



# Tim's Wine Market

*April 2024*

*By Tim Varan*

As we continue our commitment to education this year the April selections are the opposite of our March selections, which you may remember were from wineries who reached out to us in response to falling sales. In April, both selections come from two very popular wineries who sell out their entire production each year. The wines in our features are two side projects they both use to promote their brand. As you will read they have different reasons for creating these wines but their goals are the same, showcasing their amazing house style.

## **Andrew Will Involuntary Commitment 2021 (\$28)**

For those who are also Reserve Club members you will recognize that we are also featuring the Andrew Will Cabernet Sauvignon Champoux Vineyard this quarter. I picked this wine for the April New World Red feature a few weeks ago, but then I noticed that his Champoux Vineyard fit my theme for the Reserve Club so I requested a sample, and the rest is history. Coincidentally, the origin of Involuntary Commitment is linked to the owner of Andrew Will, Chris Camarada, and his partial ownership of several vineyards in the Columbia Valley. In 2015 several of their holdings had grapes that were uncommitted at the time of harvest so Chris's son, Will, took them and made the first vintage of Involuntary Commitment. Although they have not produced this wine every year, when they do it receives great accolades because of the amazing fruit quality. I also believe that given the crisis for growers in Washington State, this and a lot of wines like it will be hitting the market soon.

Although it is not exactly mainstream media, a seismic shift in the Washington State wine industry happened on August 10th when Chateau St. Michelle announced they would not renew grape contracts for 40% of their production. To understand the impact this has on the state, 60% of the value of all Washington State wines is produced by Chateau St. Michelle and their associated brands. In a state where there is already sizable over-production, the impact is devastating. The good news for consumers is that prices for grapes have been dropping, providing opportunities for wineries to produce value-priced wines. Understandably, growers are less happy.

To produce this wine the blend is roughly half Cabernet Sauvignon, with healthy additions of Cabernet Franc and Merlot. Although they are coy about the sourcing it would appear that most of the grapes come from vineyards where Chris Camarada is a partner, including the prestigious Champoux and Two Blondes sites. Given the market for grapes in Washington it is also safe to assume they are augmenting with fruit from other sites. This wine was aged in neutral French oak barrels for 11 months then bottled.

The reason this wine stood out in my tastings is that it shows the Andrew Will style, which is a wine with great power but not over-extraction or excessive oak. Decant this wine for a half hour before serving and chill to cellar temperature, 55 degrees. Then this wine offers a beautiful aroma of cherry and blackberry preserves, milk chocolate, caramel, graphite, clove and allspice. On the palate it has medium weight and tannins that sit back and do not start to appear until near the finish. Drink this wine 2024-2032 with grilled tri-tip with peppers and onions, chicken mole enchiladas or the recipe of the month.

## **2020 Villa Creek Cherry House Red Wine (\$29)**

Ok, ok, I know we are not supposed to judge a book by its cover, or in this case a wine by the label, but my first impression of this one was not good. The label is pretty rudimentary and I am usually against any wine that carries the generic "red wine" name instead of something proprietary. Then, during the tasting, the wine blew me away, so I dug a little deeper and discovered that the wine is made by Cris Cherry of Villa Creek. This connected the dots of the name and quality since Villa Creek is one of the elite properties in Paso Robles. Fitting to our theme the wines of Villa Creek are made from estate grown grapes and are very small production. Cherry wanted to make a wine in larger quantity to introduce consumers to the Villa Creek house style, and ended up purchasing fruit from a couple neighbors in order to make his "House Red." Always a stickler for details, these grapes are grown following certified organic practices, which is also the way the Villa Creek wines are farmed.

The Villa Creek winery was founded by Cris and JoAnne Cherry, who in 1996 opened a restaurant in downtown Paso Robles by the same name. After a few years of getting to know the local vintners they decided to make their own wine and began looking for land. What they found was a parcel on the border between the Willow Creek and Adelaida Districts of western Paso Robles. They recognized that this site has three amazing attributes: high elevation, proximity to the Pacific Ocean and limestone soils. This combination means that the grapes ripen very slowly and the wines retain freshness thanks to the ancient sea bottom. They made their first vintage in 2001 and ever since have been putting out some of the most sought after examples of Rhone varieties in California.

When it comes to their House Red I have found conflicting details about the components of the wine. The winery tech sheet lists Grenache, Carignan, Syrah and Graciano without specifics to quantities. My distributor gave me Mourvèdre, Carignan and Syrah, again without percentages. Another source I trust lists 50% Grenache, 40% Carignan and 10% Mourvèdre. The only consistency I found in all the sources is that the wine is aged in mostly older French oak barrels, with 15% new. Regardless of the blend, it is cool to be able to bring this one to you.

Decant this wine for a half hour and again, serve at cellar temperature. When I tasted this wine I was immediately impressed with the notes of ripe, fresh red cherries, cooked raspberries and cranberries, milk chocolate, black olives and dried thyme and sage. Where this wine really shines is on the palate, where the ripe but not overripe fruit stretches across the palate with great finesse and plenty of tension. You will want to drink this wine from 2024-2029 with seared pork tenderloin with dried cherries or this delicious Coddle.

## **Irish Coddle**

This month I wanted a recipe to work with the robust flavors of both wines, but not one centered on beef. I try to mix it up with my recipe selections after the disastrous 4 consecutive month run of salmon dishes in 2014. Then I found this dish which has three of my favorite foods in one casserole dish: potatoes, bacon and sausage. So take your statin pills and give this one a try, it is killer with both wines and easy to make. Also, the recipe calls for bratwurst because they are easy to find but if you have access to bangers it is more authentic.

**1 ¾ pounds Yukon Gold potatoes, peeled and sliced 1/4 inch thick**

**Salt and pepper**

**4 slices thick-cut bacon, cut into 1-inch pieces**

**1 ¼ pounds bratwurst**

**2 onions, sliced into 1/2-inch-thick rings**

**1 tablespoon minced fresh thyme**

**1 ¾ cups chicken broth**

**2 tablespoons cider vinegar**

**2 tablespoons minced fresh parsley**

Adjust oven rack to lower-middle position and heat oven to 325 degrees. Shingle potato slices in bottom of 13 by 9-inch baking dish. Sprinkle with ½ teaspoon salt and ¼ teaspoon pepper; set aside.

Cook bacon in 12-inch skillet over medium heat until crispy, 12 to 14 minutes. Using slotted spoon, transfer bacon to paper towel-lined plate. When cool crumble the bacon or cut into small pieces.

Carefully add sausages to now-empty skillet and cook until lightly browned on tops and bottoms, about 5 minutes. Transfer to paper towel-lined plate.

Pour off all but 2 tablespoons fat from skillet and return to medium heat. Add onions, thyme, ½ teaspoon salt, and ½ teaspoon pepper. Cover and cook until onions are softened, 7 to 9 minutes, stirring occasionally and scraping up any browned bits.

Add broth and vinegar, scraping up any browned bits, and bring to simmer. Carefully pour onion mixture over potatoes, spreading onions into even layer.

Place sausages, browned side up, on top of onions. Transfer to oven and bake until paring knife inserted into potatoes meets little resistance, about 1 ¼ hours.

Remove from oven and let cool for 10 minutes. Sprinkle with parsley and reserved bacon. Serve.