



October, 2017



The first pick for this month is made by Dennis Hill, his Zinfandel blend the **2014 Angel's & Cowboys Proprietary Red (\$19)**. Although not a celebrity winemaker, along the lines of Helen Turley or Heidi Peterson-Barrett, Dennis has produced many well-known bottlings over his almost five decades of winemaking in California.

Dennis began his career as a harvest intern at Seghesio Vineyards in the 1970's. At that time Seghesio was one of the largest producers in Sonoma County, focusing on jug quality production of red and white blends. From there Hill worked around Sonoma, at Alexander Valley Vineyards, DeLormier and Mill Creek. Ultimately he landed the job as the first head winemaker for Blackstone, which after their stratospheric success, sold to Constellation for an eye-popping \$140 million dollars in 2001. For six years he worked within the Constellation empire, helping to establish the Hayman & Hill wines along with Aussie winemaker David Hayman. In 2007 Dennis decided to strike out on his own, and along with business partner Yoav Gilat, founded the Cannonball Wine Company.

Although they have never been a club feature, I have been a fan of the Cannonball wines since their inception. In a time when California prices are sky rocketing, they offer exceptional quality and value. For less than \$20 it is hard to find a more honest expression of varietal wines produced in Sonoma County. Along with the

Cannonball wines, Hill and Gilat collaborated with graphic artist Michael Schwab and have created the Angels & Cowboys wines, which includes a pretty darn good Rosé and this Proprietary Red.

The original premise of the Angels & Cowboy wines was to create a brand that pays homage to the trail blazer and rule breaker in us all. Like the Cannonball wines they offer exceptional value, but as blends instead of varietal wines. For the Proprietary Red, Dennis and Yoav would prefer to keep the exact recipe secret. They do publish that it is primarily Zinfandel, blended with Malbec and Cabernet Sauvignon, all grown in Sonoma County. Dennis tells me that the real secret to this wine is the long hang time of the grapes, which allows them to achieve greater-than-normal ripeness and more supple natural tannins. This allows the forward, juicy nature of Zinfandel jump out, reinforced with more backbone from the Malbec and the Cabernet Sauvignon. He also layers in a rich sense of oak to build aromatic dimension and texture in the finished wine. The result is a bottle with great texture from beginning to finish, with a bit more tannin and mouthfeel than is true of pure Zin in this price range.

When you are ready to serve this wine, let it breathe in a decanter for at least a half-hour before serving. This will allow the bouquet of cooked raspberry and blueberry, lavender, eucalyptus and milk chocolate to evolve. Then when you take a sip, this wine initially reveals a bright and lively sense of fruit that softens and fills out in the middle, the graces into a long finish. You can serve this extremely versatile wine with everything from ribs to burgers, or your favorite take-out BBQ brisket.

My second selection for this month comes from one of Australia's most acclaimed winemakers, David Powell, and his **2015 Powell & Son Riverside GSM (\$25)**. David burst on the winemaking scene in 1996 with the release of his 1994 Torbreck Shiraz called Runrig. The unusual name of the winery, and the wine, are from David's working as a lumberjack in Scotland following his years in university. Eventually he ended up back home in Australia. He and his young wife settled in the Barossa Valley, working at a number of wineries included Peter Lehman, Yalumba, Wolf Blass and Rockford.

It is important to understand that at this time, in the late 1980's, the style of wines being produced in Australia was changing, from a tradition of mostly fortified port-type wines to dry, table examples. Many older growers, who were never paid much for their grapes, started to leave their vineyards go fallow as the price they were being paid for their grapes did not cover the cost of farming. This is when David discovered vineyards of old Shiraz vines that were no longer being commercially farmed. He arranged with the owners to farm them, and make a wine, paying after the wine was sold, and share in the profits. Through this process, called *farm-share*, he managed to assemble a portfolio of old vines vineyards around the Barossa, Clare and Eden Valleys. While this is very rare today, it was also extremely common in Europe around the same time, as young, energetic winemakers looked to make their imprint on the wine world but could not afford to buy land.

From the mid-1990's through around 2004, Australian wine was the hottest category in the business. During this time Powell rode the wave, crafting many highly rated and collectible wines, primarily from those old vine

blocks. He also produced a less expensive wine, called the Woodcutter, that was a “GSM,” made up of Grenache, Syrah and Mourvedre from old vines too. In 2002 he brought investor Jack Cowin on to provide working capital and their brand continued to grow. Then in 2008 Cowin wanted out and he and Powell sold some, or depending on who’s story you believe, all of their shares to American businessman Peter Kight. Shortly after, to the shock of the wine world, Powell was fired from Torbreck and banned from the property, which also included his home. As you can imagine an ugly fight ensued between the two men. I will not go into the details, as it is something of a “he said” vs. “he said” situation, but both sides are well documented on-line. The end result is Powell left and began working on his new project, Powell & Son, with Callum, who you can probably imagine is the “son.”

Curiously I was never a big fan of the Torbreck wines, which I often found to contain unacceptably high levels of a yeast spoilage called brettanomyces. Under Kight’s leadership the wines are much cleaner and a good example of the style. During a recent tasting of the Powell & Son wines I was equally impressed with the depth and clean nature of the entire lineup. The Riverside bottling is their entry tier red, a blend of 60% Grenache, 20% Syrah and 20% Mataro (Mourvedre). All of the grapes for this wine are harvested by hand from old vines in the Barossa, then fermented and aged in 2300 liter French oak tanks.

When you are ready to serve this wine, allow it to breathe in a decanter for at least a half-hour before serving. When you pour a glass you will immediately be greeted by a complex nose of kirsch, blackberry preserves, dark chocolate, clove, allspice and anise seeds. The palate relatively big, with a wave of dark fruits framed by moderate tannins and a bit of lifted acidity from the Grenache. This wine is very drinkable now but will improve for up to ten years.

### **Panang Beef Curry**

I do not often cook curry at home, but the subtle spicy undertone of the two feature wines both inspired me to step out of my comfort zone. This dish is not particularly spicy but you can adjust the heat depending on the amount of red chile you use, or the brand of curry paste. If you are unsure, add the curry paste sparingly and adjust to your taste. Although annoyingly hard to find, Kaffir lime leaves are available in Asian markets or on-line, and they are worth seeking out. Alternatively you can substitute 3 strips of lime zest and 1 strip of lemon zest, minced fine.

**2 pounds boneless beef short ribs, trimmed**  
**2 tablespoons vegetable oil**  
**2–4 tablespoons Thai red curry paste**  
**1 (14-ounce) can unsweetened coconut milk**  
**4 teaspoons fish sauce**  
**2 teaspoons sugar**  
**1 Thai red chile, halved lengthwise (optional)**  
**6 kaffir lime leaves, middle vein removed, sliced thin**  
**1/3 cup unsalted dry-roasted peanuts, chopped fine**

1. Cut each rib crosswise with grain into 3 equal pieces. Slice each piece against grain 1/4 inch thick. Place beef in large saucepan and add water to cover. Bring to boil over high heat. Cover, reduce heat to low, and cook until beef is fork-tender, 1 to 1 1/4 hours. Using slotted spoon, transfer beef to bowl; discard water. (Beef can refrigerated for up to 24 hours; when ready to use, add it to curry as directed in step 2.)

2. Heat oil in 12-inch nonstick skillet over medium heat until shimmering. Add 2 tablespoons curry paste and cook, stirring frequently, until paste is fragrant and darkens in color to brick red, 5 to 8 minutes. Add coconut milk, fish sauce, sugar, and chile, if using; stir to combine and dissolve sugar. Taste sauce and add up to 2 tablespoons more curry paste to achieve desired spiciness. Add beef, stir to coat with sauce, and bring to simmer.

3. Rapidly simmer, stirring occasionally, until sauce is thickened and reduced by half and coats beef, 12 to 15 minutes. (Sauce should be quite thick, and streaks of oil will appear. Sauce will continue to thicken as it cools.) Add kaffir lime leaves and simmer until fragrant, 1 to 2 minutes. Transfer to serving platter, sprinkle with peanuts, and serve over rice.