



Tim's Wine Market

June 2024

By Tim Varan

This is a new offering for the June New World Red club, replacing a wine in the previous offer. Our apologies but the product we tasted/selected and the one delivered were not the same quality so we have “recalled” the previous bottle. As this is an emergency substitution there is no theme for this offering, just two great wines.

2020 Halter Ranch Côtes de Paso - Winery Price \$55 | Club Member \$35

I have been a fan of Halter Ranch for many years. In 2013 I took a group of my franchisees to the area for a tour of several wineries and we stayed at the guest house at Halter Ranch. It is a lovely, turn of the 19th century farmhouse that has been completely remodeled and is available to rent, which I strongly recommend if in the area. While there we spent a lot of time with the winemaker and now general manager, Kevin Sass, and learned why this estate is so impressive. This wine, their example of a Châteauneuf-du-Pape, is a stunning testament to the quality this vineyard can produce. Longtime members may recall that the 2014 version of this wine was a selection back in October, 2016.

The estate that is now known as Halter Ranch is a very historic property in Paso Robles. It was originally established in 1880 by Edwin Smith, as part of a 3600 acre estate. Smith made his first fortune as a wholesale butcher, but later multiplied his money with investments in silver mines. During his ownership he built a grand Victorian farmhouse on the estate and used the property to raise livestock and thoroughbred horses. In 1885 the first mansion burned to the ground, but was quickly rebuilt. This is the house where we stayed. In 1943 the property was divided and 1200 acres were purchased by the MacGillivray family. They continued the agricultural tradition and planted the first grapes on the property in 1996.

After the tragic death of the last MacGillivray, the property was purchased by Hansjorg Wyss in 2000, who acquired 900 acres of the original parcel. Wyss, who was born in Switzerland, found the estate during his morning jog, while visiting a friend in the area. At the time Wyss was founder and chairman of Synthes, a pharmaceutical appliance company. In 2007 he sold Synthes to Johnson & Johnson, and has an estimated worth of \$6.1 billion. Now he is primarily involved in philanthropy, including being the single largest donor to his alma mater, Harvard University.

The vineyards of Halter Ranch that are neighboring those of Tablas Creek, lie on the west side of Paso Robles. Paso is a big appellation and those who know it well often divide it as “east side” and “west side” with the dividing line being Interstate 101. The east side, farthest from the ocean, is very warm and dry, because it receives little oceanic influence. This is the land of big Cabs and Zin, with many producers making wines that crest 15% alcohol. By contrast the rolling hills of the west side are often blanketed in morning fog and receive cool ocean breezes in the late afternoon and evening. This means the grapes take longer to ripen and retain more acidity. It also translates to wines with better balance.

For their 2020 Côtes de Paso, the blend is a very Châteauneuf-du-Pape looking combination of 70% Grenache, 15% Syrah, 13% Mourvèdre and 2% Tannat, which would not be traditional. When you open this wine, make sure to decant it for an hour before serving. Once you do it offers a complex combination of black cherry confit, strawberry jam, red licorice, eucalyptus, thyme and a faint whisper of pink peppercorns. In the mouth this wine is nicely plump and expressive, with a fine, almost gritty sense of tannins, followed by another wave of fruit that lasts into the long finish. Drink this wine over the next five years, with the recipe of the month, or cajun rubbed baby back ribs.

2021 Tapiz Cabernet Sauvignon “Alta Collection” - \$22 per bottle

For years we have been fans of the wines from Patricia Ortiz and her Mendoza winery Tapiz. Located at over 4000 feet above sea level the wines produced at this winery are intense and powerful, yet with an elegance that is hard

to match. It is no surprise really, her consulting oenologist is Jean Claude Berrouet, who produced 44 vintages of Chateau Petrus and the first 24 vintages of Dominus. Mastering the powerful wines produced in the Pomerol region of Bordeaux and Napa Valley gives him incredible insight into working in the extreme conditions of Mendoza.

The region of Mendoza is unusual in that it is simultaneously one of the easiest places to grow grapes and the most difficult. It is a desert so the only water is through irrigation, so there is little disease pressure but also the yields can be small in years where there is little runoff from the Andes. Perhaps the greatest challenge is the high elevation, ranging from 2200 to 4600 feet above sea level. At this altitude the UV light is far more intense than at sea level, so vines have to be trained with more leaf canopy than other regions to protect the grapes from sunburn. Like your skin, when grapes sunburn their outer layer will peel and burst, ruining the grape and eventually the whole cluster. Also, the lack of water and sun can dehydrate the grapes, skewing the balance between sugar, acidity and water. Finding the perfect balance between all these factors is where the insight of Mr. Berrouet is invaluable.

One of the hallmarks of a Berrouet wine is the way the grapes are handled in the winery. All the grapes are sorted and destemmed, then fermentation takes place in stainless steel tanks at low temperature for up to 15 days. Then once the wine is dry it is raked off the skins but left on the “gross” lees for an additional two weeks. This extra step is time consuming and expensive at a time when storage space is in short supply, but essential for the wine to develop balance. After this second rest the wine is raked off the gross lees in a mix of French and American oak barrels for 10 months. The final blend of the 2021 also includes 5% Merlot.

Decant this wine for a half hour to let the tannins integrate and the nose to develop. One of the advantages of the vineyard being at such high elevation is the alcohol is under 14.5%, which is surprising when you taste the wine. There are the classic notes of ripe, blueberries and blackberry preserves, graham cracker wafer, cinnamon sticks and graphite. Where this wine excels is on the palate, with the deep fruit in perfect harmony with the tannins and oak. Drink 2024 to 2029 with grilled steaks or our recipe of the month.

Stuffed Veal Cutlets

This dish is really Italian in nature but works great with both wines. If you do not eat veal you can substitute pork loin chops with no other adjustments to ingredients or cooking time.

4 (3-ounce each) veal cutlets, about ¼ inch thick, halved crosswise

2 ounces fontina cheese, shredded (½ cup)

4 thin slices Prosciutto di Parma (2 ounces)

2 large eggs

2 tablespoons all-purpose flour

1½ cups panko bread crumb

8 tablespoons unsalted butter

Salt and pepper

Lemon wedges

Pat 2 cutlet halves dry with paper towels and place between 2 layers of plastic wrap. Pound cutlets into rough 5 by 4-inch rectangles, about ⅛ inch thick, using meat pounder. Place 2 tablespoons fontina in center of 1 cutlet half, leaving ¼-inch border around edge. Lay 1 slice prosciutto on top of fontina, folding it as needed to prevent any overhang. Place second cutlet half over prosciutto. Gently press down on cutlets to compress layers, then press along edges to seal. Repeat with remaining cutlet halves, fontina, and prosciutto.

Whisk eggs and flour in shallow dish until smooth. Spread panko in second shallow dish. Working with 1 stuffed cutlet at a time, carefully dip in egg mixture, allowing excess to drip off. Dredge in panko to coat both sides, pressing gently so crumbs adhere. Place breaded cutlets in single layer on wire rack set in rimmed baking sheet and let sit for 5 minutes.

Heat butter in 12-inch nonstick skillet over medium heat until foaming subsides (do not let butter brown). Place cutlets in skillet; cook until deep golden brown and crisp on first side, 3 to 6 minutes. Gently flip cutlets using 2 spatulas and continue to cook until deep golden brown and crisp on second side, about 4 minutes, adjusting burner as needed to prevent scorching. Transfer cutlets to paper towel-lined plate and blot dry. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Serve immediately with lemon wedges.