



It was my intention to continue our study of the Pacific Northwest this month but one wine did not arrive in time. The substitution provides a chance to look a little more closely at the concept of *elevage*, or in English, *aging wine prior to release* into the market. Both are superb and will give you a whole new respect for their varietals.

2007 Chehalem Pinot Gris Reserve (\$20)

Chehalem owner/winemaker Harry Peterson-Nedry is well known as one of the top producers of Pinot Noir in Oregon. What is often overlooked is his dedication and mastery of white varieties, including a top rate Riesling and two examples of Pinot Gris. His regular bottling of Pinot Gris is what you expect of the grape; shimmery and bright with citrus and apple flavors. His Reserve wine, the feature this month, is made in a completely different style that provides you with a full flavored and serious wine meant for big, important meals.

This wine starts as a Reserve bottling right from the vineyard. All of the grapes that go into this bottling come from the three estate vineyards; Stoller, Ridgecrest and Corral Creek. Each vineyard has a distinctive soil type so the Pinot Gris fruit expresses a different character depending from which it came. After sorting, the grapes are crushed and the juice is moved to neutral (3-year-old and older) oak barrels for fermentation and aging. Harry chooses to use neutral oak barrels because he wants the oxidation quality from the wood but not any flavor. He also uses several yeast strains for the fermentation to further add complexity.

Once the wine is finished fermenting it is left in the barrel, on the lees, with frequent stirring. The lees are the remains of the yeast after fermentation. Their breakdown, via enzymes found naturally in the yeast cells, helps to build richness in the wine and adds another layer of complexity to the flavor. You can tell the richness they add by looking at the thickness of the legs as they ooze down the glass. It is also during this time a portion of the wine is allowed to undergo malolactic fermentation. Malolactic fermentation occurs when a very specific bacteria consumes the malic acid (think Granny Smith apples) and converts it to lactic acid (found in milk and cream) which also adds weight and dimension to the final product. Malolactic fermentation is another tool winemakers use to change the taste and feel of white wines as they age before bottling. It is almost always used in the production of red wine. After six months of aging in barrel the wine is assembled, filtered and bottled.

You will immediately know that this is not your run-of-the-mill Pinot Gris the moment you pour a glass. The color is deeper than normal, showing a light golden tone. The nose is a complex blend of kumquat marmalade, quince, fresh pineapple and lemon blossoms. What impresses me most about this wine is the incredible balance it displays. There is a broadness to the fruit that expands immediately upon hitting the tongue. Then a fine vein of minerality rises and gives this bottling a great sense of structure that persists into the long finish. This wine is a real triumph in American Pinot Gris so enjoy with a rich, creamy seafood dish or with the Roasted chicken with dijon-lemon sauce below.

2004 Bridgeway Syrah (\$15)

The first week of June there was an article in the New York Times that focused on California Syrah. In the article writer Eric Asimov asked the tongue in cheek question, "what is the difference between a case of pneumonia and a case of California Syrah?" His answer, "You can get rid of a case of pneumonia." The reputation of this grape has taken a beating in the past couple of years and I agree with Asimov that in many cases it is unjustified.

Syrah can produce wines that are thrill ride for many different customers. New-to-wine drinkers often like inexpensive Syrah/Shiraz for their jammy, forward fruit and soft tannins. Experienced consumers may find that the grape offers a different, and arguably more complex aromatic spectrum than even Cabernet Sauvignon. Right now this is the grape to buy for anyone looking for exceptionally good deals on complex wines. Which is how we get this wine for a WOM selection at \$15.

I have tasted with Bridgeway owner Steve Marsh a couple of times in the past few years and I find him to be a solid source for mid-priced wines. What makes him unique is that he doesn't make wine or even get his hands dirty during harvest. Steve buys barrels and tanks from other brick-and-mortar wineries and creates blends that he feels offer great value. His focus, with regards to value, is to make wines that sell for \$20-25 a bottle, but as he has said to me several times that the quality of wine he blends be well above that price range. For this wine 94% of the final blend is Syrah that comes from Paso Robles. There is a small amount of Viognier, Roussane and "other whites" that were co-fermented with the Syrah to add complexity.

Elevage, or aging, occurred in older American oak barrels so they didn't impart any flavor on the wine, but allowed oxygen to work it's magic on the tannins and anthocyanins (color compounds) during this period. As oxygen bonds to the

phenolic compounds in the wine (the tannins and anthocyanins) they form long chains of molecules that are less obvious to the small receptors on the tongue (the taste buds.) Eventually these chains become big enough they are visible to the eye and will actually fall out of suspension. This has the effect of changing the wine from purple to garnet. This can also happen slowly in the bottle as oxygen moves around the cork. During this time another group of chemical reactions to oxygen are also changing the aromatics of the wine through the formation of esters, but that is too big of a topic to address here.

When you pull the cork on this wine please let it breath in a decanter for at least half an hour. It has been bottled for almost five years and it needs a little oxygen to blossom. Once you do you will discover a wine with a complex aroma of red miso, new leather, soy sauce, toasted coconut, black olive and cherry pie filling. In the mouth it offers a smooth but deep feel, with all of the flavors unfolding in layers into the long finish. In a true testament to quality this wine evolves in the glass/decanter for at least two hours after opening so enjoy over the whole evening. Serve with any grilled meat but particularly lamb or bacon wrapped filets.

Marinade

1/3 cup honey
1/3 cup soy sauce
3 cloves garlic , minced
1 tablespoon grated fresh ginger
1 teaspoon minced fresh thyme leaves
1 teaspoon of black pepper

Mix all ingredients together in a small bowl.

Chicken with dijon-lemon sauce

1/2 cup Dijon mustard
1 tablespoon fresh thyme , stems removed
4 chicken breast halves
2 tablespoons butter
1 1/2 cups chicken stock
1 tablespoon of fresh lemon juice
1/4 cup heavy cream

I was looking for an easy but flavorful dish for the Chehalem Pinot Gris and I stumbled on this great recipe. Make sure you marinate the meat for the full time or the flavor won't be strong enough.

Mix Dijon mustard and thyme; coat chicken pieces with this marinade and sprinkle with salt. Cover and refrigerate for 24 hours.

Bring chicken to room temperature and heat oven to 350°. Melt 1 tablespoon butter in a skillet. Add 2 breasts and cook, skin side down, over medium-high heat, until well browned, about 6 minutes. Transfer breasts to a roasting pan. Repeat cooking process with remaining chicken, adding another tablespoon butter, if necessary. Transfer chicken to the oven; roast until juices run clear when pierced with a fork, 20 to 25 minutes.

Meanwhile, add chicken stock and lemon juice to the skillet; bring to boil, scraping up any brown bits that have stuck to the pan; simmer until stock reduces to 3/4 cup, about 10 minutes. Add cream; return to simmer for 1 minute. Pour sauce into an appropriate container. Submerge an immersion blender and blend until sauce is smooth and frothy. Place a piece of chicken on each of 4 dinner plates. Spoon a portion of sauce over each piece of chicken and serve immediately.

Grilled leg of lamb made for Syrah

I strongly believe that lamb exists for Syrah the way I also believe that duck exists for Pinot Noir. This recipe is an easy way to feed a crowd (or four really hungry people) and is perfect with the Bridgeway Syrah.

You can also use your broiler to cook the meat the same way. Simply use a rimmed baking sheet and well oiled cookie drying rack.

Marinade (see left)

1 7-pound leg of lamb , boned, butterflied, and halved between the eye and the bottom round

1 1/2 tablespoons olive oil

Prepare the marinade. Rinse the lamb with water then put into a non-reactive bowl and pour the marinade over the meat. Allow to sit refrigerated in the marinade, with a couple of turns, for 12 hours.

Open all grill vents. Build a fire large enough to cover half a large (21-inch) charcoal grill and come within 1 1/2 inches of the grill rack, about 5 pounds of hardwood charcoal. (If using briquets, build a fire large enough to cover half the grill and come all the way up to the grill rack, about 7.5 pounds.) Allow charcoal to burn down until the flames have died and all the charcoal is covered with a layer of fine gray ash, about 20 minutes. Return grill rack to position, open lid vents, cover grill with lid, and let rack heat for 5 minutes.

Remove the lamb from the marinade and dry with paper towels. Rub with the olive oil and then place lamb pieces, fat side down, on the side of the rack that is not directly over the coals. Lamb should sizzle when it hits the grill.

Grill lamb, uncovered, for 5 minutes. Fat side still down, rotate meat so that outside edges are now closest to the fire; grill, uncovered, until fat side of lamb is a rich dark brown, 3 to 5 minutes longer. With tongs or a large meat fork, turn both pieces over; repeat grilling procedure described above, rotating lamb to ensure even cooking, until an instant-read thermometer inserted into the thickest part of each piece registers 130 degrees for medium rare, about 10 minutes longer. Transfer meat to a large platter or cutting board, tent with foil, and let rest 20 minutes. Slice on an angle and serve.