

September 2009

# Wine of the Month Club



2008 La Paradou Viognier (\$15)

2008 La Paradou Cotes du Luberon Rouge (\$15)

This month we will feature the last white wine of the year as we have now had a run of three-in-a-row. The features this month were originally planned for October but in a rare instance of shipping efficiency the wines actually arrived early. Please accept my apology for this circumstance but enjoy the wines.

I have a hard time picking my favorite region of France but the Luberon, part of what we call Provence, is near the top of the list. The region received its name from the Romans, who allowed members of their legions to retire and settle the area, partly as repayment for their efforts and also to create a buffer from the Germanic tribes to the north. As an enticement to the soldiers, the Romans built many towns in "the provenances" that included amenities such as roads, clean water and arenas for sporting events. You can still see some of their accomplishments, including an arena in Arles and aqueducts across the region.

The beauty of this region is well documented but until you drive across the hills and mountains in mid-summer it is hard to comprehend. The fields are like blankets of lavender and sunflowers broken only by the occasional vineyard. If you roll the car windows down you can become overwhelmed by the scent of the "garrigue" or the wild herbs (savory, marjoram, thyme and sage) that mingle with the ever present lavender. It is from this mix we get Herbs du Provence, a scent that also permeates the wines of the area.

For this month we feature two wines from La Paradou, made by Frédéric Chaudière, His family owns one of the top estates in the neighboring Cotes du Ventoux region, Domaine Pesquie. The name Paradou comes from a four-hundred year old farmhouse that sits on one of the family holdings in the Luberon. The Chaudière own two parcels, both at high elevations, and it is these vineyards which are the fruit source for these wines. Frédéric farms the properties according to the standards of Terra Vitis, an organization that promotes respect for the environment and integrated farming. Because of their high elevations, the vineyards are harvested later than is the norm for the area, yet the grapes retain vivid acidity. All of the grapes are hand harvested and fermentations for both wines are fermented and aged entirely in tank.

For the white wine, which is 100% Viognier, the fruit is hand picked and sorted then fermented at cool temperature to retain the complex aromatic compounds of the grape. Unlike so many versions where the alcohol dominates the fruit, here you see the sweet jasmine and honeysuckle floral notes, complimented by perfectly ripe white peach. There is in the nose a note of chalk dust, which appears again on the palate as the foundation upon which the copious amounts of pit fruits rest. This wine has great persistence, with fruit and minerality running deeply into the finish. Serve this wine with grilled salmon with a mustard/orange marmalade glaze.

The red wine is a combination of Grenache and Syrah, from vineyards that are sixty to eighty years old. Like the Viognier the grapes for this wine are hand harvested and sorted before going into the fermentation tank. Because Chaudière wants to capture the pure fruit expression of the grapes he ferments only in tank then allows the wine to age for ten months before bottling.

As a result of his efforts the color of this wine is a vivid garnet color with little saturation in the legs. The nose is a combination of fresh cherries, raspberries, blackberries, sage, lavender and thyme. At first this wine shows a little stiff, but after half an hour in the decanter it softens to show a plump sense of fruit and an undertone of minerality. This wine displays more acidity than tannin, so drink now and up to one year, with any beefy, lamb-y dish; especially the recipe of the month.

## Steak Tips Provencal

This month I only have room for one, really incredible recipe. I modified this dish from a feature in this month's **Cook's Illustrated** to give it a little Provencal flare. It is a lot like a lunch I had in Beaujolais, north of our featured region, but the cuisine of the area is pretty much the same.

It may look complicated but the recipe goes together quickly so make sure you have all your cutting done before starting to cook the meat. Please take the time to find dried porcini mushrooms (in the produce section at bigger Publix stores) and the right cut of meat. Serve this over either noodles (more traditional) or rice with the red wine choice this month.

- 1 tbsp soy sauce
- 1 tsp sugar
- 1 1/2 lbs sirloin steak tips,  
trimmed of excess fat and cut into 1 1/2-inch chunks
- 1/4 oz dried porcini mushrooms
- 1 3/4 c low-sodium beef broth
- table salt and ground black pepper
- 2 tbsp vegetable oil
- 1 lb mushrooms, stems trimmed, caps wiped clean and cut  
into 1/4-inch slices
- 1 large onion , halved and sliced thin (about 1 1/2 cups)
- 1 large garlic clove , minced or pressed through garlic  
press (about 1 tbsp)
- 1 tbsp Herbs du Provence
- 4 tsp unbleached all-purpose flour
- 1 tbsp chopped fresh parsley

Combine soy sauce and sugar in medium bowl. Add beef, toss well, and marinate at least 30 minutes or up to 1 hour, tossing once.

Meanwhile, cover porcini mushrooms with  $\frac{1}{4}$  cup broth in small microwave-safe bowl; cover with plastic wrap, cut several steam vents in plastic with paring knife, and microwave on high power 30 seconds. Let stand until mushrooms soften, about 5 minutes. Lift mushrooms from liquid with fork and mince (you should have about  $1\frac{1}{2}$  tablespoons). Strain liquid through fine-mesh strainer lined with paper towel into medium bowl. Set mushrooms and liquid aside.

Sprinkle meat with 1/2 teaspoon pepper. Heat 1 tablespoon oil in 12-inch skillet over medium-high heat until smoking. Add meat and cook until well browned on all sides, 6 to 8 minutes. Transfer to large plate and set aside.

Return skillet to medium-high heat and add remaining tablespoon oil, white mushrooms, minced porcins, and  $\frac{1}{4}$  teaspoon salt; cook, stirring frequently, until all liquid has evaporated and mushrooms start to brown, 7 to 9 minutes. Scrape pan to loosen fond. Add onion and  $\frac{1}{4}$  teaspoon salt; continue to cook, stirring frequently, until onion begins to brown and dark bits form on pan bottom, 6 to 8 minutes longer. Add garlic, Herbs du Provence, and flour; cook, stirring constantly, until vegetables are coated with flour, about 1 minute. Stir in remaining  $1\frac{1}{2}$  cups beef broth and porcini soaking liquid, scraping bottom of pan with wooden spoon to loosen browned bits, and bring to boil.

Nestle steak pieces into mushroom and onion mixture and add any accumulated juices to skillet. Reduce heat to medium-low and simmer until steak registers 130 degrees on instant-read thermometer, 3 to 5 minutes, turning beef over several times. Season with salt and pepper, sprinkle with parsley, and serve.

