



# Tim's Wine Market

May 2024

By Tim Varan

When I made the May selections in mid-February, my intended teaching point was going to be the effect of tariffs on wine. While it does not get a lot of attention in the US, in March 2021, the Chinese government imposed tariffs of up to 218% on wines from Australia in retaliation for subsidies and the dumping of steel in the country. The effects were catastrophic to the Australian wine industry, who shipped 1.1 billion dollars of wine to China in 2019. Things were so bad that Treasury Wine Estates, the multinational corporation which owns Penfolds (Australia) and Beringer (California) among many others, began labeling the wines from California as Penfolds. This is because Penfolds was the #1 brand sold in China before the tariffs. Thankfully, the two countries came to an agreement in March, 2024, so my theme was shot, but that is ok, research discovered some new angles.

As it turns out there are a couple of good teaching points about these wines but after two months of commerce driven themes this month we will return to the vineyards. In the case of both selections they come from relatively cool climates and they are the result of a lot of selection work in the vineyard and at the cellar door. Although I am not going to dive too deep into the topic, both wines are also made by female winemakers.

## **2018 Yalumba Cabernet Sauvignon "Sanctum" - \$26**

By now, you probably realize that I favor wines produced by small, family owned wineries. Yet, one of my favorite sources for Australian wines is the Yalumba winery, which is family owned but produces 750,000 cases per year. Like another favorite, the Zuccardi family in Argentina, the Smith family produce an extensive number of wines from many different sources across their vast holdings. Despite their size the overall quality is excellent. A good case in point is the Sanctum Cabernet Sauvignon, of which only 2000 cases are produced.

The Yalumba winery may be big but they are not the largest in Australia, that distinction belongs to the Casella family, makers of Yellow Tail, who last year produced 13.5 million cases of wine. However, Yalumba is the oldest family owned winery in Australia, established in 1849. The current owner, and the great, great grandson of the founder, is Robert Hill-Smith, who took the helm in 1985. He pointed Yalumba in a new direction that focused solely on matching the right varietals to the correct terroir and farming using organic practices. Initially his focus was on the Barossa Valley, where the majority of the family holdings are. Eventually he began expanding their holdings including the purchase of the famed Menzies Vineyard in Coonawarra. It is from this spectacular vineyard that our feature wine is produced.

When the Menzies Vineyard came up for sale in 1987, Robert Hill-Smith jumped at the chance to purchase the site. Located 4 hours southwest of the home winery in Barossa, the Coonawarra region is one of the coolest areas in Australia that is capable of ripening Cabernet Sauvignon. What makes this Coonawarra incredibly unique is the soil, a layer of red clay that lies over a bed of limestone. Coupled with the cool temperatures and very long growing season of the area the Cabernets show great power and tension.

For our theme, it is important to understand how the grapes for this wine are selected. The estate's top Cabernet Sauvignon is The Menzies, from which the grapes from the oldest vines and best blocks are chosen. Once the wine is barreled down another selection is made and only the top barrels will be blended and bottled as The Menzies, the remaining wine sold under the Cigar Cabernet Sauvignon. This leaves several other blocks within the vineyard, either younger vines or sites that are not considered ultra-premium, and those grapes are used to produce Sanctum. Winemaker Natalie Cleghorn then aged the wine in 6% new French oak barrels for 15 months.

Make sure to decant this wine for a half hour before serving and try to chill to cellar temperature. Once you do, this wine displays a complex nose of cooked blackberries and blueberries, eucalyptus, bay leaf and milk chocolate. On the palate it has a deep core of fruit but a surprisingly savory finish. Drink 2024-2027 with slow braised pot roast or leg of lamb.

## **2021 Paxton SGM AAA - \$30**

In the early 1990's the wines of Australia were pretty new to the US and one of the most popular categories were the G-S-M's, an abbreviation for Grenache, Shiraz and Mourvedre blends. When I saw this wine it harkened me back to those days, even if the letters are skewed. It comes from the Paxton winery, which has been producing wine since 1979 in the McLaren Vale region, south of the city of Adelaide. Founder David Paxton championed organic, and later biodynamic farming practices, in the region from their inception.

Looking back over the NWR features through the years, I made a lot of selections from the McLaren Vale. It is a cool climate dominated by the breezes that come in from the nearby Gulf of St. Vincent. In fact, the vineyard where most of the grapes for this wine are grown is called Seaview Ridge. The cool climate is ideal for slow ripening and this means the wines have fantastic intensity but also great tension. This is particularly important for Shiraz, which can get very jammy and alcoholic if it ripens too quickly.

Before entering the wine business, David Paxton was in the wool trade, so he gave this wine the AAA moniker, which is the highest quality designation for wool. He did this because this wine is the assemblage of their best blocks of Shiraz and Grenache, with a small amount of Mourvedre for aromatics and color. Winemaker Ashleigh Seymour ferments each variety individually then make the blend and ages the wine for 9 months in small, used French oak barrels.

What caught my attention about this wine is the nature of the fruit. Where many GSMs are soft and rich, this one has beautiful focus. The nose is a melange of cooked boysenberries and cranberries, candied orange peel, fennel seed and cocoa powder. On the palate the fruit is plump and forward, with a kiss of earth and cold coffee into the finish. Drink 2024-2027 with grilled lamb chops or Salisbury steak.

### **Salisbury Steak**

Looking back at the archive I cannot believe I have never used this recipe for a NWR feature. It is one of my family's favorites and works with any powerful red wine. It is the ideal selection for both features this month and one I bet you return to again and again. Forget the old lunch cafeteria version, this one is so much more than a hamburger with gravy on it. I typically serve this with mashed potatoes but it also great on egg noodles. The recipe calls for 1/4 cup of ruby port but if you don't have it on hand then us the wine you are serving and a couple of teaspoons of sugar.

**1/2 cup milk**

**7 tablespoons instant potato flakes**

**1 pound 90-percent lean ground beef**

**Salt and pepper**

**4 tablespoons unsalted butter**

**1 onion, halved and sliced thin**

**8 oz white mushrooms, sliced thin**

**1 tablespoon tomato paste**

**2 tablespoons all-purpose flour**

**1 3/4 cups low-sodium beef broth**

**1/4 cup ruby port**

Whisk milk and potato flakes in large bowl. Add beef, 1/2 teaspoon salt, and 1/2 teaspoon pepper and knead until combined. Shape into four 1/2-inch-thick oval patties and transfer to parchment-lined plate. Refrigerate for 30 minutes or up to 4 hours.

Melt 1 tablespoon butter in large nonstick skillet over medium-high heat. Cook patties until well browned, about 5 minutes per side. Transfer to plate.

Add onion and remaining butter to empty skillet and cook until onion is softened, about 5 minutes. Add mushrooms and 1/2 teaspoon salt and cook until liquid has evaporated, 5 to 7 minutes. Stir in tomato paste and flour and cook until browned, about 2 minutes. Slowly stir in broth and port and bring to simmer. Return patties to skillet, cover, and simmer over medium-low heat until cooked through, 12 to 15 minutes. Season sauce with salt and pepper. Serve.