

December, 2013

Tim's Wine Market



As our kids get older, the holiday meals are taking on even more importance, as distance and busy schedules do not allow for many opportunities to break bread together. While I used to say Thanksgiving was my favorite meal, I increasingly believe it to be our Christmas Eve dinner after church. For several years the menu has centered around a smoked, standing rib roast, which I pair with a nice, older Bordeaux. Last year I added an appetizer of stone crab claws and Champagne, which is really a great, if expensive, way to start the meal. So this year my features retrace the wine categories of last Christmas Eve's meal. The way I see it, the opportunity for big family moments are increasingly rare, so why not make the most of the ones we have.

2012 Torello Mata Cava Brut Reserva (\$22)

I do not believe that in the sixteen-year history of the Explorer Club, we have ever featured a sparkling wine in December. It seems almost impossible, but I can find nothing in my archive to convince me otherwise. This is surprising, as I am a big fan of great bubbly. Is there any beverage that makes the holidays as festive? I also cannot think of a better thing than a glass of bubbles to hand company as they walk in the door. It is the perfect way to say "thank you for coming, welcome to our home."

If I am fixing this egregious oversight, it only seems appropriate to do so using this Cava. Agusti Torello Mata has been in our store several times and we are, at least in Orlando, enormous fans of his products. There are a number of great Cava producers, who in my mind rival the fantastic grower Champagnes of France, and this is an excellent introduction to the category.

The first thing that needs to be explained is that while this is a sparkling wine, it is not Champagne. Champagne is a region of France, like Bordeaux or Cotes du Rhone, with geographical boundaries and strict rules about which grapes may be grown, and how the wine may be made. The most important thing for this write-up is to know that all wines made in the method of Champagne, or *method Champenois*, undergo a secondary fermentation in the bottle to create the bubbles. What separates quality sparkling wine from the stuff served at Sunday brunch for bottomless mimosas, is the complexity and dimension derived from bottle fermentation and aging. Good sparkling wines are made all over the world and in my mind they must undergo fermentation in the bottle. It is important to note that all Cava, which is the Spanish version of Champagne, is bottle conditioned. In full disclosure, bowing to the pressure of the large wineries, the geographical boundaries of Cava production are very loose. This is one of the greatest differences between the top producers, such as Torello Mata, Gramona, and Raventos who farm in the traditional region of Penedes. By comparison, the black bottle, \$5.99 stuff that is stacked as an end-cap in the grocery stores is from vineyards in other, lesser, areas of Spain, which still qualify as "Cava."

The history of Cava is quite long, stretching back to the late 1800's. The category was only a regional specialty until the 1950's, when large producers began to seek export markets. In 1959 Agusti Torello Mata founded his estate, after several years of running an analytical lab catering to the wine industry. Unlike the big producers who are only concerned with volume, Agusti focuses on making wine from old vines, in a slow method that yields amazing results.

To produce his Cava, Agusti uses old vines and relies only on the classic, indigenous varieties of the Penedes. This vintage is a blend of 39% Macabeu, 38% Parellada, and 23% Xarel-lo. All of his vineyards lie close to the Mediterranean and at high elevation. The extreme growing conditions create incredible intensity of flavor in the grapes. The wine then undergoes the bottle fermentation and aging for 24 months. This is important because the legal limit is only 9 months, but the additional time creates considerably more complexity in the final wine. Because of the extended aging, Agusti also finishes the wine with a scant 4 grams of residual sugar per liter. Cheaper Cava, which bottle ferment and age for only the legal limit, 9 months, need to fill in the mid-palate with more sweetness as the wine doesn't develop complexity from aging. (The big Champagne houses do the same thing, but that is story for another day).

When you prepare to serve this wine, open it, but allow it to rest on the counter a few minutes to warm up. Once the wine reaches the 45-50 degree range, pour a glass and stick your nose down into the flute (without inhaling any wine.) The bouquet is an exotic combination of vanilla beans, lemon peel, marzipan, butterscotch, dried pear, and white peppercorns. In the mouth it is quite vivid and crunchy to start, then as the fruit begins to open a flash of minerality fires across the palate before finishing with a very long, polished sense of fruit. Serve this wine with peel and eat shrimp, poached halibut with a lemon beurre blanc or, you guessed it, stone crab claws.

2014 Chateau Queybet-Pouillac Bordeaux Supérieur (\$12)

When it comes to pairing wine with fatty cuts of beef, nothing beats red Bordeaux. When examining a standing rib roast, regardless of how you prepare it, you cannot help but notice the thick layer of fat across the meat. New World Cabs have the tendency to be, how can I say this nicely? "*not really dry*"; this creates some problems as they fail to cut through the fat. Sure, Bordeaux gives up a little bit of weight, but the drier nature of the wines works better with fatty cuts. There, I said it, and the same holds true for lamb too.

This Chateau lies about ten miles southeast of the town of St. Emilion in the Entre-deux-Mers area of Bordeaux. The history of this property begins in the Middle Ages with monks who planted the first vines on this site. In the 18th century the castle Queyret-Pouillac, as we know it today, was constructed. A stone lintel of the main house is dated 1783. It is a good size property, over 150 acres, with vineyards planting on the rolling hills surrounding the Chateau. The soils tend to be gravel and rock at the top of the hills, and clay on the sides. The Cabernet varieties are planted on the tops while the Merlot, which does better in clay, lies on the slopes.

The blend of this wine is 60% Merlot and 20% each of Cabernet Sauvignon and Cabernet Franc. After picking, the grapes are fermented in stainless steel tanks for up to thirty days, then the wine is moved to concrete tanks where it is aged for a year. For a long time I looked down my nose at Bordeaux that is not aged in oak barrels, until my friend and bonafide Bordeaux guru, Bill Blatch, explained why he prefers tanks for aging. Since the producers of most inexpensive Bordeaux cannot afford new barrels, they are forced to buy the used barrels from other wineries. Since no one goes to great lengths to clean the barrels they are selling, the new owners inherit a lot of problems in the way of contaminants. It could be a rogue bacteria or mold, or simply barrels that smell like vinegar, but they certainly do not improve the next wine put into them. In his mind, which is good enough for me, it is best to use aging containers that can be properly cleaned. Hence why concrete and stainless steel tanks are so popular with inexpensive Bordeaux.

When you are ready to serve this wine, decant it for a half-hour and also let it chill briefly in the refrigerator. The nose is a complex combination of dusty, black currants, fresh cherries, red plums, subtle pipe tobacco, milk chocolate, and bit of graphite. On the palate it is relatively soft at first, then develops a subtle shade of tobacco and forest floor that wraps around the fruit, finishing with nice balance and smooth tannins. Serve this wine over the next two years with pot roast, leg of lamb or standing rib roast.

Stone Crab Mustard Sauce

There is not much work in cooking the stone crab claws, but sauce is key. This is supposedly the recipe from Joe's Stone Crab on Miami Beach, but who really knows. If you are not a fan of mustard I also love drawn butter with the crab too, and both work great with Champagne or good sparkling wine. This sauce also works great with peel-and-eat shrimp and fried oysters.

**1 tablespoon Colman's dry mustard,
or more to taste,
1 cup mayonnaise
2 teaspoons Worcestershire
1 teaspoon A-1 sauce
2 tablespoons cream
salt**

Place the mustard in a mixing bowl or the bowl of an electric mixer. Add the mayonnaise and beat for 1 minute.

Add the Worcestershire, A-1, cream, and a pinch of salt and beat until the mixture is well blended and creamy. If you'd like a little more mustardy bite, whisk in 1/2 teaspoon more dry mustard until well blended. Chill the sauce, covered, until serving.

Standing Rib Roast with Herb Crust & Roast New Potatoes

With such a hefty price tag, you want to make sure you cook this one right. This recipe produces a cut that is medium to medium rare, depending on the thickness of the roast. *I adjust this recipe by removing the roast from the oven after step 1, and putting it in my smoker, maintaining 250 degrees to a couple of hours. With any luck the sermon does not run long and I get home just in time to hit 125-130 degrees internal temperature.*

**1 first-cut (3- or 4-rib) beef standing rib roast
2 1/2 teaspoons salt
1 1/4 teaspoons pepper
3 tablespoons minced fresh thyme leaves
3 tablespoons minced fresh rosemary
2 tablespoons Dijon mustard
2 tablespoons olive oil
1 tablespoon all-purpose flour
1 teaspoon sugar
3 pounds small red potatoes,
scrubbed and halved**

Adjust oven rack to lowest position and heat oven to 450 degrees. Season roast with 2 teaspoons salt and 1 teaspoon pepper and arrange on V-rack set inside roasting pan. Roast until well browned, about 1 hour.

Combine herbs, mustard, oil, flour, and sugar in small bowl. Remove roast from oven and reduce heat to 250 degrees. Spread herb mixture evenly over top of roast. Return to oven and roast until center of meat registers 125 degrees (for medium-rare), about 1 1/2 hours. Transfer to cutting board and let rest, uncovered, for 30 minutes.

Meanwhile, increase oven temperature to 450 degrees. Pour off all but 3 tablespoons fat from roasting pan. Toss potatoes, remaining salt, and remaining pepper in large bowl. Arrange potatoes, cut-side down, in roasting pan. Roast until golden brown and tender, about 30 minutes.

Transfer potatoes to serving bowl. Carve the meat off bones and slice to desired thickness. Serve.