



As we continue to follow the winemaking process from vine to bottle, this month I have two selections that are both blends, produced in similar climatic conditions but from vineyards with very different expositions. This is a fancy term that is used to describe the vineyards slope, elevation and orientation to the sun. All of these factors determine the grape variety that can be grown, they type of trellising they use and if irrigation is possible, just to name a few variables. Both selections this month are blends, but using different varieties, but the effects are just as apparent.

## February, 2019

### 2016 DiamAndes Perlita (\$15)

For this selection, we return to the Valle de Uco region of Mendoza, Argentina. DiamAndes is one of seven wineries created by a group of Bordeaux chateau owners who, upon the advice of Michel Rolland, purchased 2100 acres of land in 1998. They market themselves collectively as the *Clos de los Siete*, and all use the jet setting oenologist Rolland to oversee the winemaking. DiamAndes was created by Alfred-Alexandre Bonnie, who actually named the estate for his perspective on Mount Aconcagua, which reflected in the pond looks like a diamond. Bonnie also owns the well-known Château Malartic-Lagravière, a Grand Cru Classé de Graves, as well as Château Gazin Rocquencourt, in Pessac-Léognan. They farm 321 acres of vineyards, 303 dedicated to red varieties and a small piece, 27 acres, planted to white varieties.

Growing grapes in the Valle de Uco is particularly easy if you have water rights. The vineyards were all planted in the early 2000s, and the winery was opened in 2005. The high elevation, nearly 3100 feet above sea level, and very dry climate allow for a slow ripening of the grapes. The high elevation also means the grapes are bombarded with UV rays, which causes them to have thicker skins and more color. Although these vines are close to the Andes, the terrain is actually flat, as the weathering of the Andes for millions of years has filled in the Uco Valley, which basically lays at the base. This allows for irrigation to be effective as the water does not run away from the roots and downhill.

The soils in this area were formed by the slow weathering of the nearby Andes Mountains, forming a base in the Uco Valley of sand and gravel, mixed with larger, round boulders. For many years, it was believed that the Andes Mountains formed six to 10 million years ago as the result of tectonic activity. There is now a belief, put forth by Dr. Laura Evenstar from Bristol's School of Earth Sciences, that they are actually much older, forming as long ago as 30 million years. As the mountains weathered, rock broke away from the higher elevations and has slowly tumbled down the mountains, rounding as they move. This creates deep ribbons of rounded rocks, covered later by sand, that form what the locals call "brazos", or arms, under the soil. These brazos have little soil between the rocks, which then puts stress on the vines as the roots much extend farther into the soil for nutrients and water. Some of the rocks are also covered with calcium carbonate, which imparts a light mineral quality into the wines as well.

For this wine, the fruit is hand-harvested and hand-sorted to remove anything but perfect grapes, then fermented in small stainless steel fermentors. This winery uses a technique called fractional pump-overs, where a portion of the fermenting wine is syphoned from the bottom and sprinkled over the cap of skins floating on top, which extracts the greater color and softens tannins. This wine is then aged in stainless steel for eight months. The blend for Perlita appears to always be 80% Malbec and 20% Syrah, or at least the last four vintages.

The color is an almost impenetrable violet with thick and very stained tears. Pour a glass and you get a rich nose of cooked cherries, blackberries, milk chocolate, dried figs, cinnamon and allspice. On the palate, it is nicely dense but smooth with tannins that are present but really far back, more on the finish. Drink this wine with a grilled ribeye or rack of lamb.

### 2014 Andrew Rich Glacial (\$45)

I first met Andrew Rich in 2004 while attending Pinot Camp, during an extended visit to the Carlton Winemaker's Studio. This "winery" is a place where small wine producers rent space and take advantage of the state-of-the-art equipment at the facility. There are up to a dozen wineries that work out of the space, and over the years has been an incubator for many of the big names in the Willamette Valley. During that visit, I spent a good bit of time with founder Eric Hamacher, of Hamacher wines, and Scott Wright of Scott Paul. Later in the day, I hung around the tasting room and visited with Andrew, who produces a number of wines from both Washington and Oregon. Several times over the years I have purchased his wines for our clubs, as they are always well crafted and interesting.

Andrew began his wine career by editing a wine column for a national magazine. This inspired him to move to Burgundy, France, and study winemaking. He returned to the US and worked for six years at Bonny Doon, under the innovative Randall Grahm. In 1997, he then moved to the Willamette Valley with the goal of making Rhone-inspired wines from Grenache, Syrah and Mourvedre, similar to those he fell in love with while living in France. Unfortunately, he had to wait a few years before grape contracts for those varieties, which at the time were rare in Washington State. Eventually, he worked his way into the Rhone Ranger club, a term originally coined for Randall Grahm, and today sources from the best sites for Syrah in Washington State.

Starting with the 2014 vintage, at the suggestion of his national sales manager, and former Winter Park, Florida resident, John House, Andrew began labeling some of his wines by the way their soils were formed. This strong coincidence, and my personal friendship with John, led me to choose this wine to inaugurate my theme for this

quarter. Unfortunately the shipping company missed the memo and this wine arrived two days too late for the January release, so you get it in February instead.

The blend for this wine is 52% Syrah, 26% Mourvedre and 22% Grenache. Andrew is fortunate to buy all of the Syrah for this wine from the Red Willow Vineyard, located at the western edge of the Yakima Valley, in Washington State. Many times I have written that the soils in the eastern portion of Washington State were heavily influenced by the Missoula Floods, which happened at the end of the ice age. The Red Willow vineyard is unique in that, at more than 1200 feet above sea level, the floods had no effect on their soils. Theirs were formed during the ice age by the movement of glaciers through the valley in which the vineyard lies. As a result, their soils are not as rich as the lower elevations, and the hillsides on which the vines are planted are considerably steeper than those closer to the Columbia River. It was this unique set of circumstances that inspired David Lake, a Master of Wine, to encourage Red Willow's owners to plant the first Syrah vines in Washington State on the site, in the mid-1980s. I was lucky enough to meet David in the late 1980s, when he was the winemaker for Columbia Winery, and he discussed how much Red Willow reminded him of the vineyards of Hermitage, in the northern Rhone Valley of France. When the owners of Red Willow later visited Hermitage, they too were stuck by the similarity and even built a small chapel at the top of the vineyard, similar to the one that graces Hermitage.

The remaining components of this wine, the Mourvedre and Grenache, are purchased from sites planted for Andrew in the Ciel du Cheval vineyard. This equally famous vineyard also lies at higher elevation, 500 to 1500 feet above sea level. The soils in Ciel du Cheval are also poor after thousands of years of weathering have depleted the nutrients. What remains is a very high level of calcium carbonate, which raises the pH of the soil and gives the wines from Ciel du Cheval an uncommon freshness for Washington State.

You will want to decant this wine for a half-hour or so before serving. When you pour a glass, it immediately delivers a deep nose of fresh blackberries, black cherries, dried black plums, Full City roast coffee beans, rosemary and bay leaf. On the palate it shows a deeply concentrated core of fruit, with firm tannins, moderate acidity and nice length. You will want to drink this wine over the next four to six years. Serve with slow braised country pork ribs or lamb chops.

### **Country Style Pork Spareribs**

This may sound like sacrilege to some of you, but growing up in Western Pennsylvania, my only understanding of BBQ was chipped ham heated in a skillet with Heinz BBQ sauce, and country-style pork spareribs drenched in the same product and baked in the oven until semi-tender. The first time I had actual pulled pork and barbecue ribs from the Fat Boy's on East Colonial drive, it was an epiphany. As much as I love good barbecue, the sweetness in most recipes, coupled with the vinegar often used for balance, wreaks havoc with most red wines. However, country-style pork spareribs are a versatile cut of meat that, if properly prepared, works wonderfully with most wines. This recipe uses a straightforward, aromatic braise to produce flavorful and tender meat. I recommend serving this meat over rice, polenta or mashed potatoes.

A quick note about spareribs. These are sold in the butcher section and differ from St. Louis style, or baby backs, in that they are separate pieces of meat. Try to select those with 3/4 to an inch of meat on the bone. For this recipe, the boneless versions work well too.

#### **3 lbs bone-in country style pork ribs**

**Salt and pepper**

**3 tbsp of olive oil**

**1/2 cup carrot, chopped**

**1/2 cup celery, chopped**

**1 cup onion, chopped**

**4 cloves garlic, minced**

**2 tbsp tomato paste**

**1/4 cup apple cider vinegar**

**2 bay leaves**

**1/4 tsp of dried thyme**

**2 1/2 cups chicken stock**

**3 tbsp of fresh parsley, chopped**

**1 tsp of lemon peel**

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees and make sure the rack is in the center position.

Pat the ribs dry and sprinkle with salt and pepper. Heat 2 tbsp of olive oil in a Dutch oven until the oil is shimmery, then brown the ribs on all sides, about 2 minutes per side. Work in batches if you need to, adding a little more oil between additions. When all of the meat is browned, set aside and add the last tbsp of oil to the pan. Add the carrots, celery, onions and 1/2 tsp of salt, and cook over medium heat until soft, about 5 minutes.

Add the garlic and cook 1 minute until fragrant, then add tomato paste and stir for 3 minutes until the bottom of the pan is copper colored. Deglaze the pan with vinegar and add the thyme and bay leaves. Add the ribs to the pan, then add as much chicken stock as it takes to come up half-way up the ribs.

Cover the Dutch oven and place in the oven. Braise until the meat is tender, about 1 1/2 hours. Remove the lid and return to the oven for 1/2 hour, allowing the liquid to concentrate. Remove from the oven and use a spoon to remove as much fat as possible floating on the top of the braising liquid. Stir in the parsley and lemon zest. Serve over rice, polenta or mashed potatoes.