

Member Newsletter

March 2013

Spring is in the air in Napa Valley!

Spring Wine Release

No wine before its time, but it is now time to release some of our wonderful 2010 vintages! In this wine club shipment, you will be receiving some of our newly released red wines that have been gracefully aging in our cellar for 2 years. We have included the Wine Advocate reviews at the end of this newsletter so you can see the accolades these wines have received. Additionally, our 2009 Seduction was named one of the 10 Best Bordeaux-style blends and our Merlot was named one of the 10 Best California Merlots – both by the Wine Spectator.

As you know as a Wine Club member, our goal is to bring you the best possible wine at a reasonable price. Because we avoid the 50% discount we would have to give to distributors, we can keep our prices 50% lower by only selling direct to consumers. The truth of this becomes very apparent when you look at our scores and see how expensive the other wines are that we compete against and outscore.

We hope you enjoy these wines as much as we enjoy having you as a Wine Club member!

Wine Club Member Cruise Report

Barb and I recently joined 96 Wine Club members and other guests on the Celebrity Reflection on January 19th for a 7 night cruise through the Eastern Caribbean. We had never been on a cruise before so we did not really know what to expect – in fact, one of our friends warned us that it may not be that much fun. That prediction could not have been further from the truth – we had a GREAT time! The ship was beautiful – about 1,000 feet long and held 3,000 passengers and 1,500 crew. Inside it was like being in an atrium hotel 13 stories tall – it was hard to believe it was all floating upright on the water. Seven restaurants, multiple swimming pools, great bars and entertainment options included a theater with Broadway style shows every night. Best of all, everywhere were other wine club members to talk with and share stories of our lives. This is what made the cruise such a special experience – getting to know everyone and becoming good friends. We had 2 sit down tastings of O'Brien wines, including reserves

and 2007 Seduction, and then a lunch pairing of wines with food in a beautiful Italian restaurant at the rear of the ship. The ship stopped at San Juan, Puerto Rico where we visited the fort, ate great Cuban food, and Bart bought a new Panama hat. Then St. Maarten, where we snorkeled and did drunken diamond shopping (but not so drunk that we bought anything thankfully). Last to St. Kitts, where Barb had her first experience driving an ATV up into the lower rain forest and past an old sugar mill from the 1700s. You can see pictures from the trip on our website under the Wine Club menu.

We announced we will be going to Ireland in late April 2014 to celebrate the 1,000 anniversary of the death of Brian Boru on the battlefield at Clontarf (just outside Dublin). We went last summer to check out Ireland and to plan the tour – and we had a blast. It will even be better with a horde of wine club members on buses (drinking) and taking over villages (drinking) and going out to eat together (more drinking). We will be sending out the plans in the next month or so.

We hope you can join us on this epic adventure to Ireland!

Upcoming Events

Our wine club member event calendar for 2013 is below. If you happen to be in Napa Valley during one of our Wine Club Pickup Parties, please come by and join the fun. In April, we are participating in Napa Valley Arts in April showcasing artist Tim Howe. Our hotel partner for this event, offering special packages to our wine club members, is Milliken Creek Inn. During the summer, we encourage you to come visit us for Date Night at the Drive-in and sit on the back lawn to watch the sunset over the Mayacamas Mountains. A wonderful site to see!

February 23	Wine Club Pickup Party
March 17	St. Patrick's Day Celebration
April 15-21	Napa Valley Arts in April
May 18	Wine Club Pickup Party
July 27	Date Night at the Drive-In
September 7	Wine Club Pickup Party
September 28	Night of Unrestrained Reserve
November 16	Wine Club Pickup Party

Wine 101 with David Yorgensen and Mark Davis

Wine Storage and Care

Wine is an incredibly complex and diverse liquid; though mostly comprised of water and alcohol it is quite evident that this is not the extent of the delicious ambrosia's composition. Wine is loaded with

various acids, tannins, aromatic compounds, and phenolics all of which are extremely important to the wines flavor as well as its ageing potential. Most of these compounds are derived from the grapes themselves; though yeast also helps play a role in the wines ultimate composition along with the role of producing alcohol from the sugar found in grape juice.

Because of the complex makeup of wine, it is important to care for it properly in order to conserve its composition as the winemakers intended. Wine is sensitive to both hot and cold temperatures as well large temperature fluctuations. Because of this wine should not be stored at extremely cold nor extremely hot temperatures.

Wine stored at cold temperatures (below 50°F) for long periods of time can have certain acids that crystallize and settle out of solution. The main acid responsible for this is tartaric acid. At temperatures, even of those found in your refrigerator, tartaric acid can form crystallized compounds called tartrates. These then can precipitate out of solution and appear like tiny glass crystals at the bottom of the bottle or underside of the cork. This is especially common with white wine as they tend to have much higher concentrations of tartaric acid than red wine. Tartrate crystals that settle in wine bottles are perfectly normal and harmless. A common preventative technique used in wine production is to chill the wine over long periods of time to force these crystals to fall out of solution before bottling. However, this is both very energy intensive (i.e. not very “green”) and also may be detrimental to the wines overall taste and complexity. At O’Brien Estate we choose not to undergo this process and instead keep the wine pure and complex. If you must store wine at cold temperatures, like that in a refrigerator, know that crystals may naturally settle at the bottom of the bottle.

The other main factor that should be taken into account when storing wine is temperature stability. Large temperature swings (say 20 degrees over less than a 24 hour time period) are extremely detrimental to wine. This is due to the fact that a vacuum is formed in the bottle when the wine gets cold, pulling air in, and then expands when hot, pushing air out. This air exchange in and out of the bottle excessively oxidizes the wine.

Additionally, wine that experiences extreme heat can become “cooked”; diminishing desired aromatics and adding undesirable other aromas. A pushed cork can often be a visible sign of a bottle that has been improperly stored at temperatures too high.

Some take home messages:

- Wine, especially white wine, when stored at cold temperatures can precipitate out crystals called tartrates. This is natural occurrence and they are not harmful.

- Wine should be stored in a dark, moderately humid environment that maintains a stable temperature and preferably stored on their sides to help maintain a moist cork.

- The ideal temperature to store a wine is 50-59 °F.

Recipe

We always like to provide a seasonal recipe to pair with our wines. Executive Chef Elizabeth Binder, our dear friend who has catered our dinners for several years, is competing on this season of “Top Chef - Seattle”. Be sure to watch the show on Bravo TV – very fun! She graciously provided this recipe for your table as it pairs beautifully with all of our red wines.

New York Strip, Radicchio, Juniper Berry & Blackberry Jus

Serves 8

Ingredients:

8 prime New York strip steaks (1 1/2 inches thick, about 14 to 16 ounces each; the thickness is more important than the weight)
2 sticks unsalted butter
1/2 cup extra virgin olive oil
8 teaspoons kosher salt & 8 teaspoons cracked black pepper (*or Juniper rub - recipe below*)
4 heads radicchio - cut into wedges, drizzle with evoo, season and grill.
2 bunch dandelion greens - toss with grilled radicchio to wilt.
1 punnet blackberries!
1 qt blackberry jus (*recipe below*)

Method:

Melt the butter over medium-high heat and skim the milk solids from the surface. Set aside to cool. Remove the steaks from the refrigerator about 30 to 40 minutes before cooking. Cover loosely with plastic wrap and allow the steaks to come to room temperature. Before grilling, shape the steaks by gently pushing the sides into the center to create height.

Mix the oil and 1/2 cup of clarified butter on a large serving plate. Put the steaks into the oil-butter mix to coat each side, then lift the steaks to allow the excess oil to drip off. (Make sure that the steaks don't have too much oil-butter mix on them, as this will create flare-ups on the grill.) Coat each side of the steaks with 1 teaspoon of salt and 1 teaspoon of black pepper / *rub of your choice (see below)*.

Place the meat on the hottest part of the grill. If at any time the grill flares up, move the steaks to the outside edge, returning them to the center when the flame dies down. Do not slide the steaks across the grill; gently pick them up with tongs. The key is not to flip them around. Ultimately you want to turn a New York strip steak only three times, cooking each side twice for 3 minutes at a time (for a total cooking time of 12 minutes), to get a rare steak with adequate char.

Telling when a steak is done is not an exact science. One technique is to cut a small slit in the steak to see the color of the meat. A professional presses the meat and compares its firmness to the softer, fleshy part at the base of his or her own thumb; if it's the same density, the meat is rare. The firmer center of the palm is like the feel of a well-done steak. (It takes practice.)

An instant-read meat thermometer is most accurate of all; insert it into the center of the steak. Rare is 110 to 115 degrees; medium-rare, 120 degrees; medium, 125 to 130 degrees; medium-well, 130 to 135 degrees; and well, 140 degrees. (Err on the low side, since steaks will continue to cook when removed from the grill.) Allow the meat to rest for 4 - 5 minutes before serving, to allow the juices to emerge from the center.

Dress chicories with pan juices from cooking beef.

Assemble on plate with roasted/grilled beef, fresh blackberries and blackberry sauce.

Wine Advocate Reviews

Robert Parker Jr. has now retired from being the head taster at the Wine Advocate, a wine journal he founded in 1975. In his last year of tasting wines in Napa – 2010 – he gave our wines four 94 point scores (2007 Seduction, 2008 Seduction, 2008 Merlot Reserve, 2007 Unrestrained Reserve). Now the new taster for Napa wines is Antonio Galloni, his reviews, and those of Robert Parker, are below for the wines we currently still have available.

2007 Seduction Bordeaux Blend 94 points

“The 2007 Seduction exhibits more graphite, licorice, black currant, and blackberry, with some floral underpinnings. I don’t like it better or worse than the 2008. Slightly more restrained, this gorgeous, medium to full-bodied wine is another impressive example of Napa viticulture at an attractive price point.” - Robert Parker

2010 Seduction Bordeaux Blend 94 points

“The 2010 Red Blend Seduction is one of the darker, richer wines in this range. Here, too, the tannins are quite silky and polished, making the wine quite enjoyable even at this early stage. Violets, mocha and cloves are layered into the rich, sumptuous finish. The appropriately named Seduction is indeed very hard to resist. I imagine it will be even better in another year or two, once some of the baby fat drops off. The blend is Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Cabernet Franc. Anticipated maturity: 2015-2025.” - Antonio Galloni

2010 Chardonnay Reserve 93 points

“The 2010 Chardonnay Reserve is another striking wine from O’Brien. The sur-lie aging in French oak gives the wine notable breadth and volume, but without masking varietal character. The 2010 Reserve is gorgeous in the way it captures the exuberance of California Chardonnay, but with much more nuance and transparency than is common within this style. Almonds, floral infused honey and nectarines all come alive on the creamy, textured finish. The 2010 is rich, bold and beautiful. I would prefer to enjoy this striking Chardonnay in its exuberant youth. Anticipated maturity: 2012-2016.” - Antonio Galloni

2009 Devotion Cabernet Franc 92 points

“A gorgeous wine laced with hints of espresso, bitter chocolate, grilled herbs and dark red fruit. The wine possesses dazzling inner perfume and fabulous persistence all the way through to the finish. Sheer silky tannins convey an impression of elegance. Anticipated maturity: 2014-2024”. - Antonio Galloni

2010 Devotion Cabernet Franc 92 points

“The 2010 Cabernet Franc Devotion is another wine that stands out for its textural depth, finesse and sheer polish. There is plenty of varietal character in the glass, something I can’t always say about Napa Valley Cabernet Francs. Grilled herbs, mocha, plums, espresso and cloves are some of the many nuances that all meld together in this deep, fleshy wine. Layers of fruit continue to resonate on what seems like an eternal finish. The ripeness and softness of the tannin suggests the Devotion will drink well pretty much right out of the gate. Anticipated maturity: 2015-2025.” - Antonio Galloni

2010 Romance of the Heart Bordeaux Blend 93 points

The juiciest of dark raspberries, cloves, mint and freshly cut roses flow from the 2010 Red Blend Romance of the Heart. This supple, inviting wine possesses gorgeous depth and richness, all in a silky style that makes it approachable today. The 2010 firms up with time in the glass, but it remains quite polished and approachable for the year. Sweet herbal notes from the Cabernet Franc appear on the finish, adding further complexity and character. The Red Blend is Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon and Cabernet Franc. Anticipated maturity: 2013-2020.

2010 Merlot (not yet rated by Wine Advocate)

“Deep and dark ruby/plum in color, the 2010 Merlot is big, dark and intense with mouth filling fruit of blackberry, black cherry and cassis. Aromatics of sweet cherry liquor, caramel, toffee, coffee, and forest floor that lead to a profile of cedar, earth, black cherry and creme de cassis that is both exotic and elegant. The abundant fine grained tannins and youthful acids provide ample structure to this wine.” – David Yorgensen

From our family to yours we wish you health and happiness!



Bart O'Brien



Barb O'Brien