



April, 2018



This month, we head to the great northwest with two features that represent the region well. Both are new vintages of old favorites that I am delighted to bring back.

The first selection is the **2016 Sineann Red Table Wine (\$20)** that comes from one of my favorite winemakers, Peter Rosbeck, one of the most passionate winemakers I know. Peter started making wine in 1985, one of the early pioneers of the Willamette Valley. In 1994, he launched Sineann with partner David O'Reilly, who has since gone on to create Owen Roe. From the beginning, Peter has sought out vines growing in unique and distinctive vineyard sites regardless of their geography. His second criteria for choosing a site is that the grower must be willing to have a near-draconian attitude about crop thinning to ensure intensely flavored grapes come harvest. As a result, he produces small quantities of over two dozen wines each year from Oregon, Washington State, California and even New Zealand. When you taste with him, he goes into great detail of why he makes each wine, why the site is important and the personality of the grower.

Sourcing grapes from so many areas, you can probably guess that Peter is not exclusive to the classic Oregon varieties of Pinot Noir, Chardonnay and Pinot Gris. In fact, about half of his total red wine production is Pinot Noir, but the balance is mostly Cabernet Sauvignon, with small amounts of Zinfandel, Merlot, Petite Verdot and Syrah either bottled or used for blending every year. He harvests all of the vineyards and grape varieties separately and each is made in a way that respects their individual character. Some years, a wine may be bottled as a unique wine, other vintages may go into a blend, it all depends on whether the finished wine will be special.

As part of the red wine making process there is always a good bit of wine trapped in the skins after the fermentation is complete. I have often used the term "free run" wine, which is the juice that will flow freely from the tank when the winemaker wants to remove it from the skins. The grape skins are then moved to a press where the remaining wine is removed using pressure. This wine has a different character than the free run, and every winemaker has a different opinion about its quality and usefulness. Peter is generally very happy with his press wine but does prefer not to use it with his single vineyard wines, so he creates a blend that is nothing more than all of the press wines put together in a random proportion based on the size of production. As a result, his Red Table Wine is about half Pinot Noir and the balance is mostly Cabernet Sauvignon, Zinfandel with small amounts of Merlot and Syrah. Peter told me that for this wine he also blends in a small amount of Lemberger from the Champoux vineyard in Washington. He makes this wine just to use as a component for the Red Table Wine because it adds nice color and fills in the mid-palate. Once the wine is blended, it is barreled down in older French oak barrels for a few months to polish the edges.

With the 2015 vintage, the amount of Cabernet Sauvignon in this blend is a little bit higher, as Peter has cut back on his Pinot production and makes a little more Cabernet. As a result, the new bottling is beefier than previous bottlings. When you pop the vinoc, decant this wine for at least a half-hour before drinking. The aroma is fairly spicy, with obvious notes of black pepper, cooked black raspberries, dried plums, black figs and a subtle hint of violets. On the palate the wine is definitely bigger than previous bottlings, showing a dense texture with bold fruit framed by more obvious tannins. Good now, this wine will likely improve up to three years. Drink with grilled skirt steak, marinated in pineapple, soy and ginger or braised short ribs.

The next selection is the new label of a previous Explorer Club feature, the **2015 John Ryan Pinot Noir (\$25)**. Some of you may remember the previous vintage carried the name, Take Me Home. After a few concerns about the label being a bit too salacious, John opted for a slightly more classic graphic for the new bottling (In fact, he made the decision after labeling some cases, so you may have a bottle that has one label on top of the other).

John House is a local boy, growing up in Winter Park. I met him many years ago when he started attending our wine classes. It is probably ok to say now, but at the time he was only 20 years old, although we did not know that until after he came of age. From our humble classroom, he became a buyer at Whole Foods in Winter Park, then moved on to become a local distributor rep. After only a couple of years, in an almost unprecedented move, he became the national sales manager for Chehalem Vineyards in the Willamette Valley. It is very unusual for someone of his age, and without other winery sales experience, to achieve such a position. So 10 years ago he and his wife, Ksenija, moved to Portland, Oregon.

Since then both John and his wife have grown in the wine business. Four years ago they launched their own wine brand, Ovum, dedicated to producing dry, Alsace-style white wines. They developed a cult following for their dry Rieslings, Gewurztraminer and Muscat, so most of the production is bought by top restaurants across the US. We are lucky to have few of his wines on the shelf in Orlando, which we can transfer if you are club members at another location. Then two years ago, John surprised us with a Pinot Noir. Although they do not farm any vineyards, yet, John has a lot of contacts after working with Chehalem. Through these connections he has produce his second bottling, which is very similar in style to his original wine, although from a different source.

One thing that is consistent with John is that he likes a Pinot Noir that actually tastes like the variety. While this may seem like an obvious statement, there are a lot of producers who use enzymes to extract extra color, use copious amounts of oak or even add back sweetness to cover up a wine's deficiencies. This is particularly true with Willamette Pinot Noir, as the grapes are very transparent, and any little flaw is obvious.

The grapes for this wine come from a 12-year-old vineyard in the Eola-Amity Hills of the Willamette Valley. This is the southern-most of the sub-AVAs of the Willamette, and is the coolest as it lies in the direct line of the Van Duzer corridor. Vineyards in the corridor receive a direct blast of cool wind that travels unimpeded from the cool Pacific Ocean through the coastal mountain range. As a result, the vineyards in this area typically bud later, produce smaller berries with thicker skins and harvest a little later than the rest of the Willamette.

To make this wine, John leaves almost half of the grapes on the stem, fermenting what is called "whole clusters." When using the stems they must be dry, or lignified, and the grapes have to be perfectly healthy. Doing this imparts more tannin and structure on the finished wine, as well as adding a savory element. Other devotees of the style are Josh Jensen, formerly of Calera, and his Oregon disciple Steve Dormer of Christom Cellars. After the wine is dry, it is racked to French oak barrels, with roughly 20% being new. The wine is aged without racking for a year, then all of the wine is moved into older, neutral, French oak barrels for an additional six months. This is to prevent the oak from dominating the finished wine.

When you are ready to serve this wine, decant it for half an hour. The first thing you should notice is that the color is relatively light, as whole cluster fermentation often strips the wine of a little color. Do not be concerned, it makes up for it on the palate. The nose is a savory combination of saffron, sumac, hibiscus blossoms, leather ball mitt, fresh, tart cherries, creme de frambois, cassia buds and dried oregano. On the palate it starts relatively high-toned and crunchy before developing a deeper, savory texture and smooth, but somewhat obvious, tannins into the finish. Good now, this wine will likely age for three to five years in the cellar. Drink with roast duck and green peppercorn sauce, or grilled pork tenderloins with Zatar seasoning, lemon and parsley.

## **Pan-Seared Duck Breasts with Green Peppercorn Sauce**

You may have to order your duck breast online. I can occasionally find them at Whole Foods, or buy them at the farmer's market, but most either bring them back from the Dekalb Farmer's Market or order from D'Artagnan. It is worth the effort for a really special dish that works nicely with both of the feature wines. This is a classic interpretation of *Magret de Canard au Poivre Vert*, one of my favorite French dishes and one I actively seek every time I visit the country.

The key to the success of this dish is to score the skin in a cross-hatch pattern, trying not to cut through to the meat. Then start the breasts, skin side down in a medium hot pan to slowly render the fat and crisp the skin. Try not to cook them past medium or you risk them being a bit tough.

**4 boneless duck breast halves (about 6 ounces each), skin scored on the diagonal**

**Salt and ground black pepper**

**2 medium shallots, minced (about 1/3 cup)**

**3/4 cup ruby port**

**2 tablespoons dried green peppercorns, crushed**

**1 cup low-sodium chicken broth**

**1/2 cup heavy cream**

**1 teaspoon juice from 1 lemon**

1. Pat the duck breasts dry with paper towels and season with salt and pepper. Heat a 12-inch nonstick skillet over medium heat until hot, about 3 minutes. Add the duck breasts, skin side down, lower the heat to medium-low, and cook until the fat begins to render, about 5 minutes. Continue to cook, adjusting the heat as needed for the fat to maintain a constant but gentle simmer, until most of the fat has rendered and the skin is deep golden and crisp, 20 to 25 minutes longer.

2. Flip the duck breasts over and continue to cook until the center of the breasts are medium-rare and measure 125 degrees on an instant-read thermometer, 2 to 5 minutes. Transfer the duck to a carving board, tent loosely with foil, and let rest while making the sauce (the duck temperature will rise to 130 degrees before serving).

3. Pour off all but 1 tablespoon of the fat left in the skillet. (Save it for sautéing mushrooms or potatoes!) Add the shallots and cook over medium-high heat until softened, 2 to 3 minutes. Add the port and green peppercorns and cook until the liquid has reduced to a syrupy consistency, about 4 minutes. Add the chicken broth and cream and cook until the sauce has thickened and measures about 1 cup, about 5 minutes. Off the heat, stir in the lemon juice and season with salt and pepper to taste; transfer the sauce to a bowl or gravy boat. Slice the duck breasts thin and serve, passing the sauce separately or pouring it over the duck.