

NEWPORT WINE CELLAR *& Gourmet*

Pressed for Thought

I have a hankering for something new. Surely, it is that time of the year, and as a northeasterner, I am conditioned for change. With that change, I want new flavors, new labels, and new stories to tell. This month's selections are all new to the shop and to the club, as well as being all new to the state. It is exciting to see new wines enter our marketplace! That is not all that links them together, they are also selected because they will serve well as partners to the foods of the season. I was at the farmer's market on Saturday, and I was thrilled to fill my bag with spring sprouts, scallions, radishes, collard greens, baby kale and fresh spinach! These greens are fresh, crisp, bright flavors that need wines that will balance, provide fruit against their acidity and bitter flavors. The trick is that the wines need acid to stand up to acid, but they also need fruit and body to balance the sharpness of flavor and bitterness of these spring vegetables.

I rarely think about food without considering what wine I will pair with it. Truth be told, more often, I think about what wine will excite my palate before I start to construct my meal. This is the benefit of a wine club with a seasonal mindset. I have done the thinking for you! These wines are conveniently in your rack ready to go, so you can concentrate on your menu.

My affection for Spring could be elevated by the *Goldilocks* nature of the wines that appropriately pair with the flavors of the season. Neither full bodied nor ultra-light wines, these are medium bodied wines that are just right. They tend to have crowd appeal and food flexibility, they are easy to enjoy on their own, and have a grounded sensibility with a note of petrichor and budding tulips. I hope you enjoy them all, find something new to excite your palate, and that they give you patience to survive April, it is *the cruelest month*, teasing us with the colors of warmth. Stay in the moment, enjoy your wine, summer is around the corner and without the rain, the flowers would not be so stunning nor the tomatoes so delicious!

Responsible Indulgence--April 2024 Wine Notes

If you are creating a beautiful salad to celebrate the return of fresh local vegetables, try one of the value whites for this month. Both will dance well with those lighter flavors of spring. The **2020 Domaine de Cabrials Sauvignon Blanc** has wonderful citrus notes—lime and grapefruit and a crisp, zippy acidity balanced by a nice round mouth feel. I love the white flowers on the nose as you raise the glass! It is dry on the finish, which is a wonderful contrast to its fruity start. The grapefruit pith note gives the wine a complexity that surprised me for the modest price point. The **2021 La Bastarda Toscana Bianca** by contrast will provide more stone fruit and melon flavors with a little green apple and apricot. Its acidity expresses itself more quietly. And, instead of white flowers, this one leans to honeysuckle. It is a blend of Chardonnay and Trebbiano, and it has floral, fruit and earth notes in an easy drinking, dry, but fruity white. Roast a chicken simply with that big salad or maybe a piece of fish pan-seared, but keep it simple and enjoy the lightness.

If you like a rosé with a bit more to chew on, you will enjoy my **2023 TRW Rosé** made with Grenache, Mourvèdre, Syrah, and Cinsault, sourced from Lake County & Yolo County in California. This one has cherry notes, a little sour fruit, watermelon and citrus with a woody quality that is likely a result of the whole cluster maceration prior to bleed off. It can handle some intensity of flavor, but it definitely wants food. I suggest a quiche lorraine!

For some Value Reds, I want options. As we know there are still some cool days in April, so the 2020 Chateau Blouin Bordeaux Rouge has layered and compelling flavors of plum, cherry, cola, and vanilla. The brambly fruit comes from the Cab Franc, but the Merlot gives it body, rounds the edges and softens the tannins. It is a value price point, but this wine is surprisingly complex and approachable. For a bit lighter expression, try the 2021 Zemmer Schiava, a medium bodied red from the Alto-Aldige region of Italy. The Zemmer family has been making their alpine wines for a century, and the wines reflect the terroir and the hand-crafted nature of their work. The Bordeaux is just as you would expect, but likely this grape is new to you. It is more berry and brightness, earth and fresh plum flavors, maybe even a little rhubarb. It would be great with a little spice!

The 2022 Renzo Masi Chianti will meet you in the middle of the two value reds with a bit more body and intensity than the Schiava but less so than the Bordeaux. It has all the character of Sangiovese that you expect—juicy front fruit, tension on the midpalate, and earth, spice, and warmth on the finish. Its texture gives it some weight, but the wine finishes fresh and clean, so pair it with tomato sauces or braised meats.

If it is your purpose to learn a bit about your palate, taste the two value whites and take note of the distinctions. The brightness of acidity and intense aromatics make the grape an ideal white for spring vegetables. Depending on where the SB is from, your experience can be quite different. These both have an abundance of citrus, jasmine, honeysuckle, lemon and orange blossoms aromatics, but the wines differ in their flavors and textures. The 2020 Chateau Roquefort Sauvignon Blanc from Bordeaux has more minerality and chalkiness. There is a feeling of talc on the palate, which gives the appearance or feeling of dryness, likely because of the chalky soil in which it is grown and its minerality. The 2022 Stony Mountain Sauvignon Blanc comes to us from Marlborough, New Zealand, where the wines have greater fruitiness—more gooseberry and grapefruit and passionfruit flavors, as well as more herbaceous-ness—grass, bell pepper, jalapeno. There is no right or wrong, only the right occasion for the wines to satisfy your own hankering. These wines are great with cheeses, egg dishes, a bowl of beef barley soup to contrast the richness of each of these, but also their high acid makes them ideal for big salads, which I cannot get enough of right now.

2021 Marquilliani is the one return to a bottle we have seen before. This Corsican rosé is the palest pink, but don't be fooled into any assumptions about flavor. This is a serious and somewhat hedonistic wine that will seduce you. It has an ethereal softness and almost transparent hue of pink, but the stony terroir of the island imbues the grapes with character, minerality, and depth of flavor. Anne and her father Damiel Amalric make wines together at the family farm, and theirs is weightless and delicate, but imparts cherry, herbs, and citrus—more blood orange than lemon. It would be ideally served with smoked salmon and creme fraiche with fresh scallions and lemon zest.

For the Select Reds, I offer some variety to allow for both the warmth of early spring and the still cooler weather that reminds us that Mother Nature is not quite done with her winter work. For a lighter red, reach for the 2021 Zemmer Legrein. This varietal is unique to the alpine region of Alto Adige DOC, Italy, in the north, where the growing conditions are extraordinarily challenging, mountainous, and with volatile weather patterns. The wine is treated gently during the ferment, which is apparent in its style. It is approachable and light to medium bodied, but with intensity of flavors like plum and dark cherry. It is assertive, which allows for it to be paired with duck or roasted red meats. It also pairs well with rich bean stews and alpine cheese dishes like fondue.

2020 Verziomartini Langhe Nebbiolo is also assertive without bold body. 100% Nebbiolo from La Morra, this is an exceptional wine with character and layers of flavor. The fermentation of this wine is in tank, not barrel but the malolactic fermentation takes place in oak. These strategies lead to complexity of flavor. You will immediately pick up on cherry notes, but then notice a subtle sweet spice, musk, vanilla, and mushroom. It is fruity and balanced with tannins. The 2019 Curton La Perriere Bordeaux Rouge similarly has attractive fruit and spice with lush earth and mushroom, but it has a bit more body. Its weight due to the varietal difference—Cab and Merlot are simply going to give more punch in style. That said both wines would pair well with braised meats, hearty bean stews, and gratins.

For my collectors this month, we have two remarkable wines from Paulo Manzone in the Serralunga region of Barolo. Paulo and his wife Lusiella are now the 6th generation in Paolo's family to produce wine in this highly venerated DOCG. They are both the wine makers and vineyard managers on the 24 acre vineyard.

2019 Manzone Barolo grows on a south facing slope in Serralunga d'Alba. After picking, they use the free run juice only to ferment in stainless steel at controlled temperatures, to keep the maceration slow and long. After a couple of months, they rack the wine and store it in French tonneaus, to allow time to develop. The wine has excellent depth of flavor with notable black cherry, earth and spice. It is generous and abundant in its fruit with balancing texture of very supple tannins and a lengthy and satisfying finish.

2022 Manzone Roero Arneis is a wonderful aromatic white that will delight you. It is also elegant and so well-crafted that you will stop after a sip and look at your glass with astonishment, thinking, **wow**, this is actually really, *really* good. And it is. Arneis is a grape that was formerly referred to as White Barolo and in the early 70's was near extinction. Thanks to the commitment of independent wine makers like Paulo who decided to make great Arneis, its popularity continues to rise. This one is just brimming with fragrances from pea shoots to chamomile tea, honeysuckle and almond. It is dry, mineral driven wine with loads of fruit and complex flavors. I want to let this wine shine, so I will serve with just a simple cheese plate.