



Tim's Wine Market

January, 2023
By Tim Varan

Although it was not my original theme, all three of the selections this quarter have unique names with interesting origins, which is the only unifying feature. My original plan was to highlight three examples of New World Syrah, but alas one of them did not ship in time. Ironically, the replacement wine is called Sabotage, which speaks to the way the distribution chain has disrupted all our lives in the past two years.

Naming wines is challenging, as the explosion of wineries, breweries and distilleries across the world leaves very few unique monikers. It is not unusual for a winery to launch a new brand or label, only to discontinue it after a year because they received a cease and desist letter for trademark infringement. Often, these producers need to use whimsical or non-sensical names in order to create a brand. Sometimes it helps if the owners have an unusual name, as you will see with one selection this quarter.

2019 Greenock Creek Shiraz Jaensch Block - \$69

It is a privilege to feature a wine from Greenock Creek as a Reserve Club feature. This highly acclaimed winery has been out of the US for several years, and thanks to our close relationship with their new importer, we were able to get a Florida exclusive and significant percentage of the allocation of this wine.

Greenock Creek opened their doors, in 1988, and owners Michael and Annabelle Waugh initially produced two wines, a Shiraz and a Chardonnay. Always more interested in the vineyards than the winemaking, they sought out sites with unique flavor attributes and character, growing their holdings for three decades. They were thrust into the spotlight in the early 2000s when they received 8 perfect 100 point scores for their wines from critic Robert Parker making them one of the most sought after wines from Australia. When the Shiraz bubble broke in the mid-2000's their importer imploded, and the wines were no longer shipped to the US in any significant quantity. While they lost their following in the US they remained one of the cult producers for Australian consumers. Then in 2018 the Waugh's retired and sold the vineyards and winery to Jimmy Chen, a Sydney investor and long time fan of the wines.

With Chen's purchase of the estate he is making a significant investment to modernizing the cellar, sourcing new vineyards and replanting unproductive areas of their existing holdings. He has retained Peter Atyeo, who was Michael Waugh's right-hand-man since 2007, and is the appointed keeper of the Greenock flame. The winemaking is now guided by Alex Peel, who formally made wine at Yaldara. We featured one of Alex's Yaldara wines in the Explorer Club a couple of years ago. While many things are changing for the better, they continue the tradition of open top fermentations, and all of the red wines go through an old basket press before being racked to barrel.

The grapes for this single vineyard Shiraz come from the Barossa sub-zone of Moppa. This is the first bottling from Greenock of this vineyard, which is owned by the Westlake family. The site has been farmed since the 1830s by successive generations of Kalleske's, Materne's, Severin's and Jaensch's. Inherited by Suz Westlake, the vineyard is located at the western edge of the region where the climate is hot and very dry, and there is little top soil. As a result the vines produce tiny quantities of intensely flavored grapes. As is the Greenock style, Peel picks on flavor, not analytics so these are unabashedly powerful wines but thanks to the unique soil of the area it also displays great complexity.

When you are ready to serve this wine you will want to decant it for an hour and serve at cellar temperature. The nose is a heady combination of cherry preserves, cooked raspberries, fennel seed, caramel, milk chocolate and cured meat. On the palate this wine is powerful, with deep fruit framed by moderate tannins and acidity. Drink 2023-2033.

2019 K Vintners Syrah "Motor City Kitty" - \$49

When I started my search for a Washington State Syrah for this feature I never would have guessed that a Charles Smith wine, the owner/winemaker of K Vintners, would be my selection. A former rock band manager, Smith is known for brash,

over-the-top wines. I often find his style too much for my old world sensibility, but to my surprise this wine was a standout in my tastings. Then, as I started my research the piece fell into place as to why this wine is more to my taste, while still distinctly a new world style.

The unusual name for this wine comes from an event during the early days of Charles Smith's winemaking career. In 2000 he was in the process of racking barrels and realized that a good bit of wine was left in each one because of the amount of sediment since he does not filter. At the time he only made three wines, all Syrahs, and was concerned that he was losing too much in the process. He decided to rack all of the remaining wine and sediment to a single barrel, let it settle again, then bottle that wine as special release. In order to tell that barrel apart from the others he marked it with the name of his cat, Motor City Kitty, who was sleeping on top of it at the time. The name stuck but today MCK is attached to another single vineyard Syrah, from one of the elite sites in Washington State.

The grapes for this wine come from the Boushey vineyard in the Yakima Valley of Washington State. We featured a wine with a component from this site a few years ago, the Long Shadows Saggi, a Sangiovese. This vineyard is famous in Washington State because it is located at high elevation, with extreme diurnal temperature swings each day during the growing season. It is perfect for late ripening varieties like the Sangiovese above, but also for the adaptable Syrah variety. For his version owner Dick Boushey, enlisted the help of Smith's full time winemaker, Brennon Leighton, who suggested he plant three different clones of Syrah. Like Pinot Noir, there is great diversity in the character of different clones of Syrah, which Smith uses to build complexity in this wine.

One reason I think this wine struck my fancy is that 2019 was a cool, long vintage that allowed for slow ripening of the grapes in the Boushey vineyard. Like the Greenock Creek example, this one is planted in very shallow, sandy soils that lie upon the volcanic bedrock of the region. Yields are low which creates great intensity, but in 2019 the alcohol is in cheque.

Make sure to decant this wine for up to an hour before serving, but only for aroma, the tannins are obvious but not jarring. There is no doubt it is Syrah with a nose of oil cured black olives, cherry preserves, dried sage, Thai basil and white pepper. On the palate it shows good concentration, with firm tannins and some nice tension thanks to moderate acidity which gives nice length. Drink 2022-2032.

2016 Sabotage Cabernet Sauvignon - \$49

This Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon is a fantastic wine, but I have to admit that the story about the name sold me on making it a club selection. This wine is made by Vintage Wine Estates (VWE), one of the most important of the large wine groups, and a publicly traded company. The president and genius behind VWE is Pat Rooney, who was also the head of Dean & DeLuca during their heyday. At that time the company was owned by Leslie Rudd, the late owner of Rudd Vineyards, and together they began purchasing wineries, mostly in distress situations. One of their earliest acquisitions was Windsor Vineyards, which primarily makes private label wines, but they also own BR Cohn, Cosentino, Clos Pegase, Swanson, Laetitia and Girard wineries, just to name a few.

The story of Sabotage begins with Pat's son, Sean, who despite being raised in a wine producing family, chose to attend law school. Eventually, the draw of the wine business pulled him back to the family, where he feels more at home. In honor of the way the wine business sabotaged his law career he decided to craft his own wine, from any of the various lots in the Girard aging cellar. With the help of their head winemaker, Marco DiGiulio, he assembled this blend from the best barrels of their holdings across Napa Valley. As Pat Rooney tells the story, he sabotaged the legal career of Sean, so he went in and sabotaged the best wines of Girard. You can decide if the image of lady justice on the label is ironic, or coincidental.

To assemble this wine Sean uses a lawyer's sense of detail to craft the perfect blend. A mix of all five Bordeaux varieties and multiple appellations within Napa Valley, this wine has the texture of grapes grown on the valley floor and the power of those from the mountains. Decant this wine for an hour and the nose offers a brooding combination of black currants preserves, fresh blackberries, dark chocolate, cedar, Maduro cigar wrappers and caramel. On the palate it shows more of the mountain fruit character, with obvious minerality and tannins that compact the fruit. After it has opened for a while the fruit begins to push through, offering good length. Drink 2023-2035.