

April, 2016

Tim's Wine Market



“The best laid plans...” This month the features would have taken you on a tour of the Douro River, which originates in the mountains of Spain and winds across Portugal to the Atlantic Ocean. If only someone, and in this case that is me, would have ordered the white wine. I discovered my error in late March but by then it was too late, so changes had to be made. Luckily I found enough of the Bayten SB, one of my favorites from my recent trip to South Africa. So my original theme of “wines of the Douro river valley” is gone and now replaced with, “two wines from a couple of the coolest places I have visited.”

2015 Bayten Sauvignon Blanc (\$15)

The actual name of this estate is Buitenverwachting, but is shortened to Bayten in the US market for obvious reasons. Translated from Dutch it means *beyond expectation* and if you ever have a chance to walk these grounds you will understand why. It lies to the south of Table Mountain and overlooks False Bay to the southeast. Although only a half-hour drive from Cape Town you feel like you are in the wilderness. In fact, you really are, as you have to be careful of baboons while walking the estate, as they are very common. It is one of those rare spots in the world where you can stare at a mountain, then turn 180 degrees and look at the nearby ocean. I was also lucky enough to fly over the area in a helicopter and see both views at the same time while hovering above Table Mountain. No, sometimes it does not suck to be me.

This old property was part of the original holdings of the first governor of the colony, Simon van der Stell, who settled in the area in 1685. I get the impression that Van der Stell thought a lot of himself, after all he named two of the three mountains that create the Stellenbosch after himself. The Stellenbosch even means “Stell’s bush” and was given the name by, you guessed it, Simon van der Stell. After his death the Dutch crown split his modest 15,000 acre estate. From that property was formed several of the world class Constantia wine estates we know today, including his home, Groot Constantia and the equally famous Klein Constantia. All of these estates lie to the south of Cape Town, on a southeast facing slope only seven miles from False Bay and north of the Cape of Good Hope. It is a lush climate, not unlike the Pacific Northwest, with cooler temperatures and enough rainfall that the grapes are grown without irrigation. Due to their exposition and weather off the nearby water, this area produces legendary white wines.

All of my stops in South Africa were memorable, but my evening eating and drinking with the winemakers from the Constantia area was particularly fun. There is an obvious camaraderie among them, after all there are only seven wineries in the area, and due to their proximity to the ocean, they are all surfers. Yet tasting with them they all had fantastic palates, a common trait among white wine makers. You see, winemakers from cold climates do not have a lot of “stuff” to work with from the grapes, and everything they do involves highlighting the subtlety they can coax from the juice. Red wine makers are able to extract a lot more because of the development of the skins of those grapes, which contain a lot more flavor and structure producing compounds. Tour wineries in Germany, Austria, Champagne and the Loire Valley and you will see what I mean. On that night I found myself hashing out the difference between a tomatillo and a gooseberry, like splitting aromatic hairs. In case that reference is too obscure, think about the aromatic difference between lime zest and juice. Try it and see what I mean.

Fans of Marlborough Sauvignon Blanc and Sancerre should feel comfortable with the best examples from Constantia. The wines offer an aromatic dimension most often found in the New World, but with a chiseled, almost lean, structure that is more reminiscent of the Old World examples. Let this wine warm a bit from refrigerator temperature before serving and it will offer you an exotic, yellow grapefruit, tomato leaf, green apple, oyster shell and lime zest nose. On the palate it is surprisingly broad and textured to start, picks up a delightful passionfruit note on the palate and then focuses into the long finish. Serve this wine with pan seared salmon filets with mustard vinaigrette or seared scallops with lemon zest and pesto risotto.

2012 Dominios des Castillo Ribera del Duero Crianza (\$18)

The differences between driving into the Constantia district and the Ribera del Duero are pretty stark. Our white wine selection comes from an area of lush, green forests and beautiful mountain and ocean views. The Ribera del Duero by comparison is flat, and in the middle of summer, really hot and dry. When I visited the region for three days in June, 2007, the leaves were just starting to break on the vines showing a small amount of green in an otherwise sea of brown. By comparison to Constantia, this is extreme grape growing.

The Duero River begins in the Picos de Urbion Mountains of north/central Spain. It winds westward across the country through the wine regions of the Ribera del Duero, Rueda and Toro before crossing the border into Portugal. From there it drops over 3000 feet as it crosses the country to its mouth at the Atlantic Ocean. It is during this run that it is called the Duero River and is the region that produces Port wines. On the Spanish side the regions are high desert, and the vines stretch away from the river, interspersed with wheat fields planted on the north and east facing hillsides. As the vines were just finishing their dormant period, they looked like short, dark hands sticking out of the dirt, fingers extended to the sky. In these extreme conditions they produce very few clusters of grapes, but those they do are deeply colored and intensely flavored.

This wine is produced by Bodegas Viña Vilano, which is located in the village of Pedrosa de Duero in the Burgos sub-zone. This is high country, even by Ribera del Duero standards, far from the river. The Tempranillo vines were planted in 1957 and now they yield about one bottle of wine per plant. Warm days in this area give way to very cold nights, so the grapes are harvested with a great balance of sugar and acidity. Fermentation is done in stainless steel tanks, then this wine was aged in a combination of French and American oak barrels for twelve months. It was then held at the winery for an additional year before release.

I recommend decanting this one for a half-hour before serving. With some time to open it reveals an nose of dried cherries, dried orange peel, espresso/coffee grounds and cranberry relish. On he palate it shows firm, dense fruit with a note of underlying slate. You will see the balance of this wine as the big fruit is balanced with a freshness that keeps it interesting into the finish. This wine is quite good now but will improve for at least three more years. Drink with grilled lamb chops, chorizo sausage tortilla or even a dish as traditionally American as this Salisbury steak recipe.

Asparagus and Goat Cheese Tart

I stumbled on this recipe a few years ago and it has been a favorite at our house ever since. It also helps that my wife's favorite wines are made from Sauvignon Blanc. Do not let the first step put you off, it just creates the frame of the crust and is easier than it sounds.

1 (9 1/2 by 9-inch) sheet puff pastry, thawed
6 ounces asparagus, trimmed and cut 1/4 inch thick on bias into 1-inch lengths (1 cup)
2 scallions, sliced thin
3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
2 tablespoons chopped pitted kalamata olives
1 garlic clove, minced
1/4 teaspoon grated lemon zest
1/4 teaspoon salt
1/4 teaspoon pepper
4 ounces (1 cup) goat cheese, softened

(avoiding raised border), then scatter asparagus mixture over top. Crumble remaining 1/4 cup goat cheese over top of asparagus mixture.

4. Bake tart on top oven rack until asparagus is tender and tart shell has darkened slightly around edges, 10 to 15 minutes. Let cool for 15 minutes. Drizzle with remaining 1 tablespoon oil. Cut into 4 equal pieces and serve.

1. Adjust oven racks to lower-middle and top positions and heat oven to 400 degrees. Line rimmed baking sheet with parchment paper and place puff pastry in center of sheet. Grease underside of 8-inch square baking pan, place in center of puff pastry, and fill pan with pie weights. Using sharp paring knife, score puff pastry around perimeter of pan, 1/8 inch deep. (Do not cut through pastry.)

2. Leaving pan on pastry, bake on lower-middle oven rack for 20 minutes. Remove pan, rotate sheet, and continue to bake until pastry is golden brown, 5 to 10 minutes. Let cool for 30 minutes.

3. Meanwhile, combine asparagus, scallions, 1 tablespoon oil, olives, garlic, zest, salt, and pepper in bowl. In separate bowl, mix 3/4 cup goat cheese and 1 tablespoon oil until smooth. Spread goat cheese mixture evenly over cooled puff pastry

over top. Crumble remaining 1/4 cup goat cheese over top of

Salisbury Steak

If you are like me, this dish brings back memories of your school cafeteria and a hamburger served with fake mashed potatoes and canned gravy. Then I found this recipe, which not only rescues it but is so good that my kids ask for it whenever they come home from college. If you don't have any port wine, just use red wine and a teaspoon of sugar as the substitute. Take note that the meat and potato flake combination is better if it sits for at least an hour. Serve with any red wine that has a lot of tannin, like the Dominio des Castillo Ribera del Duero.

1/2 cup milk
7 tablespoons instant potato flakes
1 pound 90-percent lean ground beef
Salt and pepper
4 tablespoons unsalted butter
1 onion, halved and sliced thin
1 pound white mushrooms, sliced thin
1 tablespoon tomato paste
2 tablespoons all-purpose flour
1 3/4 cups low-sodium beef broth
1/4 cup ruby port

1. Whisk milk and potato flakes in large bowl. Add beef, 1/2 teaspoon salt, and 1/2 teaspoon pepper and knead until combined. Shape into four 1/2-inch-thick oval patties and transfer to parchment-lined plate. Refrigerate for 30 minutes or up to 4 hours.

2. Melt 1 tablespoon butter in large nonstick skillet over medium-high heat. Cook patties until well browned, about 5 minutes per side. Transfer to plate.

3. Add onion and remaining butter to empty skillet and cook until onion is softened, about 5 minutes. Add mushrooms and 1/2 teaspoon salt and cook until liquid has evaporated, 5 to 7 minutes. Stir in tomato paste and flour and cook until browned, about 2 minutes. Slowly stir in broth and port and bring to simmer. Return patties to skillet, cover, and simmer over medium-low heat until cooked through, 12 to 15 minutes. Season sauce with salt and pepper. Serve.