



February, 2018



This month, both selections come from wineries based in the Alexander Valley area of Sonoma County. Over the years I have found this to be a rich source of high-quality red wines for the New World Red club, and this month is no exception. The picks come from two of my favorite wineries in the area which have not been featured in a long time. Fixing this oversight is long overdue.

We start with a wine from Nick Goldschmidt, his **2015 Goldschmidt Fidelity (\$20)**. Longtime club members know his name, as he has produced several selections over the years, both under his own label and as the consultant for several other wineries. Nick makes wine in six countries, as a consultant or vineyard owner, and is one of my favorite appointments each year due to his candor and bravado.

Although not as well-known as many cult winemakers, Nick Goldschmidt is, in my mind, one of the top winemakers in the world for Bordeaux varieties such as Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot. His body of work covers most of the great winemaking regions of the Americas, and his knowledge of Napa and Sonoma county vineyards is unparalleled. To me, he stands out because unlike most California winemakers, who are only interested in producing \$100+ bottles, he makes brilliant wines for \$20, and hits several price points on his way over the \$100 threshold. You will see with Fidelity that compromise is not a word he uses, regardless of price.

Like most of us, Nick did not start his adult life thinking about wine. His first degree, which he earned in his native New Zealand, was in horticulture, and he expected to be a farmer of row crops. While studying organic and biodynamic farming techniques, he became intrigued by the potential for growing grapes in an eco-friendly way. Then, an evening with good friends and a bottle of Vega Sicilia sparked a passion for wine that would change his course. After earning his bachelor's degree in Horticulture from Canterbury, New Zealand in 1982, he received another degree in viticulture from Charles Sturt (Australia) in 1985 and then a post-grad in enology from prestigious Roseworthy (Australia) in 1986. He and his wife, Yolyn, fell in love with California in 1989, while he was working as an intern at Carneros Creek, and in 1990 he accepted a permanent position under Zelma Long at Simi.

During his tenure at Simi, he rose to head winemaker and then rode the wave of big corporate acquisitions. When hired at Simi, it was owned by Louis Vuitton Moet Hennessey and later sold to Constellation. During this time, he oversaw the winemaking at Ruffino in Italy, Cloudy Bay in New Zealand and Terrazas in Argentina, eventually directing the wines at Franciscan and Ravenswood, just to name a few. From Constellation, he moved on to Allied-Domecq, where he oversaw 40 wineries, including Gary Farrell and Mumm Napa, as well as Campo Viejo in Spain and Brancott in New Zealand. Eventually Allied-Domecq was bought by Beam Wine Estates in 2006, where Nick continued in his role. When the portfolio was gobbled up by Constellation in 2008, he jumped ship and began to devote himself full-time to Goldschmidt wines.

Unlike all of the other red wines that Nick produces in California that are produced from only one grape variety, Fidelity is his only blend. The original Fidelity was created years ago to help a neighboring winery who had extra wine ready in tank, but no buyers. Nick crafted the blend and then was instrumental in selling the wine under an exclusive label to a big-box retailer. The wine was wildly successful for them over several vintages, then a few years ago it stalled out. They asked if he would sell the remaining 500 cases through his distribution network and Nick agreed. A few days after the wine received an outrageously high score in the Wine Spectator and demand exploded. Of course the big-box retailer wanted the wine back but their fate was sealed, and the last few vintages have been sold through the normal distribution channel.

The base of this wine comes from Nick's Crazy Creek Vineyard, which he has farmed since 1989. This site used to be a major component in the blend of Simi Alexander Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon, because the fruit contributes incredible power. In 2015, drought stress meant they only harvested two and a half tons of fruit per acre, which is lower than normal. The benefit is that the clusters of grapes and the individual berries were small and packed with flavor. You will notice this when you pour a glass and the color stains the tears. The base is 85% Merlot, with small additions of Cabernet Sauvignon, Petit Verdot and Cabernet Franc for the balance. Nice ferments the wine in tank then ages it in French oak barrels, 15% being new, for 16 months.

When you open this wine you will want to decant this wine for a half-hour before serving. I don't want to sound like a broken record, but this is not a wimpy Merlot. The nose is an inviting combination of caramel, dried cherries, cranberry relish, cigar box, milk chocolate and wet potters clay. The texture begins with a great sense of fruit, quickly framed by firm tannins and bright acidity, that truncate the finish. If you have the patience, this wine will richly reward you in two to three years, but try now and buy more!

Some members may recognize the second selection, **2014 Marietta Cabernet Sauvignon "Armé" (\$25)**. I selected this wine in January 2016 and it is interesting to see how the brand is evolving. At the time of the last feature,

brothers Scot and Jake Bilbro had just purchased the winery from their father Chris. Chris began his working life in hospital administration but quickly tired of the politics and stress of an office job, and founded Marietta Cellars in an old cattle barn in the Dry Creek area of Sonoma County. He learned his love of wine from this great-aunt, for whom he named the winery. For over 40 years, Marietta, and her husband Armé, operated an inn near the town of Cloverdale in northern Sonoma. It was at their table he learned the value of family, food and, of course, wine.

When the brothers purchased the estate from their father in 2012, they wanted to respect the style and value of their dad's wines while moving in a new direction. They settled on scrapping the old varietal wines (Cabernet Sauvignon, Petite Sirah, Zinfandel and Syrah) and focus instead only on blends. The Old Vine Lot still exists, now #62, and there is a Rhone-inspired blend called Christo (for Chris), a Zin-based combination called Angeli and a Cabernet-centered wine named for Chris' great uncle, Armé. They produced three non-vintage Cuvees of Armé, which were all based on Cabernet Sauvignon, before releasing this wine with both vintage and varietal designation.

The grapes for this wine come from their estate vineyards in Sonoma and Mendocino County. The Mendocino portion, which represents 65% of the blend, is mostly from their vast holdings in McDowell Valley, east of the town of Ukiah. During my first trip to this area in 1992, I spent time with the previous owner of this vineyard, Billy Crawford. At that time, they were primarily growing Cabernet Sauvignon, but were adding extensive acres of Syrah, Grenache and Viognier. Due to the heat and high elevation, the red wines from this area contribute deep color and intense structure to any blend. The balance of the wine is from their Alexander Valley vineyards in northern Sonoma county. Here, Cabernet achieves perfect ripeness with a subtle undertone of minerality that is distinctive to the area. It is this combination of attributes that make this such a compelling wine and one you will likely enjoy for many years to come.

The final blend for the 2014 is 86% Cabernet Sauvignon, 7% Malbec, 5% Merlot and 2% Petit Verdot. Each varietal was individually harvested and fermented, then blended and aged for 20 months in neutral French oak barrels. The brothers feel that neutral oak allows the wine to develop and integrate, but adds no artificial flavors that mask the fruit and sites where they are grown.

When you are ready to serve this wine, decant it for at least a half-hour before serving. Immediately, the notes of sweet red currants, black cherry preserves, black licorice, violets, dried blueberries and wet slate ooze out of the glass. Where you may notice a difference with the Lot 2 we featured a couple of years ago is on the palate. This wine shows a much better integration of tannins, which nicely wrap around the lush fruit. This is a wine you will want to drink over the next 10 to 15 years with just about anything that walked on hooves.

Pork Chop Cordon Blue

One of my guilty pleasures is Chicken Cordon Blue, a dish that has sadly fallen out of favor in restaurants. There is something about the combination, wrapped in a crunchy crust, that I find irresistible. This version adds a little heft by switching pork chops for chicken, but also removes the need to pound out the breasts flat so they cook evenly. The process of applying the coating takes a try or two to perfect, but works really well without the need for flour and egg.

16 slices (thin) provolone cheese

4 center-cut boneless pork chops, 3/4 inch to 1 inch thick (each 6 to 7 ounces), patted dry with paper towels

4 slices deli ham (each slice large enough to cover a pork chop) *I used Boar's Head Sweet Slice*

1 (5-ounce) box Melba toast, broken into rough pieces

1/4 teaspoon table salt

1/2 teaspoon garlic powder

1/2 teaspoon onion powder

1/2 teaspoon paprika

1/2 teaspoon dried thyme

1/8 teaspoon sugar

6 tablespoons mayonnaise

1. Place 4 slices of provolone on top of each pork chop (pile of cheese should be no more than 1/4 inch thick) and tear cheese to leave 1/8-inch border on all sides. Top each chop with 1 slice ham, and press down on ham to adhere to pork chop.

2. Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 425 degrees. Place Melba toast pieces, salt, garlic powder, onion powder, paprika, thyme, and sugar in heavy-duty zipper-lock freezer bag. Seal bag and pound with heavy blunt object (such as a rolling pin) until Melba toasts are crushed but still have some crumbs the size of small pebbles. Add 2 tablespoons mayonnaise to bag and work mayonnaise evenly into crumb mixture by gently squeezing outside of bag. Transfer Melba crumb mixture to large plate.

3. Using your fingers, coat 1 chop with 1 tablespoon mayonnaise. Transfer to plate with Melba crumbs, sprinkle top of pork chop with some Melba mixture, and press down firmly on chop to adhere crumbs. Flip chop and repeat, making sure that thick layer of crumbs coats both sides and edges. Transfer breaded pork chop to baking rack set over rimmed baking sheet. Repeat with remaining chops.

4. Bake pork chops until juices run clear and instant-read thermometer inserted into center of chop registers 145 to 150 degrees, 17 to 23 minutes. Remove chops from oven and let rest on rack for 5 to 10 minutes. Serve immediately.