



Reserve Club

Winter 2018

Issue XI.I

I am stepping out on a limb with the selections this quarter by breaking my first rule: there will always be a Napa Cabernet in each offering. Yes, I know that most of you do not care, but to me it is important to produce what we advertise. That said, when I was going over my tasting notes, looking for the right combination of wines and prices, I could not find a really exciting Napa Cab that fit the mix. There are, however, three wines that stood out above all else, and those are the selections for this quarter. I stand by my belief that you will find them very interesting, and when you are done drinking them, you probably will not even notice.

My first pick for this quarter is the **2013 Henschke Keyneton Euphonium (\$69)** which ranks as one of the best New World wines I tasted in 2017. The genesis of this selection began when I had lunch with Stephen Henschke in late October. I have been a fan of his wines for many years, and I feel they are the premier estate in Australia, producing wines with a legendary capacity to age. During the luncheon, I tasted one brilliant wine after another, and decided it was time to bring them to our customers. Unfortunately, most of their wines are produced in limited quantities so the options for a Reserve Club selection are limited. Thankfully the brand manager for their American importer freed up extra allocation for me to use this bottling in our club.

The Henschke family came to Australia in 1841, fleeing religious persecution in their homeland of Silesia, Prussia, then part of Germany but now located in modern-day Poland. Johann Christian Henschke and his young family made the difficult, 98 day voyage, but he lost his wife and daughter during the trip. When he and his two young sons arrived, they originally settled in Adelaide, along with many other German immigrants. He remarried, became a citizen, and in 1862 moved to the Barossa range, where he and his wife purchased their estate in what is today called the Keyneton area. His first vintage of wine was produced in 1868, and begins what is today a six-generation winery.

In 1873, Johann Christian handed over the reins to his son, Paul Gotthard Henschke. It was Paul Gotthard, who in 1888, began the Henschke Family Brass Band, utilizing three instruments purchased from Germany. One of those, a B Flat euphonium, is the inspiration for this bottling. Although I have found no evidence to support my hypothesis, I believe it is the deep nature of this wine that is evocative of the euphonium, which is similar to a small tuba. All three of these instruments have been maintained and are still in the family today.

The family has continuously made wine since those days, but the modern era for them began with Cyril Alfred Henschke, who was born in 1924. He started to take over the winery in 1952, transitioning their production from fortified wines to exclusively table wines. Carl was very focused on quality, his mantra being "better rather than bigger." In 1970, he was the first Australian winemaker to be awarded a Churchill Fellowship, which allowed him to travel to other wine regions and learn new and modern techniques in winemaking. This set the stage in 1979, when Carl's son Stephen took over winemaking. Stephen, along with his wife Prue, studied in Geisenheim, Germany for two years prior to taking the helm, and brought with them a far greater understanding of how to use technology and vineyard techniques to improve the wines. This included better refrigerated tanks for fermentation, vertical shoot positioning for trellising in the vineyard and a slow transition to all wines being bottled under screw cap. Stephen is a strong proponent for this closure, having studied the effects of aging on the wines for more than two decades.

To produce the Keyneton Euphonium, Stephen and Prue use grapes grown in both Barossa Valley and neighboring Eden Valley, which is why the wine is simply labeled as "Barossa." The geological origin of this region is the weathering of the Mount Lofty Ranges. This is an important range of low mountains which lie east of the town of Adelaide, and stretch 300 miles from the tip of the Fleurie peninsula. The elevation is important as it contributes a significant diurnal temperature swing, preserving natural acidity in the grapes. To make the 2013, Stephen used a blend of 45% Shiraz, 36% Cabernet Sauvignon, 17% Merlot and 2% Cabernet Franc. Stephen does not believe the wood should speak through the wine, so he uses only 15% new oak. The barrels are a combination of mostly French hogsheads (250 liter) with a small amount of American oak as well.

When you open this wine, you will need to decant it for at least two hours before serving. Ideally, you will not drink this wine for 10 years, but that demands a lot of patience. If you decide to drink the wine now, then it will give you a restrained nose of deep nose of black cherry jam, dried eucalyptus, Maduro cigar wrapper, cinnamon, nutmeg and dried thyme. The feel in the mouth is nicely deep, with a soft sense of fruit, polished tannins and relatively low acidity. Despite the generous tasting noted, I feel this wine will reveal considerably more in the future.

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My second selection, the **2013 Dusted Valley Cabernet Sauvignon (\$45)** is the first time I have selected one of their wines for this club, but they are no stranger to TWM clubs. Over the years I have picked more than a dozen of their wines for inclusion in the Explorers and New World Red clubs.

Dusted Valley is the partnership of Chad Johnson and Corey Braunel, who have built quite a following for their wines. Both Chad and Corey grew up on farms in Wisconsin and have farming in their blood. It is funny to read their biographies because it does not appear that either liked the lifestyle growing up. Now, they spend a lot of time kicking dirt in eastern Washington, looking for vineyards that produce grapes of exceptional quality. One of the reasons this wine stood out is that producers in Washington State enjoy very favorable conditions for growing grapes and can produce extremely powerful, show-stopper wines.

Although we think of Washington as wet, that is only the western edge of the state. The Cascade Mountains rise at the coast and create a rain shadow on the eastern side of the state. This is particularly extreme in the middle of the state where growers receive only a couple of inches of rain each year. Even in cool years, the growers can harvest their grapes into November without the threat of rain that plagues their neighbors to the south in the Willamette Valley.

Growers in Washington also enjoy more sunlight than the producers farther south, for example Napa Valley. Because of their high latitude, the vines receive two extra hours of sunlight each day during the growing season. Over the course of a summer, this adds more than 200 hours of additional sunlight. The reason the fruit is not super-ripe is due to their extreme diurnal temperature swings, where it can drop over 50 degrees during the night, shutting down photosynthesis and preserving acidity in the grapes.

The last primary characteristic that differentiates Washington State reds from other areas is a subtle note of minerality. Millions of years ago eastern Washington, Idaho and western Montana were part of a vast field of volcanos that deposited hundreds of feet of lava across the region. Over the years, the rock weathered and created the top soil. Then, during the last ice age, a series of cataclysmic floods swept across the region, sweeping the top soil down the Columbia River and depositing it in the Willamette Valley of Oregon. The Missoula floods left much of the Yakima and Columbia River valleys virtually devoid of top soil, meaning that often the grape vines grow in very rocky soils. As the vines in Washington continue to get older, their roots reach deep into the soils and extract the subtle minerality, which is expressed in the wine.

For their 2013 Cabernet, the pair use a blend of 80% Cabernet Sauvignon, 14% Petit Verdot, 5% Merlot and 1% Cabernet Franc, sourced from some of the best vineyards in Columbia Valley. In addition to their own estate vineyard, Southwind, they also source grapes from the famed Dionysus, Stone Tree, Olsen and Elephant Mountain sites. The combination of vineyards builds amazing complexity into this wine. It is aged in French oak barrels, of which 40% are new, which adds another layer of dimension to the finished wine. There were just over 1100 cases of this wine produced.

When you open this wine, make sure to decant it for an hour before serving. Once you do this, it offers an explosive nose of blackberry and blueberry jams, menthol, dark chocolate, caramel, soy sauce and baking spices such as allspice and clove. The texture is dense but with smooth, slightly obvious tannins and a long finish. Drink over the next three to five years.

My final selection, the **2015 Ghost Block Zinfandel “Pelissa Vineyard” (\$45)** is only the second such pick of this variety in the history of the club. This version comes from the Napa Wine Company, one of the oldest continually operating wineries in the valley. The Pelissa vineyard is located right behind the winery, and the nine acres of Zinfandel planted are some of the last in the Oakville AVA.

For those not familiar with the cult-like Ghost Block wines, they are the creation of vineyard owner Andrew Hoxley and winemaker Rob Lawson. Andrew is also the owner of the Napa Wine Company, which was started by his family in 1903. Today, it is home to dozens of small brands which use the facility to custom-crush their wines. Rob is a bit of rock star in his own right, consulting on several wines in the valley including Fisticuffs, Mirror and his own label Pavi. He has been an especially hot producer since the 2005 Ghost Block Cabernet Sauvignon landed on the Wine Spectator Top 100 in 2008.

To make this wine, they use a nine-acre parcel of Zinfandel that is planted in the vineyard behind the Napa Wine Company. It is named for Andrew and Babe Pelissa, who purchased the land in 1930 and used it for a dairy farm. Later, it became the site of the famed BV 7 vineyard, home to the great Georges de Latour wines of the 1970s and 80s. In 1993, it was purchased by heirs of the Pelissa family and renamed. This is one of the last plantings of Zinfandel in Oakville, as the grape does not command as much money as the more popular Cabernet Sauvignon. For this bottling, Rob uses exclusively American oak barrels, half of them being new, and aging the wine for 12 months.

When you are ready to drink this wine, decant it for an hour before serving. As soon as you pour the first glass, the dramatic nose of Zinfandel jumps out, offering you combination of sweet, black licorice, juniper berries, molasses, graham cracker, dried figs and black peppercorns. I chose this wine because on the palate it is high pitched for a moment, showing more frame than usual for the variety, with moderate acidity and slightly obvious tannins. Although showing well now, this wine will improve for two to three years.

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