



May, 2016



For my selections this month, I am pairing two wines that reverse roles. They display fine balance, varietal correctness and site typicity, but due to the conditions where they are grown, they show traits that are slightly outside the norm.

The first pick is the new vintage of a selection from December, 2012. For those that remember the previous bottling, the **2013 Wine Trees Auctor (\$20)** is a completely different wine. When we last sampled this wine as a club feature, the vintage was 2010, a cool year that forced a lot of good winemaking. By comparison, 2013 is a dream vintage where the wine made itself in the vineyard, and all winemaker, Douglas Danielak, did was coax it into the bottle.

The reason that this wine reverses role of what you may expect is because the varieties used to make it are generally used for "big" wines. Unlike the previous bottling, which was a wine made up of eight different grapes that combined to create balance, this one is basically a Rhone blend. Made up of 57% Syrah, 35% Grenache, 6% Mourvedre and 2% Cabernet Sauvignon, you might expect this wine to be large framed. In reality, it is medium weight with lovely fruit and a nice sense of lift on the palate. The reason is where the grapes for this wine are grown.

All of the fruit for this wine comes from the Paso Robles AVA in central California. For longtime club members, this is familiar territory and the area has a reputation for making really big wines. While it is true that much of Paso Robles is hot and flat, there is a portion called "the westside," which is closer to the ocean, higher elevation and consequently much cooler. The vines used to produce this wine grow on the westside, in a vineyard only six miles from the Pacific ocean. In this area, it is not uncommon for temperatures to reach close to 100 degrees during the summer days, but then drop down into the 50's at night. The grapes ripen without a problem, but also retain great natural acidity, which is apparent in this wine.

The other factor that contributes to this wine's freshness is the soil in which the vines grow. Paso Robles lies on the eastern slopes of the Santa Lucia Range of the coastal mountain ranges of California. Formed when the Gorda Plate collided into the American Plate, this range of mountains is a complex mix of ancient sea bottom mixed with volcanic activity. This vineyard contains soils of weathered granite, marine sedimentary rocks, and volcanic rocks, which all contribute to the complexity of the finished wine. Rhone varieties, of which this wine is mostly made, thrive in poor soils and the conditions help for the grapes to retain acidity.

Winemaking for the Auctor is done with the intention of keeping this wine light on its feet. The grapes are hand harvested and kept separate, then destemmed into stainless steel fermentors. Once dry, the components are placed in barrel with only a small percentage of new oak for fifteen months. Then Danielak and owner, Bruce Cunningham, create the final blend and return the finished wine to barrel for an additional three months. The wine is bottled without filtration.

When you open this wine I would encourage you to decant it for a half hour before serving. At first, this wine smells like our kitchen when my wife is making her triple berry jam of raspberries, blueberries and blackberries. As you continue to swirl it, there are notes of dried orange peel, tobacco, cedar and allspice that slowly unfold as well. On the palate, this wine is soft and lush with a nice wave of fruit that is lifted mid-palate, has a light note of acidity and very soft tannins on the finish. I do not find the 2013 as brooding as the previously featured 2010, and it makes the perfect wine for summer barbecue. Serve with pork brochettes with rosemary and garlic or grilled swordfish with black olive tapenade.

My second selection for this month comes from the highly regarded Penny's Hill winery in McLaren Vale, Australia. The **2014 Farmers and Stockholders Cabernet Sauvignon (\$25)** is a wine that is deceptively large framed, a testament to the warm climate of the region. Like Paso Robles, the temperature of the McLaren Vale varies widely depending on where you are in the region. Some parts of the region produce very elegant, lower body wines, while others produce robust reds. Penny's Hill is known for powerful wines, which you are about to discover.

The Penny's Hill winery was founded by Tony and Susie Parkinson, who take the name from the hill it lies below. From Penny's Hill, you can see the Gulf St. Vincent in the distance, which is the reason this area also enjoys a wide diurnal temperature swing each day during the growing season. When they purchased the land in 1988, it was in use for cattle grazing. Their original plan was to buy an established vineyard, but they found nothing suitable in the specific portion of McLaren Vale they were looking. Since acquiring the original eighty acre parcel, they have purchased several other neighboring properties. This includes the Ingleburn estate of Thomas Goss, one of the pioneers of grape growing in this region. Longtime club members may remember that Thomas Goss Shiraz was a feature in May, 2013, which this winery also produces with the help of Ben Riggs. Although not the first to grow grapes in this area it was the wines produce by Goss that brought attention to McLaren Vale. Goss recognized the unique climate this part of McLaren Vale has due to the proximity to the Gulf St. Vincent and the balance that can be achieved in the wines.

Due to the size of the Penny's Hill estate, which is 105 acres of planted vineyards across three different properties, the winery produces a number of different labels. They only grow red grape varieties but purchase grapes from some vineyards in the nearby Adelaide Hills to produce white wine. Winemaker Alexia Robert creates the Farmers and Stockholder's wines primarily from a vineyard they call Goss Corner. Planted in 1996, this site was used by the Goss family for almost 150 years to grow hay for their cattle. The label pays homage to an old farmer's club, called Farmers and Stockholders, that was similar to the American movement of Patrons of Husbandry, better known as the Grange. In 1876, John Norman, one of the early grape growers in the region brought his wine to the Farmers and Stockholders meeting to toast the long-term potential of grape growing in the region. 140 years later it is safe to say he was right.

To produce this wine, the grapes are harvested and destemmed into stainless steel tanks. When fermentation is almost complete, the wine is moved to oak barrels and larger pieces, called hogsheads, where it finishes. Alexia feels that the wines show better texture and polish if allowed to finish fermentation in wood. The wine is then aged for ten months in mostly neutral wood, three and four use barrels, before bottling.

When you open this wine, decant it for at least a half hour before serving. When you pour a glass, it offers you deep and inviting nose of dried black cherry, ripe currants, black plums, milk chocolate, eucalyptus and cigar box. On the palate, it is very dense and rich, with the fruit framed by a fine grain of minerally and smooth tannins. This wine is certainly delicious now, but will likely age for up to five years. Drink this wine with this amazing pork and bean recipe, smoked brisket with a tomato-onion relish or grilled pork tenderloin with cherry demi-glace.

## American Cassoulet

While the nature of this recipe has more in common with baked beans than a true, French cassoulet, it is a great recipe for hearty red wines. If you are used to the sweet style of most canned pork and beans, or smokehouse style barbecue beans, then this recipe will be a revelation. It may also surprise you that cassoulet is typically paired with robust red wine. That is probably not hard to imagine in a dish with four pounds of pork! Please note this is a slow cooker recipe. If you prefer you can prepare this in a Dutch oven and cook at 275 degrees for several hours until the beans are tender. If you do that you will need to add small amounts of chicken stock to prevent the dish from drying out. Serve this dish with any medium weight, fruit driven wine such as our features this month or Zinfandel and Grenache based wines.

**1 pound dried great northern beans, rinsed, sorted, and soaked in cold water to cover for at least 8 hours or up to 24 hours**

**3 pounds country-style pork ribs (about 12 ribs), trimmed of excess fat**

**Salt and ground black pepper**

**2 tablespoons vegetable oil**

**1 medium onion, chopped medium**

**6 medium garlic cloves, minced or pressed through a garlic press**

**1 cup dry white wine**

**2 tablespoons tomato paste**

**1 teaspoon fennel seed**

**1 teaspoon dried thyme**

**1 bay leaf**

**1 pound kielbasa sausage, sliced 1 inch thick**

**2 (14.5-ounce) cans diced tomatoes**

**2 ¾ cups low-sodium chicken broth**

**¼ cup chopped fresh parsley leaves**

1. Drain the beans and transfer them to a slow cooker. Dry the ribs thoroughly with paper towels, then season generously with salt and pepper. Heat 2 teaspoons of the oil in a 12-inch skillet over medium-high heat until just smoking. Add half of the ribs and brown on all sides, 5 to 7 minutes. Transfer them to the slow cooker. Return the skillet to medium high heat and heat 2 more teaspoons oil until just smoking. Brown the remaining ribs and transfer them to the slow cooker.

2. Return the skillet to medium heat and heat the remaining 2 teaspoons oil until shimmering. Add the onion and ¼ teaspoon salt; cook, stirring occasionally, until beginning to brown, about 2 minutes. Add the garlic and cook until fragrant, about 30 seconds. Add the wine, tomato paste, fennel seed, thyme, and bay leaf, scraping up the browned bits from the bottom of the skillet; turn the heat to high and bring to a boil. Transfer the onion mixture to the slow cooker.

3. Add the kielbasa, tomatoes, and chicken broth to the slow cooker. Cover and cook, on either low or high, until the meat is tender, 7 to 8 hours on low or 5 to 6 hours on high. Before serving, discard the bay leaf, stir in the parsley, and season with salt and pepper to taste.