



Heirloom Grapes

I am an avid gardener, and August is when I begin to plan the fall garden to plant in mid-September. As you probably expect, I farm using organic practices, and I have a preference to plant heirloom varieties of tomatoes, beans, peppers and lettuce. I do this, because in my opinion, they have more flavor than your standard commercially available varieties.

This month I have selected two grapes to feature that are themselves heirlooms. These are ancient varieties that make very interesting wines. Although they have been grown in Europe for millenniums, their popularity has ebbed and flowed in the past seventy years, mostly for economic reasons. Now new wineries and winemakers recognize the amazing character of the wines they produce, and are bringing them back. Enjoy the selections this month and how incredibly food-friendly they are with a wide range of dishes.

2016 Taburno Falanghina (\$20)

The Falanghina grape is found primarily in the Campania region of Italy, which is home to the city of Naples. Vineyards in this region lie primarily on the hillsides of the Apennine Mountains, which form the spine of the entire peninsula. The formation of the Apennines started about 20 million years ago, but since many of the volcanos in the chain are still active, it can be said they are not finished yet. During their formation they pushed through the bottom of an ancient sea bottom, lifting the limestone base and breaking up. For this reason the soils of Campania are a mix of volcanic, sedimentary and metamorphic soils, each providing the perfect growing conditions for many different grape varieties.

Viticulture in this region likely began with the Greeks, who came to southern Italy seeking areas to grow grapes for wine production. They brought with them a lot of varieties from Greece, and it is likely Falanghina was carried over then. It is such an old variety that DNA testing does not reveal any known parents. What we do know is that there are actually two different clones of this variety, falanghina beneventana and falanghina flegrea. At the moment producers typically blend the two together and do not identify this on the label. My guess is the difference is really important if you are tasting them side-by-side at the winery, but matters little when you are drinking a bottle over dinner.

Falanghina was a very popular variety in this region in the 19th century, but much of the vineyards in this area were destroyed during the WWII. One of the places the American invasion of Italy took place was Campania and the fierce fighting destroyed most of the vineyards. After the war, producers looked to plant varieties that gave them high yields, with little concern for complexity or quality. Through the second half of the 20th century this variety all but disappeared, before several producers began to experiment with it in the 1990's. Today, Falanghina enjoys great popularity, in part because it retains high acidity when grown in hot climates. For this reason we also see it now being planted in some parts of the California and Australia.

The Cantina Taburno is a growers cooperative, meaning that many families contribute their grapes to the winery, then split the profits after the wine is sold. There are over 300 families, farming almost 1500 acres, who participate. The Cantina del Taburno offers technical assistance to the growers and encourages them to work with indigenous varieties. They are also associated with the University of Portici (Naples) and has an on site analysis laboratory and a laboratory for micro-vinification. Many students use the facility to do research, write their theses and work on-site. As a result, the wines from Cantina Taburno are viewed as some of the finest, and modern wines in the region.

Do not think that because the bottle is elongated that the wine is sweet in any way. The bouquet is a mix of fresh nectarines, dried apricots, white peppercorns, juniper berries and sea salt. On the palate this wine shows a bold expression of fruit to start, then narrows as the wine's naturally high acidity pulls it together at the finish. This wine is a natural with all forms of seafood, as well as pasta with cream sauce and even grilled chicken breasts, marinated in pineapple and soy sauce. Drink this wine over the next year.

2017 WEON Carignan (\$18)

With Carignan we have another ancient variety, one that also has a mixed background and confusion thanks to more than a thousand years of history. Prior to 2003, some claim the variety was moved west by the Phoenicians from the middle east. Then DNA evidence pointed to an origin in north-central Spain. The variety is the same as Mazuela in the Rioja region, and is called Samsó in Catalonia. This adds to the confusion since that is also the name for Cinsault, a completely different grape. In the US, researchers at UC-Davis crossed it with Cabernet Sauvignon to create Ruby Cabernet. That is a variety that is often used in blends for color and alcohol, as well as acidity.

The riches to rags story of the Carignan grape is almost the exact opposite of Falanghina. Where that grape fell out of favor after WWII, this one exploded in popularity. The difference is that Carignan is capable of producing enormous crops, as much as ten to eleven tons per acre, while achieving high alcohol and retaining some acidity. For about fifty years the producers in the south of France went crazy growing this grape, churning out an ocean of cheap, high octane plonk. And that became its downfall. When the European Union first started working on trade issues, one of the first to resolve was France flooding the rest of Europe with the cheap red wines, made primarily from Carignan. As a result, many farmers were paid to rip out their vines, and appellation rules were created limiting its use. From 1980 to 2000, almost 131,500 acres of the Carignan was uprooted, often replaced with more fashionable international varieties such as Cabernet Sauvignon and Syrah. However there was a faction, particularly high in the mountains south of the Central Massif, who saw the value of this grape, if the vines were properly farmed for low yields. Winemakers like Sylvain Fadat, at his

Domaine d'Aupilhac, inspire a younger generation to use Carignan that grows in extreme conditions, or from very old vines.

One such fan is David Marcel, a Frenchman who arrived in Chile with a winemaking degree from Montpellier and a young, Chilean bride. After working with large wineries during his studies, he yearned to make wines on a small scale, seeking out unique climates and very old vines. His quest took him to the Maule Valley, south of the city of Santiago, and a parcel of old Carignan vines planted in 1960. The vineyard sits high in the Andes foothills and is not irrigated, so each vine produces only a few clusters. All of the work in this vineyard must be done by hand but the results are worth it.

For this wine the grapes are destemmed, and placed in large concrete fermentors where they are first foot trodded. Fermentation happens with native yeast and the wine is left on the skins for a few days after it is totally dry. The wine is then racked to tank and left to rest for four months before bottling.

The thing that drew me to this wine is the lip smacking, delicious nature of fruit, especially as we hit the dog days of summer. Decant this wine for a half-hour before serving as I find Carignan really benefits from a little oxygen. Then you are greeted by charming notes of hibiscus, rose hips, fresh muddled black raspberries and pipe tobacco. On the palate it is juicy and soft, with a plump sense of fruit that is framed by moderate tannins and acids. While this is not a profound, stick-it-in-the-cellar wine, it is a great drink this time of year with vegetable lasagna, chicken tandoori or grilled pork tenderloin with Zatar seasoning and pomegranate syrup.

Spring Risotto

This is a fantastic recipe for the Falanghina. I often serve this as a side dish with grilled chicken but it certainly stands alone for a light dinner.

4 cups low-sodium chicken broth
1 cup Arborio rice
6 tablespoons unsalted butter
1 onion, chopped fine
2 garlic cloves, minced
1 cup frozen peas, thawed
1 cup frozen fava beans, thawed
2 ounces (2 cups) baby arugula, chopped rough
2 ounces Parmesan cheese, grated (1 cup)
Salt and pepper

1. Microwave 3 cups broth, rice, and 2 tablespoons butter in large covered bowl until most of liquid is absorbed, 14 to 16 minutes.

2. Melt 2 tablespoons butter in 12-inch nonstick skillet over medium heat. Add onion and cook until softened, about 5 minutes. Stir in garlic and cook until fragrant, about 30 seconds. Add parcooked rice and remaining 1 cup broth. Bring to simmer and cook, stirring constantly, until rice is almost tender, 4 to 6 minutes. Stir in peas and fava beans and cook until heated through, about 1 minute. Off heat, stir in arugula, Parmesan, and remaining 2 tablespoons butter. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Serve.

Shrimp Fra Diavolo

This recipe is an absolute winner, and works great with both wines. Pay attention to the step where you make a quick stock from browned shrimp shells. It adds a layer of flavor that you will not find in even the best restaurant examples.

1 ½ pounds large shrimp (26 to 30 per pound), peeled and deveined, shells reserved
Salt
1 (28-ounce) can whole peeled tomatoes
3 tablespoons vegetable oil
1 cup dry white wine
4 garlic cloves, minced
½ - 1 teaspoon red pepper flakes
½ teaspoon dried oregano
2 anchovy fillets, rinsed, patted dry, and minced
¼ cup chopped fresh basil
¼ cup chopped fresh parsley
1 ½ teaspoons minced pepperoncini, plus 1 teaspoon brine
2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil

1. Toss shrimp with ½ teaspoon salt and set aside. Pour tomatoes into colander set over large bowl. Pierce tomatoes with edge of rubber spatula and stir briefly to release juice. Transfer drained tomatoes to small bowl and reserve juice. Do not wash colander.

2. Heat 1 tablespoon vegetable oil in 12-inch skillet over high heat until shimmering. Add shrimp shells and cook, stirring frequently, until they begin to turn spotty brown and skillet starts to brown, 2 to 4 minutes. Remove skillet from heat and carefully add wine. When bubbling subsides, return skillet to heat and simmer until wine is reduced to about 2 tablespoons, 2 to 4 minutes. Add reserved tomato juice and simmer to meld flavors, 5 minutes. Pour contents of skillet into colander set over bowl. Discard shells and reserve liquid. Wipe out skillet with paper towels.

3. Heat remaining 2 tablespoons vegetable oil, garlic, pepper flakes, and oregano in now-empty skillet over medium heat, stirring occasionally, until garlic is straw-colored and fragrant, 1 to 2 minutes. Add anchovies and stir until fragrant, about 30 seconds. Remove from heat. Add drained tomatoes and mash with potato masher until coarsely pureed. Return to heat and stir

in reserved tomato juice mixture. Increase heat to medium-high and simmer until mixture has thickened, about 5 minutes.

4. Add shrimp to skillet and simmer gently, stirring and turning shrimp frequently, until they are just cooked through, 4 to 5 minutes. Remove pan from heat. Stir in basil, parsley, and pepperoncini and brine and season with salt to taste. Drizzle with olive oil and serve.