



August, 2016



This month, the features could be called Beauty & The Beast, due to the contrast in their character. Curiously, both wines are made by one of the Elder statesman of California, Bob Broman. Much like the different personalities of our children, these wines show radically different qualities, yet share the same polish and sophistication I have come to expect from Broman's handy work.

After graduating with a degree in fermentation science in 1973, Bob worked for Louis Martini, who he credits with teaching him how to make wine. From there he moved to Concannon in the Livermore Valley, before landing at Stags' Leap in 1981. After four years at the helm with Warren Winiarski, he moved on to establish the Guenoc Winery for the Magoon family. From there he became the vice president of St. Supery, where he oversaw the construction of their winery and directed the winemaking team. In 1996, he launched his consulting business, overseeing projects in California, Chile, and the Republic of Georgia. Both the Mystery Pinot Noir and the Murex employ his consul. Around the same time, he launched Broman Cellars, where he produces a small amount of wine under his own label, from a combination of purchased grapes and his estate vineyard outside of St. Helena.

The first selection, the **2013 Mystery Pinot Noir (\$17)** is a very different style than the Chalone Pinot Noir that was the July feature. Pinot Noir is a variety that can display vastly different characteristics depending on growing conditions and winemaker prerogative. Although not my intention when I selected the wine, the two wines are a striking contrast of style and character. You may remember that the vineyards where the

Chalone grapes are grown are difficult, cold conditions and the winemaker works to not show his finger prints on the wine. It is the epitome of a wine that is grown, not made. By comparison, Mystery is a price-point Pinot Noir made with grapes that grow in the vast Monterey Valley, which lies adjacent to the Chalone AVA, but at much lower elevation in much more fertile, and warmer, growing conditions.

There are two ways to drive from Monterey to Paso Robles, and I am lucky enough to have done both. The slow way, which takes about four hours on the weekends, is to meander down US 1, also known as the Pacific Coast Highway. It is a visually striking drive, as you slowly wind your way through the coastal valleys, while looking down on the rocky shore line hundreds of feet below. My family and I took this trip on July 4th, 2014, and it remains one of my favorite car trips ever (my wife is big on car trips so this is no small statement.)

The faster way which I did a few days later, is to take US 101, the major north-south artery of California. As soon as you leave the city of Monterey you begin to pass through one of the largest and most fertile valleys in the US, and the source for much of the summer produce you consume. I can remember seeing thousands of acres of artichokes, brussel sprouts, cabbage, and melons stretch on either side of the road for as far as the eye can see. Then, about thirty miles south of the city, you begin to see grape vines replace field crops, and for the next hundred miles it is one, long, vast vineyard occasionally interrupted by pasture land. These 40,000 acres of vines are the Monterey AVA, which also encompasses the Santa Lucia Highlands and Arroyo Seco sub-AVAs too. It is from these vineyards that Broman sources the grapes for Mystery Pinot Noir.

One thing that makes Pinot Noir different from most other red varieties is that the amount of grapes that are harvested per acre greatly effects the quality of the finished wine. This is called the *yield*, which in the US is expressed in tons per acre. For example, in the high elevation, poor soils of the Chalone AVA, they are typically farming about 2 tons of fruit per acre, or the equivalent of a bottle per plant. In the fertile soils of the Monterey Valley, which were created by millions of years of shifting by the Salinas River, yields for Pinot Noir can exceed 8 tons of fruit per acre. At those levels you lose the subtle character of the fruit, as well as any sense of minerality that may be derived from the soil. For winemakers who only look to make a drinkable wine, they can correct the shortcomings by adding coloring agents (yes it is legal in the US), fake oak flavor, and leaving residual sugar. All of this will build texture and give the wine some flash, but not real complexity.

For Mystery, Broman plays to the strongest character of the fruit, the cool climate of northern Monterey Valley. Rather than build a Frankenstein Pinot and put a lot of un-natural stuff in with the grapes, Broman uses extended skin contact and French oak barrels to build complexity and texture in the final wine. After you decant this wine for half an hour, clear your mind and pour a glass. It reveals a subtle hose of fresh black raspberries and black cherry, dried hibiscus flowers, bay leaf, and orange pekoe tea. On the palate it is pleasantly plump to start, then the frame of acidity and tannins bring a subtle frame to the middle and finish. Good now, this wine will improve for a year or two. Serve with salmon, either grilled or as sushi, or with pork tenderloin pan seared and served with a cherry/balsamic pan sauce.

If the above wine is the Beauty, then the **2013 Murex Imperial Red (\$22)** is the Beast. With this wine, Broman shows his range by crafting a dense, dark, brooding wine that is as far in style from the Mystery as Snow White is to the Black Cauldron.

The name for this wine is actually a play on Broman's name. Tyrian purple, also known as Imperial purple, is a dye that was traded by the Phoenicians around 1700 B.C. For centuries this was the color of royalty, due to its depth and permanence, so it was highly sought after and expensive (as you can imagine). The Phoenicians, who were located around modern day Lebanon, learned how to extract this dye from a predatory snail of the area called the Murex. As they were one of the great sea-faring civilizations of ancient times, they traded this dye across the Mediterranean and achieved great prosperity. When I asked Bob about the connection, he told me that we now know that Imperial Red is based on the element Bromine.

In order to achieve the deep color needed to call this wine Murex, Broman relies on his skill of blending to craft a wine that is both deep and smooth. It is made from Syrah, Petite Verdot, Tannat, and Cabernet Sauvignon from various sources around California. For this blend, Tannat and Petite Verdot provide the power and color, Syrah the texture and Cabernet is actually used to soften the edges. Broman also ages this wine in French oak barrels, about 25% new, for twelve months.

When you are ready to serve this wine, give it a good half-hour, and preferably a full hour, in the decanter before serving. Give this wine a swirl and watch the deeply stained tears roll back into the glass. I'm not sure if the color is actually Imperial purple, but it is impressive. The nose is a brooding combination of blackberry puree, Luxardo cherries, milk chocolate, fresh chopped sage, Maduro cigar wrapper, and pencil shavings. On the palate it starts with a juicy pop of black fruits, then the moderate tannins and bright acidity appear and give this wine the structure to age for up to ten years. Drink this wine with a fatty cut of meat, like hickory smoked brisket, or grilled leg of lamb.

Brisket with Mushrooms

As I have written before, Sunday night is when I cook big meals, pull out an aged bottle of wine from cellar, and enjoy spending time with my family. Unfortunately I do not always have the necessary time to prepare such meals and I have to rely on some slow cook techniques. This one has become a family favorite for everyone except my daughter Katie who does not like mushrooms. Please note that this dish needs four to five hours to cook, and an additional hour to cool, for best flavor and texture.

1 (4- to 5-pound) brisket, fat trimmed to 1/4 inch

Salt and pepper

3/4 cup water

1/4 ounce dried porcini mushrooms, rinsed

1 tablespoon vegetable oil

1 pound white mushrooms, trimmed and quartered

2 onions, chopped

1 tablespoon packed brown sugar

3 tablespoons all-purpose flour

3 garlic cloves, minced

1 teaspoon minced fresh thyme

1 cup low-sodium chicken broth

1 cup dry red wine

3 bay leaves

1 teaspoon balsamic vinegar

1. Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 300 degrees. Pat brisket dry with paper towels. Place roast fat side up on cutting board and prick all over with fork. Cut brisket in half crosswise into 2 roasts. Season with salt and pepper. Microwave water and porcini in covered bowl until steaming, about 1 minute. Let sit until softened, about 5 minutes. Drain porcini through fine-mesh strainer lined with coffee filter, reserve liquid, and mince and reserve porcini.
2. Heat oil in 12-inch skillet over medium-high heat until just smoking. Brown 1 roast on both sides, 10 to 14 minutes; transfer fat side up to 13 by 9-inch baking dish. Repeat with remaining roast.
3. Pour off all but 1 tablespoon fat from skillet. Add mushrooms and 1/4 teaspoon salt and cook over medium-high heat until liquid evaporates and mushrooms are golden brown, about 8 minutes. Add onions and sugar and cook, stirring occasionally, until browned, 8 to 10 minutes. Add flour, garlic, and thyme and cook until golden and fragrant, 1 to 2 minutes. Slowly whisk in broth, wine, 1/2 cup reserved porcini liquid, reserved porcini, and bay leaves, scraping up any browned bits, and bring to boil. Reduce heat to medium and simmer until thickened, about 8 minutes.

4. Pour sauce over roasts and cover dish tightly with

aluminum foil. Bake until tender and fork inserted into meat meets no resistance, 4 1/2 to 5 hours. Let brisket cool at room temperature in dish, uncovered, for 1 hour, flipping halfway through cooling. Discard bay leaves. (Cooled brisket can be refrigerated in sauce for 2 days; reheat gently, covered, in 300-degree oven for 1 hour before proceeding with step 5.)

5. Transfer roasts to carving board. Strain sauce through fine-mesh strainer into fat separator; reserve mushrooms. Let liquid settle, then pour into bowl. Stir vinegar into sauce and microwave until warm, 30 to 60 seconds. Slice roasts against grain into 1/4-inch-thick slices and return to dish with mushrooms. Pour 1 1/2 cups sauce over meat. Serve with remaining sauce. (Refrigerate sliced brisket in sauce for up to 3 days; reheat meat in sauce.)