

RED ROGUES
DECEMBER 2009


PLUMPJACK
WINES

Alas, 2009 is coming to a close, and I'm certain that many of us are thankful and looking forward to 2010. One of the great opportunities 2009 brought us is the availability of some high-priced wines at a much lower price point. Ultimately, it's a wonderful time for consumers.

An exciting aspect in the world of wine is that there are always pioneers planting new varietals in areas where other varietals are much more prominent. For example, when one thinks of South Australia, the first type of wine that comes to mind is Shiraz. When one thinks of Italy, we reminisce about great Brunellos or Barolos. Likewise, when one thinks

of some of the great wines of Spain, we automatically think of Tempranillo from Rioja. However, a few wine makers from each of the above mentioned areas have strayed from the more traditional path and brought some forward thinking ideas to each of their regions. From Sicily, Salvatore Geraci produces the 2006 Rosso Del Soprano; from Spain, Christopher Cannan and Rene Barbier produce the 2004 Laurona; and from South Australia, Darryl Groom produces the 2008 Zinfandel.

This is a terrific trio of vino for the wine adventurer. Bon Voyage!

2006 ROSSO DEL SOPRANO, PALARI - \$31.99

Italy has more than 600 different types of indigenous grapes for the production of wine. We've all heard of Sangiovese, Nebbiolo, Pinot Grigio, Barbera, and another 10 or 12. Most rosso's are made by blending multiple grapes. The 2006 Rosso Del Soprano is made from varietals that few of us would recognize—Nerello Mascalese, Nerello Cappuccio, Nocera, Actana, and Galatena grapes—all indigenous varieties from Sicily. You can be the first on your block to boast of having tried a wine with these grapes blended together. This same blend is better known for the more famous and award winning "Faro" by Palari, which was highlighted by the *Wine Report* of 2007 as one of the best wines from Italy.

The proprietor, Salvatore Geraci, has been a Sicilian 'foodie', an architect, and a friend of Carlo Faggi, the editor of *Vini & Liquori*, a magazine out of Milan. He has always had a passion for traveling around Italy, sampling restaurants by tasting world-class food and wines. His organoleptic pleasures (this word is stolen from a colleague) led him to Santo Stefano Briga, between Messina and Taormina, where he found bush-trained vines that were a half-century old. He started his production of wine in 1990. Year after year, Geraci would take his two wines to the *Gambero Rosso* offices and let his friends sample his latest vintages—but never releasing them for sale to the general public. Finally, he released the 1994 vintage to the public and was awarded due biccheri (2 glasses out of a possible 3) from the prestigious *Gambero Rosso*, Italy's famous guide for rating wines. Beginning in 1996, the Palari wines won *tre biccheri* (3 glasses out of a possible 3), and of course, they have been winning many awards since then.

Our featured wine is made in Santa Stefano Briga, in the appellation of Sicilia Rosso, with head-trained vines from volcanic basalt soil. The yields from the vines on the steep sloping hills are only .8 tons per acre. The grapes are soft pressed and fermented in stainless-steel tanks, and aged in French oak barrels for one year, followed by a minimum of 8 months in the bottle. This is an old world wine, a delight for those who love the dry wines of European heritage. Think of standing in the middle of a forest with a floor of pine needles and mushrooms for the aroma profile. The bright, grapey flavor offers black cherry, with some raw leather flavors—it's rustic but not fleshy. A long finish brings a touch of spice and vanilla. This will age for 3-8 years. Serve with braised short ribs or aged cheese. The Sicilians serve it with Filetto al Forno con Pomodoro e Basilico.

2004 LAURONA - \$32.99

Spain is a fascinating country where food and wine are a large part of its daily culture. Traveling and dining in Spain can be a grand surprise for the neophyte traveler who is ready to go to sleep at 10 p.m. and suddenly realizes that 10 p.m. is when dining begins. The 2004 Laurona is made from 50% Garnacha, 25% Merlot, 15% Syrah and 10% Cabernet Sauvignon. According to Pliny the Elder, Laurona is named for a local vineyard which was the best and most famous vineyard in Spain some 2000 years ago when the finest wine in Spain was exported to Rome.

Seeing the potential for great wines to be made from less expensive land, Christopher Cannan, an Englishman from Bordeaux, and Rene Barbier, also from Bordeaux purchased property in the Catalan area of Spain, which is approximately 1½ hours North of Barcelona, near the town of Falset. Falset is just south of the famous appellation of Priorat. Cannan, famous for founding Europvin—a French and Spanish Marketing Company—collaborated with Rene Barbier, proprietor of the world famous Clos Mogador. With intimate knowledge of this part of Spain and belief in its potential as a genuine fine wine source, Cannan and Barbier founded Laurona in 1999 and have worked diligently to help Montsant achieve its own Denominación de Origen.

Both partners have excellent reputations within the world of wine for their unyielding specifications about the way that their wines are made—from the vineyards, where they work with about a dozen local growers, to the sorting table, where only the finest and perfectly ripened grapes are chosen, to the winery where the use of modern technology is employed. The integrity of the wine is paramount. There are approximately 5,000 cases produced annually.

The grapes come from the best hillside vineyards around Falset, where the vines are between 15 and 80 years old. The soil conditions are similar to the soils in Priorat, which features schist, clay, sand and gravel. The vinification is very classic, with long macerations, followed by six years of aging in 500L French oak barrels—some new. The lees are reincorporated into the barrels after malolactic fermentation.

The 2004 Laurona has aromas that are slightly minty with dried herbs and rosemary. There is a seamless integration of fruit and tannin. The wine has flavors of crushed berry fruit with a hint of anise, and finishes long with a fleshy (but not overtly extracted) finish. Well-balanced fruit, with good tannin structure, and perfect acidity make for a well-made wine. I would serve this wine with grilled steak or roasted lamb, and the wine will last another 4-8 years.

2008 GROOM ZINFANDEL, BUSH BLOCK - \$27.99

The Barossa Valley in Australia is hot, dry, and has a fairly level growing floor where some of the best Shiraz in the world comes from. Syrah and Zinfandel grapes flourish with these types of growing climates. The Flying Winemaker, Darryl Groom, is known to many here in the USA as the illustrious winemaker behind the Geyser Peak wines. In 1990 he moved to Northern California, but previous to this he was with the Penfolds group, and he was responsible for producing their world class Grange. He is known as the Flying Winemaker due to the time that he spends traveling to and from the Barossa Valley.

Darryl and his partners, Lisa Groom, who was the marketing arm of Penfolds and is now Darryl's wife, and David and Jeanette Marshall, who live in the Barossa Valley, are producing one of the first Zinfandels outside of California. The partnership purchased 87 acres of property adjacent to the very famous Kalimna vineyard, where the grapes for Grange are grown. There are only 8 acres of bush vineyards planted to Zinfandel.

Though there is still a heated debate about where Zinfandel began, it is a well-known fact that California has been producing great Zinfandels for more than 150 years. Through DNA tests, the viticulturalists have more or less proven that the original Zinfandel came from Croatia and is a close relative of Primitivo, grown in Italy.

Many agree that the best Zinfandels produced are from old vines that are head-trained, aka 'bush vines'. Although the grape is hardy, old vines typically produce smaller yields, which translate to deeper flavors. The grapes, however, are much more expensive and more time consuming to produce. Groom's principle is to get deep flavor and extraction from the Zinfandel 'bush vines'.

Mint and eucalyptus erupt out of the glass and then the aroma of vine-ripened tomatoes explodes! The mouth is dense, with big, dark blackberry flavors, some raspberry and a touch of raisin, making for a medium-bodied wine. Some spiciness, which reminds me of old-fashioned Spice cake, and black and white pepper come through with a long finish. This is a wine that clearly expresses the Zinfandel varietal flavors. Drink now or hold for 3-5 years, and only 400 cases were produced. This will pair perfectly with rich pasta dishes or spicy, pork tenderloin.