



January, 2019



In October, I had a little time to work in my vegetable garden, which for those of you who share my love for this endeavor know is a month or so too late to call it a true winter planting. While pulling weeds, tilling and planting seeds for beans, carrots, beets, peppers, broccoli rabe and several forms of lettuce, I started thinking about soil, how it affects the vegetables I grow, what they taste like and how all of it relates to wine.

The great thing about gardening is it gives you lots of time to think. This project made me start thinking about grape growing and how vines grow in the dirt, produce leaves, then flowers and finally fruit. So for this year, I think it will be interesting to follow this cycle and see how it relates to the wines we drink. My selections for one month each quarter will reflect what is happening in the vineyard at the time of release. In the northern hemisphere, all vines are dormant right now, so it seems like a good time to discuss dirt and the effect it has on the finished wine. My selections for this month are from two areas with very different soils and climates. Both producers try to limit their “fingerprints” on the wine by not masking the flavor with too much oak. I think both will give you a good sense of how important the medium for the vines is and how it translates to the finished wine.

The first selection is a wine I discovered in the early part of the fourth quarter of 2018 from a winery that is quite new to us. The **Lujon Red Table Wine #6 (\$20)** was too good to ignore for the holidays, so we brought in some cases to the Orlando store, but for most of you this should be a completely new wine.

I will admit that when these wines were first presented to me, I was unimpressed with the labels and was pretty dismissive. Then we tasted through the white wines, a Riesling, Pinot Gris and Chardonnay, and my attention was piqued. Working through the reds was fun, as they bottle wines on both sides of the Columbia River (from Washington State and Oregon). Ultimately, I ended up buying 120 cases, with the wines being very well received in the Orlando store during the holidays. You received the Dundee Hills Pinot Noir as a November feature, but the other standout, at least of the under \$30 wines, is their Red Table Wine. It is also the only one that sports a different, vastly improved, label than the other bottlings.

Lujon cellars is a joint venture between owner/winemaker John Derthick and his father, Lewis. John has worked for other wineries in both California and the Pacific Northwest for more than 25 years, and began making his own wines with his father in 2005. He started with a small bottling of a Walla Walla Cabernet Sauvignon and Syrah, and has now grown to producing eight different varieties from vineyards on both sides of the border. Like many producers just starting out, he bought his grapes from trusted vineyard sources.

Each year, John's Red Table Wine is a different blend and sometimes uses barrels from multiple years, which is why it not labeled with a vintage. In the case of this bottling, it is all 2017 vintage and could even be labeled as Walla Walla appellation, but that will likely change with the next wine and John does not reprint the labels.

Getting back to soils for a moment, the Walla Walla AVA offers a unique look at the soil types of eastern Washington and Oregon. Most of the lower elevations in the area are composed of gravel and sand soils, remnants of the Missoula floods of 15,000 years ago, and the shifting riverbed of the Columbia River. As you climb the slopes of the hills in the area, below 1,100 feet you find a layer of silt left over from the Missoula floods that backed up and settled in the area. These soils are very dense and rich in nutrients and minerals. Above 1,100 feet you find deep silts, called loess. These are soils are often found in dry climates, created by millions of years of dust blowing across a flat landscape. In some areas these soils can be eight to 11 feet thick. This soil has great water retention properties, which is important in the arid Walla Walla AVA. For this wine, John uses two vineyards for the grapes, with each lying on one of the higher elevation soils.

The Syrah used for this wine is nine barrels from the Dwelley Vineyard, which lies on high elevation loess, and four barrels from the Birch Creek Vineyard, planted in silt soils. All 11 barrels of Merlot for this wine are from the Dwelley Vineyard as well. There are also two barrels of Cabernet Sauvignon from the Spofford Station Vineyard and one barrel of Malbec from Birch Creek. For those looking for exact numbers, the blend is 48.1% Syrah, 40.7% Merlot, 7.4% Cabernet Sauvignon and 3.7% Malbec.

When you are ready to pull the cork on this wine, I suggest decanting it for a half-hour before serving to allow the bouquet to develop. Once you do, this wine offers a delicious combination of tart cherry, cooked cranberry, cinnamon syrup, szechwan peppercorn and milk chocolate. On the palate it shows a soft, supple texture with moderate tannins and lowish acidity. Drink this wine over the next two years with a bacon wrapped filet, wild mushroom studded meatloaf or blue cheese hamburger.

The second selection is a wine that caught my attention over a year ago and I finally have a spot for the feature. It is the **2016 Jim Barry Cabernet Sauvignon “The Cover Drive” (\$24)** from the Australian appellation of Coonawarra. Longtime members may recall that the 2008 vintage of this wine was a feature in 2011. Generally, I am lukewarm on most Aussie Cabs, but those from the Coonawarra district are very distinctive and some of the most interesting examples in the world.

This wine is made by the legendary Jim Barry winery, a second generation property and one of the innovators in cold climate grape-growing in Southeastern Australia. The founder, Jim Barry, was born in Adelaide and started making wine in the 1940s after graduating from Roseworthy Agricultural College, the Aussie equivalent of UC Davis. In

1959, he and his wife Nancy purchased their first vineyard but Jim continued working for other wineries until the mid-1970s. During that period, the couple continued to purchase high quality vineyards as they became available, focusing on the Clare Valley and Coonawarra regions. Today they own over 600 acres, including holdings in some of the most legendary districts of both areas. Jim died in 2004, and today the property is managed by his son Peter James Barry and his kids, Tom, Sam and Olivia.

It is under Peter that this estate has become known not just as a great vineyard source, but also for the quality of their wines. He also graduated from Roseworthy and became the general manager in 1985. Since that time he has developed a number of labels from the family holdings, including the McRae Wood Shiraz, The Lodge Hill Shiraz and of course this Cabernet from Coonawarra. The name comes from a cricket grounds that used to sit where this vineyard is now planted. What makes Coonawarra so special is its famous red soil, called 'Terra Rosa.' The iron-rich, sandy soils lie on a bed of ancient limestone which holds water during the rainy winter season until needed during the hot, dry summer. The region is also located closer to the ocean, so it benefits from evening breezes that come off the cold Antarctic Ocean. The combination of warm days and cold nights helps the grapes achieve full ripeness and maintain acidity.

Winemaking for this wine is pretty straightforward. The fruit is hand-harvested and destemmed, then put into two ton punchdown bins where it is fermented for seven to eight days. After a brief, three day post-fermentation maceration, the wine is racked to barrel where it ages for 12 months. Like many Aussie wineries, Jim Barry uses a combination of half French oak, half American, with one-third of the barrels being new. This wine is also bottled without filtration or fining.

When you pour a glass, make sure you stick your nose in the glass and take a big whiff. There is a cool, complex quality to Coonawarra that I find really intoxicating. This wine shows the classic notes of menthol and eucalyptus, cooked blackberries and blueberries, espresso grounds and dark chocolate. In the mouth, this wine has a beautiful punch of upfront fruit with the hints of mint winding around like a piece of golden yarn in a tapestry. The tannins are slightly obvious, but nicely integrated, and there is a good lift of acidity at the finish. This is a great Cab to drink from 2019 to 2022 with tri-tip steak, pork tenderloin and white chili.

Mushroom Farrotto

1 ½ cups whole farro
¾ ounce dried porcini mushrooms, rinsed
6 cups water
4 tablespoons unsalted butter
12 ounces cremini mushrooms, trimmed and sliced thin
Salt and pepper
½ onion, chopped fine
1 garlic clove, minced
2 teaspoons minced fresh thyme
1 ½ ounces Parmesan, grated (¾ cup)
2 tablespoons minced fresh chives
2 teaspoons sherry vinegar

Full disclosure, I used this same recipe for the Explorer Club last January, but as I was going through my notes looking for a recipe to work with low tannin red wines, I kept turning back to this one. I have become a big fan of farro, which is a relative of wheat, for use in soups and risotto type dishes. Here it shares center stage with dried porcini mushrooms in a dish that works nicely with both wines. You will want to buy whole farro, not pearled, if you want the full texture. This does involve a longer cooking time, but the results are worth it. Also know that farro does contain gluten.

1. Pulse farro in blender until about half of grains are broken into smaller pieces, about 6 pulses.
2. Microwave porcini mushrooms and 1 cup water in covered bowl until steaming, about 1 minute. Let sit until softened, about 5 minutes. Drain mushrooms in fine-mesh strainer lined with coffee filter. Transfer liquid to medium saucepan and finely chop porcini mushrooms.
3. Add remaining 5 cups water to saucepan and bring to boil over high heat. Reduce heat to medium-low to maintain gentle simmer.

4. Melt 2 tablespoons butter in large Dutch oven over medium-low heat. Add cremini mushrooms and ½ teaspoon salt and cook, stirring frequently, until moisture released by mushrooms evaporates and pan is dry, 4 to 5 minutes. Add onion and chopped porcini mushrooms and continue to cook until onion has softened, 3 to 4 minutes. Add garlic and stir until fragrant, about 30 seconds. Add farro and cook, stirring frequently, until grains are lightly toasted, about 3 minutes.

5. Stir 5 cups hot water into farro, reduce heat to low, cover, and cook until almost all liquid has been absorbed and farro is just al dente, about 25 minutes, stirring twice during cooking.

6. Add thyme, 1 teaspoon salt, and ¾ teaspoon pepper and continue to cook, stirring constantly, until farro becomes creamy, about 5 minutes.

7. Remove pot from heat. Stir in Parmesan, chives, vinegar, and remaining 2 tablespoons butter. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Adjust consistency with remaining hot water as needed. Serve immediately.