



2014 Cigar Box Pinot Noir (\$15)

There is an old saying in the trade, “if you want to make a small fortune in the wine business, start with a large fortune and build a winery.” This month, we look at two “wineries” who have found success, this one using a thoroughly modern model, and the next feature doing it the old fashioned way. I think you will see they both ultimately achieve exceptional quality and value, even if they arrive there via different paths.

The Cigar Box brand is the brain child of Greg Crone, a New Zealand transplant who fell in love with wine at college. He moved to the US in 1996 to work for Seagram’s wine division, Chateau & Estates, launching their New Zealand wine brand, Brancott. During his time with the company, he learned the marketing side of building a brand, but also saw first-hand the struggle many wineries have covering the overhead of their brick and mortar locations. After Seagram’s was absorbed into Diageo, much of their wine division was sold off. Brancott was bought by Allied-Domecq, and by then Greg had had enough of the corporate wine game. He left and started consulting, which has evolved him into the maker of Cigar Box, his company called Liquid Brands.

Unlike many “virtual” brands, Greg feels that the strength of his wines is sourcing grapes from a consistent vineyard. While this may sound elemental, believe me, it is far from common. Crone searches the globe, primarily in the Southern Hemisphere, for vineyards that he feels can produce exceptional wine. He then has the grapes grown to his specifications and the wine made at a nearby custom crush facility. This type of winery allows for small wineries to share expensive, high-tech equipment, while spreading the cost across several users.

For this wine, Greg has found an old Pinot Noir vineyard in the Central Valle of Chile. This is a large growing area that begins at the outskirts of the capital, Santiago, and stretches for several hundred miles to the south. The region is bordered by the Andes Mountains to the east, and the coastal range to the west. As such, most of the valley is shielded from the cold winds that blow off the Pacific Ocean. The warm conditions create the perfect environment for growing Bordeaux varieties such as Cabernet Sauvignon, Carmenere, and Merlot. There are, however, gaps in the mountains and this creates pockets of cooler areas, particularly higher up the slopes, where Pinot Noir can thrive.

The vineyard where these grapes are grown is relatively unusual by the standards of Chile. First, it is old vine Pinot Noir, which is a rare variety in a country where Cabernet is king. Odder still, it is planted at relatively high elevation in poor, rocky soils. This causes the vine stress, naturally limiting the yield of grapes and providing greater concentration in the wine. Finally, due to the vineyard’s remote location, it must be picked by separate from the grower’s other sites. This is particularly important because in Chile, they still have a “one size fits all” attitude about harvesting. When they feel that the first grapes in the vineyard are ready to pick, which is usually Merlot, they harvest all the grapes to save money. This is why so many Chilean Cabernet Sauvignons and Carmenere taste “green.” Here, the grapes are picked at the perfect ripeness, because there are no other grapes varieties growing in the vineyard that need to be picked.

When you open this wine, give it a splash in the decanter before serving, and even a slight chill. The bouquet is charming, with notes of fresh cherry and pomegranate juice, dried spearmint, and sassafras lifting out of the glass. On the palate it has good mass, with a delicate frame of acidity and just a kiss of long, smooth tannins. Drink this wine over the next two years with grilled pork tenderloin or roast turkey.

2012 Truchard Vineyards “The Shepherd” (\$20)

In comparison to Greg Crone’s “virtual” winery, Truchard is an actual place, with vineyards, a winery, and a tasting room you can actually visit. They also are one of the earliest families to see the potential of the Carneros district, being true pioneers of this incredibly important growing region at the southern end of both Napa and Sonoma counties.

While the Truchards may be pioneers in the Carneros region, grape growing and farming run deeper through their veins than establishing this vineyard in 1972. In 1887, Jean Marie Truchard and his brother, Father Jean Marie Truchard emigrated from Lyon, France. Together, they established a vineyard and winery on a 500-acre plot of land in Southeast Texas and even launched a winery. The speculation in the family is that they were fleeing the outbreak of phylloxera in Europe. Unfortunately, the vines succumbed to the relentless Texas heat and by prohibition, the brothers had converted most of their land to cattle grazing. Lucky for us, the desire to live off the land was passed through the generations, with Jean Marie’s grandson, Tony Truchard, always longing to grow something on his parcel of Texas heaven.

The story takes a detour in 1972, when Tony, now a medical doctor in the Army, was stationed at the Presidio, with his wife Jo Ann, and their young family. While taking a country drive with the family, Tony discovered an abandoned prune orchard in an area south of the Napa Valley. It is hard to imagine now, but in those days Napa was just starting to re-emerge as a wine growing region. No one was planting grape vines in the area now known as Carneros, because at the time most felt the cool climate and high clay content in the soil were not hospitable to grapes. After purchasing the 20 acre parcel, Tony hired an agricultural consultant and set about establishing a vineyard.

The first thing they determined, with the site’s close proximity to San Francisco Bay, was that the ground water in the area was too saline to use for irrigation. Tony capitalized on the high clay content to develop retention ponds and capture rain water and run-off. Since that meant water was at a premium, they implemented some of the first drip irrigation on the vines in California. They also planted more vines per acre than the norm at the time, believing that high density planting would create more competition among the roots of the vines, limiting the yield of grapes. Over time their success allowed Tony to purchase neighboring properties, and now they farm 280 acres of vines on 400 acres of land. Most of

their grapes are sold to some of the top names in Napa and Sonoma, but in 1989 they also established their own winery and brand.

One reason the Truchard Vineyard is so famous, and their grapes sought after by so many wineries, is the great diversity of varieties they grow. Conventional wisdom of the time was that the region was best for cool climate varieties such as Chardonnay and Pinot Noir. Tony, along with his son's Anthony and John Anthony II, show that through intense viticultural work, they can grow Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, and Merlot, as well as a number of rare varieties such as Marsanne, Roussanne, Tempranillo, Petit Verdot, and even Zinfandel. It is mostly through their efforts that the Carneros AVA was created in 1983.

The name *Carneros* means *the ram* in Spanish, because in the age of the missions, the region was best known for grazing sheep. Our feature wine, the Shepherd, pays honor to that legacy. It is a blend of Syrah, Zinfandel, and Tempranillo, all from estate grown fruit. When you open this wine, give it at least a half hour in the decanter before serving. When you pour the first glass it greets you with a surprisingly high toned, sense of milk chocolate, slate, black currants, blackberries, Luxardo cherries, and an intriguing note of dried ancho pepper. In the mouth this wine is quite firm and muscular, with firm, dusty tannins, and moderate acidity. This is a wine that demands a dense protein, such as steak or tuna, that you will want to drink over the next five years.

Seared Salmon with Balsamic Glaze

This is a super easy recipe, that only requires you not burn the salmon. It is ideal with Pinot Noirs that are on the riper side and show a good bit of oak, like the Cigar Box.

1/4 cup balsamic vinegar
1/4 cup orange juice
2 tablespoons honey
1/8 teaspoon red pepper flakes
1 sprig rosemary (about 5-inches long)
2 teaspoons vegetable oil
4 skin-on salmon fillets, 6 ounces each, 1 to 1 1/4 inches thick
Salt and pepper
2 tablespoons unsalted butter

Whisk vinegar, juice, honey, and pepper flakes together in small bowl, then add rosemary. Heat oil in large nonstick skillet over medium-high heat until smoking. Season salmon with salt and pepper and cook, skin side up, without moving, until well browned, 4 to 5 minutes. Flip fish skin side down and cook until all but very center of fish is opaque, 2 to 3 minutes. Transfer to platter and tent with foil.

Wipe out pan with paper towels and lower heat to medium. Carefully pour balsamic mixture into pan (it will splatter). Simmer until thick and syrupy, about 5 minutes. Remove rosemary sprig. Whisk in butter, season sauce with salt and pepper, and pour over salmon. Serve.

Country Style Pot Roast

This is a great, make ahead recipe for the slow cooker. It works with any bold red wine, but particularly well with the Truchard Shepherd.

1 boneless beef chuck-eye roast (5 to 6 pounds), tied
Salt and ground black pepper
4 teaspoons vegetable oil
4 medium onions, chopped medium
1 large celery rib, chopped medium
4 medium carrots, peeled and cut into 1-inch chunks
6 medium garlic cloves, minced or pressed through a garlic press
1 cup dry red wine
1 (28-ounce) can crushed tomatoes
2 cups low-sodium chicken broth
1 3/4 cups low-sodium beef broth
1/2 teaspoon red pepper flakes
1 teaspoon dried oregano
3 bay leaves

Dry the roast 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. Brown the roast thoroughly on all sides, reducing the heat if the fat begins to smoke heavily, 8 to 10 minutes. Transfer it to a slow cooker.

Return the skillet to medium heat and heat the remaining 2 teaspoons oil until shimmering. Add the onions, celery, and carrots; cook, stirring occasionally, until the vegetables are lightly browned, 4 minutes. Stir in the garlic and cook until fragrant, about 30 seconds. Add the wine, scraping the browned bits off the skillet bottom, and cook until almost dry, 8 to 10 minutes. Add the tomatoes, broths, red pepper flakes, bay leaves, and thyme; bring to a boil. Pour into the slow cooker.

Cover and cook, on either low or high, until the meat is tender, 9 to 10 hours on low, or 6 to 7 hours on high. Transfer the beef to a carving board and tent loosely with foil to keep warm. Allow the cooking liquid to settle for about 5 minutes, then use a wide spoon to skim the fat off the surface. Discard the bay leaves. Puree the liquid and vegetables, in batches, in a blender or a food processor fitted with the steel blade until

smooth. (Alternatively, use an immersion blender and puree in the slow-cooker insert until smooth.) Stir in the parsley and season to taste with salt and pepper. Slice the roast into 1/2-inch-thick slices, arrange on a warmed serving platter, and pour 1/2 cup of the sauce over the meat. Serve, passing the remaining sauce separately.