



Reserve Club

Winter 2019

Issue XII.I

In October, I had a little time to work in my vegetable garden, which for those of you who share my love for this endeavor know is a month or so too late to call it a true winter planting. While pulling weeds, tilling and planting seeds for beans, carrots, beets, peppers, broccoli rabe and several forms of lettuce, I started thinking about soil, how it affects the vegetables I grow, what they taste like and how all of it relates to wine.

The great thing about gardening is it gives you lots of time to think. This project made me start thinking about grape growing and how vines grow in the dirt, produce leaves, then flowers and finally fruit. So for this year, I think it will be interesting to follow this cycle and see how it relates to the wines we drink. My selections for one month each quarter will reflect what is happening in the vineyard at the time of release. It helps that all three wines are made by family wineries who practice organic viticulture, so there is little intervention of man obvious in the finished products. I also chose wines from three different soil types to help you understand the role this plays in the wines. Of course this is just one of the hundreds of variables that change each wine, but I hope you come away with the understanding that great wines can only come from places with appropriate soils.

My first selection is the **2014 Powers Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon “Champoux Vineyard” (\$40)**. Over many different selections from the Columbia River Valley, I have discussed the effect of the Missoula floods, but rarely have I addressed the source of the bedrock of the area, which was formed by volcanic activity. The origin of this bedrock began 17 million years ago during the Miocene period when the area covering Montana, Wyoming, Idaho, Washington and eastern Oregon was dotted with active volcanos. Over millions of years, these volcanos spewed lava and volcanic ash, blanketing the region several hundred feet deep. In the period following this time, the land was relatively flat, and rain, creeks and rivers slowly eroded the hard rock, creating what is commonly called *loam*. This is a blend of sand, silt and organic material that is quite fertile and perfect for growing almost any crop.

When discussing great Washington state wines, it is almost impossible not to mention the legendary Champoux vineyard, which is pronounced like *shampoo*. This site is, in part, the origin of the great wines from Quilceda Creek, Andrew Will, Woodward Canyon and our friends from Powers Vineyards. This site, in what is now the Horse Heaven Hills AVA, was originally planted in 1972 by Don Mercer. The initial seven acres were part of his sprawling 6,600 acres of field crops, planted in the areas with deep loam soils. Coincidentally, the determining factor for the location of the original vines was that they were out of range of an overhead sprinkler system. Mercer's original vision was to produce a wine similar to Chateau Lafite-Rothschild, although the soil makeup and climate share little in common. Nonetheless, the quality of the grapes inspired him to continue planting vines, growing to more than 130 acres by the time he established Mercer Vineyards in the early 1980s. At that time, he hired Paul Champoux to manage the vineyard.

Originally a hop farmer, Champoux switched to grape vines and managed the first 2,300 acres of vines for Columbia Crest. In 1989, Mercer closed his winery, so Paul and his wife, Judy, began leasing the vineyard and selling the fruit to many of the elite names previously mentioned. By 1992, they formed a partnership with these wineries and purchased the vineyard outright. In 2014, Paul retired, suffering from West Nile Virus, and now the vineyard is managed by Dan Nickolaus.

Champoux quickly recognized the potential for this site and instituted the radical idea to farm the vineyard organically. To this day, there has never been a man-made herbicide, fungicide or fertilizer used on the vines. One of the great advantages of this particular site is that the proximity to the Columbia River means there is a constant breeze blowing across the vines. This lowers the humidity and temperature of this site, meaning the grapes ripen slower with less impact from pests or disease.

For the Powers Reserve bottling, they use exclusively Cabernet Sauvignon, which is hand-harvested and destemmed before going into the fermentor. They employ a pump-over technique to gently extract color and tannins. Once dry, the wine is raked to small, French oak barrels, where it undergoes malolactic fermentation. Once that is complete the wine is then moved to a combination of 65% new French barrels, the balance being second and third pass. The wine is then aged for 30 months before bottling. There were 998 cases made.

When you open this wine, allow it to breathe in a decanter for up to an hour before serving. Once you do, it delivers a rich nose of ripe red and black plums, caramel, cedar, blackberry jam, Maduro cigar wrapper and milk chocolate. On the palate it is very muscular and powerful, with firm wood tannins and surprising high acidity. Drink from 2020 to 2029.

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

The second selection, the **2014 Kathryn Kennedy Lateral (\$55)**, comes from an area we have discussed frequently as well, Napa Valley. Unlike eastern Washington, which has relatively homogenous soils of similar origin, the Napa Valley geological history is considerably more complex. Over 150 million years ago, a line of volcanos formed on the eastern border of what is today Napa Valley, eventually creating the Vaca Mountains. Then 15 million years ago, plate tectonics slowly formed the low mountains that are the Mayacamus, forming the western border of the valley. This also created the Napa River, which flows south through the valley to San Pablo Bay. It is worth mentioning that San Pablo Bay was much bigger at one time, reaching to present day Yountville. The result of this geological activity and erosion is that Napa Valley contains more than 100 different soil types, almost half of all identified series in the world. Growers take advantage of this by planting specific grape types and rootstocks to the various soils that dominate each vineyard.

Unlike the Powers Champoux, which is sourced from a single vineyard, Lateral is made from three sites in Napa Valley, all in the cooler, lower parts of the valley, primarily Coombsville and Carnerlos. The soils in this part of the valley, which spent millions of years under the San Pablo Bay, are heavier in clay and gravel. It is the perfect medium for growing Merlot and Cabernet Franc, which both prefer a little more moisture in the soil than Cabernet Sauvignon.

For Lateral, winemakers Marty Mathias and Chris Condros seek to produce a right bank Bordeaux-inspired wine, with grapes sourced from Sinskey, Yount Mill and Pat Garvey vineyards. All three sites are cooler, allowing for a longer ripening season, while natural acidity is preserved. They use a blend of 66% Merlot and 34% Cabernet Franc, but don't think for a moment that this wine will be lighter. Merlot can develop just as much power, and sometimes even more, than Cabernet Sauvignon when grown in the right conditions. In Lateral, it adds great power and texture to the wine, but without the hard tannins common in Cabernet Sauvignon.

When you open this wine, decant it for up to an hour before serving. I like this wine as a contrast to the fairly dense Champoux bottling as it is more high-toned, with dominant notes of fresh black cherry and blackberry, dried sage, pipe tobacco, caramel and soy sauce. On the palate, it has good texture, showing broad fruit, smooth tannins and moderate acidity. You can drink this from 2019 until 2028.

Finally, we have **2016 Talley Vineyards Pinot Noir "Rincon Vineyard" (\$65)**. The Talley family has been farming in San Luis Obispo, California since 1948. At that time, Oliver Talley started growing specialty vegetables in Arroyo Grande valley. Over time, they have become one of the largest producers of cilantro, bell peppers, Napa cabbage and Brussel sprouts in the country. They are so well known for the high quality of their produce that they published a cookbook, *Our California Table, Celebrating the Seasons with the Talley Family*, published by Winter Park's own Story Farm.

In the 1970s, Oliver's son, Don, watched with great interest as several vineyards began to develop around them, specifically in the nearby Edna Valley. Grape growers were attracted to the Santa Barbara region's sunny weather, low humidity and cool temperatures. He planted a small test plot in 1982 on the west hillside, which today is called Rincon Vineyard. He included Chardonnay, Pinot Noir, Riesling, Sauvignon Blanc and Cabernet Sauvignon. When they produced their first 450 cases of wine in 1986, Don was encouraged enough to continue expanding their vineyard holdings. With completion of the new winery in 1991, they expanded their estate vineyards to current day 190 acres, focusing almost exclusively on Chardonnay and Pinot Noir. At that time, the winery was handed over to Don's son, Brian, who along with his wife Johnine, run it today.

Located seven miles northeast of the Pacific Ocean, the Rincon Vineyard is planted on two southerly facing hillsides rising from the floor of the Arroyo Grande Valley. The soils are shallow and composed primarily of Diablo Clay, a dark calcareous soil that limits vine vigor. Clay is a sedimentary soil that in this case is derived by the weathering of the shale bedrock. This soil type, coupled with the steepness of the hills, results in Chardonnay and Pinot Noir yields averaging less than three tons per acre and produces wines with distinct mineral aromas and flavors. The benefits of the low yields, with regards to Pinot Noir, are noticeable when you taste the concentration and texture of the finished wine.

All of the grapes for Rincon are hand-harvested, and 5% whole clusters were included in the fermentors. The wine was aged in a French oak barrels, with 20% being new, for 18 months. There were 528 cases produced. When serving, decant this wine for 15 to 20 minutes and it will reveal a dramatic nose of dried red cherries, fresh sliced red cabbage, fresh raspberries, dried red plum, caramel and cloves. On the palate this wine is surprisingly firm, with a slightly crunchy quality to the fruit, with low tannins but moderate plus acidity. Drink from 2019 to 2025.

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