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## RESPONISBLE INDULGENCE

March 2023, Wine Notes

We have had a very mild winter, but as a lifelong New Englander, I knew that was destined to change. So, I write these notes looking out at the snow on the ground, and honestly, I welcome it. I know that most people will argue with me. I agree that summer is divine, but I love winter. Without snow, I don't want to stay home and *wrap up* in a big pot of beef stew, or Italian wedding soup, I would never make a thick cut grilled cheese sandwich, nor would I eat pasta twice in one day, and I love all of those moments. For that, I say, bring on the snow, cut some thick slices of bread, and pour me a weighty white, a bold red or maybe a spicy Rioja. It is with this hankering that I selected the wines for the club, and I hope you will enjoy them and the snow. Fear not, summer will return, and we will have loads of rosé and sand in our toes once again.

### The Value Wines for March

We need wine to help us balance our culinary choices. I begin the list with two Italians, both are easy going, approachable wines that are food flexible. The 2020 Mercato Pesce Bianco and the Carne Rosso both come from the Verona region of the Veneto in Northern Italy. Organically farmed in the hillsides around the city of Verona, south of the Valpolicella region and east of Lake Garda. Don't let these playful labels fool you, these are serious wines. The white, an aromatic blend of Garganega and Chardonnay and Incrocio Manzoni, is lush and expressive with apple and pear notes, and a lovely soft candied lemon peel finish. It is fresh, but also impactful. It is great with fish, so it is aptly named, but also wonderful with a cheeseboard. The red blends Montepulciano, Corvina with Merlot for soft and dark fruit aromatics and flavors of cherry, plum and blackberry. It has subtle notes of tobacco and spice. These are table wines, but not simple ones. Enjoy the red with some braised beef shank and warm up!

For March, I chose to skip rosé and offer a second red. It seemed more fitting with the weather, though it is more than that. I am excited about the rosé release that will be happening soon and I thought you should miss it a little, so you will long for it more. Instead, I included the 2021 Chateau d'Oupia Les Heretiques, which is a perennial favorite around here. It will give you the warmth of the sun of Southern France and the same grapes as the rosé's that hail from that region. It is a blend from Minervois where the wines are fresh, complex, and

a little wild. It has loads of personality, exuberant red and black fruits, and a warming peppery finish. Try it with a pot of bean stew, a burger, or even a pizza. It is food flexible, and I expect you will want to order a case of this value red to enjoy all year long!

Rounding out the Value 6 pack, I looked for wines that satisfy and give lush richness of texture and flavor. The 2021 Gorgo Custoza is a rich white blend of Cortese, Garganega, and Trebbiano. Farmed and vinified organically by Roberta Bricolo. The wine has fragrant honeysuckle and tropical aromatics, peaches and stone fruit on the palate, and a soft melon finish. It is refreshing and still powerful enough to stand up to a big bowl of pasta cacio e pepe (follow my blog for the recipe this week). The 2021 Luberri Rioja "Orlegi" and the 2020 Zorzal Terroir Unico Malbec offer us a bit more intensity of flavor and heat. The Rioja has dark black cherry notes with a plum and vanilla, and there is a touch of leather and pepper to wrap yourself up in. The Malbec, similarly, will warm you with its smooth, jammy approach, but it is complex, with texture and leather notes, earthy flavors to balance the juicy dark red and black fruits. These are food flexible wines, but they would serve you well with roasted meats and vegetables. They like the intensity of flavor that roasting brings to the plate!

### *The March Select Wines*

The 2021 Labbé Aymes kicks off the Select wines this month, and I will tell you that you will love this wine. It is unique, coming to us from the alpine region of Savoie (pronounced *savwa*) in the southeast of France, where the landscape is lush, rugged, and beautiful, the foods are rich and full of flavor, and the people are warm and welcoming. In this continental alpine climate grapes are planted on steep slopes and all hand harvested, the conditions are harsh, but large bodies of water moderate those effects, and the wines that are produced have a character of strength and fortitude. This one is 100% Jacquère. It has floral aromatics, and pear, white peach and grapefruit pith flavors with good minerality on the finish. If you have wondered about flint, this one will show you. I like this with some fondue, a regional favorite.

The 2020 A Portela is 100% Mencia, which is the hallmark grape for the northwest of Spain. It comes in a wide variety of styles, from rustic to elegant. The A Portela comes to us from Valdeorras, where the temperatures are a bit warmer and drier than that of its western neighbors, while a bit cooler than neighboring Bierzo to the east. Valdeorras is sheltered from both the hot Continental winds and the cold wets winds off the Atlantic by mountain formations that surround it. This terroir produces an elegant expression of Mencia that is generous and abundant in fruit and spice, but it is also lean, precise, and elegant. This would pair well with a wide variety of foods, and you can go simple like charcuterie, but I suggest that you make some empanadas and fill them with sauteed mushrooms or pulled pork—it is a bit of work, but you won't regret it!

The 2020 Jean Loron "Beau" Beaujolais will seduce you with its easy approachable fruit and compel you to stay with its curious complexity. It has abundant red fruits, berries and cherries, with a little tart cranberry, and then it has a little herbal note with an earthy forest aroma, but

then a spice sneaks up ever so subtly, and you ponder it, what is it? Well, I will let you tell me. It is great with any bistro meal, but I loved it with moules frites on Sunday for brunch with friends.

The 2020 Matisco Vire-Clesse is an opulent Chardonnay with abundant apple, melon, lemongrass and whiteflowers, quince, and pineapple aromas and flavors that are all balanced with bright minerality and a long, satisfying finish. It comes to us from the Maçonnais in the southernmost part of Burgundy. This is actually two towns, lying in the northern part of Maçon, where the Chardonnays are fresh, round, and delicate. The weather and soils are ideal for Chardonnay production—arguably these are the best Chardonnay in the world. This is an example of the balance of supple and tender. Enjoy it with pan roasted salmon, roasted root vegetables, and fresh tangy cheeses. A roasted beet salad arugula salad with toasted hazelnuts and crumbled goat cheese will be on my menu for this one.

To round out the Select level, I chose two very different reds, but they both satisfied a need for bolder flavor, fruity wines that would allow me to roast fish, meat or vegetables. 2021 Thevenet Bourgogne Pinot Noir from Burgundy has a surprising richness along with its classic French style. The approach is soft and fruity, and the acidity tempers that black cherry fruit, providing texture without any rough edges. Black cherry, tangy ripe raspberry, dusty limestone minerality and an alluring herbal or black tea note on the finish. The wine is supremely balanced with soft tannins. Its elegance and intensity of flavor lend itself to regional fare—roasted chicken, beef bourguignon, or fondues, but it also pairs great with Asian dishes like the spicy ramen at our favorite local place! Take it down to Yagi Noodles!

The 2020 Fonterenza Pettirosso from Tuscany, has more warmth and intensity with a bit more tang on the finish. It is a blend of Sangiovese and Cilieggiolo, a lesser-known grape with flavors that bespeak its Italian name (Cherry Tree). It is farmed on organic, sandy, volcanic soils in the hills about an hour south of Montalcino (home of Brunello). The brightness of this wine is amplified by steel and cement fermentation and aging, which maintains freshness and acidity without the secondary flavors and aromas that wood will add. These two reds share intense black cherry fruit and violet notes, but stylistically they divert from there. This one with brown spices and herbs, even a hint of cocoa, making the wine very distinctive and alluring. It has a refreshing finish with a touch of cranberry tanginess that balances the intensity of fruit on the front palate. Enjoy this with some tomato sauce, stewed meats, or a steak!

### *Collector Wines for March*

For those that collect wine, it is a rare treat to find a wine that has bottle age when you buy it. It is my good fortune to work with a few wineries that hold some stock back to release later. These wines pop in the store now and again, so you may have seen them before, but when I am given a little, my club deserves them! That means the wines are ready to drink now. Bordeaux needs time to develop and evolve to show itself beautifully, and these wines illustrate what happens when we are patient.

The wines come from two different vintages and two distinctly different appellations. If you are curious to see the difference between left and right bank Bordeaux, try them side by side, and you will note the stylistic differences, despite their age difference.

The 2002 Chante Alouette "Courmeil" from Saint Emilion is Merlot heavy, as is traditional on the right bank. Right and Left Bank Note: This is a geographic reference to the proximity to the river that runs through the region, but it also indicates technical choices that arise out of the differing soil types and weather/climate patterns.) This is Merlot that will make you understand why Merlot lovers appreciate this grape. It is full of dark black fruits with a smooth, sustained, lengthy delivery of its aromas and flavors—plum, leather, cassis, fennel, and black olives—and it has a remarkable freshness on the finish for its age. The Cabernet Sauvignon and Franc gives it the structure that allows for its longevity. It is a remarkable wine that deserves a good meal, so take your time with this one and plan your menu. The same rings true for the 2010 Chateau du Grand Bos from Graves.

This one is more Cabernet Sauvignon driven, though it has a good proportion of Merlot and a pinch of Cabernet Franc. The result is a classic left bank Bordeaux with a bigger structure, more tannins and a bit more power. 2010 was a great vintage, so the wine will continue to age well, but it is showing wonderfully right now. It has spiced plum, dark brambly fruit, nutmeg, and tobacco leaf, graphite, cocoa, and wet stones on a sandy beach—yes, minerality and salinity on the finish give it a lovely freshness. I have a little bit, and imagine you will want a few to stock the cellar with, so let me know if you want a few more.

Both of these wines are indeed meat wines, so I would pan sear a good New York strip, finish it in the oven, and make a quick green peppercorn sauce while deglazing the pan. That said, it is also fantastic with mushrooms, so if vegetables are your choice, get a mix of Lion's Mane, Shitakes, Maitake, Pioppino, and Beeches and sauté them with a little butter and thyme, serve them on a toasted piece of thick cut bread and add a runny egg on top, finish with Malden salt. That would work! The wine wants intensity of flavor, fat, and salt, so get creative.

Stay warm, wrap up in a delicious meal, and clean out a closet. Summer will be here before we know it and our to-do list will get lost in the sand.

Cheers, Maria