



December, 2016



If there is a theme to the two wines I have selected this month for New World Red, it is *redemption*. In the case of my first selection, the long-time store favorite **Kestrel Lady In Red Holiday Selection (\$22)** this wine is a triumph, of sorts, of David over Goliath.

Until a couple of years ago this wine was a perennial holiday favorite of the TWM's, then an change in management at the winery snapped it away from us. At the time the winery owner had passed and his children, on the advice of a dubious industry "expert", chose to seek fame and fortune on the shelves of a large, national wine and spirits chain. With little more than a kiss out the door, the winery took the brand away from their local, family-owned distributor, and therefore us, one of their largest supporters in Florida. As they say, the grass is always greener, and they quickly found out that some chains are more interested in price than quality. Within a couple of years their brand was all but dead, as the big box retailer insisted on cheaper and cheaper prices, so the quality suffered.

Then a few months ago the owners, realizing their error, rehired key personnel, including their national sales manager, and set about to re-establish the brand. He contacted me, and after a good bit of soul searching on my part, I begrudgingly tasted the new samples. If I have learned one thing at church over the years, it is forgiveness. As it turns out, the wines are different than before but just as good. What better way to reintroduce this winery than with their seasonal favorite, the Lady In Red Holiday bottling.

Many first-time customers of Lady in Red think this wine is little more than a gimmick, and the wine is secondary to the packaging. They actually created this brand a few years ago, at the suggestion from a group of MBA students doing a case study on winery growth. The group focused on the issue of how to grow the Kestrel brand when they work only with estate grown fruit. Their recommendation was to develop a different label, one where they could use purchased grapes, without having to re-brand Kestrel. The winemaker of the time, Flynt Nelson, was uncompromising in quality and so the regular Lady In Red bottling is made from grapes grown by a collection of his friends. The LIR Holiday is still made entirely from estate grown grapes, which is why there are only 360 cases made. Keep in mind that by using all estate fruit in this project they are using wines that sell for more than \$25 a bottle.

The secret to the success of this wine is that they own some very old vines, and the raw material is apparent. Longtime winemaker Flint Nelson is no longer involved, having left to start Wit Cellars. Now Justin Michaud is now at the helm. Unknowingly, I have been a fan of Justin's wines where he worked at Goose Ridge/Stonecap as well as Bergevin Lane for a few years. In my tasting of the current releases, his style appears to be a bit more powerful than Flint's. I always felt that Kestrel wines were unusually polished for Yakima Valley. Now they appear to be more in character with the region. The standout of all the wines was the LIR Holiday bottling. In what is becoming a bit quite trend, this wine is crafted using the best combination of barrels in the cellar. As such it is a blend of young, raw wines, with those which have matured nicely in barrel, give this wine a sense of depth and complexity that is rare in new release, Yakima reds. The latest bottling is a blend of 40% Merlot, 35% Cabernet Sauvignon, 15% Syrah, 9% Sangiovese, and 1% Viognier, which was co-fermented with the Syrah. The components were aged from 12 to 36 months in barrel, a combination of French and American coopers.

The new release is deep ruby colored wine with an exotic nose of bourbon barrel, vanilla, toasted coconut, fresh black plums, cooked cherries, allspice, and star anise. In the mouth this wine shows impressive, almost cordial-like concentration, with deep veins of fruit running into a long finish framed by smooth, soft tannins. Good now, this wine should continue to improve for at least ten years. Drink with pot roast, lamb stew, or standing rib roast.

There are few wineries in the western world with the history of Tahbilk, or as it was known until 2000, Chateau Tahbilk. The winery was established in the Goulburn Valley of Victoria in 1860 by the Bear brothers. It is located on the first road that connected Sydney and the fledgling community of Melbourne. The aboriginal name for the area was tahbilk-tahbilk, which means "land of many watering holes," and so that is how the estate got its name.

Led by John Pinney Bear, the brothers took out an ad in local papers, offering to buy a "million cuttings" of "strong grape vines." The response to their request was impressive, as they quickly acquired over 600,000 cuttings. With such a dramatic beginning, they were the largest and most modern winery in Australia within 20 years. Sadly, before they reached the magic million cuttings, tragedy struck. John or "J.P." Bear passed away in

1890, then phylloxera arrived to decimate all of Australia's vineyards. After that, consumer tastes changed from dry wines to fortified examples like port, and the property fell into disrepair.

In 1925 the property was purchased as an investment by Reginald Purbrick. During the height of the recession, his son Eric decided to tackle the winery as his project, and quickly began making improvements to the facility and vineyards. For five generations the Purbrick family has run Tahbilk and are recognized as leaders in the Australian wine industry. They recently released the **2014 Tahbilk Million Cuttings (\$25)** which honors the ingenuity and foresight of their founding fathers, even if they are few hundred-thousand vine cuttings short.

Tahbilk winery lies within the Goulburn Valley, a sub-appellation of the vast Hunter Valley wine region, Most of the vineyards lie about two hours north of Melbourne. The region lies between the Great Dividing Range, which is the Australian equivalent of the Rocky Mountains, and the Murray River. It is an area that has lots of lakes as well as the Goulburn River, so the abundance of water makes agriculture very important to the region. Also, thanks to millenniums of shifting rivers, the soils are mostly sandy and gravelly, which is a perfect medium for grape vines. The climate is warm during the day, but due to the numerous bodies of nearby water, temperatures drop dramatically during the night. This is why the region is famous for producing long lived Semillon wines, as well as boasting some of the oldest Shiraz vines in the country. In fact, Tahbilk has a block of Shiraz vines that remain from the original 1860 plantings.

To craft the Million Cuttings, the Purbrick family uses vines that are fifteen years old. The blend is 70% Cabernet Sauvignon and 30% Shiraz. Both components were aged in a combination of French and American oak barrels for thirteen months, with the final blend made just before bottling.

When you open this wine, let it breathe in a decanter for half an hour before serving. I love this wine because it shows the subtle, elegant side of Australian reds, with notes of cooked cherries, pomegranate syrup, saffras, and an enticing wisp of eucalyptus. On the palate it is fairly high toned to start, then the fruit pushes forward and fills in the middle before moderate tannins and lively acidity frames the finish. Drink this wine over the next two to three years with braised pork shoulder, braised lamb shanks, or seared tuna steaks with a porcini mushroom powder.

Leg of Lamb with Pomegranate Glaze

There is something about the rich flavor of lamb, and the sweet/sour flavor of pomegranate that works so well together. This easy recipe combines the two for an elegant dinner party, or quite dinner for two with left-overs. Both of the wine selections work great with this recipe.

Mix garlic powder, rosemary, thyme and pepper in small bowl until well blended. Reserve 1 teaspoon of the seasoning mixture for the Pomegranate Glaze. Stir salt into remaining seasoning mixture. Brush lamb with oil. Coat evenly with seasoning mixture. Place lamb in large resealable plastic bag or glass dish. Refrigerate at least 12 hours or overnight for best flavor

Lamb:

- 1 tablespoon garlic powder**
- 1 tablespoon chopped fresh rosemary**
- 1 teaspoon dried thyme *or***
1 tablespoon fresh
- 1 teaspoon fresh ground black pepper**
- 1 tablespoon kosher salt**
- 1 butterflied boneless leg of lamb,**
about 3 pounds
- 2 tablespoons olive oil**

Pomegranate Glaze:

- 4 cups pomegranate juice**
- 1/2 cup molasses**
- 1/4 cup balsamic vinegar**

Meanwhile, for the Pomegranate Glaze, mix pomegranate juice, molasses and reserved seasoning mixture in medium skillet until well blended. Bring to boil. Reduce heat to low; simmer 20 to 30 minutes or until mixture is reduced by half, stirring occasionally. Cool to room temperature. Stir in balsamic vinegar

Roll lamb up and tie with butcher's twine. Place lamb on rack in roasting pan. Roast in preheated 450°F oven 30 minutes. Reduce oven temperature to 325°F. Roast 30 to 40 minutes longer or until thermometer inserted into thickest part of lamb reaches 125°F for medium-rare. Brush with 1/4 cup of the Pomegranate Glaze during last 10 minutes of cooking. To serve, drizzle with remaining Pomegranate Glaze

Tim's note: A butterflied leg of lamb is uneven thickness, so the thinner parts will cook faster than the thicker parts. For lamb with even doneness, before marinating, cut the lamb into evenly sized pieces following the natural separations in the leg, then tie each with butcher's twine. Roast using the same directions but cut the cooking time down by 10 to 15 minutes.