

April 2010

# Wine of the Month Club



I often joke that I sell wine to support my cooking habit. All-Clad cookware, Wustoff knives, 50-year-old Balsamic vinegar, heck tomatoes these days! None of this stuff is cheap. To me it is all worth it when you pull together a meal where the food and the wine hit together on a higher plain. This month I have a couple of wines that are good by themselves, but have the ability to elevate the right dish in a totally new way. Remember to decant them and chill to the proper serving temperature, in this case about 60 degrees.

## **2007 BANSHEE Paso Robles Red Blend (\$13)**

In the wine industry there are a lot of buyers who, as my mom used to tell me when I would overload my plate at Sunday dinner at Grandma's, "have eyes bigger than their stomachs." Last month the AVA Cab was a wine I bought from a broker in California who bottled it for someone's WOM club in Minnesota and they ran out of cash before they took all the wine. This month a friend of mine found this wine at a custom crush facility in Sonoma, 1000 cases that a distributor ran out of gas trying to sell. In both cases we were able to buy a wine that was originally intended to sell for a heck of a lot more. With Banshee the distributor in California sold over a thousand cases of this wine at \$240 a case, so you see we got a great deal.

The components of this wine were really expensive Grenache, Syrah and Mourvedre grown in the Paso Robles area of Central California. The Paso Robles region is often considered to be two completely different growing zones, the west side which benefits from morning and evening fog as well as cool ocean breezes during the day. This climate is great for cool weather varieties, such as Sauvignon Blanc and Chardonnay, as well as some red grapes like Pinot Noir. The much warmer east side has none of these cooling influences, it is an area that is for warm weather varieties only, such as Syrah, Petite Sirah and Zinfandel. For this wine part of the Syrah and the Mourvedre come from the west side, the Grenache and the remaining Syrah come from the east. By combining the two the result is a big wine, with broad shoulders, that also displays a good bit of structure.

When you have properly decanted and you bring this wine down to temperature you will see a wine with deep ruby color and a little bit of staining in the tears. The nose displays a charming sense of fresh and cooked cherries, blueberries, blackberries, fresh sage, rosemary and black tea. Although aged in French oak barrels for a year this wine doesn't show a lot of oak on the nose or the palate. In the mouth this wine is dense, with the fruit tightly packed and held in check by some slightly obvious tannins and vivid acidity. This wine is intended to be a "food wine" so serve with grilled lamb chops, baked pasta or seared tuna dusted with mushroom powder.

## **2006 SANGUINETI Rosso di Montepulciano (\$20)**

We are big fans of Antonio Sanguineti, which may be obvious since we have made three of his wines WOM selections since 2008. I generally like everything he does but this wine never blew me away. Then in January we hosted a dinner in Orlando with Antonio and I had the chance to sit and taste this wine with food, which totally changed my opinion. The pairing was steak tartare, dressed with smoked salt and cocoa nibs; a fabulous pairing that showed how the right dish can really elevate a wine. Before you flip to the back page in horror, we won't have anything like that for a recipe this month but I think I can get you an experience that is pretty close.

The name Rosso di Montepulciano is very confusing to consumers. In part because the Italian government decided to create the very first DOCG as *Vino Nobile di Montepulciano*, which is a wine from the central part of Tuscany, south of Chianti Classico and north of Montalcino. The grape of the region is Prugnolo Gentile, one of the many members of the Sangiovese family. Where the confusion lies is that there is also a grape called Montepulciano, which is grown primarily on the east coast of Italy, specifically in the Marches and Abruzzo. One wine made from the grape is Montepulciano d'Abruzzo but it is not related to this wine at all. (I could also further confuse you by telling you this wine could also be called Chianti Colli Senesi but that really clouds the picture.) For this month we will just focus on what we know, that this is one great bottle of wine from Tuscany.

The fruit that goes into this wine are lots that Antonio has deemed not worthy of his *Vino Nobile di Montepulciano*, so he pulls them out of the aging process a year earlier than the DOCG. This wine is also blended with 10% Merlot (legal in the DOCG too) and is aged in a combination of French oak barriques (225 liter) and larger Slovenian ovals (upwards of 1000 liters). The combination of woods allows this wine to age gracefully, developing some bouquet from oxidation in smaller barrels while the larger oak contributes finesse and length. The Merlot is also necessary to round out the mid-palate and soften this wine on the edge.

Once this wine has been allowed to open up for an hour you will discover a wine that smells like Chianti, with notes of raspberry, green tea and star gazer lily. There is a ripeness, like plum jam, that fills in the center of this wine and also gives it more mid-palate. The texture in the mouth is pretty deep and smooth, with red fruit flavors complimented by mocha and caramel on the finish. Good now this wine will age for two to four years and should be served with braised meats or roast turkey.

## Chicken with Proscuitto

This is a modified Jamie Oliver recipe that I played with and found it to be a really good red wine dish. Don't waste your money on expensive Proscuitto for this one, the pre-sliced stuff at Costco is good as is the less expensive Boar's Head from Publix. Make sure it is sliced thin but stays in one piece.

**2 chicken breasts**

**2 tsp of herbs, chopped (any combination of sage, parsley, rosemary)**

**1/4 cup finely grated Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese**

**Zest of 1 lemon**

**Salt and pepper**

**4 slices of Proscuitto**

**Olive oil**

**1 tbsp of lemon juice**

Lay out the chicken breasts and cut them through the middle long ways, then pound them to a thickness of 1/4 inch. (This is a more effective way than pounding a whole breast.) Sprinkle with salt and fresh pepper and an equal amount of lemon zest. Divide the cheese between each breast then cover with a piece of Proscuitto.

In a large pan heat 1 tbsp of olive oil and a 1/2 tbsp of butter until hot. Place the chicken breasts in the pan, Proscuitto side down. Cook until the edges of the Proscuitto begin to crisp and the edges of the chicken are cooked. Flip the breasts over and cook until browned. Due to the thinness they will cook in about 2 minutes per side. Remove from the heat and allow to rest, covered, for five minutes. When ready to serve drizzle with a little olive oil and a drop or two of lemon juice. (Jaime used balsamic vinegar, which is also good but I thought put too many flavors on the plate. My family unanimously liked the lemon juice better.) Serve with risotto or steamed vegetables.

## Steaks with coffee rub and stout reduction

This dish works great with the Sanguineti Rosso. The wine elevates the coffee flavor of the meat and the roasted malt of the stout sauce, but has enough structure that it doesn't get lost. This dish also worked well with the Banshee but without the sauce.

**1/2 cup medium grind Italian Roast coffee**

**1/2 cup black peppercorns, freshly cracked**

**1/4 cup packed dark brown sugar, plus 2 tablespoons**

**1/4 cup kosher salt**

**1/4 cup granulated garlic**

**1 1/2 tablespoons cayenne pepper**

**1 1/2 tablespoons paprika**

**4 (1 1/2 to 2-inch) thick New York strip steaks**

**2 tablespoons olive oil**

**16 ounces stout**

**2 tablespoons unsalted butter, room temperature**

Preheat oven to 425 degrees F.

Combine coffee, peppercorns, 1/4 cup brown sugar, salt, garlic, cayenne pepper and paprika in a small bowl. Press firmly onto steaks. Let steaks rest, covered, for 30 minutes at room temperature.

To cook, heat oil in a large saute pan until almost smoking. Add steaks and sear 2 to 3 minutes on each side. Do not overcrowd the pan. Use two pans if needed. Move steaks to a baking dish and finish cooking in the oven until desired doneness. Remove to a cutting board or platter and let rest 10 minutes before slicing.

Meanwhile, bring stout to a simmer in a small saucepan and reduce by about 1/3. Remove from the heat and whisk in the butter and 2 tablespoons brown sugar. After steaks have rested, pour any juices from the cutting board into the sauce, and serve with steaks.