



Reserve Club

Spring 2018

Issue XI.II

My first selection, the **2014 Little Giant Cabernet Sauvignon (\$59)**, comes from one of my favorite people in Napa Valley, Chris Dearden. Chris and I met through one of my former employees, and over the years have spent several hours tasting together in Florida. When I entered the Master of Wine program in 2007, Chris was one of the first winemakers I contacted to better understand the science of winemaking, and he was incredibly patient with all of my tedious questions.

Back in those days, he was the winemaker and general manager for a Napa winery specializing in wines made with Italian grape varieties. One rainy morning we walked their vineyards adjacent to the Napa River, talking about vine density, root stock selection and the challenges of farming the fertile and clay heavy soils of their site. Along the way we also looked for obsidian arrowheads, which became visible after the rains. Because of its location next to the river, their vineyards were the prime hunting ground for the Wappo Indians for 10,000 years before settlers flocked to what is now California. It was the Wappo who gave the valley its name, as the word Napa means "land of plenty" in their language. Later we walked through the winery, which was the former Charles Shaw winery in the days before Two Buck Chuck, and talked about the challenges of the wine business.

One of the reasons I enjoy talking with Chris is that 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 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.

Most of the wines Chris produces are from purchased grapes, but he and Paige own an estate vineyard in one of the coolest sub-zones of Carneros. This property is also their homesite, and it has a commanding view of a geological formation that is called the Sleeping Giant. This is because the view to the west of their property, looking across the Mayacamus Mountains, looks like a giant's face as he lies on his back looking up at the sky. Under the Sleeping Giant label, they produce a Cabernet Sauvignon, Chardonnay and Pinot Noir. He also produces the Little Giant in honor of their two dogs, both Newfoundlands.

To make the Little Giant, Chris sources the grapes from the Lamonica vineyard on the Silverado Trail, next to the Darioush winery. This gently sloping vineyard has a thin layer of decomposed granite top soil lying on top of the bedrock. The quick draining soil and poor nutrient content mean the vines naturally produce smaller quantities of very intensely flavored grapes. All of the clusters are hand-picked, destemmed and cold-soaked before fermentation. Chris approaches Cabernet similar to Kongsgaard, allowing the wine to sit on the skins post-fermentation, for up to 28 days, then racks the wine to barrel with a high amount of fine lees. Chris and Kongsgaard believe this time in contact with lees produces greater complexity and dimension than clear wine. He ages the wine for 25 months in 75% new, French oak barrels. Chris produced 297 cases of the 2014 vintage.

When you open this wine, make sure to decant it for up to an hour before serving. Once you do, this wine delivers a surprisingly savory expression of Napa Cab, with gorgeous notes of graphite, cedar shavings, cooked black cherries, muddled black currants, dried thyme and dark chocolate. On the palate it is nicely dense and rich, with a great sense of fruit framed with moderately firm tannins and bright acidity. Drink this wine over the next seven to 10 years.

The second selection also comes from one of my favorite winemakers, but one who plies his craft on a more global scale. Although his primary winery is in the Willamette Valley of Oregon, Peter Rosback, he makes wine from grapes grown in Oregon, Washington and California, as well as projects in New Zealand. When my family and I visited him in Oregon, last August, in space he rents from Lady Hill Winery, he tasted all of us on 20 different wines, which my daughters found exhausting. Peter guided us through each single vineyard wine, describing exactly what attribute drew him to the site and character he wants to express. There were several standouts in the lineup, but the wine that makes the most sense for us as a feature is the **2014 Sineann Cabernet Sauvignon "Baby Poux" (\$55)**.

My love affair with Peter's wines started in 2004, when I visited the Willamette for the first time. After tasting roughly 300 wines during a trade event called Pinot Camp, I wanted to bring a few things home to "study" more intentionally. I

Buy six bottles of the Reserve Club features and receive a 20% discount off the listed prices

stopped into a local wine shop known for their diverse selection, and with the owner's help, purchased a mixed case of Pinots. Although he did not participate in Pinot Camp, I was aware of Rosback's wines and purchased several of his different single vineyards. Later, after drinking them, I reached out to Peter to buy his wines for my stores, only to be told he simply did not have enough. A year later I spoke with him while attending another trade event in New York City, and was told the same thing. Several years later, I received a call from a small, startup distributor, asking if I had time to taste with their latest acquisition, Sineann. Of course I made time, and when Peter walked in the door, the first thing he said to me was, "I told you someday I would have wine for you." They have been on my rack ever since. Some of you may remember a feature of his Lazare Cabernet Sauvignon, from Napa no less, back in January, 2015.

This wine comes from a block of vines in the Champoux Vineyard, in the Horse Heaven Hills of Washington state. It was planted by Paul Champoux in 1990, with cuttings taken from the original "block one," which are some of the oldest Cabernet vines in the state. That block was planted by the former owner, Don Mercer, in 1972. The name Baby Poux was first used by Rick Small, the legendary winemaker of Woodward Canyon. Peter has produced a Cabernet from this block every year, except a couple where frost prevented a crop, since the first vintage, in 1995. He loves the wines from this block because they evolve faster than is typical for Washington State. Peter also believes that now the vines are reaching their mature phase, their complexity rivals that of the legendary block 1.

To make the wine, Peter destems the grapes then puts them through a five-day cold soak to extract color and water soluble tannins. Fermentation occurs in tank using inoculated yeast, then the wine is racked to barrel, with a quarter being new, and aged for 18 months. Roughly 525 cases were produced of the 2014.

When you are ready to serve this wine, you will want to decant it for up to two hours. Once you do, it offers a rich nose of sassafras, Luxardo cherries, black licorice, black plum, orange incense and vanilla wafers. The feel on the palate is very powerful, but with surprisingly smooth, long tannins and moderate to even low acidity. Drink this wine over the next five years.

The final selection, the **2014 Andrew Rich Pinot Noir "Volcanic" (\$55)** is one of a new generation of wines from another of my favorite Oregon producers. I first met Andrew in 2004 when attending Pinot Camp, during an extended visit to the Carlton Winemaker's Studio. This "winery" is a place where small wine producers can rent space and take advantage of the state-of-the-art equipment at the facility. There are up to a dozen wineries that work out of the space, and over the years has been an incubator for many of the big names in the Willamette Valley. During that visit, I spent a good bit of time with founder Eric Hamacher, of Hamacher wines, and Scott Wright of Scott Paul. Later in the day, I hung around the tasting room and visited with Rich, who produces a number of wines from both Washington and Oregon. Several times over the years I have purchased his wines direct for our clubs, and now he has a distributor who makes supporting him easier.

Andrew began his wine career by editing a wine column for a national magazine. This inspired him to move to Burgundy, France, and study winemaking. He returned to the US and worked for six years at Bonny Doon, under the innovative Randall Grahm. In 1997, he then moved to the Willamette Valley with the goal of making Rhone inspired wines from Grenache, Syrah and Mourvedre, like the ones he fell in love with while living in France. Unfortunately he had to wait a few years before grape contracts for those varieties, which are rare even in Washington State, became available. During that time he fell back in love with Pinot Noir, which brings us to the feature this quarter.

Andrew's national sales manager, John House, brought this wine to my attention during a recent visit. For years, Andrew has produced several different Pinot Noirs from single vineyard sites as well as those under proprietary labels. At John's suggestion, they have cut their production and focused on their best sites selected by soil type and growing conditions. There is a marine sedimentary bottling as well as one from the wind-swept Eola-Amity Hills bottling. I thought all were quite good, but for this quarter I have selected the Volcanic, which is fleshier and more powerful than the other two.

The grapes for this wine come from the La Colina and Hyland vineyards, both planted on Jory soils. La Colina lies at the southern tip of the Dundee Hills, on a six foot layer of Jory soil. The vines were planted between 1999 and 2001, so they are starting to reach their mature phase. The Hyland vineyard, in the McMinville AVA, was first planted in 1971, with additional vines installed in 1989. At over 200 acres, it is one of the oldest sites for "old vines" in the Willamette. Here, the vines are also planted in the volcanic Jory soils. Both wines show the riper, dark fruit flavors typical of grapes grown in volcanic soils, despite being cooler locations. Rich uses 25% new French oak barrels for aging, so as to not mask the subtle flavors.

When you open this wine, decant it for half an hour before serving. Once you do, it reveals a brooding nose of roasted coffee beans, campfire (in a good way), cooked tart cherry, rhubarb, grains of paradise. On the palate, it has nice breadth and balance, with a long sense of fruit and polished tannins. Drink over the next three to five years.

Buy six bottles of the Reserve Club features and receive a 20% discount off the listed prices