



Monthly Wine Club

November 2009

Thanksgiving is one of my favorite holidays. We not only give thanks for all the wonderful bounty the world offers, and for the opportunity to reunite with friends and family, but it is a holiday that embraces the pairing of food and wine. I have been very fortunate for the last number of years to be a guest at my friends Lynn and Steve's home on Thanksgiving. Lynn prepares one of the most delicious

Thanksgiving meals, and every year I tell myself I will

try to control how much I eat, and every year I fail! She brines her turkey for days in advance, then wraps it in thickly sliced bacon and roasts it. The meat is so moist and flavorful; it is out of this world. There are usually two types of stuffing, a variety of salads, buttermilk biscuits, and more. When it is time to choose the wines for our November wine club shipment, I draw on my organoleptic memories of Lynn's turkey and all the accompaniments and pick accordingly. Share these wines on Thanksgiving Day, and then buy some extra bottles. They will make any meal a special event.



Situated between the Mediterranean on the southwest, Italy on the west, Croatia on the southeast, and the Austrian Alps to the north, it will come as no surprise that the Slovenia's major influences when it comes to wine are Italian, German and Hungarian, with some French sensibility thrown into the mix. Yet, nothing is a greater influence on Slovenian wine, however, than the extremely variable climate of the region, which can vary to such a great degree that the size of the country's wine production regularly fluctuates twenty to thirty percentage points from vintage to vintage. The Alps, which form Slovenia's northern border, shield the land from the harshest of northern weather and also moderate the intense continental summer heat. The southern slopes of the Alps, and their rolling foothills, offer a large number of good viticultural sites that are grouped into three winegrowing regions differing in microclimate, soil composition and viticultural tradition: Podravje, Posavje, and Primorje. These three primary winegrowing regions are planted to around 60,000 acres of vineyards, representing more than one percent of the nation's tiny 7,827 square miles of territory. Slovenia doesn't have a north-south divide so much as an east-west one. This is notable in both the grape varieties, and wine styles produced, as well as in food and culture. With more than 40,000 registered wineries according to the Oxford Companion to Wine, it's not hard to believe that the average vineyard size for the country falls somewhere between 8 to 15-acres. Slovenia produces both red and white wines, but the white wines are by far the best and most interesting. These whites are either made as single varietals or as blends, using a wide variety of techniques, from the more traditional vinification in large, old oak casks, to modern stainless steel winemaking. Slovenian winemakers produce distinctive wines from familiar grapes like Pinot Gris, Riesling, and Sauvignon Blanc, to less well-known varieties such as Ribolla Gialla, Malvasia, Traminer, and Sylvaner, to the out-and-out obscure Kerner, Pikolit, Vitovska, Sapon, and Pinela. In 2007, Verus Vineyards was created by Danilo Snajder, Rajko Zlivcar, and Bozidar Grabovac, who all previously worked for the former state wine co-op at Jeruzalem-Ormoz. Their mission statement says, "Verus stands for true, real, actual, also sincere, genuine, fair etc.. These characteristics distinguish also our vineyards and people working there. With the required expertise and precise work in the vineyards and the cellar we strive for our wine to maintain the fresh taste of grapes, of the location, the soil, the vintage and the surrounding area." Their vineyards are located in Styria (Štajerska), on the Jeruzalem-Ormoz hills in Eastern Slovenia within the winegrowing region of Podravje. This is arguably the best winegrowing area in the Podravje region, although the smallest, with the highest density of ideal viticultural sites,

*2008 Verus
Furmint
Štajerska, Slovenia*
●●●●●●●●●●
*2008 Drystone
Pinot Noir
Central Otago, New Zealand*

where vines cling to just about every hillside. It is an area of low, rounded hills composed of partly consolidated mid-Tertiary sediments. The soil is sandstone-clay and more fertile compared to neighboring areas. Furmint, known in Slovenia as Šipon, is the classic white grape variety of Hungary's sweet, golden Tokaji, but an increasing proportion of it is now being vinified dry and shows just how noble this grape variety is. Since about 2003, Hungarian growers have been experimenting with making dry whites from this grape, trying out oak aging and lees contact, and some of them even seeking out specific terroirs most suitable for dry white wine growing. It seems as though the Verus team has been absorbing all these lessons, and have produced a Slovenian Furmint worthy of international recognition. The grapes for the 2008 come from a sustainably-farmed, southeast-facing, vertical, single vineyard in the Ivanjkovci commune. Most of the hand-harvested grapes were cool-fermented for three weeks in stainless-steel, but 15% of them were fermented in new Seguin Moreau French 225-litre barriques, and left on fine lees for four months. The finished wine is floral and aromatic, with aromas of apples and pears. Stone fruits combine with gentle oak and lively acid, all nicely balanced, on the palate. Only 600 cases were produced. It is wonderful on its own as an aperitif, or pairs beautifully with oysters, clams, or just about any seafood.

The 2009 Verus Furmint is \$19.99/bottle, \$215.90/case.



Unlike Napa Valley or the Médoc of Bordeaux, Central Otago, on New Zealand's South Island, has attracted travelers long before it became famous for wine. With its deep woods and vast moors, snowy peaks and savage gorges, Central Otago is one of the most beautiful wine regions in the world, and Central Otago's vineyards are the furthest south in the world. The viticultural history of Central Otago, however, goes back to the 1860s gold rush, when a Frenchman and former miner named Jean Desire Feraud planted 1,200 vines, supposedly of Pinot Noir, and made a Burgundy-style wine. His bottles won prizes at a competition in Sydney, but he couldn't persuade the miners to give up hard liquor in favor of wine. After a few vintages, Feraud sold the property. One person who appreciated Feraud's efforts was Romeo Bragato, a Yugoslavian viticulturist and author of the "Report on the Prospects of Viticulture in New Zealand," published in 1895. In his report, Bragato declared, "There is no better country on the face of the earth for the production of Burgundy grapes than Central Otago." Modern winemaking in Central Otago began less than three decades ago, and it wasn't until the founding of Felton Road in 1991, and the release of its first vintage (1997) of Block 3 Pinot Noir that the world really took notice. Like Burgundy, Central Otago enjoys a continental climate, experiences intense sunlight and altitudes that range from 650 to 1,300 feet. There is also an extreme difference between daytime and nighttime temperatures. Furthermore, the vines in Central Otago's vineyards are planted far closer together, so each is asked to produce half as many grapes as it might in another part of New Zealand, like Marlborough. This helps explain why Central Otago Pinots have riper flavors and less alcohol than Pinots from other parts of New Zealand. With its relatively small vineyards and wildly variable vintages, making Pinot Noir in Central Otago's mountains is not for the fainthearted—nor for the large multinationals. Dick Berridge, a landscape architect who has designed resorts in the U.S., Japan and Australia, was an early investor in Napa's Duckhorn Wine Company. In 1989, while on a cycling tour through Burgundy, Dick discovered what would become his lifelong passion: great pinot noir. While touring Central Otago, he recognized the opportunity to produce world-class pinot noir—wines on par with the greats of Burgundy. A chance meeting in 2000 between Dick and Central Otago viticulturalist Tim Morrison Deaker led to the creation of Berridge Vineyards Estates, and his own wine company: Drystone. Berridge has developed vineyards in three key sub regions of Central Otago: Bannockburn, Lower Burn and Gibbston. His Pinot Noir is a blend of grapes from these three vineyards, and the combination of each of these areas results in a wine of great complexity and regional identity. The wine is made by Dean Shaw, regarded as one of the top winemakers in Central Otago. The 2008 pinot was fermented with native yeasts in open-top fermentors, with punch-downs twice a day following a six-day cold soak. Aging took place in 60-gallon French oak barrels, 30% new, for 10 months. 1,346 cases were produced. The 2008 Drystone Pinot displays a lovely deep color for Pinot, and a gorgeous nose to match. The wine has aromas of intense black cherries, combined with aromatic spices. It is full and well structured, revealing just a little tannin on the finish. In the mouth, black cherry fruit dominates, hints of clove and nutmeg surface, and the wine possesses great acidity hiding behind the substance of the wine. This wine will pair beautifully with all poultry (especially roasted duck,) richer fishes such as salmon and tuna, and spicy dishes like Moroccan tagine or some Indian dishes.

The 2008 Drystone Pinot Noir is \$23.99/bottle, \$259.10/case.