



It is a joy to bring you the selections each month and I hope you find the Explorers Club as rewarding as a member as I do in telling the stories of the fascinating people, and amazing places from which they originate. On behalf of all in the Tim's Wine Market family, we wish you joyful holiday season, and prosperous and healthy New Year.

Bervini Sparkling Rosé (\$18)

After fourteen years of writing the Wine of the Month/Explorers Club, last year lightning struck and I finally thought to select a sparkling wine for a December selection. It turned out to be a runaway success so this year I bring you another.

This example comes to us from the Bervini winery, a third generation estate that lies in the area between the Prosecco and Friuli wine regions in northeastern Italy. Like many of the estates in this region, they are a relatively large and diverse organization, producing sparkling wines as well as dry reds and whites. Founded in 1955, this Bervini family started by selling their wines to local restaurants and hotels in bulk. Over time their business model evolved and today they produce an amazing collection of wines that represent the modern side of Italy.

There is no provision for Rosé in the laws that govern the production of Prosecco, but that is what this wine would be if allowed. The grapes used to make this wine grow in vineyards within the controlled zone, and are farmed using organic techniques, although not certified. It is a blend of 93% Glera, the grape of Prosecco, and 7% Robaso. Robaso is a grape unique to the plains of the Veneto, and when vinified alone produces grapes that are high in tannin and acid. In fact the name *raboxo* in the native Venetian language means "angry." As with all Prosecco, this one is fermented in large, stainless steel tanks, which preserves aroma and freshness. It is finished with twelve grams of residual sugar per liter, which is technically in the brut range but at the higher end of the spectrum. Typically I prefer sparkling wines with lower residual sugar, but for Glera it works as it adds a layer of texture.

When you are ready to serve this wine, take it out of the refrigerator and pop the cork. Then let it sit for 10-15 minutes and warm slightly so it will release more bouquet. Once you do it delivers a gorgeous aroma of soft, freeze-dried strawberries, hibiscus flowers in syrup, orange marmalade and a touch of rooibos tea. On the palate it is soft and plump, with a big punch of fruit that is quickly restrained by a light frame of acidity and undertone of minerality. Drink this wine as the perfect brunch bubbles, with a smoked salmon and leek tart or a quiche with spinach and Prosciutto, or all by itself!

2015 J. Bookwalter Subplot #33 (\$22)

We have featured this wine a couple of times over the years, but always as a New World Red selection. When I tasted this bottling I approached the distributor about another feature and John Bookwalter came back with a little better price for higher volume, which allowed me to use it for an Explorer Club selection.

The Subplot is produced from the various barrels and tanks left over after all of the more expensive wines from this winery are finished. While this may sound a little too much like a Friday night, left-over buffet, there is not much in this winery that is not superb, and when crafted by John Bookwalter the results are spectacular.

As Washington State wineries go, the Bookwalter's are considered pioneers in the state. Jerry Bookwalter moved to Washington State in mid 1970's to become the viticultural manager of Sagemoor Vineyards, a 500-acre property that includes the now famous Bacchus, Dionysus and Weinbau sites. Born in California and with a degree from UC Davis, he had been managing vineyards in the Golden State, but fell in love with the climate and potential of eastern Washington. Then in 1993, the winemaking bug finally bit him and he launched J. Bookwalter wines. The first efforts, made in his garage, were mostly white wines, but when his son John joined him, they moved into a commercial building. Over time, they realized that customers had a hard time finding them in an industrial complex, so they moved into an actual winery and have since added a restaurant.

I am always amazed when I taste the Bookwalter wines that winemaker John, Jerry's son, has no formal training. In the mid-1990's John "accidentally" ran into Zelma Long, the legendary winemaker of Simi, at a conference in the Tri-Cities area. She agreed to consult on the Bookwalter wines, and John absorbed her wisdom like a sponge. In the last couple of vintages, he has hired Caleb Foster to handle the day-to-day winemaking so he can focus on sales, but he still keeps an active hand in what is going on in the winery. Coincidentally Bookwalter also uses Claude Gros, who oversees Chateau Negly from features in October and November, as a consultant.

All of the wines produced by Bookwalter have a literary term for their name. The Subplot series started in 1983 when they began producing a non-vintage red wine. As you can guess this is the 33rd version of that wine and now most bottlings are vintage dated. 2015 was a fantastic vintage for Washington State and this wine shows the richness and power of a quality vintage, with a surprising sense. Most of the wine that goes into the Subplot are from their younger vines, combined with the press wine from their best parcels. For this wine the blend is 60% Merlot, 20% Cabernet Sauvignon, 10% Cabernet Franc and 10% Syrah, produced from grapes grown 3 different vineyards in the Columbia Valley. 10% of this wine was aged in new French barrels and the remaining portion in progressively older barrels up to five years old. The wine spent 120 months in oak before bottling.

I strongly recommend decanting this one for a half hour before serving. Once you do, it gives you a explosive nose of dried red plums, cooked blueberries, dark chocolate, vanilla bean and a kiss of menthol. On the palate it is quite soft

initially, with a big sense of fruit framed by a light sense of acidity and tannins. The finish is very long and nicely balanced, showing that this wine should age nicely for three to five years.

Leek and Smoked Salmon Tart

Do not let the long list of ingredients scare you, this recipe is pretty easy. It works really well with sparkling rosé as well as still versions, and salty white wines like Albarino.

Crust

1 ¼ cups (6 1/4 ounces) unbleached all-purpose flour
1 tablespoon sugar
½ teaspoon salt
8 tablespoons (1 stick) unsalted butter, cut into 1/2-inch cubes and chilled
3 tablespoons ice water

Filling

1 tablespoon unsalted butter
1 pound leeks, white and light green parts only, halved lengthwise, sliced thin, and rinsed thoroughly
Salt
2 large eggs
½ cup half-and-half
1 tablespoon minced fresh dill leaves
Ground black pepper
6 ounces smoked salmon, thinly sliced, cut into 1/4-inch pieces
1 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil
1 tablespoon minced fresh chives
1 lemon, cut into wedges (for serving)

in a 10-inch skillet over medium heat. Add the leeks and 1/2 teaspoon salt and cook, covered, stirring occasionally, until the leeks are softened, about 10 minutes. Remove the pan from the heat, remove the lid, and let the leeks cool for 5 minutes.

6. Whisk the eggs, half-and-half, dill, and 1/4 teaspoon ground black pepper together in a large bowl. Stir in the leeks until just incorporated. Spread the leek mixture over the bottom of the baked crust. Bake the tart on the baking sheet until the filling has set and the center feels firm to the touch, 20 to 25 minutes. Set the baking sheet with the tart shell on a wire rack and cool to room temperature, about 2 hours.

7. Toss the salmon with the olive oil and chives and season with salt and pepper to taste. Sprinkle the salmon evenly over the cooled tart. Slice the tart into wedges and serve with the lemon wedges.

1. FOR THE CRUST: Spray a 9-inch tart pan with a removable bottom with vegetable oil spray; set aside. Pulse the flour, sugar, and salt together in a food processor until combined, about 4 pulses. Scatter the butter pieces over the flour mixture and pulse until the mixture resembles coarse sand, about 15 pulses. Add 2 tablespoons of the ice water and continue to process until large clumps of dough form and no powdery bits remain, about 5 seconds. If the dough doesn't clump, add the remaining tablespoon water and pulse to incorporate, about 4 pulses.

2. Tear the dough into walnut-sized pieces, then pat it into the prepared tart pan. Lay plastic wrap over the dough and smooth out any bumps or shallow areas using your fingertips or the bottom of a measuring cup. Place the tart shell on a large plate and freeze until firm, about 30 minutes. Meanwhile, adjust an oven rack to the middle position and heat the oven to 375 degrees.

3. Place the frozen tart shell on a baking sheet. Gently press a piece of extra-wide heavy-duty aluminum foil that has been sprayed with vegetable oil spray against the dough and over the edges of the tart pan. Fill the shell with pie weights and bake until the top edge of the dough just starts to color and the surface of dough under the foil no longer looks wet, about 30 minutes.

4. Remove the shell from the oven and carefully remove the foil and weights. Return the baking sheet with the tart shell to the oven and continue to bake, uncovered, until golden brown, 5 to 10 minutes. Set the baking sheet with the tart shell on a wire rack to cool while making the filling. (Do not turn off the oven.)

5. FOR THE FILLING: While the crust is baking, melt the butter

Steak Fajita Pita Pizza

This is an easy dish for quick dinners and fantastic with full bodied, soft red wines like the Bookwalter Subplot.

2 teaspoons dried oregano
1 teaspoon chipotle chile powder
Salt and pepper
1 (14.5-ounce) can diced tomatoes
8 ounces skirt steak, trimmed
1 poblano chile, stemmed and seeded
1 red onion, cut into 1/2-inch-thick slices
4 - 6 pita
8 ounces shredded Mexican cheese blend
½ cup chopped fresh cilantro

1. Preheat the broiler and position the top rack to the second highest location. Combine oregano, chile powder, 1 teaspoon salt, and ½ teaspoon pepper in bowl. Pulse tomatoes and their juice with half of spice mixture in food processor until coarsely chopped, about 5 pulses; transfer to bowl. Pat steak dry with paper towels and rub with remaining spice mixture. Broil the steak, poblano, and onion until well charred and meat registers 125 degrees, about 3 minutes per side for steak and 4 minutes per side for vegetables. Transfer steak and vegetables to carving board, tent with aluminum foil, and let rest for 5 minutes. Thinly slice steak against grain; slice poblano into thin strips; separate onion rings.

2. Place the pitas on a foil covered cookie sheet and spread with reserved tomato sauce. Cover with toppings and cheese. Broil until the cheese is bubbling, about 5 minutes. Cut each pita into four pieces and sprinkle with cilantro.