

March, 2016

Tim's Wine Market



This month we continue the 2016 world tour with a visit to France. The theme is, “what is and what shall be” as we look at a wine that is perfectly mature and ready to drink now, and one that will improve over the next few years. In order to receive the maximum enjoyment from the older wine when you decide to drink, I encourage you to closely follow the directions.

2014 St. Cosme Cotes du Rhone (\$16)

Since the late 1980's the Rhone Valley has jumped dramatically in consumer opinion. This started when wine critic Robert Parker published his first book **The Wines of the Rhone** in 1987 and turned the spotlight on this often ignored region. His enthusiastic reviews turned many farmers into wine celebrities, particularly in the regions top village, Chateauneuf-du-Pape. With the hype came higher prices, which allowed the growers to build new winemaking facilities and install modern equipment. It also created opportunities for young growers to travel and learn winemaking in other parts of the world, improving the consumer opinion for Rhone varieties, particularly Grenache and Syrah. They returned to their farms eager to employ new farming and winemaking techniques which led to even greater wines and scores.

My first visit to the region was in 1993, and after a day spent tasting in Chateauneuf-du-Pape, we drove north to the little village of Gigondas to visit a couple of new growers. At the time Gigondas had just been elevated to Appellation d'Origine Controlee (AOC) status and you could almost feel the electricity in the air of this tiny, hillside village. We met Yves Gras, the young renegade that was leading Domaine Santa Duc into the modern era, and one of my travel companions also mentioned that we should visit Louis Barroul at Chateau du St. Cosme. It was not in the schedule for that trip, but within a couple of years I did meet Louis in Florida and his wines have been a standard of Gigondas for me ever since. Along with Gras the two men have moved Gigondas out of the shadows of Chateauneuf and the wines are considered by many collectors to be equal in appeal and quality.

One of the reasons for this jump in quality is that they younger generation is stepping outside of their own properties to source grapes from other great areas for their Cotes du Rhone, which allows them to concentrated their best estate grapes on the flagship wines. For Louis Barroul, who is the 14th generation to run his Chateau de St. Cosme estate, he founded a negotiant business in 1997 that allows him the freedom to buy grapes from many far-flung parts of the Rhone to craft an incredible array of wines. His dedication to quality keeps him at the top of the critic's list of best Rhone producers and no where is that more evident than his entry Cotes du Rhone, which is the standard bearer for the entire region.

This is a rare example of a Cotes du Rhone from the southern end of the zone which is pure Syrah. Typically Cotes du Rhone (CDR) wines are dominated by Grenache, which is a much more common variety in the hot, dry climate of the Southern Rhone. For this wine Louis uses the Syrah from two vineyard sites, one in the Gard (south of Avignon) and the other from the Vinsobres AOC. 2014 was a particularly good vintage for Syrah grown in Vinsobres, so this wine contains 75% grapes grown in that village. The grapes are all hand harvested, then fermented in stainless steel tanks. After fermentation the wine is aged in concrete vats for a few months before bottling.

The 2014, while young, is another in a string of great CDR's bottled by Louis under the St. Cosme label. The color is moderately deep garnet and the nose shows very pure expressions of blackberry, fresh red and black cherries and savory notes of thyme, lavender and celery leaf. On the palate this wine is medium weight, with a big presence of blackberry fruit and herbs that stretches into a moderately long finish. Good now this wine will get better for several years, reaching the apex around 2021. Serve with roast chicken or grilled skirt steak drizzled with olive oil and lemon juice.

2006 Chateau Ampelia Cotes de Castillon (\$20)

It is not everyday that I am able to find great, old Bordeaux at a reasonable price. This wine offers an interesting contrast to the young, aggressive Cotes du Rhone above, as it is refined, polished and near the end of it's drinking window. I will state up front that this wine needs to be consumed in the next year, so please do not bury it in your wine collection!

The Chateau Ampelia is not an old winery, only founded in 1999. Although the estate is new, the owner, François Despagne, can trace his winemaking lineage in neighboring St. Emilion, back to the 17th century. His family acquired the Chateau Grand Corbin-Despagne, a St. Emilion Grand Cru Classe, in 1812 and Francois is the seventh generation to lead that estate. Like many of the current generation of Bordelais, when he inherited the chateau he recognized the need to expand outside his current family holdings. While many of his neighbors looked overseas, to California and South America, Despagne only looked as far as the neighboring commune of Castillon. After a three year search he found the perfect piece of vineyard land and established Chateau Ampelia.

Although very close to the village of St. Emilion, the Cotes de Castillon is not an area with a rich, winemaking history. The appellation is primarily a plateau that stretches east from St. Emilion and rises in elevation as it reaches the Central Massif. The soil at the western edge of the appellation, near St. Emilion, is primarily sand, which produces very average quality wines. Depagne found a 5 hectare (12.5 acre) parcel of old vines at the far eastern side at high elevation planted in a limestone, clay mix. The old vines produced the perfect *Grand Vin* Francois was seeking.

The winemaking at Chateau Ampelia shows the attention of someone used to producing Grand Cru Classe wine. Since 2010 the vineyard has been farmed using organic practices and during the growing season several passes are made through the vineyard to remove second crop growth and green harvest under-developed clusters. At harvest the grapes are double sorted then fermented in stainless steel tanks. Once the fermentation is complete an initial blend is created,

then moved to barrel. Roughly a third of this wine is aged in new French oak barrels with the remaining portion in second and third used barrels. After twelve months the blend is adjusted then returned to barrel for an additional nine months. There is no filtration or fining used at bottling.

When you open this wine you will want to drink it all in one evening, preferably in less than three hours. The color is brick-umber and it shows some sediment. Decant it slowly and wait fifteen to twenty minutes before serving. Once you pour a glass you are met with a deep nose of dried black cherries, soy sauce, tamarind, black peppercorns and old velvet. In the mouth it is quite soft and subtle at first, with a slight brightness of acidity in the mid-palate and a small presence of tannins near the finish. You will want to drink this wine in 2016, with a pot roast or grilled ribeye.

Stuffed Mushrooms with Blue Cheese and Bacon

This easy recipe brings a collection of flavors together that you will find in both wines. Serve with either wine, as an appetizer or as an entree for two with a salad.

- 24 large white mushrooms (1 3/4 to 2 inches in diameter), stems removed and reserved**
- 2 tablespoons olive oil**
- Salt and pepper**
- 1 small shallot, minced**
- 2 garlic cloves, minced**
- 2 slices bacon, chopped fine**
- 1/4 cup dry white wine**
- 1 ounce blue cheese, crumbled (1/4 cup)**
- 2 tablespoons chopped fresh chives**
- 1 teaspoon cider vinegar**

3. Flip caps gill side up. Divide stuffing evenly among caps. Return caps to oven and bake until stuffing is heated through, 5 to 7 minutes. Serve.

Beef Stir-Fry with Peppers and Black Pepper Sauce

- 1 tbsp. plus 1/4 cup water**
- 1/4 tsp. baking soda**
- 1 pound flank steak, trimmed, cut into 2- to 2 1/2-inch strips with grain, each strip cut crosswise against grain into 1/4-inch-thick slices**
- 3 tbsp. Soy Sauce**
- 3 tbsp. Dry Sherry or rice wine**
- 3 tsp. cornstarch**
- 2 1/2 tsp. packed Light Brown Sugar**
- 1 tbsp. Oyster Sauce**
- 2 tsp. rice vinegar**
- 1 1/2 tsp. toasted sesame oil**
- 2 tsp. coarsely ground Pepper**
- 3 tbsp. plus 1 teaspoon Vegetable Oil**
- 1 red bell pepper, stemmed, seeded, and cut into 1/4-inch-wide strips**
- 1 green bell pepper, stemmed, seeded, and cut into 1/4-inch-wide strips**
- 6 scallions, white parts sliced thin on bias, green parts cut into 2-inch pieces**
- 3 garlic cloves, minced**
- 1 tbsp. grated fresh ginger**

1. Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 425 degrees. Line rimmed baking sheet with aluminum foil. Toss mushroom caps with 2 tablespoons oil, 1/4 teaspoon salt, and 1/8 teaspoon pepper in large bowl. Arrange caps gill side up on prepared sheet and roast until juice is released, about 20 minutes. Flip caps and roast until well browned, about 10 minutes; set aside.

2. Meanwhile, pulse reserved stems, shallot, garlic, and 1/8 teaspoon pepper in food processor until finely chopped, 10 to 14 pulses. Cook bacon in 8-inch nonstick skillet over medium heat until crispy, about 5 minutes. Add stem mixture to skillet and cook until golden brown and moisture has evaporated, about 5 minutes. Add wine and cook until nearly evaporated and mixture thickens slightly, about 1 minute. Transfer to bowl and let cool slightly, about 5 minutes. Stir in blue cheese, chives, and vinegar. Season with salt and pepper to taste.

This is a simple recipe that works exceptionally well with the St. Cosme Cotes du Rhone. The wine shows very subtle notes of green pepper, black pepper and soy sauce, making it the perfect complement. Serve this dish over steamed rice.

1. Combine 1 tablespoon water and baking soda in medium bowl. Add beef and toss to coat. Let sit at room temperature for 5 minutes.

2. Whisk 1 tablespoon soy sauce, 1 tablespoon sherry, 1 1/2 teaspoons cornstarch, and 1/2 teaspoon sugar together in small bowl. Add soy sauce mixture to beef, stir to coat, and let sit at room temperature for 15 to 30 minutes.

3. Whisk remaining 1/4 cup water, remaining 2 tablespoons soy sauce, remaining 2 tablespoons sherry, remaining 1 1/2 teaspoons cornstarch, remaining 2 teaspoons sugar, oyster sauce, vinegar, sesame oil, and pepper together in second bowl.

4. Heat 2 teaspoons vegetable oil in 12-inch nonstick skillet over high heat until just smoking. Add half of beef in single layer. Cook without stirring for 1 minute. Continue to cook, stirring occasionally, until spotty brown on both sides, about 1 minute longer. Transfer to bowl. Repeat with remaining beef and 2 teaspoons vegetable oil.

5. Return skillet to high heat, add 2 teaspoons vegetable oil, and heat until beginning to smoke. Add bell peppers and scallion greens and cook, stirring occasionally, until vegetables are spotty brown and crisp-tender, about 4 minutes. Transfer vegetables to bowl with beef.

6. Return now-empty skillet to medium-high heat and add remaining 4 teaspoons vegetable oil, scallion whites, garlic, and ginger. Cook, stirring frequently, until lightly browned, about 2 minutes. Return beef and vegetables to skillet and stir to combine.

7. Whisk sauce to recombine. Add to skillet and cook, stirring constantly, until sauce has thickened, about 30 seconds. Serve immediately.