



Tim's Wine Market

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By Tim Varan

For the last five years we have seen a sizable number of historic, family owned wineries in California change hands, often selling to large wine companies. The reason is that it is really hard for American wineries to transition from founders to the next generation of ownership. There are many reasons but the most frequent are that the next generation is not interested, tax consequences, or the sheer amount of capital it takes to buy out the previous generation. This month we will look at two wineries and how they handled this issue.

Amapola Creek Proprietary Red Wine - \$29

It is almost hard to believe now, but when I started selling wine in the late 1980's some of the most sought after wines were the single vineyard Chardonnays of Chateau St. Jean. The founding owners of Chateau St. Jean, Ken Sheffield, and Bob, and Ed Merzoian were table grape farmers from the central valley of California who were interested in producing serious wines in a cooler climate. After a search they discovered the Goff estate in what is now the Valley of the Moon district in Sonoma and purchased the property in 1973. They named the property after Jean Sheffield, the wife, sister and sister-in-law of the founders. They then hired Dick Arrowood, who was working for Korbel making sparkling wines so he recognized the advantage of growing grapes in cooler climates.

Within a few years, Chateau St. Jean created a portfolio of single vineyard Chardonnays. These were some of the first in California and became the critical darlings of the time. I can still remember fighting for allocations of those wines, three bottlings which were very different from the oak and butter bombs of the era. After getting married Dick Arrowood and his new wife Alis launched their own eponymous winery and label in 1985. Arrowood stayed on at Chateau St. Jean until 1990 before leaving to focus full time on his own winery.

Always a leader, Dick and Alis established their own winery with the purchase of a site on what is today the Moon Mountain AVA. This appellation is one of the few that lies on the Sonoma side of the Mayacamas Mountains that form the border between Napa and Sonoma Valleys. The vineyards of the Moon Mountain benefit from higher elevations and coastal breezes, with a western exposure to receive a long day of sunshine. This allows for slow ripening of both red and white varieties, producing wines with impressive power and structure. By 2000 the Arrowoods were tired of the challenge of growing their brand and traveling all the time so they decided to sell the winery, and their name, to Robert Mondavi. For those keeping score the Arrowood winery has been sold three more times since and is now owned by the Jackson family, of Kendall-Jackson fame.

When Dick and Alis sold Arrowood they purchased a 150 acre property on Moon Mountain and planted 20 acres of vines. They began to produce wine under the Amapola Creek label, which runs through the property. Production has never been very high and they sold primarily direct-to-consumer until they decided to fully retire in 2023. Looking to continue their legacy they sold their property to their neighbor Brion Wise of the B. Wise winery. He continues to farm their vineyard organically and for now maintains a separate label for the wines.

My selection is really interesting because it is a kitchen sink blend from several vintages and varieties. The notes from the winery state that the components are from the 2016 to 2018 vintages. The blend is 70% Cabernet Sauvignon, 10% Grenache 10% Syrah, 4% Mourvèdre, 3% Petite Sirah and 3% Petit Verdot, all from their estate Mount Mountain AVA vineyards. 15% was aged in new oak and the remainder in older barrels and was bottled in 2021.

When you open this wine you will want to decant for a half hour to let the bouquet develop. It then reveals a mature but still lively nose of cooked red plums, blackberries, dried black figs, caramel, clove, Maduro cigar wrapper, graphite. On the palate there is a rich core of fruit framed with moderate tannins, with a nice interplay of oak and fruit. Drink 2024-2026 with pot roast, grilled steaks or Korean beef ribs.

2010 No Limit Syrah - \$29

In 1982 the wine industry in Central California was very new, and Pinot Noir was not as popular as it is today. That is why Bob Lindquist, the founder of Qupe decided to focus on Syrah and Chardonnay. His logic being that Syrah grows great in cool climates as long as there is plenty of time for it to ripen. This can be an issue in the ancestral home of Syrah, the Northern Rhône Valley of France, but the climate of the Santa Maria Valley in California is much drier. For decades Lindquist produced some of the most impressive examples of Syrah in California, eventually aided by his son Ethan.

Then in 2014 as part of his succession plan Lindquist sold a portion of the winery to Terroir Life, a private equity company owned by Charles Banks. Both Bob and Ethan Lindquist stayed on to run the winery but things quickly degraded. In 2016 Banks was convicted of defrauding basketball player Tim Duncan and sentenced to 4 years in prison. As a felon he cannot possess an alcoholic beverage license so the Lindquists eventually sold the entire winery to Vintage Wine Estates. Although the original plan was for Bob to stay on he left after a few months and founded Linquist Family wines, along with his wife Louisa Sawyer-Lindquist. By this time Ethan was already producing wine under his own label, Ethan, but also formed a partnership to create the No Limit brand.

The principal investor for No Limit is Cliff Korn, who in addition to a passion for wine is also an avid poker player. He and Ethan source their grapes primarily from the Lindquist family vineyard producing two different Syrah bottlings; All In and The Nuts. Both are poker terms with All In being their base label and The Nuts a selection of best barrels. When looking for a good example of Syrah for a future club selection this one dominated a comparative tasting, which is no surprise as it is almost 14 years old.

Personally I find older, cool climate Syrah to be some of the most interesting wines in the world. This one does not disappoint with a wildly interesting nose of strawberry preserves, oil cured black olives, bay leaf, crushed mint, dried black figs and old leather book bindings. On the palate this wine is youthful, with gorgeous tension that holds the fruit in check as the tannins are almost gone. Drink 2024-2030 with grilled lamb chops.

Grilled Lamb Chops with Pomegranate Glaze

This is an easy recipe that works with both wines, with directions for gas or charcoal grills. You can also broil them and achieve similar results.

2 (1³/₄- to 2-pound) rack of lamb, fat trimmed to 1/8 inch
1¹/₂ tablespoons plus 1/4 teaspoon kosher salt, divided
1 tablespoon sugar
1 teaspoon ground allspice
1 teaspoon ground fennel
1 teaspoon granulated garlic
1 teaspoon pepper
5 tablespoons pomegranate molasses, divided
1/2 cup chopped fresh mint
1/2 cup pomegranate seeds
6 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
1/4 cup chopped fresh parsley
1 garlic clove, minced

Cut lamb racks between ribs to separate chops. Combine 1¹/₂ tablespoons salt, sugar, allspice, fennel, granulated garlic, and pepper in bowl. Pat chops dry with paper towels and sprinkle all over with salt mixture.

FOR A CHARCOAL GRILL: Open bottom vent completely. Light large chimney starter filled with charcoal briquettes (6 quarts). When top coals are partially covered with ash, pour evenly over half of grill. Set cooking grate in place, cover, and open lid vent completely. Heat grill until hot, about 5 minutes.

FOR A GAS GRILL: Turn all burners to high; cover; and heat grill until hot, about 15 minutes. Leave all burners on high.

Clean and oil cooking grate. Brush chops all over with 1/4 cup pomegranate molasses. Place chops on grill (over coals, if using charcoal) and cook (covered, if using gas) until chops are charred and register 135 to 140 degrees, about 2 minutes per side, rearranging chops as needed for even browning.

Transfer chops to serving platter, tent with aluminum foil, and let rest for 10 minutes. Stir mint, pomegranate seeds, oil, parsley, garlic, and remaining 1/4 teaspoon salt together in small bowl. Brush tops of chops with remaining 1 tablespoon pomegranate molasses. Spoon mint mixture over chops.