



Tim's Wine Market

March 2024

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This year we are embarking on an extra element of wine education with the selections each month. So far we have examined one topic in farming and winemaking, in March we tackle marketing. Right now the wine industry is slipping into uncharted territory with declining sales, and it is causing a lot of concern after two decades of constant growth. Our selections this month come from two wineries who reached out to us to consider their wines for a club selection. Kiona is a winery we have worked closely with for years but it has been a while since their last feature. The second came to us through a broker and while we knew them by reputation there is no personal connection. I think you will find their stories, and the quality of their wines to be exceptional.

2018 Kiona Cabernet Sauvignon “Red Mountain” - \$39

Although not as well known as other Columbia Valley wineries, Kiona is one of the OG's of the region and their story is an amazing testament to a vision against all adversity. The origin of this wine begins in 1972, with the dream of two General Electric engineers to grow wine grapes in Washington State. Being engineers, partners John Williams and Jim Holmes did their research, and discovered ideal conditions for grape growing on an undeveloped area in the Yakima Valley called Red Mountain. Although this area is high desert, they also knew that water could be found at roughly 550 feet below the surface. They enlisted a driller who thought they were crazy, and basically told them so 545 feet down when the well was still dry. He asked them how much farther they wanted to go, and John pulled \$100 out of his pocket and told him that far. Lucky for the partners, they hit water at exactly 550 feet. With a water source available they began planting vines, using their high school aged kids and their friends as labor. By 1977 they had a little more than fifteen acres planted, initially to Chardonnay, Cabernet Sauvignon, and Riesling.

Since the first plantings the Williams family have expanded considerably, always focusing on Red Mountain. In fact, John was one of the founding members of the board that pushed for a Yakima Valley AVA, then the Red Mountain AVA in 2001. The Red Mountain AVA is the smallest in Washington State, with only 4040 potential acres of vines. There are currently fifty-four wineries on the mountain, and 2300 acres planted. This also makes it the most densely planted AVA in Washington as well. In order to use the Red Mountain AVA on a label, the wine must be 100% fruit from the AVA, and must be produced and bottled within the border of the appellation. This guarantees that when you see the name on a label you are going to experience the true nature of this unique growing region.

The reason that this wine is included with our educational theme involves how wineries now have to engage their distribution network. Although it is growing, the direct-to-consumer market for Washington State wines is substantially smaller than California wineries and therefore they need distributors. In this case the local distributor already carries several Cabs from Kiona so this new addition to the lineup is more than they want to add for the local portfolio. JJ Williams, the third and current family member to run Kiona reached out to us directly to see if we would pick the wine up as a club feature. Naturally we love to be first to market for our club members and of course the wine is also dynamite.

I was surprised to learn this is not exclusively Kiona grapes, with them purchasing from their neighbors as well. The components for this wine were sourced as follows: 56% Kiona Estate, 38% Heart of the Hill (Kiona), 4% Sunset Bench, and 2% Ranch at the End of the Road. The grape make up is 99% Cabernet Sauvignon and 1% Petit Verdot. Make sure to decant for up to an hour and then the wine reveals a rich aroma of muddled blackberries and floral notes of alyssum and gardenia, which waft through deeper layers of black licorice, graphite, and espresso roast coffee beans. The feel on the palate is where this wine is unique, with a stunning combination of power and lift, as if the acidity picks this body up and elevates it into the finish. There are also sizable tannins in this wine, so do not rush to pull the cork as it will be best in 2025-2035.

2021 Truett-Hurst Zinfandel “Rockpile” - \$39

Truett-Hurst is on the short list of top Zinfandel producers in California, but as the saying goes, that and a nickel will buy you a cup of coffee. In this case the winery is victim to the unfortunately declining consumer interest in wines made from Zinfandel. As such they reached out to us through a broker with an almost “make us an offer” deal on one of their flagship Zins. For context, the winery price of this bottling is \$65.

When I started selling wine in the late 1980’s Cabernet Sauvignon was not yet the dominant variety it is today, with Zinfandel, Merlot and Pinot Noir all enjoying similar popularity with consumers. In fact, the release of the 1990 vintage Zinfandels created one of the biggest feeding frenzies I have experienced with many consumers chasing the highest rated wines. Unfortunately, this renewed popularity began to give way to Bordeaux-style blends, particularly centered around the late-ripening Cabernet Sauvignon. Critics lauded the Cabernet-based wines of the Napa Valley, and by the 1990s demand for Zinfandel shrank to a fraction of its former glory while Cabernet Sauvignon enjoys the spotlight. Today Zinfandel is in danger of being eradicated in many parts of California as Cabernet Sauvignon commands a much higher price point per ton. Sadly there is little incentive for growers to cultivate Zinfandel, and many winemakers have ripped out their old vines in order to plant Cabernet Sauvignon. However, many winemakers prefer Zinfandel for its varietal characteristics and historic importance, and make it their mission to create high-quality varietal bottlings of the grape.

One winery that works as traditionally as possible is Truett-Hurst, whose team have been producing wines in Sonoma County since 2007. This bottling is from the Rockpile AVA, located close to the border of Mendocino County, sitting on hillsides 800 feet above Lake Sonoma itself. Here the soils are predominantly pebbles and gravel, a result of erosion from the coastal winds. Stony soils lead to lower yields, which concentrates flavor and aromatics, while the cooler climate and coastal breezes prevent over-ripeness and preserve the grape’s natural acidity. The cool, dry climate and access to natural water sources makes the Rockpile AVA ideal for their biodynamic farming, which is often a challenge in some of California’s warmer growing regions.

All fruit used in this wine is harvested by hand, and comes from a single vineyard site in the Rockpile AVA. When you open this wine, you will want to decant for up to half an hour. Once this wine has some time to open up it delivers classic Zinfandel notes of fresh blackberry, red plum, strawberry preserve, rhubarb compote, and coffee grounds. Drink now through 2030 with dry rubbed baby back ribs, bacon cheeseburgers, or spinach ravioli.

Beef Tri-Tip

For the wines this month a rich cut of beef is perfect for either, and my go to of late is this incredible cut. With obvious marbling and rich flavor this is the perfect cut to work with any red wine. This recipe is for the oven but if you have a grill you can certainly adapt the cooking method.

2 tablespoons kosher salt
1 tablespoon freshly ground black pepper
1 tablespoon smoked paprika
1 teaspoon garlic powder
¼ teaspoon cayenne pepper
1 tablespoon chopped fresh rosemary leaves
1 (2 1/2 pound) beef tri-tip roast

Preheat the oven to 225 degrees F (110 degrees C).

Mix salt, pepper, paprika, garlic powder, cayenne and rosemary together in a small bowl. Place tri-tip in a baking pan. Season generously with the spice rub until both sides are completely covered.

Bake in the preheated oven, flipping after 45 minutes, until an instant-read thermometer inserted into the thickest part reads 130 degrees for medium-rare, or until desired doneness, 1 1/2 to 2 hours.

Cover pan with aluminum foil and let meat rest for 20 minutes. Remove tri-tip to a cutting board and cut into 2 pieces along where the grain changes direction. Slice meat across the grain and transfer to serving plates.