



Tim's Wine Market

December 2024

By Tim Varan

To bring 2024 to a conclusion I thought it would be gratifying to finish the year with two outstanding examples of Cabernet Sauvignon from the twin titans of California; Sonoma County and Napa Valley. It happens that both of these wines were created by a friend of mine, Tim English, who operates a small wine distributor in Ohio and Florida. He created both wines to pay homage to people he greatly respected and they are both made by the same winery so they show the character of each region when the winemaking process is basically the same. Sadly we lost Tim quite suddenly, and far too young, a few months ago so the features are paying honor to him as well.

2020 William Kavney Cellars Cabernet Sauvignon - \$29

If you read the back label of this wine it is apparent that Tim produced this wine to pay respects to his dad, William Kavney English. William influenced the family's love of English bulldogs which is why he put one on the label. The wine is designated from Sonoma County but is 90% Alexander Valley with the remainder coming from other appellations across Sonoma County. It has been a while since we put the spotlight on a Cab from the Alexander Valley so this is a great one to compare and contrast with a Napa bottling.

The Alexander Valley lies at the northern and eastern edge of Sonoma County, adjacent to the Mayacamus Mountains that form the boundary with Napa County. The area is named for Cyrus Alexander, who was hired to scout the region in 1840 for Henry Delano Fitch, who hoped to settle the valley and establish a cattle ranching business. Eventually Alexander stayed on as the ranch manager and secured some grape vines from Fort Ross, on the Sonoma coast, which became the first plantings in the region. In 1848 gold was discovered nearby at Sutter's Creek which spawned a gold rush that lasted until 1850. During this time many Europeans came to the area, particularly Italians, and they also brought grape vines with them. After the gold rush ended many stayed and established farms where they also began growing grapes and making wine to serve the large Italian population in nearby San Francisco. Then in the 1880s some immigrants formed the Italian Swiss Colony agricultural cooperative at Asti. This provided a vehicle for grape growers to sell their production each year and helped launch the first California wine boom. Although wine was still not a common beverage for most Americans the trend continued to grow and by the 1950s the Italian-Swiss Colony was California's second-most visited tourism destination after Disneyland. The Alexander Valley AVA was established in 1984 and since then has grown to 15,000 acres of vines and 42 wineries.

Tim English enlisted the help of one of our favorite winemakers in the area, Michael Pozzan, to make this wine to honor his dad. As mentioned before, the wine is primarily Alexander Valley grapes with 10% from other parts of Sonoma. It is also 95% Cabernet Sauvignon and 5% Merlot. After extended skin contact the wine was fermented then aged for 20 months in French Oak, 25% new, 75% 2nd & 3rd use barrels. What we love about Michael is he does not rely on any tricks in the cellar like micro-oxidation or additives so the wines actually taste like the variety and place.

Since this wine was created by Tim to honor his dad, here is his tasting note. *This wine reminds me of a berry picking trip I took on a long summer weekend in Maine. While in culinary school in Rhode Island, one of my favorite past times was visiting parts of New England with classmates for long weekends. On one of those trips, we were picking berries not too far from Portland, Maine and I managed to sit upon a bag of mostly blueberries, blackberries and fruit that they called Maine berries which looked like Mulberries to me. In a hot car with us distracted by local beer and lobster, the berries started to ferment and the plastic bag was blown up like a balloon in the car. When I popped it we had this beautiful smell of berry compote that I can still remember almost 40 years later. It also has this subtle earthy note that I find lingering in the background which gives it another layer of interest. It has a bit of grip on the finish but I expect that will fade away in the next few years and it will get very exotic flavors of truffles, cedar and pine forest. Drink 2024-2028 with steaks, roasts or even hamburgers.*

2017 Alexis Soyer Cabernet Sauvignon - \$29

We featured another wine under the Alexis Soyer label two years ago, a Petite Sirah blend called Black Gold. During my tastings this Cabernet really stood out as a great example and a cool pairing against the William Kavney. It is also made by Michael Pozzan with techniques that are basically the same so it is a nice contrast to the Alexander Valley bottling.

Having a culinary background Tim admired the life and accomplishments of Alexis Soyer, who arguably was the first celebrity chef. Alexis Soyer was a French chef, writer, inventor and philanthropist who lived from 1810-1858. After attracting attention in his native France as an up-and-coming culinary superstar he moved his talents to London, eventually becoming the chef de cuisine for the prestigious Reform Club. He also undertook the design of the kitchen, introducing innovations such as cooking with gas, adjustable temperature ovens and refrigeration using a system of piped cold water instead of ice.

After the death of his wife, Soyer turned his attention to helping solve dietary issues for the less fortunate. He established the first soup kitchen in London for the poor, which was so successful that he was asked by the British government to assist with the Irish potato famine. He then turned his attention on feeding the British army during the Crimean war. Learning that starvation and food poisoning were major issues with military campaigns, he helped create the precursor to the Army Catering Corps, a system that was used until the end of WWII. Sadly, after years of working in kitchens with coal fired ovens he suffered the great malady of chefs of his time, black lung, so his death was hastened by the effects of traveling with the army in Crimea. Although only 48 years old when he died he was one of the most famous chefs ever and a hero in both France and England.

For this wine Michael used grapes from three vineyards in Napa Valley. The first is the Pelissa family site that is organically farmed and the site of several of Michael's wines. The second is a new property in Chiles valley in the Vaca Mountains which is rounded out by grapes from Yountville on the valley floor. For aging 25% of the barrels were new and the balance were second and third use for 12-16 months.

The reason I chose this example of a Napa Cab is the same as the Alexander Valley bottling above, it is not adulterated and actually tastes like it should. The nose is an intriguing mix of dried Montmorency cherries, blackberry preserves, milk chocolate and orange pekoe tea. On the palate it is bold but the fruit is restrained with fairly obvious tannins that carry into the finish. While good now, you can drink this Cab until 2029 with a standing rib roast or braised short ribs.

Ricotta & Pork Meatballs

I had a different recipe in mind this month until I discovered this one in the New York Times Cooking section. I am always down for a good meatball, either in a classic Italian preparation or in brown gravy with mushrooms and noodles. This version produces a light and airy meatball that is very versatile for both. I even made a few small ones and served on toothpicks before the FL/FL State game as appetizers. This recipe also freezes nicely so you have a quick dinner waiting with your favorite pasta sauce.

½ cup/4 ounces whole-milk ricotta

½ cup/2 ounces grated Parmesan

2 teaspoons kosher salt

1 teaspoon ground black pepper

1 large egg

½ cup plain dry bread crumbs

1 pound ground pork

Heat oven to 425 degrees. In a large bowl, combine all of the ingredients and use your hands to gently mix.

Shape the meat into 12 equally sized balls (about 2¼ inches in diameter). Arrange on a greased rimmed baking sheet.

Bake until golden and cooked through, about 15 minutes. Serve warm.