
10 ounces shiitake mushrooms, stems discarded, caps wiped clean and sliced 1/4 inch thick
10 ounces cremini mushrooms, wiped clean and sliced 1/4 inch thick
1 cup frozen peas
1 1/4 cups low-sodium chicken broth
1/2 cup heavy cream
1 tablespoon lemon juice from one lemon
Ground black pepper
6 ounces Camembert, cut into 1/2-inch cubes (do not remove rind)
2 tablespoons chopped fresh chives

1. Bring 4 quarts water to rolling boil, covered, in stockpot; add 1-tablespoon salt and pasta, stir to separate, and cook until just shy of al dente. Drain and return pasta to stockpot.

2. Meanwhile, heat butter and oil over medium heat in 12-inch skillet until foaming; add shallots and cook, stirring occasionally, until softened, about 4 minutes. Add garlic and cook until fragrant, about 30 seconds. Increase heat to medium-high; add shiitakes and cook, stirring occasionally, for 2 minutes. Add cremini mushrooms and 1/2 teaspoon salt; cook, stirring occasionally, until golden brown, about 8 minutes. Transfer mushrooms to bowl. Add frozen peas and broth to skillet and bring to boil, scraping up browned bits; off heat, stir in cream, lemon juice, and salt and pepper to taste.

3. Add mushrooms, broth mixture, cheese, and chives to pasta in stockpot. Toss over medium-low heat until pasta absorbs most of liquid, about 2 minutes; serve immediately.

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