

RED ROGUES
FEBRUARY 2007



PLUMPJACK
WINES

In the not so distant past, when you would think of great Syrah and Shiraz from around the world, the renowned Syrahs from the Northern Rhone, Hermitage and Cote Rotie would certainly come to mind, as would Grange from Australia. I recently searched *The Wine Spectator* archives for Syrah/Shiraz and the resulting list contained over 5,000 entries.

There has virtually been an explosion of interest in this varietal over the last 50 years, and with this keen interest, more plantings. For example, in California there were a mere 4,000 acres of Syrah planted in 1997, compared to the over 18,000 acres today. In 2003, Australia had more than 100,000 acres planted. Globally, there are over 287,000 acres planted, and those numbers are continuing to increase annually.

The Syrah grape has made its way to all corners of the wine-growing world, and the fact that our wines this quarter come from Sicily, Argentina, and South Africa proves that point.

Syrah's popularity with the consumer comes in part due to its compatibility with Mediterranean-inspired cuisines, as well as its affordability. While there are many Syrahs that can cost hundreds of dollars, the reverse is also true. Syrah can offer wonderful flavors and quality at very reasonable prices.

The popularity of Syrah from the grape grower comes from its versatility. The grape can thrive in a variety of soils and climates. Some of the best French Syrah comes from unbelievably steep, terraced hillsides where there can be cool temperatures. Australian Shiraz thrives in the valleys with much warmer temperatures.

The incredible thing about Syrah is the breadth of flavors that this grape imparts, such as wild berry, leather, pepper, spice, huckleberry, raw beef, tobacco, earthiness, and many, many more. Generally, you will find Syrahs from cooler climates displaying more austerity, more structure and more concentration, while the wines from warmer climates are fruit forward, intense, and lush. What is remarkable about our selections for this quarter is the diversity of the flavors each of these wines offers.

While sampling the wines, I dined on the Balboa Cafe's rigatoni with sausage, red peppers, and arugula, and it is no coincidence that this pairing rocks. Braised short ribs shepherd's pie, which is a recipe in our new *PlumpJack Cookbook*, would be another great choice.

FIVE REASONS WHY PLUMPJACK LIKES SYRAH:

- 1 There are so many different flavors and styles.
- 2 So many food and wine pairings, so little time.
- 3 It's affordable and delicious.
- 4 We love exploring the world of wine.
- 5 Where will the next great Syrah come from?

THIS MONTH'S SELECTIONS . . .

2004 KAID, SYRAH, SICILY

\$26.99

Proprietor: Antonino, Rosolino & Natale Alessandro

Winery location: Camporeale, Palermo, Sicily

Vineyards: 1,200 feet above sea level

Age of vines: 16 years

Alcohol: 13%

Cases produced: Less than 2,000, only 100 imported for California

Varietal blend: 100% Syrah

Vinification: 12 days of maceration, 6 months in stainless, then 10 months in barriques

Aging potential: It's lovely now, and will age 3-5 years

Descriptors: Beautiful aromas of fresh tobacco, pine, slightly peppery, medium-bodied, dark berries, a touch of green olives, with a velvety, smooth finish.

Food pairing: Hearty dishes like lamb shanks or stew

Interesting fact: While most Italian producers stick to their native grape varieties, the Alessandros have planted many varietal types which are foreign such as Chardonnay, Viognier, Syrah, and Grenache.

2003 FAIRVIEW JAKKALSFONTEIN SHIRAZ, SOUTH AFRICA

\$29.99

Proprietor: Charles Back, 3rd generation

Winery location: Paarl, 40 miles from Table Mountain

Vineyards: Area called Malmesbury where soil is gravelly and red

Age of vines: 9 years

Alcohol: 15.3%

Cases produced: 30 cases available for the entire USA

Varietal blend: 100% Shiraz

Vinification: Small yields, non-irrigated old bush vines grown in weathered shale soils. Aged in medium toasted French and American barrels

Aging Potential: 3-6 years

Descriptors: Medium-bodied with nice structure for aging potential, inky dark color, toasty vanilla, elegant, somewhat restrained fruit. Dark berry with black pepper notes.

Food pairing: Spicy pasta dishes, meatloaf, and hearty cheeses

Interesting fact: In the 17th Century there were many jackals in the Swartland (Black Land) region of the cape, and these wild animals kept killing the sheep and goats. The settlers from the Dutch East India Company decided to start growing agricultural products such as grapes because their livelihood was being compromised. Hence the name Jakkalsfontein Vineyard. Now Fairview has started raising goats and sheep for their milk, and they are the largest producer of specialty cheeses in South Africa.

2003 FINCA LA ANITA, ARGENTINA

\$26.99

Proprietor: Antonio Mas

Winery location: Alto Agrelo, Mendoza, at the foot of the Andes

Vineyards: Alto Agrelo, Mendoza

Age of vines: 15 years

Alcohol: 14%

Cases produced: 1,800

Varietal blend: 100% Syrah

Vinification: The wine is unfiltered, aged for 3 months in new French oak casks from Alliers and Tronçais.

Aging potential: 3-8 years

Descriptors: Initial aroma of raw leather and meat, medium-full-bodied. Big blackberry, white pepper, toasty oak, with velvety finish. Open for an hour before drinking.

Food pairings: Meaty dishes, grilled lamb steaks, or juicy burger.

Interesting fact: Antonio does a special bottling of white and red wines for the Argentine Breeders of Quarter Horse Association.