

October 2009

Wine of the Month Club



It is ironic that as I start to write this month's offering I am also tending to nine racks of baby back ribs slowing cooking under the haze of burning hickory. Both of the wine selections for October are perfect for foods that come off the grill, cooked using either direct or indirect methods. Of course they also work with a lot of other foods too.

2006 Plungerhead Zinfandel "Sierra Foothills" (\$15)

At last count we have sold over a hundred cases this year of the regular Lodi bottling. The opportunity came to buy most of the state allocation of this smaller production wine and after tasting it, I jumped at it. Although you can see winemaker Richard Bruno's hand at work there is no mistaking the difference. This example, targeted at a higher price (\$18 a bottle), displays a greater sense of terroir and more depth than the normal Lodi bottling.

The Sierra Nevada foothills are most famous as the area that spawned the first gold rush in 1849. After the gold rush ended many miners settled in the area, recognizing the region's potential for commercial farming. The climate of the area is perfect for many crops but on the thin soiled, higher slopes, wine grapes are the preferred crop. This region also enjoys the classic combination of hot days and very cool nights, which are perfect for balanced wines.

All of the grapes for this wine come from a single site, called the Clockspring Vineyard, where the vines are all more than fifty years old. The soil of this part of the Sierra Nevadas is iron rich, which contributes to the golden color of the hills that spawned the nickname, Golden State. This iron also creates a structure and crunch to this wine that distinguishes it from the regular bottling. Winemaking is straightforward, with fermentation in stainless steel tanks and aging in French oak.

When you pop the top on this wine, called a Zork, you should decant for a few minutes and lightly chill this wine before serving. The color is deep garnet and the nose is a heady combination of ripe strawberries and raspberries, with subtle tones of molasses, vanilla, clove and allspice. In the mouth there is a massive wave of fruit that hits the palate, with the fruit components showing a slightly cooked, jammy quality. What tells you this wine is from the Sierra Nevadas is a rhubarb, crunchy quality that rises near the finish to provide focus. You can drink this wine now or it age for a year or two. Serve with anything from pasta to baby back ribs.

2004 Averill Lake Petite Sirah (\$15)

Petite Sirah does not make my short list of favorite grapes but this one offers some pretty stunning quality for the money. Most of the inexpensive examples are one dimensional, showing little more than fruit and occasionally, oak. This one offers up a really complex nose and palate, a combination of proper age and good winemaking.

The appellation of this wine is simply California and the name is taken from winemaker Bruce Walker's favorite place, not a specific vineyard. Bruce has made his bones as the winemaker/partner of Starry Night, a premium Zinfandel oriented producer from Sonoma County. (He made this wine for a now defunct New York importer/distributor who had a small branch in South Florida.) Bruce's style of wine is full throttle and dramatic, so a couple of years in the bottle have allowed this wine to settle down and develop nicely. I would guess that he probably produced this wine from fruit left over from his nine different Zinfandel bottlings. It is not uncommon that when a winery wants to buy the fruit from a specific vineyard, they often have to take all the fruit, not just what they want. It is this reason that many Zin producers (because this seems to be specific to Zin guys) often make non-varietal wines as a way to use up the Petite Sirah and Carignane that comes with the Zinfandel fruit.

When the vendor gave me this wine blind, I was immediately baffled by the color, which is medium garnet and shows good saturation to the rim. Age? Then the nose, which is like walking into the house during holiday cooking baking season. You get a big hit of cinnamon, allspice and clove, along with the smell of fresh made blackberry preserves and a nice dose of black peppercorn. The feel in the mouth is supple and almost lush, with a long, penetrating sense of fruit into the finish. The oak notes provide a good sense of tannin that also carry with the wine, making me believe this wine will go for a couple of more years. Serve with braised beef, or with a portabello mushroom roasted and stuffed with wild mushroom barley and greens.

Pork tenderloins with an Indian spice rub

I love cooking tenderloins, they are the perfect white canvas for any flavor I want to introduce. This combination of spices is the perfect compliment to Zinfandel and oak notes of the Petite Sirah, so you can serve with either wine, or both! If you don't have time, skip the brine portion of this recipe but watch out you don't overcook the meat.

1/3 cup sugar
2 tsp table salt

2 pork tenderloins

1 tsp ground fennel
1 tsp ground cumin
2 tsp brown sugar
1 tsp ground coriander
1 tsp dry mustard
1/2 tsp ground cinnamon
1/4 tsp ground cloves

Dissolve the sugar, salt and water in one quart of room temperature water. Pour into a gallon zip lock bag and add the tenderloins. (You can also use a deep bowl.) Allow the tenderloins to soak, refrigerated, for at least one hour, up to three, then remove, rinse and pat dry.

Mix all of the spice ingredients together. Rub the mixture the all over the tenderloins and allow to rest for an hour in the refrigerator before cooking.

A half hour before cooking, prepare your grill or preheat your broiler or gas grill. (If using your broiler, place a cookie cooling rack on a cookie sheet to lift the meat off the metal surface and allow airflow under the meat.)

When the coals are ready, or the broiler/gas grill is hot, rub the cooking grate with oil and apply the pork tenderloins. Cover and cook for three to four minutes, until well marked. Roll the tenderloins over and cook for two to three minutes on that side, again until well marked. Turn a third time, but only 25% of the way over, and cook for another three to four

minutes. Roll the meat a final time, to the only portion of the tenderloin not cooked, and allow to cook until the internal temperature is 145°F at the thickest part.

Remove the meat from the grill and allow to rest, covered with foil, for ten minutes. Slice into 1/4 inch slices and serve.

Korean Short Ribs

I was not born in the south but I have lived here 25 years so I feel that the culture has permeated my being. That said, it kills me to say you can grill any rib that is not pork, but here is a delicious application for short ribs cooked, (insert gasp) on the grill. Usually I like to braise this cut but here grilling works great. (If you don't have a grill, cook these in the oven at 325°F until the meat is tender.) The initial prep time may look tedious but it only takes a minute and you will get the hang of it after a couple of times.

1 medium ripe pear, peeled, cored and sliced into 1 inch chunks

1/2 cup soy sauce
6 cloves of garlic, peeled
2 tsp of fresh ginger
6 tbsp of sugar

2 tbsp of sesame oil
3 scallions, white parts and green, sliced thin
1 tbsp rice wine vinegar

2 1/2 lbs short ribs, look for at least 1 inch of meat above the bone

Lay the rib bone down on the cutting board and make a slice between the meat and bone, opening it up but not cutting all the way through, like a book. Repeat this process at 1/4 inch intervals, effectively butterflying the meat and opening it into a long, thin, piece of meat.

Place the pear, soy sauce, garlic and ginger in the bowl of a food processor. Pulse until smooth, scraping down the sides as needed. Add the sugar, sesame oil and vinegar and give it one quick spin. Add the scallions. (Reserve 1/4 cup of the marinade in a separate container)

Place the short ribs in a zip lock bag and pour the marinade over the meat. Put in the refrigerator and allow to marinate at least four hours but overnight is best.

A half hour before cooking, prepare your grill, making sure the grate is pretty clean, because the sugar in this marinade will stick to everything. Remove the meat from the marinade and wipe off any extra or bits. When the grill is ready, oil the grate and place the meat with the full cut open across the coals. Grill for three to five minutes, until it starts to brown, then flip. Have a squirt bottle ready because the high fat content of this cut does cause flare ups. After five more minutes, or when the opposite side is nicely browned, remove from the grill and brush a thin coat of the reserved marinade on each piece, then tent and allow to rest for ten minutes. The traditional way to serve these is with white rice and kimchee, but I like mine with stir fried vegetables.

