

Responsible Indulgence--January 2024 Wine Notes

a wine club for the socially conscious & the wine curious



Cheers & Happy New Year!

It is not just another month, January marks the start of a new year. It is a time to reset, to make plans and resolutions, to reflect back on the year that has past and think about this coming year. So, what will we eat, drink and think about this year? These are the important questions!

New perspectives, provide an opportunity to fine tune or perhaps just look at the club with fresh eyes. I am thrilled to say that we are up to over 160 members, so keep spreading the word. You are my grass roots effort, and I am grateful for your help. The increasing numbers mean that I can leverage greater discounts, so you get even better wine for the buck, which is great for everyone. It also helps me sustain my support of small producers, who focus on quality over quantity.

Growth means that organization is critical, so for starters, I am establishing a few new logistical strategies and I need your help:

1. **The first Wednesday of the month is Wine Club Pick Up Day!** You can come in and taste wines from all three levels, talk about what you like, learn a little, meet other club members, and just generally chat about life, the weather, and the traffic in Newport.
2. All requests for **substitutions must be emailed to me 30 days prior to Pick Up.** Or just tell me when you pick up one month that you want a change for the next! We do our best to accommodate on the spot, but those last minute substitutions, will incur a \$10 service charge.

3. Please alert us if you need us to hold your wine. Happy to do it, but at the end of each month we need to organize for the next, so wine will be shipped or delivered at your cost, unless you alert us to hold it for you.

Please let me know if you have any questions or requests. I am grateful for your support and appreciate your help with these few details, as I continue to grow.

ok, now the wine notes...

For the January wines, I have two ideas swirling around in my mind like a couple tortellini floating in broth—abundance and moderation. These two ideas may seem at odds with one another, but I would say that they balance each other and create a compelling tension. I want wines that are abundant in flavor and intensity this month and I seek food that is going to warm me and excite me during the winter doldrums, but I have just completed a culinary marathon of indulgence and need to give my body and spirit some quiet time. That is the tension that I was seeking as I put together this month's selections—abundance with restraint. Possible? Well, I hope you enjoy them, at least!

As always, the wines in the shop and for the club stand out against the large, commercially produced wines both in the quality of expression and flavor, as well as in the impact on the earth and to our bodies. They are composed of the highest quality fruit, hand harvested and crafted with minimal intervention, naturally fermented, and handled with a care for the earth and everyone along the chain. They are made with the sharing of food in mind, prioritizing quality over quantity. So you are supporting that ethos of wine making while enjoying every sip!

In a way, this is *being good*, which is on everyone's mind these days. I hear a lot of talk about being good, and for me that means that we have an elevated social consciousness, caring about how our own actions can impact others or the world. If you are celebrating Dry January, as a way to "be good," fear not, all the wines are *dry* this month!

VALUE WINES

To begin with the Value wines include a fresh, palate cleaning rosé from South Africa, a luscious Viognier and a deep, dark red from the southwest of France. The balance comes in the combination, allowing you to choose what will suit your palate.

The 2023 Radley & Finch Rosé is one of a line up of great value wines that you have seen before, though not this vintage. Two South African friends, both wine makers and hooligans, created this brand to provide "a kiss ass wine at a great price." These are their words, but I can confirm they have achieved their goal. You can enjoy this wine all times of the year, despite its "summer sessions" name. It will bring you the warmth of the sun with its refreshing berry and citrus notes, and cleanse your palate with its bright acidity. Close your eyes, dream of the sunshine of South Africa; you will be transported. It is ideal for the winter cleansing of the palate. I am on a salad kick right now, after weeks of rich food, so it is a welcomed pairing for my dijon vinaigrette.

If something richer is what you palate seeks, but you still want it cold, grab the 2022 Saint Peyre Viognier. This wine comes to us from a co-operative producer in the south of France. The aromatics on this wine suggest a complexity that far exceeds its modest price point, as does the quality of the wine on your palate. It has melon, apricot, and apple, swirling with citrus, mandarine orange, vanilla, and cream. I will roast a chicken weekly at this time of year, in part because it is a simple and very satisfying meal, but also because the oven warms our home. This wine will be a perfect pairing for that simple, juicy and crispy roasted chicken rubbed with butter and whatever fresh herbs are surviving.

The 2019 Domaine Piquemal Cotes de Roussillon rounds out the Value 3 Pack this month, and it does so with style, finesse, and depth of flavor. This comes to us from a fourth generation wine maker, farming 48 hectares of land in the foot hills of the Corbieres Massif, located in the French Pyrenees. The vineyard was established by the Piquemal family a century ago, and is now under the careful supervision of Marie-Pierre Piquemal, who was honored with the title of Winemaker of the Year in 2018 by France's famed Le Guide Hachette. Her total production is only 15k cases, this is small in the world of wine. It is a velocity wine that you can wrap up in and stay warm. A blend of Old Vine Carignan, Syrah, and Grenache, hand crafted, naturally fermented with just a kiss of oak. It is medium bodied, dark red, intense aromatic fruits—red and blue, on the nose, and a smooth, deep red with good long finish and just a little tannin to give structure to the wine. Enjoy this with some braised short rib tossed with tagliatelle. The long cooking time will warm your home, and the freshness of the wine will cleanse your palate!

But wait, there are 3 more Value wines, for those who choose the 6 or 12 pack!

The 2020 Carta de Fitaprata comes from a small estate near the ancient city of Evora in the rolling hills of Alentejo, Portugal. This is a young vineyard established in 2003 with a winemaker who is respectful of tradition but pushing the boundaries of the regional styles to produce a remarkable wine for the modest price point. Antonio Macanita is committed to the principals of artisanal wine making, and this lush and complex wine is the result of that. It is abundant in primary fruit, ripe, but still balanced by violets and black brambly bright fruit. Its obvious pair would be roasted beef, but I am making a celery root/butternut squash veloute that I am making—the wine acts much how a bright juniper berry would!

If you are looking for a little spice to accompany a rice dish or some slow cooked pork, I suggest the 2018 Paul & Remi “Green” Tempranillo that comes to us from Aragon, Spain. It is fresh and alive, as are the hills of the Pyrenees, lush and green, where the grapes are grown at 900 meters above the ocean. Christophe produces wines that have a unique expression for the region, they remain Spanish but with a French style. Spicy and intense with balance, brightness and terroir. I like the minerality that I note on this wine, which makes it an ideal pairing for broth soups, escarole and garlic, or pan roasted pork loin.

To cleanse the palate, the 2021 Josef Fishcher Gruner Veltliner displays citrus zest and green apple with a notably minerality on the finish, balancing creaminess of an acid driven structure gives the wine depth and appeal. The creaminess softens the edges, making the wine very alluring. Josef Fischer is the fifth generation wine maker at this estate that was established by his family in 1898. He is certified organic and works entirely without synthetic chemicals, which is

particular difficult in this region, as the steep slopes make all the manual work even more challenging and labor intensive. The wine is quite special, and will make you pause for thought.

SELECT WINES

For the Select Wines, I tried to follow the same principal of balance—abundance and restraint, but these wines have an elevated complexity that give them more character.

The 2022 Domaine la Courtade Les Terrasses de la Cortade Rosé lands on the January list because it is a lush rosé that has a beautiful smooth texture, creamy mouth feel, and bright fresh red fruits. It is a perennial favorite around here because of the complexity and exceptional quality. More than that, it is an all year round rosé, meaning that it delivers elegance and complexity along with intense flavor; this is not a simple beach wine. Berries, melon, citrus zest, jasmine flowers, fennel, and blood orange dredged in sea salt. I like this one for sipping while I cook with some cheese and charcuterie, or hearty salads made with warmed greens and roasted winter vegetables.

For whites, I included one that will cleanse your palate with its brisk bright freshness. The 2022 Mar de Vinas Albarino is no simple white, though, with complex and delicious flavors along with a tense acidity. It is 100% Albarino from a small estate of 30 year old vines in Rias Baixas. It is whole cluster pressed to give complexity, structure and earthiness. The fruit itself will give you citrus zest and pith, melon, and pear with salinity on the finish. Enjoy this one with some pan seared scallops over greens! And if you seek a richer white, grab the 2017 Botanica Semillion! Yes, you read that right, 2017, and it has aged with grace into a complex and delightful wine. It has notes of almond and vanilla, melon and ripe baked apples, but on the palate is surprisingly light and fresh along with those mature flavors. It is interesting and delicious. I suggest spicy Thai dishes for this one!

There are three reds in the Select 6 Pack and each one provides a slightly different experiences, depending upon your mood.

If you seek something on the lighter side of reds, or more specifically the lighter side of “winter reds,” the 2021 Cret de Bine “Bio Addict,” from Beaujolais, will provide depth of flavor on a lighter framework. It is easy and approachable but far from simple with ripe berry notes and mushroom, fleshy fruit balanced with good acidity and earth. It is easy enough to drink on its own, so enjoy while you are cooking. It would also accompany a wide variety of meals from spicy dishes, Asian cuisine, or a simple omelet and salad (I am binging on Julia!).

The 2018 Fable Mountain Night Sky is a blend of Syrah, Grenache and Mourvedre from the Night Sky Vineyard in Tulbagh, an isolated property tucked high up in the Witzenberg Mountain range, two hours from Cape Town. It is a wild setting with baboons eying the wines from the vineyard’s edges. Imagine “out there” and then drive two more miles. The views are said to be breathtaking, and the property is pitched high up some 500+ meters in elevation, straddling a wildlife preserve. Yes, this is the taste of the wild, but still smooth, lush and extravagantly ripe without being jammy or heavy. The wine is as remarkable as the property. It is juicy and rich, with earthiness and tensions of acidity that is achievable because of the blend. Bramlby fruit,

anise, herbs, fennel, olives, tomato paste, and cocoa. It is savory and herbal, but fruity and juicy. It would be great with a roast that was seared before finishing in the oven, roasted potatoes, or sautéed bitter greens with loads of garlic!

2017 Chapillon Cuvee Paul is a different style of Grenache that comes from Aragon in Spain, where Christophe makes Spanish wines with French style. This Grenache will show itself differently than the Fable Mountain Grenache. It is more austere, with more structure and tannins, but simpler fruit profile, and a more extracted fruit flavor. You might try them side by side provided you have time and friends to share them with. I will open one of each on Saturday this week, so feel free to come by and try them.

COLLECTOR WINES

2022 Coenobium Rescum is a remarkable wine that is blend of Trebbiano, Malvasia, Verdicchio and Grechetto made by two sisters, who are sisters. Silly as that sounds, these women are Cistercian nuns, who have been organically farming the 5 hectares of vines in Vitorchiano, Lazio, since the early 90's. Paolo Bea began offering some advice to them to improve their wines and their exposure. Now, I get 8 bottles a year! And, they go to you, my loyal club collectors. This is a wine of abundance, in color, aroma, and flavor. To the eye it has a deep, golden color, and the nose is honeyed, and herbal with candied citrus. The wine remains balanced because of the minimality on the finish that is exacting and the final touch of anise that leaves a smile on your face. I like this one with food, but it is flexible. I often take it to a local BYOB that serves a tuna tartar flatbread with a spiced, asian drizzle and the wine works perfectly with that dish, but recently I had it with a garlic anchovy sauce with bitter greens on gnocchi and I nearly took my pants off over my head!

Sometimes timing makes choices for me, and the second wine is an example of this. It just happened to come in the same day at the Coenobium, and thus, they were thrust together! It just so happens that they both are fine examples of my January theme of abundance of flavor in a wine that has some restraint and still cleanses the palate.

The 2021 La Ferm de la Foret is an American wine made in the spirit of the French Rhone. This wine sings! It comes to us from the Columbia Gorge in Oregon, more specifically Forest Grove, located at the northern extremity of the Willamette Valley in the heart of Pinot land. But this is decidedly not Pinot Noir, it is 100% Grenache. It is made by a relative newcomer to the scene, Bobby Whelan, who is following a dream and has some support from a couple of industry rock stars to help him make a remarkable wine. We are ultimately a community, and it is a wonderful story of wine. This Grenache is rich in flavors of cherry, berry, plum, and leather, with just a hint of spice. I am a fan of juicy Grenache, and this one really surprised me with its balance of power and joy. The wine is silky and aromatic and deserves a good meal, and I suggest duck, keep it simple, just roast a breast, crisp the skin and enjoy!

I hope that all the wines bring you pleasure, and that you continue to eat, drink, and think!

Cheers, Maria