



... WHEN THE CONVERSATION IS AS IMPORTANT AS THE WINE

FALL 2011

Conversations with Chris

by Ashley Ludwig

After a busy summer, I was at last able to catch up with Winemaker Chris after his return from the Long Beach Grand Cru Awards & Tasting Event, a special fundraiser that followed a wine competition where three Middle Ridge wines received awards – a silver medal for the 2007 Meritage, a gold medal and Chairman's Best of Class Award for the 2008 Tahquitz (Cinsaut), and a gold medal and Sweepstakes (best red!) for the 2008 The Mountain (Cabernet Franc).

Me: When I heard you were a sweepstakes winner, I thought, "Great, that's exciting!" And then I looked at the list of competitors and my jaw dropped. Congratulations!

Chris: Thanks. There were only five Sweepstakes winners out of over 2000 entries, one in each of five categories – one for the whites, one for reds, and so on. It's quite an honor to be recognized as having the best red wine in the competition.

Me: I understand that the Grand Cru is considered one of the top international wine competitions. I also like the way it's tied to a fundraiser for the Legal Aid Foundation of Los Angeles. You were able to pour your wines at the event?

Chris: Yes, that's right. It was a great experience, especially when you hear major store and hospitality vendors telling their staff to go to the Middle Ridge table to taste a prime

example of a good Cabernet Franc. The crowd was very wine savvy, and I enjoyed chatting with them and answering questions. They were excited to hear about what's coming up, too.

Me: What's that?

Chris: We're releasing our first reserve wines in September. They're two Reserve Cabernet Sauvignons – one made from grapes harvested in Paso Robles, and one from Temecula Valley grapes. They spent 24 months in new French oak and have been resting in bottle for almost a year. They definitely have that "Wow!" factor.

Me: Twin Reserve wines? Knowing your sense of humor, I'm thinking you're interested in stirring up some curiosity to get people talking.

Chris: It's true. I love helping people understand more about wine, like the differences between growing regions. Paso Robles and Temecula have very different soils. Paso Robles typically has calcareous limestone, and Temecula has granitic sandy loam. And then there's the variation in temperatures between the two areas and differences in growing practices at the vineyards. The side-by-side comparison we've created provides a great educational opportunity for folks. They get to see what can happen when you take the same varietal, in this case Cabernet Sauvignon, from two viticultural areas and put them

through identical enological (winemaking) practices. You get different, distinctive results ... and a lot of great conversation!

Me: And maybe future award winners.

Chris: (*He laughs.*) Maybe so. It all goes back to care and patience, to doing things the old way – the right way. It shows up in the wine.

Me: And now, the dreaded question! What's your favorite of the two Cab Sauv's?

Chris: You might as well ask someone which one is their favorite kid! I love them both – the Paso Robles with its dusty overtones and the Temecula for its rich, fruity nose.

My favorite part is watching people smell and taste the Temecula Reserve Cab Sauv. Most folks have high regard for a Paso Robles wine, but many are skeptical that a Temecula wine can stand up against it. When they try the Middle Ridge Temecula Reserve and their eyes light up ... now that's fantastic!

The Reserve Cabernet Sauvignons truly are special. Decide for yourself which is your favorite and come by The Collective to keep the conversation going.



IDYLLWILD

Wine in the Pines

OVERHEARD

@MIDDLERIDGE...ON YOUTUBE

Middle Ridge wine started a conversation that just keeps going.

Recently, we created an array of videos from events and conversations with the winemaker that are now available for viewing online. The following clips are “overheard” segments. Check our newsletter’s list of links, or go to our Facebook Fan Page, to see for yourself what’s cooking at Middle Ridge.

ON THE WINEMAKER & WINEMAKING



“I love drinking Middle Ridge wine because knowing Chris, the winemaker, I know how much of a passion he has for making wine and how much effort he puts into every glass of wine he makes.”

Steven Levesque
Law student at California Western School of Law

Chris Johnston “I would not have been a winemaker if it wasn’t so much fun. Making wine is really an incredible process, and it’s a passion. If it wasn’t such a good time, I’d just be a wine drinker (grins).” **View the whole video on YouTube.**

ON IDYLLWILD

“I drink Middle Ridge wine from Idyllwild. It’s an absolutely fabulous wine — age-able, but very drinkable right now. (He leans back and views his glass.) Idyllwild is a fantastic little town above the Temecula area. It has four seasons — a great place to visit, great wine.”

David Jones
Hospitality Service Consultant

Chris Johnston “Idyllwild is truly an artist’s community. There are art events going on all the time ... The winery was started up here; the laboratory is still here; and this is where I get my inspiration for creating new wines — different, fun wines.” **View the whole video on YouTube.**



Fall

THE PERFECT SEASON TO VISIT IDYLLWILD, CALIFORNIA

The mountain community of Idyllwild is often called California’s best kept secret. With plentiful web reviews on travel sites such as Yelp.com, Trip Advisor.com, and others, the secret is out about the gorgeous views, miles of hiking trails, streets lined with art galleries, and the fine dining. And, yes, Middle Ridge wine is served in Idyllwild’s finest restaurants.

Café Aroma

In the unique, artsy spirit of Idyllwild, Café Aroma mentors up-and-coming culinary stars, some of whom have gone on to the best schools in the industry. The bistro also supports local growers, brewers and wineries — none more local than Idyllwild’s own Middle Ridge Winery.

Creek House

The Creek House is known for its steaks and seafood. It’s also an ideal place to enjoy Middle Ridge wine — on the patio overlooking Strawberry Creek or in front of a crackling fire on a chilly mountain evening.

Gastronome

Fondly referred to as “The Gnome,” this restaurant has a beautiful, rustic appeal including a dramatic view of Tahquitz Peak. It’s a favorite for family celebrations and toasting with a bottle of Middle Ridge wine.

The Mountain

With a relaxed, comfortable atmosphere, The Mountain is a slow food restaurant with ingredients sourced from nearby organic farms and local purveyors. It’s no wonder Middle Ridge wine is served here!

Now Available in Los Angeles

FarmShop LA

Santa Monica (Brentwood), California Culinary Director / Owner Jeffrey Cerciello and Restaurant Director / Owner Michel Darmon bring their experience at French Laundry, Bouchon, Bouchon Bakery, Ad Hoc, and Per Se to this unique, distinctive bakery, artisanal market, and restaurant which now serves Middle Ridge wine. Chris heartily recommends the pastrami sandwich for lunch! And don’t forget to tell Jeff and Michel that Chris and Melody from Middle Ridge sent you.

IN THE NEWS & COMMENTS

IDYLLWILD VINTNERS CABERNET FRANC WINS COMPETITION

by Sally Hedberg

<http://idyllwildtowncrier.com/2011/08/02/idyllwild-vintners-cabernet-franc-wins-competition/>



Chris and Melody Johnston proudly display some Middle Ridge awards.

Here's what readers are saying, by way of congratulations:

In congratulations of recent awards... Now, I want to try all of those award winning wines... Congratulations, Idyllwildians!

~Sue Thorson

Chris, you are truly an excellent wine-maker that ranks up there with some of the best. Glad you returned to UC-Davis, and now the results are proving you made the right moves.

~Jim Karalun

I've had the pleasure of living in Idyllwild from 2003-2009. How can I obtain a bottle or two of Chris Johnston's 2008 Cabernet Franc? Please tell me how I may purchase a taste of home!

~Jeanne Atkinson

FALL WINE CLUB SHIPMENT

MIXED CLUB

- 2008 Sauvignon Blanc, Temecula
- 2008 Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon, Paso Robles (New!)
- 2008 Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon, Temecula (New!)

RED ONLY CLUB

- 2007 Meritage, Temecula
- 2008 Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon, Paso Robles (New!)
- 2008 Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon, Temecula (New!)

Upcoming Events

ART WALK & WINE TASTING

Saturday, October 8

2:00 – 5:00 pm

Stroll the streets of Idyllwild with your souvenir wine glass while enjoying live music and special exhibits in the art galleries. Meet Winemaker Chris Johnston outside Acorn Gallery and Café Aroma. Sponsored by the Art Alliance of Idyllwild, proceeds benefit art education.

Location:

Idyllwild, CA

www.artinidyllwild.com

ANNUAL BARREL TASTING EVENT

Saturday, November 12

6:00 – 8:00 pm

Be among the first to preview some great reds from last year's harvest. There will also be music, food, and a display of fine photography, jewelry and decorative gourds from Idyllwild artists Lon Mercer and John Simpson.

Location:

Middle Ridge Winery at Temecula Valley Winery Management

27495 Diaz Road

Temecula, CA 92950

WINE CLUB MEMBERS' CORNER

WINE CLUB MEMBERS, SYLVIA AND ERIC CHILDRESS:

Q: How long have you been a member of the Middle Ridge wine club?

A: About eight months.

Q: What's your favorite part about visiting their tasting room at The Collective wine bar?

A: Oh, that's easy – good company, good food, and PHENOMENAL wine. Winemaker Chris is a joy and a very pleasurable person to visit with. He's genuinely interested in the members and loves taking the time to talk about wine and creativeness – the emotional side of

wine. Melody, his beautiful bride, brings balance and that touch that makes everything special. And Crispin is a chef extraordinaire. It's a great combination that makes for an ultimate Middle Ridge Winery experience.

Q: And what's your favorite Middle Ridge wine?

A: The Cinsaut (Tahquitz) is what reeled us in. Mistik is a high on our list of whites. And now, after several wine club shipments and many visits to the tasting room, we can't make up our minds because everything is GREAT.

Q: Why would you recommend a wine club membership to others?

A: After being members of a few Napa Valley wineries, we had a difficult time with Temecula wines in general. Being extremely discriminating in our tastes, if there is even one wine we don't like at a winery, we won't bother becoming members. Well?... We're still members aren't we?! We even LOVE the whites and we are not normally white wine drinkers. Sign up today, you will NOT regret it.





Middle Ridge wines available at:

Middle Ridge Winery at
The Collective
28544 Front Street
Temecula, CA

In Idyllwild at:
Selected Restaurants,
Idyll Awhile Wine
Shoppe & Bistro, and
Mountain Top Liquor Store

Online:
www.middleridge.com

LONG BEACH GRAND CRU INTERNATIONAL WINE COMPETITION

2008 The Mountain
Cabernet Franc
California



Cabernet Franc is known for its smooth drinkability and spicy nose, and this one is no exception. It has fruit-forward aromas of red cherries, blueberries, and a hint of raspberry along with a slightly dusty nose. It has good Cabernet Franc spice in the nose with a burst of fruit on the palate. The oak integration is wonderfully smooth with a nice fruit finish and a gentle vanilla aroma wrapped around it all. The acid structure combined with the tannins help this wine stand up to just about anything. The Mountain is screaming for a nice thick steak. Add some mushrooms sautéed in garlic butter and a baked potato, and you've got a meal fit for a king (or queen!). Or if you're like Winemaker Chris, you'll just drink it all by itself.

\$28/bottle Production: 44 cases *Note: Extremely low inventory of this wine. If it is sold out, Chris suggests trying the 2008 Dark Canyon (Cabernet Sauvignon).*

2008 Tahquitz
Cinsaut
Temecula Valley



This is our second Tahquitz, named after a legendary rock outcropping in Idyllwild, California, the headquarters of Middle Ridge Winery. True to the characteristics of a Cinsaut, Tahquitz is a medium-bodied wine with lots of fruitiness and soft tannins. It exhibits bright red cherry aromas and flavors along with a touch of raspberry and a hint of rose. It also has a nice allspice aroma that's the result of aging in 100% French oak for 18 months. Tahquitz is a wonderful drinking wine – it's designed to enjoy alone, but it works well with many foods, especially a wood-fired grilled chicken or grilled whitefish. Also try it for brunch with a bell pepper and ham omelette or pasta alla carbonara.

\$26/bottle Production: 50 cases *Note: Extremely low inventory of this wine. If it is sold out, Chris suggests trying the 2008 Devil's Slide (Merlot).*

Come taste Middle Ridge wines at
The Collective wine bar in
Old Town Temecula,
which serves as our tasting room,
and at special events in Idyllwild.



The Collective
28544 Old Town Front Street
Temecula, CA 92590



www.middleridge.com


2007 Meritage
Temecula Valley




Red Meritage wine, a blend of Bordeaux varietals, is known for its smooth, silky texture. Made mostly of Merlot, this Middle Ridge Meritage is especially smooth. The addition of Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc and Petit Verdot give it a complex, robust structure. Rich aromas of black cherries and blackberries abound, accented by hints of spice and tobacco. As the wine opens up, a touch of vanilla and licorice unfold. On the tip of the tongue, you'll notice a sweetness that comes from aging in a combination of French and American oak for 19 months. Enjoy this wine with steak, grilled pork chops, barbecue chicken, or veal chops with mushrooms. It even goes great with pizza!

\$32/bottle Production: 75 cases

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 **Long Beach Grand Cru Award Winners:**
www.longbeachgrandcru.org/site/index.php/website/awards/

 **Facebook:**
www.facebook.com/middleridgewine

 **Twitter:**
twitter.com/middleridgewine

 **YouTube:**
www.youtube.com/user/MiddleRidgeWinery#p/u