



WEEKEND ARGUS

Saturday, February 9 2019 | AFFLUENCE

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LIFESTYLE



FOOD

châteauneuf-du-pape finds its balance

it seems that a stylistic correction may well be under way.

We found plenty of well-modulated bottles, despite the ripeness of the grapes in the 2016 vintage. These wines were indeed characterised by potent fruit flavours, as expected in such a year, but they were balanced by savoury herbal flavours as well, all underscored by tannins that, if not exactly stern, offered length and structure.

"They were showing great," Edouard said.

Few wines were too oaky, and few were jammy. For me, the biggest problem was a one-dimensional fruitiness in a few of the wines that lacked the herbal, earthy quality of classic Châteauneuf-du-Pape.

One thing that has not changed for the better is price. These are expensive wines, with only three of the 20 bottles under \$50, none of which made our top 10. Only two of our 10 favourites were under \$65, so we did not select a best value.

There's another way to look at it, though. Châteauneuf is a peak expression of the southern Rhône. Paying \$84 for a Beaucastel, our No 2 bottle, is considerably less than you would pay for a top Hermitage or Côte-Rôtie from the northern Rhône, to say nothing of a leading Bordeaux, Burgundy or Champagne.

Our consensus favourite was the Chante-le-Merle Vieilles Vignes from Bosquet des Papes, a cuvée made from old-vine grapes that were not destemmed before they were crushed. (Leaving the stems on is an old-fashioned technique that can add savoury elements to the wine.) We found it to be intense and complex, powerful yet balanced.

The Beaucastel, our No 2, was savoury, with an old-school leathery element that we liked. No 3 was the Cuvée Renaissance from Domaine de Cristia, a rustic, chewy wine, with flavours of dark fruit and licorice. Both of these wines have higher-than-typical percentages of mourvèdre in the blend, 30% for Beaucastel and 40% for Cristia. As climate change takes hold, more producers are increasing their mourvèdre components, as it tends not to get as jammy and alcoholic as grenache does.

No 4 was La Dame Voyageuse from Domaine de la Mordorée, a more typical blend with 75% grenache, yet it, too, offered complexity and dimension. It was followed by the Clos St Antonin, a powerful, fruity wine, 100% grenache, that nonetheless offered some complex herbal flavours, and the Domaine du Vieux Télégraphe, a tannic wine with flavours of red fruits and flowers.

The Télégraphe, another historic name of Châteauneuf, was the most expensive wine in the tasting at \$90. The domaine makes a second wine, Télégramme, which is generally excellent and about half the price. | The New York Times



UNLIKE wines from the neighbouring Côtes du Rhône, Châteauneuf-du-Pape is not an all-purpose, everyday red.

A wine with presence and heft, it requires bold, meaty flavours and textures. And while the food of the region, Provence, may evoke summer with lovely vegetables, salads and seafood, there's a wintry side to it as well.

When a fierce mistral wind blows, it's time to crank out beef stews and roasted meats, and to uncork that Châteauneuf-du-Pape.

This braised beef dish, a pot roast, keeps a Provençal flavour profile, with eggplant, garlic, fennel, rosemary, orange, black olives and tomatoes dominating.

The fennel and anise liqueur in particular play nicely against the licorice flavours exhibited by some of the wines, as the slight bitterness of the eggplant and tapenade corals their tannins. I like to braise a nice piece of tri-tip sirloin, but this recipe will suit any cut of beef you prefer for braising.

Serve the dish with broad egg noodles dressed with a splash of good olive oil.

BRAISED BEEF WITH EGGPLANT

Yield: 6 servings
Total time: 3 hours

- 1 eggplant (about .45kg) in 2.5cm dice
- Salt
- 1 tbs extra-virgin olive oil
- 1kg piece of beef for braising (tri-tip, rump or brisket)
- ½ cup finely chopped fresh fennel bulb
- ½ cup finely chopped red onion
- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- ½ cup chopped canned San Marzano tomatoes
- 3 tbs pastis or other anise liqueur
- 4 sun-dried tomatoes in oil, silvered
- 1 cup dry red wine
- 1 cup beef or vegetable stock
- Ground black pepper
- 2 branches fresh rosemary
- 2 branches fresh thyme
- 1 tbs grated orange zest
- 1 tbs black olive tapenade

Place eggplant in a colander, dust with salt and set aside 20 minutes. Meanwhile, heat a 3.8-litre stove-top casserole on medium-high and add the oil.

Dry the beef and brown it on all sides, about 10 minutes. Remove from

the pan to a plate. Turn off heat.

Rinse and dry the eggplant. Reheat the casserole on medium and sear the eggplant, turning frequently, until it is lightly browned, glossy and still somewhat firm, about 10 minutes.

Transfer the eggplant to a bowl. Add the fennel, onion and garlic to the casserole and sauté on low heat until translucent.

Add the diced tomatoes and pastis and cook, stirring, to deglaze the casserole. Add the sun-dried tomatoes, wine and stock, and bring to a simmer.

Season with pepper. Add the rosemary and thyme. Return the meat to the casserole, cover and simmer on low heat for 2 hours, turning once or twice during the cooking. After 2 hours the meat should be tender. If not, give it another 15 or 20 minutes cooking. Remove it to a cutting board.

Discard herb branches from sauce, and stir in the orange zest and tapenade. Season to taste with salt. Add the eggplant to the casserole and simmer 5 minutes, just to reheat it.

Slice the beef and arrange on a platter. Give the sauce another quick heating, then spoon it with the eggplant over and around the meat and serve. | The New York Times



Grande Provence

Grande Provence Heritage Wine Estate Harvest Festival in Franschoek: Saturday, February 23.

Get ready to pick and stomp grapes with the family to the jovial beat of the Kaapse Klopse in the vineyards followed by a harvest table heavily laden with delicious fare and the chilled sounds of live, contemporary music. Plenty of action for the kids. 021 876 8600 or reservations@grandeprovence.co.za

HARVEST FESTIVAL SEASON

February is harvest festival season in the Cape Winelands. Here is a brief run down of what to expect so far:

Paarl Harvest Celebration

The Paarl Harvest Celebration: Saturday, March 2
Wineries: Boland Cellar, Domaine Bralms, Melasat Vineyards, Nederburg, Perdeberg Winery, Rhebokskloof Wine Estate, Simonsvlei, Vendome and Windmeul Collar. www.paarlharvestcelebration.co.za

Harvest Festival at Muratie Wine Estate

The Melck family will host their annual Harvest Festival: March 2.
Includes tractor rides through the vineyards,

a long, lazy alfresco luncheon performed by the popular Blues Band. 021 865 2330 info@muratie.co.za

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