



As you may know, this year I am making selections that allow us to follow what happens in the vineyard, and how it effects what you taste in the glass. I made the selections for this month in January, and at the time my intention was to discuss how vine training is influenced by tradition and growing conditions, along with the effect of modern advances in viticulture. Then during my trip to France in March I learned more about these estates, and a much bigger picture was revealed. Therefore, instead of the original topic, I am going to address how different families approach generational transition of ownership under the inheritance laws of France. While this may seem like a distant problem for us in the states, it has great impact on many of the family wineries we love, and how they will continue to provide us with great wine in the future.

2017 Domaine Palon Cotes du Rhone “Esparza” (\$16)

Domaine Palon is located at the foot of the “Dentelles de Montmirail” on the gentle mid-slope of Gigondas. This is a very small estate with only eighteen acres in Gigondas and eleven in neighboring Vacqueyras. The Palon family has been vigneron since the 1930's but did not bottle wine under their own name until 2003, when Sebastien Palon took the reins. Before they began producing wine under their label, Sebastien's grandfather Jean Palon was the co-founder of the Gigondas cave cooperative, and member of the governing board from 1956-1978. Sebastien's father, Jean-Pierre Palon, was also the president of the cave cooperative from 1978-2001. Under Sebastian's guidance the property has become a “cult” favorite in France, selling almost all their production immediately upon release to private clients. Unfortunately their success means that family members not involved with the winery, but still retain ownership, forced the sale of the domaine to Domaine Malijay, a large Chateaufort-du-Pape bottler. Sebastien also sold off the two vineyards used to make this wine, so this is the last bottling of Esparza ever made.

The challenge that Sebastien faced is consistent with many wineries in France. Under the old Napoleonic law of inheritance, a property is divided equally among all living children. Over several generations this means a winery could have dozens of owners, often with very few actively involved in the operation. As wine prices have increased over the past three decades, so have the value of wineries. Now it is not uncommon for family members who have no emotional attachment to a winery to demand the property be sold, so as to get their cut of the value. This is the situation that forced the sale of the fabled Sauternes estate, Chateau d'Yquem, in 1996. Ultimately the family sold more than half of the stock to LVMH, displacing the legendary Comte Alexandre de Lur-Saluces as general manager. In this case Sebastien has a contract to make the wines at Palon through 2019, after which his future is uncertain.

At least for this year we can celebrate this wine one last time. The Cotes du Rhone “Esparza” is made with grapes grown in two different vineyards. The first is a site that sits on a sandy, rocky site above the village of Vacqueyras. The vines are quite old, at least fifty years, and produce small amounts of grapes due to the extremely harsh growing conditions. Remaining grapes are produced near the village of Sablet, a high elevation area with very poor soils. This wine is a blend of 69 % Grenache, 16 % Syrah and 15 % Cinsault. All of the grapes are hand harvested and fermented in concrete. The Grenache is also aged in concrete while the Syrah and Cinsault spend time in old wooden foudres before blending.

When you open this wine, give it a splash in the decanter before serving. Once you do it delivers a bright bouquet of fresh cherry, red plums, sage, thyme and black licorice. On the palate it is quite ripe, with a broad sense of fruit stretching into a long finish. Serve this with braised lamb shanks, cassoulet or grilled sausages over polenta.

2017 Domaine J. Boulon Morgon (\$19)

I had the pleasure of visiting this domaine in April, my first stop after six grueling days of tastings in Bordeaux. The property is located in Corcelles en Beaujolais, a forty-five minute drive from the airport in Lyon. We arrived late on Friday night and had dinner at Auberge de Corcelles, a restaurant worth seeking out if you are in the area. The next morning we drove to the base of the village and domaine Boulon. What a contrast from my previous six days of appointments! Unlike the manicured lawns and stately, yet mostly unoccupied, chateaus of Bordeaux, the Boulon residence/winery had the feel of a well-used, and very old, country property. Several dogs lounged around their driveway/courtyard, with a large chicken population living in a fenced in area next to the winery. You can see how even a few euros per bottle can greatly change the fortunes of family, and the Boulons do quite well for the region of Beaujolais.

The Boulon family started bottling wine under the Domaine J. Boulon in 1973, when the fourth generation, Joseph Boulon, began selling their tiny production to private clients in the area. In 1978 his son, Jacques, married Françoise, and they began to expand the estate from the original fifteen acres, to the current size of sixty-four. Most of their vineyard acres are classified as Beaujolais, but they also own small parcels in the cru of Morgon, Brouilly and Moulin-au-Vent. Jacques is still active in the winery, but since 2005 the day-to-day operations are run by his son-in-law, Hugo, who married their daughter Ludivine. They are poised to move this winery in to the sixth generation as everyone pitches in for the success of the property. The morning of our visit, Françoise and Ludivine were gone, selling their wine at a local *marché*. Each year the family produces about 9000 cases of wine, including a surprisingly good bubbly and Beaujolais Blanc, both bottled for local grocery store chain.

The Boulons produce their Morgon from twelve acres, planted in two sites; one on limestone soils planted in 1946, the second in red volcanic rock, planted in the 1950's. This parcel lies on the slope of the famed Cote de Py, but outside the defined boundary. The grapes are hand harvested and fermented whole cluster, using wild yeast. Once dry the wine is

racked to stainless steel tanks and aged for a year before bottling. Hugo is obsessed with the pure expression of Gamay, so while the winery is a bit “rustic”, I detected no “off” aromas in any of their wines, even those not destined for the US.

When you pull the cork on this wine, allow it to breathe for at least a half-hour before serving, and again, a slight chill is recommended. I suggest using a big glass for this wine, because you want to give it lots of room to open, and it goes down so quickly it saves time refilling. The bouquet begins with a fresh nose of farm stand black raspberries and black cherry, then notes of violets, peach skin and wet granite poke out. In the mouth this wine is quite dense and full, with a firm edge of tannins and acidity holding the fruit in place into the long finish. Good now, this wine will improve for up to three years, maybe longer. Serve with a roast pork loin or coffee rubbed brisket.

White Bean Salad

I am something of a nut for cold bean salads. It probably started in my youth, when I discovered three bean salad on the salad bars of many restaurants. Traditionally I like to start most of my versions with dried beans, which to me offer more flavor and better texture than canned. However, for a quick, mid-week version, this recipe from Cook’s Illustrated ramps up the flavor of canned by soaking them in a garlic broth for a few minutes before assembly. It is best if you can let this recipe sit for 20-30 minutes after you mix all the ingredients, as the flavor is greatly improved. (It is even better next day.) Serve alongside the shanks below, or with roast chicken.

1/3 cup extra virgin olive oil
4 garlic cloves, peeled and smashed
Salt and pepper
3 (15-ounce) cans cannellini beans, rinsed
1/4 cup sherry vinegar
1 shallot, minced
1 cup grape tomatoes, quartered
1/2 cup chopped fresh basil
1/2 cup chopped kalamata olives

1. Heat 1 tablespoon oil and garlic in medium saucepan over medium-high heat until just beginning to brown, about 2 minutes. Add 2 cups water and 1 teaspoon salt and bring to simmer. Remove from heat, add beans, cover, and let sit for 20 minutes. Combine vinegar and shallot in large bowl and let sit for 20 minutes.

2. Drain beans and discard garlic. Add beans, remaining oil, tomatoes, basil, and olives to shallot mixture, and toss until thoroughly combined. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Let sit for 20 minutes. Serve.

Braised Lamb Shanks

When I think of the foods of southern France, lamb always comes to mind. While rack of lamb is a great complement to any red wine, in my opinion it is the shanks that suit the more rustic charm of Grenache and Gamay-based wines. I make this recipe often and get creative with the veggies, sometimes including celery root, fennel bulb or peppers. However you choose to prepare this dish, it works amazing with any Cotes du Rhone, Cru Beaujolais or even Dolcetto and Barbera.

**6 pounds lamb shanks (6 shanks),
trimmed of excess fat**
Table salt
1 tablespoon canola oil
2 medium onions, sliced thick
**3 medium carrots, peeled and cut crosswise
into 2-inch pieces**
**2 medium ribs celery, cut crosswise into 2-inch
pieces**
5 medium cloves garlic, minced
2 tablespoons tomato paste
1 tablespoon herbes de Provence
2 cups dry red wine
3 cups low-sodium chicken broth
Ground black pepper

1. Heat oven to 350 degrees. Sprinkle shanks with salt. Heat oil in a large, nonreactive sauté pan over medium-high heat. Add shanks to pan in batches if necessary to avoid overcrowding. Sauté until browned on all sides, 5-7 minutes. Using tongs, transfer shanks to a plate as they brown.

2. Drain all but 2 tablespoons fat from the sauté pan; add onions, carrots, celery, garlic, tomato paste, a light sprinkling of salt and 1 teaspoon of the herbes de Provence; sauté to soften vegetables slightly, 3 to 4 minutes. Add red wine, then chicken stock to the skillet, stirring with a wooden spoons to loosen browned bits from skillet bottom. Bring liquid to simmer; transfer vegetables and liquid into a deep braising pan, large enough to hold the shanks in a single layer. Add shanks, season with salt, pepper, and remaining herbes de Provence.

3. Cover pan (with foil if pan has no lid) and transfer it to the oven; braise shanks for 1 1/2 hours. Uncover and continue braising until shank tops are browned, about 30 minutes. Turn shanks and continue braising until remaining side has browned and shanks are fall-off-the-bone tender.

4. Remove pan from oven; let shanks rest for at least 15 minutes. Carefully transfer shanks with tongs to each of 6 plates. Arrange a portion of vegetables around each shank. Skim excess fat from braising liquid and adjust seasoning. Spoon a portion of braising liquid over each shank and serve.