



Tim's Wine Market

September 2023

By Tim Varan

There is really no theme to the selections this month except that earlier this year I had two great tastings with wineries whose wines we have sold for years and it made sense to put them together. So this month the “theme” is checking in on old friends.

2020 Vinum Cabernet Sauvignon “The Insider” (\$25)

Vinum Cellars is one of my favorite wineries in California because of their passion for out-of-fashion varieties and dedication to producing wines of great value. Their story begins at UC Davis when Chris Condros and Richard Bruno met while were earning their degrees in oenology. They became good friends who share, among other things, a dedication to the Chenin Blanc variety. After graduation they each entered the wine business, Chris working at Pine Ridge and Richard at Bonny Doon. Shortly after they made their first wine together, a Chenin Blanc called Pointe Blanc, which was the genesis of Vinum Cellars. Since that time they both have become big time consultants who are well known in California. Chris now oversees production at Kathryn Kennedy Winery in the Santa Cruz Mountains as well as the one he shares with his wife Suzanne called Horse and Plow. Richard spent a couple of years at Opus One, then started consulting for clients such as Michael Pozzan and Niebaum-Coppola.

Although Vinum started as a “moonlighting” job for both, today they produce nearly 100,000 cases, although most is for private label clients. These are wines they make but are labeled for other wineries. This business is a big part of why the wines of Vinum Cellars are so stunning because they have a great network of growers, from Napa to Paso Robles, and as far east as El Dorado County in the Sierra Nevada Mountains. They use these vineyards like a painters palette, with each location adding subtle nuance to a wine. The Insider is the perfect example of their knowledge of an area, where they utilize four different vineyards each from a unique sub-AVA of Paso Robles. This combination of warm climate and cooler climate sites allows them to craft a Paso Robles Cabernet that is not excessively alcoholic or overripe.

When you open this wine you will want to decant it for a half hour to further soften the tannins. When ready this wine reveals an inviting nose of red currant jam, milk chocolate, dried orange peel and fresh black cherries. On the palate it has a deep sense of mass, with tannins that are obvious but not hard and a very long finish. Drink this wine over the next five years with pot roast or these amazing beef ribs.

2021 Dancing Crow Corbeau Ruse (\$35)

I have an emotional attachment to this wine as Dancing Crow is a winery owned by Tony Cartlidge and his family. When we first opened in Orlando in 1995, Cartlidge & Browne was one of our first top selling brands. Tony and his partner Glen Browne, operated a no-frills winery in the American Canyon of Napa Valley, churning out incredible quantities of high quality, varietal wines that were top sellers for many years. In the mid-2000s they sold the brand to Vintage Wine Estates but Tony was not ready to retire. In 2013 he purchased land in Lake County, California, and along with his family launched Dancing Crow Vineyards. Today they farm 50 acres with a dedication to sustainable practices, recognizing the unique and fragile ecosystem of Lake County.

Tony's first wine under Dancing Crow was Sauvignon Blanc, which is a holdover from his days at Cartlidge & Browne where they produced the same wine. Lake County is a very unique growing environment, benefiting from high elevations, volcanic soils and the cooling effects of Clear Lake. Located north and east of Napa, the temperatures each day start cool, thanks to the mountains, but heat up quickly after lunch allowing for plenty of ripeness of white and red grape varieties. Then, in the early evening the cool breezes start to blow off Clear Lake and bring the temperatures down, preserving ripeness and freshness. This very unique quality is accentuated by the iron rich volcanic soils which also imbue the wine with intense minerality. For our feature, the grape vines used to make Corbeau Ruse benefit from all of these growing conditions.

The inspiration for this wine is the Southern Rhône Valley of France, where wines are crafted from Grenache and have the perfect balance between power and elegance. The growing conditions in Lake County are perfect for Rhône grape varieties, so this wine is a blend of 60% Grenache, 30% Syrah, 7% Viognier, and 3% Zinfandel. For this wine all of the grapes are hand harvested and destemmed. The Syrah and Viognier are co-fermented, a classic Northern Rhône technique, and then blended with the Grenache. This being their inaugural bottling of Corbeau Ruse they added 3% Mendocino County Zinfandel to punch up the fruit and add a little spiciness to the nose. The final blend was then aged in stainless steel tanks to preserve fruit. For their first effort they produced 900 cases.

During my tasting with Stephan Cartlidge, Tony's son, we talked a lot about the direction of the winery. Stefan told me their new winemaker, Scott Fitzpatrick, has a history of producing lower extraction wines, working a lot with Grenache, and they like the direction he is taking the wines. We did not taste Corbeau Ruse that day, as they do not distribute it outside of California, but after our conversation he sent a bottle for us to try. After tasting it he agreed to sell it to us for our club, making Florida the only place in the country to buy it beyond California. Decant this wine for a half hour and give it a slight chill too, cellar temperature is fine. The nose shows classic Rhône notes of hickory smoke, raspberry puree, red licorice, orange peel and crushed basil. On the nose this wine shows moderate concentration, with obvious, forward facing tannins that frame the punchy fruits and clip the finish. While good now I think this wine will show more length in a year but it is still very compelling. Drink with this mushroom galette, carnitas or smoked salmon croquettes.

Wild Mushroom Galette

The shadows in my yard are pretty long, but it still does not feel like fall! Regardless, this time of year I start to shift my cooking to dishes that feel appropriate for cooler weather. I stumbled on this recipe for an easy mushroom galette (think a lazy cook's pie) that also works with both wines this month. In my test I mixed cremini mushrooms with shiitake and it worked great.

Crust

2½ cup flour, plus more for rolling

1 tablespoon sugar

1 teaspoon sea salt

2 teaspoons minced chives

**1 tablespoon minced fresh thyme,
leaves**

1 tablespoon minced flat leaf parsley

**12 tablespoons unsalted butter, diced,
chilled**

6 tablespoons ice water

Filling

3 tablespoons salted butter

1 small yellow onion, diced

**3 cups wild mushrooms, cleaned and
trimmed (we used chanterelles)**

½ teaspoon sea salt

**½ teaspoon freshly cracked black
pepper**

⅓ cup crème fraîche

¾ cup shredded gruyere cheese

¼ teaspoon fresh thyme leaves

1 egg

Make the crust. In a large mixing bowl, whisk together the flour, sugar, salt, chives, thyme and parsley. Using a pastry cutter, or a fork, cut the butter into the flour mixture, until it resembles pea-size crumbles. Slowly add the water, working the dough until the flour and butter are incorporated. Do not over mix. Form the dough into a flat disk shape, wrap in plastic wrap and transfer to the refrigerator for at least 20 minutes before using.

Make the filling. Slice the mushrooms ¼ inch thick. Add the butter to a large skillet set over medium heat. When the butter has melted, add the onions and cook, stirring until beginning to soften, about 3 minutes. Stir in the mushrooms, salt, and pepper, increase heat to medium-high. Cook until the mushrooms are tender and most of the liquid has evaporated, about 5-7 minutes longer. Turn heat off. Preheat the oven to 400°F with a rack in the center position. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper.

On a lightly floured surface, roll the dough into a 15-inch circle about ¼-inch thick. Carefully transfer to the prepared baking sheet. Spread the crème fraîche onto the rolled out crust, leaving a 2-inch border around the edge. Using a slotted spoon, scoop the mushroom mixture out of the pan and place on top of the crème fraîche. Sprinkle the mushrooms with Gruyère and thyme. Fold the crust over the filling, pleating as needed.

In a small bowl, whisk the egg with 2 tablespoons of water. Using a pastry brush, brush the egg wash over the folded dough. Bake in the oven until golden brown and flakey, about 45-50 minutes. If the crust is getting too brown, tent with foil. Let cool on a wire rack for 5 minutes before slicing and serving.