



September , 2018



If you pay attention to the wine business, particularly from the statistic side, you know that for 20 years the arrow for virtually every category has been pointing up. According to the Silicon Valley Bank "State of the Wine Industry 2018," US consumption has doubled since 1998, from 370 million gallons to 770 million. That is 2.3 gallons per US man, woman and child. At the same time, prices have also risen, particularly in the last five years. Anyone who has visited the Sonoma or Napa wine countries in the past couple of years knows that hotels are much more expensive, tasting room fees have skyrocketed and yes, prices are definitely up. You don't really need to visit California to notice the last one. Prices have increased more than 25 percent in the past five years, and there does not appear to be an end in sight.

Thankfully, there are still a few winemakers out there who recognize that most consumers want to pay less than \$25 a bottle for most of their wine drinking. This month, I have selected wines from two wineries that produce expensive, \$100/bottle wines, but also make some for everyday drinking, too. This is not uncommon, but what makes them stand out is the amount of attention they pay to this category. Rather than slough off the winemaking to assistants and interns, these get the full attention of the head winemakers. This is because both of the wines are made by savvy owner/operators who recognize that what goes up, eventually comes back down.

The first pick is already an Orlando store favorite, and was called in from the sidelines after another wine didn't ship in time. The **2016 Boomtown Cabernet Sauvignon (\$19)** is a fantastic wine that offers serious Cab character for a lot less than most California examples I am tasting these days.

I first started buying wine from the dynamic duo of Corey Braunel and Chad Johnson a few years ago when they created Dusted Valley Vintners (DVV). They only use the DVV label for their estate-grown Walla Walla wines. They created the Boomtown label for those made from purchased Columbia Valley fruit. I have bought every vintage of Boomtown Cabernet Sauvignon since its inception and this wine gets better every year. Unlike many wineries who only make a less expensive label for cash flow, Corey and Chad put a lot of pride and effort into their baby label. They know they can only produce a fixed amount of wine under DVV, so if they are going to grow their business, it will be with the Boomtown wines. In 2012, their efforts were rewarded with accolades from industry publications, *Wine Business Monthly* and *Wine and Spirits Magazine* as both named them one of the top small brands in the US.

Chad and Corey work closely with the growers from whom they buy the grapes to make this wine and ensure that the quality is the same as what they grow for DVV. Walla Walla is the high-rent district of Eastern Washington, with different soils than most of the rest of the Columbia River Valley. By using several growers, they ensure a good supply of grapes each year because the number one threat in this part of the world is frost that kills the young buds, or worse, the whole vine. It also lets them use the various sub-appellations of the valley to further develop complexity in the finished wine.

Winemaking is pretty straightforward for the Boomtown label, with all the fruit being sorted before it goes into the fermentor. The cap is punched down twice a day until the wine is dry. This allows the skins to remain in contact for a few more days until it is moved to a combination of 75% French and 25% American oak barrels, with a total of 35% being new. The finished wine is 95% Cabernet, with 3% Petite Verdot and 2% Syrah.

It is a good idea to decant this wine for half an hour before serving. Being finished with a screw cap, it retains a little more carbon dioxide and it will open up faster outside the bottle. What I like about this wine is that it hits with an explosive nose of muddled blackberries, peppermint and eucalyptus, vanilla wafers, and black licorice. On the palate it is plump and juicy, with a good sense of fruit, moderate tannins, and moderate acidity. This wine is ready to drink now and will age nicely for three to five years.

My second pick for this month is a "big" Merlot, the **2016 Chelsea Goldschmidt Merlot (\$25)**. Although not as well known as many cult winemakers, Nick Goldschmidt is, in my mind, one of the top winemakers in the world for Bordeaux varieties. His body of work covers most of the great winemaking regions of the Americas and his knowledge of Napa and Sonoma county vineyards is unparalleled. To me, he stands out because unlike most California winemakers, who are only interested in producing \$100+ bottles, he makes brilliant wines for \$25, and hits several price points over the \$100 threshold. As you will see with the selections this quarter, the quality shines regardless of price point.

Like most of us, Nick did not start his adult life thinking about wine. His first degree, which he earned in his native New Zealand, was in horticulture, and he expected to be a farmer of row crops. While studying organic and biodynamic farming techniques he became intrigued by the potential for growing grapes in an Earth-friendly way. Then, an evening with good friends and a bottle of Vega Sicilia sparked a passion for wine that would change his course. After earning his diploma (bachelor's degree) in Horticulture from Canterbury, New Zealand 1982, he moved on to another in Viticulture from Charles Sturt (Australia) in 1985 and then a post grad in enology from prestigious Roseworthy (Australia) in 1986. He and his wife, Yolyn, fell in love with California in 1989, while working as an intern at Carneros Creek, and in 1990 he accepted a permanent position under Zelma Long at Simi.

During his tenure at Simi, he rose to head winemaker and then rode the wave of big corporate acquisitions. When hired at Simi, it was owned by Louis Vuitton Moet Hennessey and later sold to Constellation. During this time, he oversaw the winemaking at Ruffino in Italy, Cloudy Bay in New Zealand and Terrazas in Argentina, eventually directing the wines at Franciscan and Ravenswood, just to name a few. From Constellation he moved on to Allied-Domecq, where he oversaw 40 wineries, including Gary Farrell and Mumm Napa, as well as Campo Viejo in Spain and Brancott in New Zealand. Eventually Allied-Domecq was bought by Beam Wine Estates in 2006, where Nick continued in his role. When the portfolio was gobbled up by Constellation in 2008, he jumped ship and began to devote himself full-time to Goldschmidt wines.

The grapes used to make this wine come from the vineyard that Clos du Bois farmed to make their famous Marlstone bottling prior to the 2010 vintage. There was a time 10 to 15 years ago when that was one of the most coveted Meritage wines produced in Sonoma. Sadly, the corporate bean counters started making the decisions for what vineyards are used in the blend, considered the grapes too expensive, and now use lesser quality fruit for its production. The wine pales in comparison to what it once was, but the price still hovers around \$50 a bottle. Lucky for us, Nick was waiting when Constellation terminated the contract, and now farms and uses the grapes for the bottling named for his oldest daughter. This wine is 100% Merlot, and is aged for 12 months in a combination of barrels, 60% French, 20% American and 20% Hungarian, of which 25% were new.

When you are ready to open this wine, allow it to breathe in a decanter for a half-hour before serving. This wine displays a complex combination of aromas, from old leather, soy sauce, caramel, clove and black raspberry jam. On the palate it is nicely dense and broad, with a strong sense of fruit framed by polished, grainy tannins. Drink this wine over the next three to five years with lamb steaks with pistou or carnitas.

Chicken Chili with Cornmeal Dumplings

Most months I have a recipe in mind for the pairings, but this month I decided to call an audible. This recipe is in the latest issue of Cook's Country and I loved it with the Chelsea Merlot. Yes, it is a white meat dish, but the flavors in this meal are substantial so that it stands up. I am also sure that it will work nicely with the Boomtown Cabernet, which has relatively soft tannins as well.

CHILI

1 tablespoon vegetable oil

1 onion, chopped

1 poblano chile, stemmed, seeded, and chopped

¾ teaspoon pepper

½ teaspoon salt

3 garlic cloves, minced

2 teaspoons ground cumin

5 cups chicken broth

1 (15-ounce) can cannellini beans, rinsed

1 (15-ounce) can white or yellow hominy, drained

1 cup jarred green salsa

1 (2½-pound) rotisserie chicken, skin and bones discarded, meat shredded into bite-size pieces (3 cups)

½ cup chopped fresh cilantro

DUMPLINGS

1 ½ cups (7½ ounces) all-purpose flour

½ cup (2½ ounces) cornmeal

1 tablespoon sugar

2 teaspoons baking powder

½ teaspoon baking soda

¾ teaspoon salt

½ cup buttermilk, chilled

8 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted and cooled

This recipe takes about 30 minutes to prepare and about that long to cook. Don't skip the step of letting it rest for 15 minutes after you take it out of the oven. I found it thickened quite a bit and transformed from soup to chili. One other change I made was to the cornmeal dumplings. They call for three tablespoons of sugar, but my family prefers savory cornbread to sweet. I only used one tablespoon and think they are superb. Do not be alarmed that the dough is quite dry, the dumplings came out great.

Do not rinse the hominy after draining it; its residual starch adds body to the chili. Be sure to chill the buttermilk and cool the melted butter so the butter clumps when the two are combined.

1. For the chili: Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 450 degrees. Heat oil in Dutch oven over medium heat until shimmering. Add onion, poblano, pepper, and salt and cook until vegetables have softened, 5 to 7 minutes. Stir in garlic and cumin and cook until fragrant, about 1 minute.

2. Increase heat to medium-high. Stir in broth, beans, hominy, and salsa and bring to boil. Reduce heat to medium-low and simmer, uncovered, until flavors have blended, about 10 minutes.

3. For the dumplings: Meanwhile, whisk flour, cornmeal, sugar, baking powder, baking soda, and salt together in large bowl. Stir buttermilk and melted butter together in second bowl until butter forms clumps. Add buttermilk mixture to flour mixture and stir with rubber spatula until incorporated.

4. Add chicken and cilantro to chili and stir until incorporated. Using greased ¼-cup dry measuring cup (and using spoon as needed to free dough from cup), drop 8 level scoops of dough around perimeter of pot and 1 level scoop of dough in center, spacing scoops about ½ inch apart.

5. Bake, uncovered, until tops of dumplings are golden brown, about 25 minutes. Let cool for 15 minutes before serving.

