



**November , 2017**



With Thanksgiving right around the corner, it always seems appropriate to begin November with a Pinot Noir. This month, I have selected the new vintage of an old favorite, the **2014 Mercy Cellars Pinot Noir Monterey (\$25)**. Longtime members may remember the 2010 and 2012 vintages were both selections. This wine is always very popular, but historically was hard to get in enough quantity for this club. Thankfully they have doubled production from the 2010 vintage and now make over 120 cases of the 2014.

Mercy Cellars is the partnership of two friends, Mark Dirickson and Mike Kohne. Both men are longtime industry insiders who have a passion for the wines of the Arroyo Seco AVA in the southern Monterey Valley. Their production is small, given most of their wines are single vineyard bottlings from unique sites. In selecting a vineyard, they look for those that are planted to old clones of Pinot Noir and Chardonnay, which yield smaller clusters of grapes that are more intensely flavored. These vineyards do not yield much, so their production of single vineyard wines is often less than 100 cases per location. In order to have supply of wine year-round, they bottle 125 cases of this wine, which is a blend taken from all their single vineyard fruit. They chose to label this wine as the larger Monterey AVA in order to avoid label confusion, and because it sells for \$15 a bottle cheaper than their single vineyard wines.

Not many consumers know the Arroyo Seco AVA. The appellation sits at the Southern tip of the valley that creates the Santa Lucia Highlands. This is an appellation where many spectacular Pinots and Chards are being produced, and they command top dollar. Arroyo Seco is, as the name implies, the dry river bed at the bottom of the valley. It's cold, dry, windy and there is virtually no top soil: the right conditions to grow grape vines but little else. Because of the harsh conditions, the vines produce small clusters and ripen very late. The result is very intensely flavored wines with amazing structure.

The philosophy of the winemaking team at Mercy, where they also enlist Alan Phillips to consult, is to let the character of the Arroyo Seco appellation speak loud and clear. All of the fruit is gently destemmed and put in small bins for fermentation. They punch down the cap twice a day to extract flavor and color but ferment slowly, taking up to two weeks before the wine is completely dry. It is then racked to barrel for malolactic fermentation. The wine is aged for 10 to 11 months in French oak barrels, of which 10% are new, and the balance are second and third pass.

When you open this wine, give it a splash in the decanter to let the bouquet develop and soften the acidity. Once you do this, the nose opens up and shows a bright sense of strawberry jam, pomegranate seeds, baked cherry pie filling, saffras and the warm notes of a new cigar box. On the palate, this wine is bright at first, with fruit restrained by well integrated acids and light tannins. This wine is delicious now but will improve for three to five years in proper conditions. Serve this wine with a traditional turkey dinner or salmon sushi.

For the second pick, I have selected a bigger wine, the **2013 Foppiano Petite Sirah "Russian River" (\$25)**. Longtime readers know that I am not the biggest fan of this variety, often finding the wines brooding and lacking dimension. The Foppiano family are famous for their bottling, and with almost 50 vintages behind them, they have a knack for this grape that I find interesting.

Like many of the old Sonoma wineries founded by Italian immigrants, the Foppiano story begins with the gold rush. In 1855, Giovanni Foppiano made his way from New York to Sonoma county via Panama. As with many others, he did not strike gold, but ultimately bought an 80 acre farm south of Healsburg in 1896. He established the Foppiano Wine Company and began supplying the Italian immigrants in San Francisco's North Beach neighborhood. He was succeeded by his son, Louis A. Foppiano, beginning a long line of the name that carry through their 120 year history. Like most of the family wineries, they struggled through the depression by growing tree fruits and selling grapes to home winemakers. In 1926, they were even raided by the Treasury department and 10,000 gallons of "personal consumption" wine was dumped in a nearby creek. After prohibition ended, they were in good shape, with almost 83,000 gallons of wine ready to sell from the 1932 vintage. History buffs and astute readers may recognize that prohibition did not end until 1933, but what difference is a year?

The Petite Sirah grapes have been a part of their vineyard since the beginning, but it was not until 1967 that they bottled their first wine labeled as such. When UC Davis professor Carol Meredith began DNA testing on Petite Sirah in the 1990s, the old Foppiano vines were included in the study. In 1999, a 20 year vertical tasting of their Petite Sirah was conducted in London, establishing an international demand for their bottling. Then in 2002, they hosted the first Petite Sirah symposium at their winery with the group, **P.S. I love you**, and then-president Louis M. Foppiano became the first charter member.

The reason I like this example so much is that the Foppiano family emphasizes the elegant side of the variety instead of the power. Although it is much darker, Petite Sirah grows well in conditions similar to Pinot Noir, and both varieties

take some coaxing in the cellar to reveal their complexity. The grapes for this wine come from their original estate vineyard south of Healdsburg, which over the years has grown to 160 acres. The grapes are picked at their peak ripeness, not over-ripe like many producers, then fermented in open-top fermentors. They employ a couple of techniques for gentle color extraction, primarily punching down the cap three times a day, as one would for Pinot Noir. Winemaker Nova Perrill also employs some pump-overs, which when done right offer a very gentle way to coax color and flavor from the skins. The wine is then aged primarily in French oak barrels for further refinement, and 30% of the barrels are new. Perrill likes a small amount of Hungarian oak barrels in the regime to add an element of spice. After 18 months, the wine is bottled.

When you are ready to open this wine, decant it for up to an hour before serving. After this the first glass will reveal a lot more complexity, with notes of cooked blueberries and black cherries, orange water, tobacco, pencil lead and sage. On the palate, this wine is quite dense and tannic, with moderate fruit and lively acids. This wine is good now but will improve for up to 10 years. Serve with spicy beef fajitas, blue cheese stuffed hamburgers or smoked brisket.

### **Chicken Mole Poblano**

I love the complex flavors of mole sauce, particularly with spicy red wines like Petite Sirah, Syrah and Zinfandel. The sauce for this recipe has a lot of ingredients, but comes together relatively quickly, and the dimension is incredible. If you follow the recipe exactly, then leave the skin on the chicken for cooking, then remove before serving. That is, unless you enjoy limp chicken skin. *I also use the sauce for a base and add one and a half pounds of leftover turkey meat from Thanksgiving. The dark meat works best but use what you have.*

**3 ounces (6 to 8) dried ancho chiles**  
**3 ½ cups chicken broth**  
**½ cup raisins**  
**1 onion, cut into 1-inch pieces**  
**¼ cup vegetable oil**  
**2 tablespoons tomato paste**  
**4 garlic cloves, peeled**  
**1 tablespoon minced canned chipotle chile in adobo sauce**  
**¾ cup sliced almonds**  
**1 slice hearty white sandwich bread, torn into 1-inch pieces**  
**3 tablespoons sesame seeds**  
**2 teaspoons salt**  
**1–2 teaspoons cayenne pepper (optional)**  
**1 teaspoon dried oregano**  
**½ teaspoon dried thyme**  
**½ teaspoon ground cinnamon**  
**½ teaspoon ground cumin**  
**½ teaspoon ground coriander**  
**½ teaspoon pepper**  
**2 ounces unsweetened chocolate, chopped coarse**  
**4 pounds bone-in chicken pieces (split breasts cut in half, drumsticks, and/or thighs), trimmed (you can substitute 1.5 lbs of roasted turkey meat, see italics above)**

1. Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 325 degrees. Place anchos on rimmed baking sheet and toast until fragrant and pliable, about 5 minutes. Transfer to medium bowl and let cool for 5 minutes. Remove seeds, stems, and ribs from anchos and discard; tear flesh into 1/2-inch pieces and return pieces to bowl.

2. Add 2 cups broth and raisins to bowl with anchos, cover, and microwave until steaming, about 2 minutes. Let stand until softened, about 5 minutes. Drain mixture in fine-mesh strainer set over bowl, reserving liquid.

3. Process onion, 2 tablespoons oil, tomato paste, garlic, chipotle and ancho-raisin mixture in food processor until smooth, about 5 minutes, scraping down sides of bowl as needed. Add almonds; bread; 2 tablespoons sesame seeds; salt; cayenne, if using; oregano; thyme; cinnamon; cumin; coriander; pepper; and 1/4 cup reserved ancho soaking liquid and continue to process until smooth paste forms, about 3 minutes, scraping down sides of bowl as needed and adding additional soaking liquid if necessary.

4. Heat remaining 2 tablespoons oil in Dutch oven over medium-high heat until shimmering. Add mole paste and cook, stirring frequently, until steaming, about 3 minutes. Stir in chocolate until incorporated. Transfer pot to oven and cook, uncovered, for 30 minutes, stirring twice. (Paste will darken during cooking). (Paste can be refrigerated for up to 1 week or frozen for up to 1 month).

5. Place pot over medium-high heat and whisk remaining reserved soaking liquid and remaining 1 1/2 cups broth into mole paste until smooth. Place chicken in even layer in pot, reduce heat to low, cover, and cook until breasts register 160 degrees and drumsticks/thighs register 175 degrees, 25 to 30 minutes, stirring halfway through cooking. Transfer chicken pieces to serving dish as they come up to temperature. Pour sauce over chicken, garnish with remaining 1 tablespoon sesame seeds, and serve.