

BERGAMOT WINE co

Rebel Grape Society

MAY 2021

COLLABORATION

Cheers to collaboration. If you ever have the opportunity to find where these wonderful producers make their magic happen, you might at first feel like your phone has led you down a wrong path. But tucked away off of dusty old Hasset Lane in Geyserville, there is a uniquely industrial yet quaintly charming setting where this month's featured like minded friends and winemakers (as well as a couple others) spend so many of their days conspiring and inspiring one another.

Special home based spots like this allow so many of these young producers to grow their small crafts because they source the majority, if not all, of their grapes from locations throughout the entire state. And just because they may not own an estate somewhere (so few people are lucky enough to) these folks are heavily involved and hands-on in the farming process to ensure they are getting the quality of fruit they desire for the best end result they can create.

But in the end, not enough credit goes to the collaborative space: the favors and ability to cover one another in normal times, as well as in not normal times of need like during the past few years' fires. The exhausted harvest lunches, the shared moments with each other's families and pets, and the perpetual confidence that the risks they are taking in this industry are not only worth it, but also thoroughly appreciated and adored.

- Kevin Wardell, May 2021

WINE NO. 1

Ryme Wines "His"

Vermentino

Vare Vineyard, Napa Valley, California 2019

GRAPE: VERMENTINO [ver-mehn-TEE-noh]

Vermentino is a Bergamot darling, and a grape that is certainly a strong candidate poised to take the state by storm- move over Pinot Grigio! It is a native of the Mediterranean, most widely known from the Island of Sardegna, but it also thrives along the coast of Italy in Liguria and Tuscany, and in pockets along the south of France (under the rockin' name 'Rolle'). Vermentino can make a versatile range of wines with beautiful aromatics and, most importantly, ample natural acidity. But Vermentino is rarely a player in the orange wine league, with a few notable examples like Dettori in Sardegna- and of course Ryme's *His*.

WINEMAKER:

Ryme comes from the playful name-meshing of couple Ryan and Megan Glaab. The two met working as seasonal cellar hands at Torbreck Winery in Australia, and went on to various stints (together and separately) at Pax Wine Cellars, Peay Vineyards, Sine Qua Non, and Marcassin. They started their own Ryme Cellars wine project in 2007 with just one ton of the woefully under-represented Aglianico grape, and were so excited by the intensity and verve of the wine they made that they decided to delve deeper into the unexplored territory of intriguing varieties that California could serve up.

They next made two definitely disparate Vermentinos (this very skin contact *His* and a fresh and minerally *Hers*;) along with Ribolla Gialla, Cabernet Franc and a few of the classics of Sonoma County - Chardonnay and Pinot Noir. They are like classically trained musicians who listen to hard metal, they appreciate the winemaking art in all its forms, and seek to play all its iterations as fiercely and lovingly as they can.

GLASS:

Such aromatic lift to this deeply golden elixir, with fuyu persimmon crunch, quince and rose aromatics, texture like fresh picked nectarine, and just a hint of one of the finest Belgian ales: Saison du Pont. The tannins are a fine lattice work that holds the bouquet aloft, they are soft, sweet and almost chalky, like a natural mineral spring. There is so much exotic fruit - think kumquat, kiwi skin and white-flesh melon - tempered and elegant with a delicate landing.

WINE NO. 2

Leo Steen 'The Steen'

Chenin Blanc

Santa Ynez Valley, Jurassic Vineyard, California 2018

GRAPE: CHENIN BLANC [cheh-nuhn blaangk]

Chenin Blanc is famous from iconic Loire appellations like Vouvray and Sauvonnères, and is the base for many a sparkling Crémant de Loire as well. It dwindled in popularity in France due to the high proportion of wines made with residual sugar- in varying levels of off-dry. The trends today shift toward high acid, dry wines- but don't be afraid to try one of the classic styles from a great producer, especially with age on it. In California, Chenin vines have been disappearing, mainly because many vineyards were planted in the wrong places for production overdrive and not for Chenin's charm. This Loire local wants a cooler site and a grower with varietal knowledge - that's where the magic happens.

WINEMAKER:

Leo Hansen has had food and wine on his mind since he was a pup working in his father's kitchen at 12. Born and raised in Denmark, Leo sought out the sommelier life early on, including an apprenticeship with the Danish Sommelier World Cup champion, and certification as a European sommelier. His passion took him to Alsace, Loire, Champagne, Burgundy, Spain and Italy, and finally, California. Thanks to his gig as the wine director at Kong Hans, Copenhagen's first one-star Michelin restaurant, Leo ended up traveling to Cali to scout new wines. He felt such a strong connection to California's dynamic winemaking scene that he moved two years later and took on the winemaker position at Stuhlmuller in Alexander Valley.

Hansen began Leo Steen Wines in 2004 (the 'Steen' is his nerdy homage to Chenin) and has focused on expressive vineyards, the use of natural yeasts, lower alcohols, and minimal new oak. Jurassic Vineyard was planted in 1982, at 1,110 ft in the rolling hills of Santa Ynez Valley. The site takes its name from the native fossil-rich, limestone soils and is heaven for this own-rooted Chenin. The fruit sees a few hours of skin contact before pressing, with 11 months lees aging in concrete egg, 5 more months in neutral oak barrels, and 12 more in bottle.

GLASS:

There is so much wound up in this bottle, just pop and watch it unleash its many delights with time, with air, and with some fine noshings. It declares itself as Chenin right away with that signature scent of lanolin/wet wool and fresh laundry, the subtle golden fruit and rich lemon rind oiliness. There's a touch of lemongrass broth, pear skin, cotton balls and slivered almonds emerging throughout. The soil definitely speaks through this wine, telling tales of ancient seabeds, fossils and dinosaurs, with a shimmering tension between mineral seashell and oyster fat creaminess.

WINE NO. 3

Idlewild 'The Flower' Rosé

Barbera + Dolcetto + Nebbiolo

Mendocino County, Fox Hill Vineyard, California 2019

GRAPES: BARBERA + DOLCETTO + NEBBIOLO

[bar-BEH-rah] + [dohl-CHEHT-oh] + [neh-bee-OH-low]

The three red staples of Piedmont are rarely seen fraternizing together, but the concept of blending these neighbors makes all the sense in the world. Take Nebbiolo's red fruit aromatics and ample tannin and acid structure, add Barbera's bombastic purple plum juice and heaps of vibrant acidity, and stir it up with Dolcetto's sultry sweet, slightly dusty rustic charm, and voila- "The Flower" blooms. This is a testament not only to the diverse range of delights performed by Italian varieties, but also to California's endless frontier of discovery, chance, creativity and varietal promise.

WINEMAKER:

Sam Bilbro grew up playing hide and seek in his father's winery, a converted cow barn turned cellar in rural Sonoma County. He walked the vineyards and tasted wine blends with his dad, absorbing the language of wine. During years of work in the restaurant industry, Sam reached outside of California's scope and became immersed in wines from around the world, and fell particularly in love with Piedmont wines. His journey led him to the hills of Mendocino County, where he took over farming Fox Hill Vineyard which was planted to many Italian varieties.

He expanded this vineyard as well as his own - Wild Ruth, in the Yorkville Highlands - planting evermore Piedmont varieties: Nebbiolo, Dolcetto, Barbera, Cortese, Arneis, Erbaluce, and other delights. The vineyards are well-drained gravel, schist and sandstone. Obviously, Nebbiolo, Dolcetto, and Barbera ripen at different times, but Sam feels that picking and co-fermenting these three at the same time highlights their inherent qualities. The fruit goes direct to press, and the wine is aged for four months in neutral oak for complexity and texture.

GLASS:

This is a cheery summer picnic through and through. Pour a glass and immediately you're plopped down on a blanket in the midst of a sun soaked wildflower meadow, with a feast of the freshest smorgasbord of delights. There's just-picked summer strawberries, a big old bowl of cherries, icy watermelon juice, blackberry jam, roasted marshmallow nougat, fennel salumi slices, grapefruit zest, and a glass of jasmine green tea, all zipping out of the glass. Serving suggestion: pair with all of the above.