



May, 2018



This month I am delighted to present to you a new bottling from one of our earliest New World Red club features, the **2014 Train Wreck Cabernet Sauvignon (\$28.)**

Way back in September, 2006, in what was the second year of the NWR, I selected the Train Wreck Petite Sirah, although my notes do not show what the vintage was. That wine was made by our friend, Chris Dearden, from a parcel of Petite Sirah from one of the famous Napa vineyards for that variety, that are farmed near the Napa town of Calistoga. As I remember, the grower presented the grapes to a client who refused them because their sugar content was too high. He quickly called Chris to process them so they would not be lost, and described the situation as “a train wreck.” In Dearden’s capable hands the wine turned out great, and during a visit to Napa he presented it to me as a potential private label, suggesting the name Train Wreck. A couple of years later the grower sold the vineyard, or replanted it to Cabernet Sauvignon, I don’t remember the exact story, and the wine disappeared. However Chris found the brand had legs, and reinvented it as a Cabernet Sauvignon.

One of the reasons Chris’ wines are so interesting to me, is not just due to his talent as a winemaker. He has a deep understanding of the business of wine. When he attended UC Davis for his undergrad degree, instead of focusing only on winemaking, he created his own major, Winery Operations and Management. Upon graduation he worked at several Napa wineries in the late 1980’s, before heading back to school, this time at UC Berkeley, to get an MBA from the Haas School of Business. During this period he also worked for Seguin-

Moreau Cooperage, one of the top barrel makers in the world. This gave him the opportunity to travel the world and work with many top winemakers, discussing the intricate details of their winemaking process. Eventually, he returned to the valley, and for a time worked with John Kongsgaard, before his turn with Italian varieties at Benessere. Then in 2010 he and his wife, Paige, launched the Chris Dearden Wines portfolio, which is the umbrella company of Train Wreck.

Because of his long history of winemaking in northern California, Dearden has great sources for grapes. For this wine they come exclusively from the Fountaingrove area, north of the town of Santa Rosa, in Sonoma County. Although he could label the wine as Sonoma County, Chris uses the North Coast designation for this wine as he expects future vintages will contain grapes from Mendocino and Lake Counties to keep the cost in line. Rather than change the label each year, he decided make the move now. The Fountaingrove area was hard hit by the fires in 2017, with the namesake lodge in the area burning to the ground. However, 2014 was a marvelous year, with the fruit being harvested in perfect condition.

This is apparent as soon as you pull the cork, but I would encourage you to decant this bottle for at least a half-hour before serving. Once you do this it reveals deep nose of milk chocolate, candied cherries, bay leaf, black licorice and a faintly resinous note of juniper. On the palate it has a rich sense of fruit, with smooth but obvious tannins and very nice concentration. You will find this wine lingers for up to a minute on the palate. Only 550 cases of this wine were produced and it will age nicely for five to seven years.

My second selection is the end of an era, the **2012 Valle Secreto Syrah (\$20)**. The American importer in no longer buying the wines from Valle Secreto so we will likely not have access to them any longer. Some of you may remember that I also chose the 2010 bottling of this wine as a NWR selection, back in September, 2014. I really like what producers in Chile are doing with Syrah, and a few other varieties as well such as Carignan. To me they offer a more interesting take on the terroir of Chile than Cabernet Sauvignon.

Like most of the versions made in New World countries, it is hard to define the style of Syrah that comes from Chile. The country has many diverse grape growing climates so some versions are big and fruit forward, others are savory and restrained. This example reminds me most of the expressions I taste from Walla Walla, Washington. There is an initial wave of fruit, reinforced with a vein of minerality, then a long dry finish.

The grapes for this wine are grown in the Cachapoal Valley, located about an hour south of the capital of Santiago. Like most of the valleys of Chile it has been formed by a river, coincidentally named the Cachapoal, which runs east-west from the Andes to the Claro River which forms Chile’s vast central valley. The soils are alluvial, mostly sand and small rocks, from hundreds of millions of years of erosion from the Andes Mountains. This is why this wine has such a dominant vein of minerality running through the fruit. The climate of the Cachapoal is cooler than the central valley with most of the vineyards planted several hundred meters above sea level. This encourages a long, slow ripening process that is ideal for Syrah and other thick skinned varieties.

When you open this wine I encourage you to decant it for an hour before serving. Once you do the nose evolves quickly in the glass, with obvious notes of fresh blackberries and black currants, espresso coffee beans, maduro cigar wrapper, dark chocolate and oil cured black olives. When you take a sip this wine delivers the big wave of fruit typical of new world Syrah, followed by moderate tannins and acidity. This is a really savory example that is also framed by a vein of minerality that runs into the long finish. Drink this wine over the next two years.

Braised Brisket with Onions

I find that brisket is one of the perfect cuts to cook for large groups. It is not that expensive, most of the work is done before your guests arrive and it is extremely versatile in how you serve it. A dish like this can be a main course, or used for sandwiches. It even works great the next day, chopped and cooked with potatoes for hash.

The success of this recipe lies in patience to not cut the meat until it has rested overnight in the sauce. The fibers of the brisket cut are very strong, and need more time rest and redistribute juices than steaks. This takes it to the extreme, but the flavor and texture is so worth it. Serve with either wine selection.

1 beef brisket, 4 to 5 pounds, flat cut preferred

Salt and ground black pepper

vegetable oil

**3 large onions (about 2 1/2 pounds), halved
and sliced 1/2 inch thick**

1 tablespoon brown sugar

**3 medium cloves garlic, minced or pressed
through garlic press (about 1 tablespoon)**

1 tablespoon tomato paste

1 tablespoon paprika

1/8 teaspoon cayenne pepper

2 tablespoons all-purpose flour

1 cup low-sodium chicken broth

1 cup dry red wine

3 bay leaves

3 sprigs fresh thyme

1. Adjust oven rack to lower-middle position; heat oven to 300 degrees. Line 13 by 9-inch baking dish with two 24-inch-long sheets of 18-inch-wide heavy-duty foil, positioning sheets perpendicular to each other and allowing excess foil to extend beyond edges of pan. Pat brisket dry with paper towels. Place brisket fat side up on cutting board; using dinner fork, poke holes in meat through fat layer about 1 inch apart. Season both sides of brisket liberally with salt and pepper.

2. Heat 1 teaspoon oil in 12-inch skillet over medium-high heat until oil just begins to smoke. Place brisket fat side up in skillet (brisket may climb up sides of skillet); weight brisket with heavy Dutch oven or cast-iron skillet and cook until well browned, about 7 minutes. Remove Dutch oven; using tongs, flip brisket and cook on second side without weight until well browned, about 7 minutes longer. Transfer brisket to platter.

3. Pour off all but 1 tablespoon fat from pan (or, if brisket was lean, add enough oil to fat in skillet to equal 1 tablespoon); stir in onions, sugar, and 1/4 teaspoon salt and cook over medium-high heat, stirring occasionally, until onions are softened and golden, 10 to 12 minutes. Add garlic and cook, stirring frequently, until fragrant, about 1 minute; add tomato paste and cook, stirring to combine, until paste darkens, about 2 minutes. Add paprika and cayenne and cook, stirring constantly, until fragrant, about 1 minute. Sprinkle flour over onions and cook, stirring constantly, until well combined,

about 2 minutes. Add broth, wine, bay, and thyme, stirring to scrape up browned bits from pan; bring to simmer and simmer about 5 minutes to fully thicken.

4. Pour sauce and onions into foil-lined baking dish. Nestle brisket, fat side up, in sauce and onions. Fold foil extensions over and seal (do not tightly crimp foil because foil must later be opened to test for doneness). Place in oven and cook until fork can be inserted into and removed from center of brisket with no resistance, 3 1/2 to 4 hours (when testing for doneness, open foil with caution as contents will be steaming). Carefully open foil and let brisket cool at room temperature for 20 to 30 minutes.

5. Transfer brisket to large bowl; set mesh strainer over bowl and strain sauce over brisket. Discard bay and thyme from onions and transfer onions to small bowl. Cover both bowls with plastic wrap, cut vents in plastic with paring knife, and refrigerate overnight.

6. About 45 minutes before serving, adjust oven rack to lower-middle position; heat oven to 350 degrees. While oven heats, transfer cold brisket to cutting board. Scrape off and discard any congealed fat from sauce, then transfer sauce to medium saucepan and heat over medium heat until warm, skimming any fat on surface with wide shallow spoon (you should have about 2 cups sauce without onions; if necessary, simmer sauce over medium-high heat until reduced to 2 cups). While sauce heats, use chef's or carving knife to slice brisket against grain into 1/4-inch-thick slices, trimming and discarding any excess fat, if desired; place slices in 13 by 9-inch baking dish. Stir reserved onions and vinegar into warmed sauce and adjust seasoning with salt and pepper. Pour sauce over brisket slices, cover baking dish with foil, and bake until heated through, 25 to 30 minutes. Serve immediately.

To Make and Serve the Brisket on the Same Day If you would like to make and serve the brisket on the same day, after removing the brisket from the oven in step 4, reseal the foil and let the brisket stand at room temperature for an hour. Then transfer the brisket to a cutting board and continue with the recipe to strain, defat, and reheat the sauce and slice the meat; because the brisket will still be hot, there will be no need to put it back into the oven once the reheated sauce is poured over it.