



Tim's Wine Market

May 2023

By Tim Varan

This month we move south of our features from April and cross the Columbia River into Oregon. Of course we have to present a Willamette Pinot Noir, and we found a great one. We pair it with a Cabernet Sauvignon, that's right, Cabernet Sauvignon from Oregon as well. It is a cool wine with a great story, so read on...

2021 EZY TGR Red Table Wine - \$25

To fully appreciate this wine, the style and quirky label, it helps to know our relationship with owner/winemaker John House. We have known him his entire wine career because he grew up in Winter Park and attended our education classes in the Orlando store before he was even legal drinking age, which of course we did not know. Once of age he landed a job as the buyer for the local WholeFoods, then moved into distribution with one of the premier, fine wine distributors. Within a couple of years he made the jump, with new wife Ksenija, to Oregon to be the national sales manager for a Willamette Valley winery. It is worth noting that Ksenija was a new UCF grad with a degree in food science so she also got a position in their lab doing quality control and analysis.

Within a couple of years of being in Oregon John went to work for a Spanish importer, with whom we both had traveled to Spain with in 2007. This importer was doing a lot of creative things in the cellars for their private labels, which stoked John's passion for out-of-the-box thinking. While he was selling Spanish wines Ksenija had graduated to an assistant winemaker at another Willamette property. Then in 2011 they launched OVUM, a wine label dedicated to producing white wines, mostly Riesling, from incredibly distinctive, old vine sites across Oregon. True to form they experimented with different fermentation and aging techniques, crafting what quickly have become benchmark examples of dry Riesling made in the US. Sadly, the wines are made in very tiny quantities so demand far exceeds supply.

To answer this problem they created Big Salt, a dry Riesling/white wine blend that delivers incredible aromatics and texture with a persistent saline quality on the palate. That line has expanded to now include a Rosé and an orange wine as well. Along the way they also bottled a couple of Pinot Noirs, Take Me Home, which was a NWR selection in January 2017 and EZY TGR Pinot Noir, an Explorer Club pick in June 2018. Last year they added this wine, and of course there is a story about the out-of-the-way source for the grapes.

In their quest to find old vines of Riesling, John stumbled across this vineyard, which sits in the hills above the Columbia River Valley, on the border with Washington State. This area shares a very similar climate to that of Rioja, which is ideal for producing red wines with abundant ripeness but not excessive alcohol. Vines grow in a thin layer of loess atop several feet of Pliocene ash, dumped on the site 7700 years ago when Mount Mazama collapsed creating Crater Lake. The vineyard was planted in 1983, is farmed using certified organic practices and all the vines are self-rooted, meaning no rootstock.

To make this wine all of the Cabernet Sauvignon grapes are destemmed, then fermented in stainless steel tanks, of course using wild yeast. Once the fermentation was 60% complete they racked the still fermenting juice off the skins to minimize tannin extraction. The reason this is labeled Red Wine is that they needed to blend in a little Big Salt to help the native yeast finish fermentation. When you open this wine, give it a splash in the decanter for a few minutes to open up, and a slight chill is nice as well. Then you are rewarded with a big nose of black currants, pomegranate molasses, menthol, dried oak leaves and roasted beets. On the palate it is very punchy, with forward fruit and juicy, integrated tannins that frame a moderate finish. Drink 2023-2026 with hamburgers, fajitas or grilled sausages.

2020 Alexana Pinot Noir "Terroir Series"- \$35

Alexana Pinot Noir is owned by Dr. Madaiah Revana, an Indian immigrant who came to the US in the 1970s and established a successful cardiology practice in Houston, TX. A fan of wine, Revana purchased 10 acres of land in Napa Valley in 1997 and established Revana Vineyards, focusing on Cabernet Sauvignon. In 2005 he added to his portfolio by

purchasing an 80 acre estate in the Dundee Hills AVA of the Willamette Valley of Oregon. Since then he has expanded both properties with additional land acquisitions, and even added a third winery in the Uco Valley of Argentina, named Corazon de Sol. With each winery he has attracted top talent to oversee winemaking, with none other than Lynn Penner Ash guiding Alexana with Bryan Weil handling day-to-day decisions.

Like the Revana wines in Napa, his Oregon project is a collection of single vineyard wines defined by grape variety, appellation and soil type. While great for mailing list customers and tasting room visitors, the wine that defines the market for Alexana in restaurants is their Terroir Series, with the Pinot Noir leading the way. This wine is made as a barrel selection by winemaker Brian Weil, of wines aging for the single vineyard projects. It is interesting to consider that all of the pieces that go into this wine sell for \$60-85 a bottle as single vineyards, making this a tremendous value.

The core of this property is the original plantings in the Dundee Hills, where the vines grow in a mix of marine and volcanic soils between 360-640 feet above sea level. Then parts of three other sites are added to the blend; Fennwood Vineyard in the Yamhill Carlton AVA, Crawford Beck Vineyard in the Eola Amity AVA and the famed Zena Crown Vineyard also in the Eola Amity AVA. All three of these sites are dry farmed (no irrigation), the grapes are hand harvested and sorted, then fermented using native yeasts. Once dry the wine is moved to 25% new French oak barrels where it is aged for 10 months. Bryan makes the blend for the Terroir Series in the spring following harvest, looking to craft a balanced and harmonious wine for near term consumption.

When you are ready to serve this wine you will want to decant it for a half hour before serving and chill to cellar temperature, 55 degrees. The nose leans into the red spectrum with notes of hibiscus syrup, rooibos, creme de framboise, juniper berries, Luxardo cherries and sassafras. On the palate this wine shows moderate concentration and good fruit intensity, with the oak providing a dry-ish frame into the finish. Drink 2023-2026 with grilled salmon, tuna poke bowls or this herb crusted pork tenderloin.

Pork Tenderloin with Fennel/Rosemary Crust

Both of our feature selections this month show subtle verdant notes in the bouquet, which works really well with dishes involving herbs. This is an easy recipe that is perfect to serve with mashed or roasted potatoes thanks to the flavorful pan sauce.

4 tsp fresh rosemary, minced, divided
4 tsp fennel seeds, toasted, ground
2 tsp dried oregano
2 tsp garlic powder
¾ tsp red pepper flakes
Kosher salt and ground pepper
2 - 1¼-pound pork tenderloins, silver skin trimmed and halved
2 tbsp neutral cooking oil
2 tsp packed light brown sugar
¾ c low sodium chicken broth
4 tbsp salted butter, cubed into 8 pieces and frozen
2 tbsp lemon juice

Heat the oven to 450°F with a rack in the middle position. In a large bowl, stir together 3 teaspoons of rosemary, the fennel seed, oregano, garlic powder, pepper flakes and 1 teaspoon each salt and black pepper. Add the pork, turn to coat and massage the seasonings into the meat. Let stand at room temperature for 15 minutes.

In an oven-safe 12-inch skillet over medium-high, heat the oil until shimmering. Add the pork and cook, turning occasionally with tongs, until browned on all sides, about 4 minutes total. Transfer the skillet to the oven and roast until the center of the thickest tenderloin reaches 140°F, 10 to 15 minutes.

Transfer the skillet to the stovetop (the handle will be hot). Using tongs, transfer the pork to a large plate and let rest for 10 minutes. Meanwhile, add the sugar and broth to the skillet. Bring to a simmer over medium-high, scraping up any browned bits, and cook until reduced to ½ cup and slightly thickened, about 2 minutes. While whisking constantly, add the butter 1

piece at a time; add the next piece only after the previous one is almost fully incorporated. After all the butter is incorporated, stir in the lemon juice and cook until a spatula drawn through the sauce leaves a trail, about 20 seconds.

Off heat, stir in the remaining 1 teaspoon rosemary, then taste the sauce and season with salt and black pepper. Thinly slice the tenderloins and arrange on a platter. Stir any accumulated pork juices into the sauce, then spoon the sauce over the pork.