



2014 Isenhower Marsanne (\$20)

This is one of my favorite Washington State wineries, but I have not featured an Isenhower wine in a while, so you may not know their heart warming story. Brett and Denise Isenhower like to describe their 1997 entrance into the wine business as “diving head first into a shallow pool.” Both were working as pharmacists in Colorado when Brett caught the wine bug, and they moved to Walla Walla, Washington. While they both maintained day jobs as pharmacists, Brett picked up evenings and weekends working as a cellar rat. In 1999, they crushed 17 tons of grapes, Cabernet Franc, Merlot and Syrah, which they released on September 1, 2001 to great critical reviews.

Ironically, their biggest break came at the beginning of the recession in 2009. The New York Times ran a story about how they were coping with a drop in sales. What was news worthy was their decision to cut production by 50% and stop selling their wines through the distribution chain. In effect, their goal was to become more successful by being small. At the time, they were selling to over 20 distributors, but they decided to keep only one, located here in Orlando, and focus all their attention on selling from their tasting rooms. Even though they were making less wine, the demand meant they could raise prices, or at least keep them the same, and retain more of the profits by cutting out middle men. For loyal customers like us in Orlando, it meant less wine, but the quality was and is better than ever.

Although Brett is not a “trained” winemaker, he is skilled at crafting very polished wines. In the cellar, his attention to detail is incredible, with each cluster of grapes sorted twice before pressing. The juice is then racked straight to barrel for fermentation. Although Brett is also an advocate for “wild” or “native” yeast which live in the vineyards and winery, for this wine he inoculates with a lab culture which can work at very low temperatures. The blend for this wine is 81% Marsanne, from the Dutchman Vineyard and 19% Roussanne from the Olsen Ranch. Each variety was fermented separately, with the final blend made right before bottling. There were just under 350 cases made of this wine.

If you dive into any wine book or website to learn about Marsanne, you will read that it is considered a “non-aromatic” variety. That is true when first bottled, but with a little time it evolves and develops a sophisticated bouquet like this one. Believe it or not, I recommend decanting this wine for a half-hour before serving, but try to keep it chilled. You will be offered a subtle but complex combination of lemon curd, fresh peeled, yellow apple, white nectarine and underripe pineapple. In the mouth, this wine acts more like a medium weight red wine, being pretty oily and broad, with a nice sense of mass and even the sense of a little tannin. Classically, this wine is served with rich seafood dishes, such as flounder almandine, but I find it also works great with Asian inspired noodles or coconut shrimp.

2013 Pikes Shiraz-Tempranillo “Los Companeros” (\$16)

When quality Australia wines burst on the scene in the late 1990’s, one of the early standout wineries in my opinion was Pikes. Brothers Andrew and Neil Pike never chased the fad of the excessive use of oak or high amounts of residual sugar just to earn Robert Parker’s blessing in the way of 90+ scores. As a result, they have survived the malaise that has affected America’s disinterest with Australian wines, and their current offerings remain some of our most popular in the category. This bottling, which is new to me, was a standout in a tasting a few months ago and the perfect complement to the Isenhower Marsanne.

The Pikes winery got its start in 1878 when the Pike family patriarch, Henry Pike, emigrated from Dorset to South Australia. He settled in the small town of Oakbank in the Adelaide Hills and established a family business called Pikes Dorset Brewery in 1886. Subsequently, this business became known as H. Pike & Co. and the Pikes name became known throughout South Australia for its quality beverages, including beer, soft drinks, cordials and its famous Tonic Ale. From the outset, Henry Pike used the striking English Pike fish on all his beer labels, and they have continued that tradition today with their wines, a symbol of Pikes long heritage spanning three centuries.

That company was sold in 1972, but by then Henry’s great grandson, Edgar Walter Pike, was already established in the wine business as a grape grower and employee of a large winery. In 1984, he and his wife helped their sons, Andrew and Neil, establish Pikes Wines to continue their family tradition. Both boys are graduates of Roseworthy, the Australia equivalent of UC Davis. Andrew has a degree in viticulture, and Neil’s is in winemaking. Together, they run Pikes and have grown into one of the most respected wineries in the country. In 1996, they even added a small beer brand, which is also gaining acclaim as one of Australia’s top craft breweries.

All of the Pikes wines come from their 180 acres of estate vineyards, which grow in the Clare Valley, north of the city of Adelaide. Unlike many Australian wineries, the Pikes still do much of the work by hand and they farm their vineyards using sustainable practices. All of their grapes are hand harvested, and the reds are fermented using wild, or indigenous, yeasts. Some blocks of Shiraz are left on the skins for up to three weeks after alcoholic fermentation is complete to extract even greater color and structure. All of the red wines are aged in French oak barriques, 225 and 228 liters, for twelve to

eighteen months before bottling. The Pikes do not filter their red wines and the final blend of the 2013 is 80% Shiraz and 20% Tempranillo.

When you open this wine, decant it for a half-hour and give it a slight chill too. Once you do, this it offers a dynamic nose of ripe, cooked cherry and black raspberry, black licorice, cold black tea and vanilla wafers. On the palate, it has a rich feel and gobs of fruit, framed by a subtle frame of tannins into the finish. Although their back labels says this wine will age for four to five years, I think it is best by the end of 2017. Try this wine with chicken tikka masala or jambalaya.

Singapore Noodles

This is one of my favorite “go-to” recipes to serve with Riesling and Rhone-inspired white wines. The combination of curry powder flavors and seafood works well with these wines and this recipe is a quick, weeknight version.

1/2 pound medium shrimp, peeled
2 1/2 teaspoons curry powder
2 medium cloves garlic, minced or pressed through a garlic press (about 2 teaspoons)
3/4 cup canned low-sodium chicken broth
1/4 cup soy sauce
2 tablespoons mirin (sweet Japanese rice wine)
Salt
6 ounces rice vermicelli (also called rice sticks)
4 teaspoons vegetable oil
3 medium shallots, sliced thin (about 1/4 cup)
1 medium red bell pepper, stemmed, seeded, and cut into 1 1/2 by 1/4-inch strips
1 cup bean sprouts

1. Bring 3 quarts water to a boil in a large saucepan for cooking the noodles.

2. Mix the shrimp and 1/2 teaspoon curry powder in a small bowl and set it aside. Mix the garlic and remaining 2 teaspoons curry powder together in another bowl and set it aside. Mix the broth, soy sauce, and mirin together in a third bowl and set it aside.

3. Add 1 teaspoon salt and the noodles to the boiling water, stir to separate, and boil until tender, about 1 minute. Drain thoroughly and set the noodles aside.

4. Meanwhile, heat 2 teaspoons oil in a 12-inch nonstick skillet over medium-high heat until shimmering but not smoking. Add the shrimp and cook until slightly browned, about 45 seconds. Turn the shrimp with tongs and continue to cook for another 45 seconds. Remove the shrimp from the pan and set them aside in bowl.

5. Reduce the heat to medium and add the remaining 2 teaspoons oil. Add the garlic and curry powder mixture and cook until fragrant, about 30 seconds. Add the shallots and stir-fry until they begin to soften, about 30 seconds. Add the bell pepper and stir-fry until crisp-tender, about 1 1/2 minutes. Add the softened noodles, shrimp, broth mixture, and bean sprouts and toss until the ingredients are combined and the noodles heated through, about 1 minute. Serve immediately.

Easy Jambalaya

I stumbled on this recipe this past Sunday afternoon, as the remnants of Hermine drenched us, and I did not feel like braving the elements for a run to the grocery store. I had all the ingredients frozen, including shrimp stock, and put this together in about an hour. It works great with the Pikes Los Companeros, as the rich fruit plays well with the tomatoes. If you do not have shrimp stock frozen, substitute clam juice that has been diluted by half.

2 boneless, skinless chicken breasts (about 12 ounces)
Salt and pepper
8 ounces andouille sausage, halved lengthwise and sliced thin
4 teaspoons vegetable oil
1 onion, chopped fine
1 celery rib, chopped fine
1 red bell pepper, seeded and chopped fine
1 1/2 cups long-grain rice
5 garlic cloves, minced
1/2 teaspoon minced fresh thyme
2 cups leftover South Carolina Shrimp Boil broth

1. Pat chicken dry with paper towels and season with salt and pepper. Cook sausage in 2 teaspoons oil in large nonstick saucepan over medium-high heat until browned, about 5 minutes. Transfer sausage to plate. Cook chicken in sausage fat until brown on one side, about 4 minutes. Transfer to plate with sausage.

2. Add onion, celery, bell pepper, and remaining oil to empty pan and cook until softened, about 5 minutes. Stir in rice, garlic, and thyme and cook until rice turns translucent, about 2 minutes. Add broth and browned sausage, scraping up any browned bits, and bring to boil. Nestle chicken, browned-side up, to rice. Reduce heat to low and cook, covered, until chicken is cooked through, about 10 minutes.

3. Transfer chicken to cutting board and tent with foil. Stir rice and continue to cook, covered, until liquid is absorbed, about 15 minutes. Cut chicken into 1/2-inch pieces and stir into rice.

Remove from heat and let sit, covered, until chicken is heated through, about 5 minutes. Season with salt and pepper. Serve.