



December , 2017



It is hard to believe, but this month marks the beginning of the 8th year of the New World Red Club. Over the years I have tried to keep the selections “down the middle of the fairway,” save for an occasionally wine you hopefully find thought provoking. This month I have selected one “normal” wine, the newest vintage of Halter Ranch Synthesis, which will certainly satisfy those who crave a big Cab for holiday dinners. My second pick is a Tempranillo, the grape most often found in the vineyards of northern Spain. This version comes from the Barossa Valley of Australia. For reasons I will explain below, this is becoming a very important “new world” variety.

Although it is certainly a hot topic, if you ask grape growers in every region of the world that I have visited, they will tell you the climate is getting hotter. I am not going down the rabbit hole of why, that is for scientist to figure out. The fact is empirical evidence from almost every major wine region in the world says in the last thirty years, the summers are hotter.

Grape growers calculate such information by a formula called a growing degree day (GDD). The math is simple enough, but a mere knowledge of its existence is enough for our purposes. The important thing to understand is they calculate a score, which can range for 1390 to 2200 - the higher score being associated with a warmer climate. Then, they classify a vineyard, or specific wine region, in what is called the Winkler Scale. Vineyards with a GDD below 1390 are classified as a Region 1, and that includes Champagne, Tasmania, Burgundy and Chablis. Grapes like Riesling, Sauvignon Blanc and Pinot Noir do best in such conditions. A Winkler Region 2 ranges from 1391 to 1670, and includes Bordeaux, Napa and the Yarra Valley of Australia. In those conditions the Bordeaux varieties shine; Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot, as well as Syrah and Chardonnay. The Winkler Region 3 includes areas like Rioja and the Barossa Valley and the best grapes under those conditions? Tempranillo and Syrah. Many experts already consider Napa as a Region 3 in most vintages, and if things keep going the way they have been, in another couple of decades there will be no doubt. Can you imagine if it gets too warm to grow Cabernet Sauvignon in Napa? Never fear, there are already several vineyards experimenting with Tempranillo, and the results are very promising.

As I have already stated, my selection for this month, the **2014 Yalumba Tempranillo “Running with Bulls” (\$20)** is a chance to see what this variety can do outside of Spain. For this wine, Yalumba owner Robert Hill Smith finds inspiration from his personal experience of running with the bulls in Pamplona, in 1978. During that time he was working at wineries in France, but traveled across Europe during his time off. It was in this period he developed a love for wines made from Tempranillo.

When Hill returned to the family business in the Barossa Valley, he discovered many farmers were already growing the variety. In fact, although they grow Tempranillo in some of the Yalumba vineyards, they have to buy a significant amount of grapes to make this wine. Fortunately they are able to source some very old vineyards, some being more than a hundred years old. To make the wine the grapes are fermented with wild yeast, and malolactic fermentation and aging both occur in Hungarian oak barriques. Since they want the flavor of the grape to shine through they use a small percentage of new barrels, but most are “well seasoned.”

When you are ready to serve this wine, decant it for a half-hour before serving. Once you do this the bouquet pops with bold quantities of sweet cherries and red licorice, along with savory notes of grilled tomatoes with basil, old leather and sage. It has a nice sense of fruit on the palate, plump at first with fine, smooth tannins and lower acidity than most Spanish examples. This will work nicely with paella with chorizo and chicken, mussels with saffron and tomato or the cool appetizer this month, spicy sweet potato wedges and corn with harissa cream.

The second selection this month is an old favorite here at the Orlando store, but to my surprise has never been a New World Red selection. **2015 Halter Ranch Sythesis (\$25)** is created, and named because it is a chance for winemaker Kevin Sass to produce a Cabernet-centered blend using any of the other 12 other varieties grown on the ranch. When you open this wine you will understand why it is such a perennial favorite here in Orlando, and their tasting room. It is hard to find a \$25 wine delivering this much material in the current market.

At the core of this wine is the 281 acres of vineyards that make up the Halter Ranch. The property is perfectly positioned on the west side of Paso Robles, on rolling hills that range from 1500 to 1750 feet above sea level. Located 14 miles from the cool Pacific Ocean, the vineyard has several different micro-climates, which allows for the myriad grape varieties to be grown. Winemaker Kevin Sass and vineyard manager Lucas Pope divide the property into 81 different blocks, determined by soil type, exposition, and elevation. Each block is farmed for the unique conditions and grape variety grown. The blocks are also harvested and fermented separately, which leaves

Sass with a huge palette of wines to use for creating the various blends the winery produces. Sythesis is always Cabernet dominant, with the current vintage also containing 22% Petite Sirah and 2% Petit Verdot.

The Cabernet components for this wine were harvested on three different days, from September 24th to October 7th, 2015. The Petite Sirah was picked on September 16th and the late ripening Petit Verdot on October 7th. Each lot was fermented individually, in stainless steel tanks with a pump-over of the juice three times per day, for an average of 14 days. Once dry the wine was barreled in French oak, with 33% of them new, for sixteen months.

When you are ready to serve this wine, decant it for up to an hour before serving. When you do it offers a dramatic nose of fresh made black raspberry jam, crushed fresh blueberries, dried black figs, dark chocolate, vanilla wafers and a hint of violets. The feel on the palate is broad and rich, with the ripe fruit framed by moderate tannins and low-ish acidity, lasting long into the finish. Drink this wine with pot roast, steaks, or all by itself with heavy hors d'oeuvres.

Spicy Sweet Potato Wedges & Corn with Harissa Crème Fraiche

I receive a bunch of different wine and spirit related magazines, each with a few suggestions for recipes. I normally ignore them but this one caught my eye, and it is really good. It is a great pairing for wines with bright fruit, like the Running with the Bulls Tempranillo, or those based on Grenache or Syrah.

1 tbsp ground coriander
1 tbsp ground cumin
1 tbsp smoked paprika
1/2 tsp chili powder
2 garlic cloves, crushed
4 tbsp olive oil, divided
3 sweet potatoes, scrubbed and cut into wedges
8 oz. baby corn, drained on paper towels
Sea salt and black pepper to taste

Harissa Crème Fraiche

1 to 2 tbsp harissa paste
1/2 cup crème fraîche
(Sour cream works fine too)

Preheat the oven to 400 degrees, moving one rack to the top third of the oven. Prepare a cookie sheet by covering it with aluminum foil.

Quickly toast the coriander, cumin, paprika and chili powder in a skillet until fragrant, but not smoking. About 1 minute.

Add the spice mixture to a large bowl with garlic and 3 tbsp of olive oil. Add the sweet potato wedges and toss to coat. Spread them evenly on the cookie sheet and sprinkle with sea salt and pepper. Bake for 45 minutes.

While the potatoes cook, add the baby corn to the same bowl with 1 tbsp of olive oil, and toss to coat. Assemble the harissa crème fraîche by mixing the two ingredients to taste.

When the sweet potatoes begin to brown and crisp, scatter the baby corn on the cookie sheet between the wedges and roast for an additional ten minutes, or until the corn and the wedges are nicely browned.

French onion dip

Is there an appetizer more ubiquitous to the holidays than French onion dip? This version does away with the salt laden pouch and builds flavor with real, caramelized onions. Once you try this you will never go back, plus it works great with almost any full bodied red wine.

3 tablespoons unsalted butter
2 pounds onions, chopped fine
Salt and pepper
1/8 teaspoon cayenne pepper
1/4 cup water
2 1/2 teaspoons balsamic vinegar
1 cup sour cream
1/2 cup mayonnaise

Melt butter in 12-inch skillet over medium heat. Add onions, 1/2 teaspoon salt, 1/2 teaspoon pepper, and cayenne and cook, stirring occasionally, until onions are translucent, about 10 minutes. Reduce heat to medium-low and continue cooking until onions are golden, about 10 minutes.

Add 2 tablespoons water to skillet and cook, scraping up any browned bits, until water is evaporated, about 5 minutes. Add remaining 2 tablespoons water and cook until onions are caramelized and water is evaporated, about 5 minutes longer. Remove from heat and stir in vinegar. Transfer onions to medium bowl and let cool for 10 minutes.

Add sour cream and mayonnaise to onions and stir to combine. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Refrigerate for at least 30 minutes to allow flavors to blend. Serve.