



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

FALL 2014

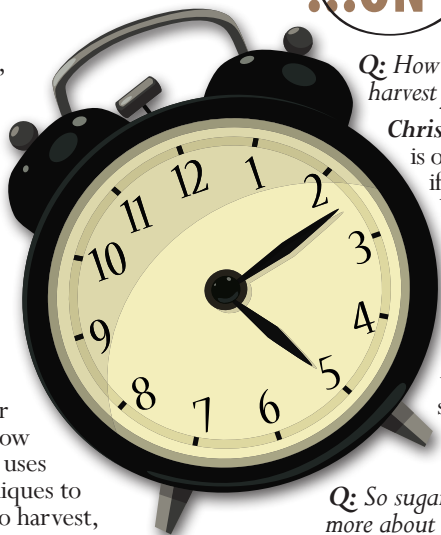
The Mad Scientist

...ON THE RIGHT TIME TO HARVEST GRAPES

As the saying goes, you can make bad wine from good grapes, but you can't make good wine from bad grapes. Picking grapes at just the right time is one of the factors winemakers use to maximize the quality of their grapes. Our writer wanted to know how Winemaker Chris uses mad science techniques to determine when to harvest, and he was happy to oblige.

Q: *Middle Ridge's Pinot Grigio grapes are usually harvested in mid-August, but this year they were picked almost a month earlier. What caused the early harvest?*

Chris: We had a warm, dry winter and spring was warm, too, so the fruit started developing earlier than usual. It also resulted in smaller grape clusters than last year – about the size of my palm – but, interestingly enough, we ended up with more grapes. Last year we harvested 3.7 tons and this year it was 5.4 tons. So even though we harvested earlier than usual, it turned out to be a good-sized crop.



Q: *How do you determine when it's time to harvest your grapes?*

Chris: I look at several things. Flavor is one of them. I taste the grapes to see if the flavors are mature. I want the berries to taste sweet and rich and to nicely express the characteristics of the varietal.

It might surprise you, but I also look at the color of the grape seeds. I want them to be brown with a hint of green. If the grapes stay on the vine until the seeds are completely brown, the sugar level will be higher than I want.

Q: *So sugar levels are also important. Tell me more about that.*

Chris: My target for white wine is to harvest the grapes at 23 brix – that's winemaking talk for a 23 percent sugar level. That produces a wine between 12 and 13 percent alcohol. At that level, white wine is refreshingly light and makes a great deck wine.

It's tricky to get the sugar level just where I want it, though. The problem is that, here in Southern California, the heat can be very intense and ripen the grapes quickly in just a single day. Not only do you run the risk of producing a wine with a higher alcohol level than you want, but you can end up with a flabby wine. You see, the life of a grape is all about converting their carbohydrates into sugar. And once they reach ripeness and have used up all their carbohydrates, they start turning the acids in the grape

into sugar. Losing acids means the wine will have less structure and mouthfeel, less robustness if you will – what winemakers call a “flabby”, uninteresting wine.

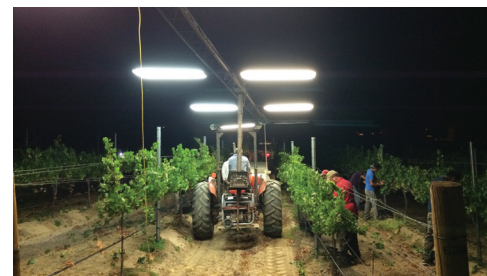
Q: *I heard that you like to pick your grapes early – very early – in the morning whenever possible. Why is that?*

Chris: Essentially, it preserves the fruit. Once the sugar level is at just the right spot, I don't want the grapes to be exposed to another day of heat. Also, the cooler temperature helps prevent fermentation from starting before the grapes arrive at the winery. I try to keep every aspect of the winemaking process under control. Surprises aren't a good thing when it comes to making wine.

Q: *So what do we have to look forward to with this year's Pinot Grigio?*

Chris: It's going to be excellent and very similar to 2013's Pinot Grigio – a very aromatic, light, clean, crisp wine. And the good news is that it will be ready for drinking early next year.

Nice!



From Harvest to Bottle

...A LOOK BEHIND THE SCENES

Harvest. Crush. Drink. Right? Not quite! The time from harvest to market for Middle Ridge's red wines is about three years. What takes so long? Ah, for Winemaker Chris, it's all about paying tribute to the beauty and potential of the grape. Let's take a quick look at what's involved.



Crush

When the grapes are delivered to the winery, they're poured into a mechanical destemmer that gently breaks the skins of the grapes. Then the grapes move onto a sorting table where the workers separate the grapes from the MOG. "What's MOG?" we asked Chris. Material Other than Grape, of course! The MOG is tossed to the side while the "must" – the berries and juice – are transferred to a tank or large bin.



Fermentation

"At this point, I add French oak shreds to preserve the red color of the juice and a pectic enzyme to help break down the fruit's cellular structure," Chris explains. "Then I cover the mixture with dry ice to drop the temperature down to 55 degrees. This allows the must to 'cold soak' which draws out the tannins and deep red colors in the grape skins. After a while, I add commercial winemaking yeast to the must to start the fermentation. The yeast converts the natural sugars into carbon dioxide and alcohol."

During this time, the berries that float up are punched down a few times each day. The "punch downs" squeeze out more juice from the grapes and keep the red skins mixed in evenly. They also keep the temperature nicely even all the way through the mixture. The entire fermentation process can take as little as a week or as long as two months.

Pressing

Once the must is fermented to dryness (when all the sugars have been converted to alcohol), the juice is removed from the solids and the remainder of the must is transferred to a press which squeezes out the remaining juice from the berries. "I have to be careful that I don't squeeze the grapes too hard, though," says Chris. "Otherwise I run the risk of cracking the seeds and releasing the seed tannins which are bitter. The next time you eat some grapes, chew on the seeds and you'll see what I mean."



Aging

The wine is then put into French oak barrels for aging. Over time, any remaining grape solids and spent yeast cells fall to the bottom of the barrel and form a sediment known as lees. "I let the wine rest on the lees to add flavor to the wine," says Chris. "I also mix it up once in a while to extract even more flavor. Then, about every six months, the wine goes through a process called racking – I remove the wine from the barrel, rinse the sediment out, and then return the wine to the barrel."

Since barrels are somewhat porous, wine slowly evaporates through the walls of the barrel and oxygen slowly enters. To prevent the wine from being exposed to too much oxygen too quickly, the barrels are constantly monitored and "topped off" with wine as needed. Slower is better when it comes to aging wine! All in all, it takes about 24 months for red wine to age to Chris' liking – where the tannin levels are smooth and the oak influence is "just right".

Filtration and Bottling

Prior to bottling, the wine is blended, if desired, and run through a filter to remove any remaining particles, essentially sterilizing the wine. It's then bottled and left to rest. "Yes, bottle shock is a real thing," Chris commented. "So I let wine rest anywhere from three months to a year before releasing it for sale."

It might take a while for Middle Ridge wine to be ready ... okay, a LONG while ... but like a poem, a well-made wine engages us and leaves us with a smile. Bottled poetry, anyone?

From Napoli to Idyllwild

...THE FOOD & FUN CONTINUES

What do you do when you're from a large, Italian family and you miss those crazy fun, family gatherings? Just ask Frank Ferro...who revels in creating social gathering spaces that recall those good times from his childhood.



Idyllwild locals and visitors know Frank from his days at Café Aroma, a popular Idyllwild eatery where customers enjoyed his delicious internationally-influenced SoCal menu. But Frank isn't one to rest after success. Come this fall, he and his wife, Lori, will be opening FERRO – a modern, casual restaurant focusing on Italian fare. With its bocce ball court, three music stages, and outdoor pizza oven, FERRO will be a prime location for lively gatherings.

As far as Frank is concerned, it is also a chance to really spread his wings. "I'm excited about designing a large kitchen where we can try new things," says Frank. "I'm always learning, and I'm always humbled by what food can do. It's been an amazing experience creating a new menu with our executive chef, Geoff Brown, and just as exciting to see the dedication of our other pre-opening staff including Justin Holmes, Michael Ferro, and Christina Rizk."

The food that will be served at FERRO is truly an homage to Frank's Italian ancestry. "My love of cooking was passed down from my grandmother to my father and then to me," recalls Frank. "My grandparents were from Southern Italy, and they never really felt 'at home' living in the U.S. Now, thirty years after they're gone, I'd like to think I'm creating a place where they would feel comfortable and everyone can enjoy their recipes."

Of course, great Italian food needs to be served with great wine. "Italian food and Middle Ridge really complement each other well," states Frank. "We also love that Middle Ridge is local and wins a great deal of acclaim." Frank's history with Middle Ridge goes way back. "My wife and I met Chris and Melody at Café Aroma when they were just getting started in the wine business. Chris loves to experiment. He'd come in with a new wine and we'd jump to taste it. He is so creative, and like us, he has a ridiculous passion for what he does."

The collaboration with Middle Ridge won't end at FERRO, however. This spring, Frank and Lori will be opening yet another social gathering place – Idyllwild Brewpub, the area's first microbrewery. "Along with beers crafted by our über-talented brewmaster, Don Put, we'll be featuring Middle Ridge's Cocktails Sur Lie line," says Frank. "In fact, Chris and Lori are designing a brand new bottle-conditioned cocktail. It will go great with the salty, savory food we'll be serving."

Want to become "like family" to the Ferros and join the party? "Like" FERRO on Facebook and watch a former Chinese restaurant transform into an Italian food haven.

On the Town

THE CHEF CHRISTO SHOW

Grilliant Ideas Radio Network
July 2014



of Christo and Chris, check out the *Idyllwild Meets Manhattan* article in our summer 2013 newsletter, which is available on our website.

Last year, we asked Chef Christo Gonzalez, an executive chef in Manhattan, to pair a few of his recipes with Middle Ridge wine. Chef Christo, a member of the Char-Broil All Star Team, continued the collaboration by inviting Chris to be on his radio show. "I invited Chris on the show because he knows his craft from grape to glass. He's innovative, creative and makes sense out of complicated things," says Christo. "My listeners absolutely loved it." For more information on the adventures

IDYLLWILD JAZZ IN THE PINES

August 2014



The annual "Jazz in the Pines" drew thousands of jazz fans to Idyllwild to hear great music and support scholarships for students at Idyllwild Arts Academy – a cause close to our hearts since Winemaker Chris studied the violin at the Arts Academy in his youth. We joined event sponsor Idyll Awhile Wine Shoppe Bistro to serve Middle Ridge wine, greet familiar faces and make new friends. Being at the festival brought back fond memories of our participation in 2009, when Middle Ridge released its wine for the very first time!

MARSHALL HAWKINS' JAZZ LEGENDS RECEPTION

August 2014



Internationally-acclaimed bassist Marshall Hawkins brought together jazz legends and alumni of the jazz program at Idyllwild Arts Academy in a night of friendship and music to support Seahawk MOJO (Modern Jazz Orchestra). The organization, founded by Marshall in 2003, promotes jazz music and music education in elementary and secondary schools. Joining the festivities – and enjoying Middle Ridge wine – were Yve Evans, Gilbert Catellanos, Roy McCurdy, Evan Christopher and Jason Jackson to name just a few. Their talent and passion made the evening a truly legendary experience.

LINKS

- Middle Ridge Website**
www.middleridge.com
- Facebook:**
www.facebook.com/middleridgewine
www.facebook.com/cocktailssurlie
- Twitter:**
twitter.com/middleridgewine
- YouTube:**
www.youtube.com/user/MiddleRidgeWinery#p/p

Come taste Middle Ridge wines at Crush & Brew in Old Town Temecula, which serves as our tasting room, and at special events in Idyllwild.



Crush & Brew
28544 Old Town Front Street
Temecula, CA 92590



www.middleridge.com

LONG BEACH GRAND CRU

Gold Medal for 2010 Meritage
Summer 2014

We released our 2010 Meritage just a few months ago, and it's already racking up awards. We call it our yum-yum juice, and it seems the judges think so, too. Not a surprise, really, since our Meritage blends have always been popular wherever they go (it's nice to be wanted!). Similar to our previous releases, this Bordeaux-style wine is a blend of Merlot, Cabernet Franc and Cabernet Sauvignon ... heavy on the Merlot.

It was aged exceptionally long – a full 39 months in French oak. The result is a beautiful, rich wine with lots of ripe plum and juicy blackberry aromas that morph into cherries. Yum!





SALMONE SOTTO SALE

Executive Chef Geoffrey Brown | FERRO | Idyllwild, CA
Chef's wine recommendation: 2013 Pinot Grigio

This simple, no-cook salmon dish is great to make for appetizers or a light, savory meal. Flavored with four types of citrus zest, the salmon takes on a beautiful bright color and a dense texture. This cured salmon is sliced diagonally, and so thinly that it's translucent, then served with crostini as an antipasto di pesce crudo. It's a recipe that can be experimented with to create many different flavor profiles and presentations – from canapés, to salads, to a brunch offering that will surely impress!

"What pairs well with Middle Ridge Pinot Grigio? My immediate thought is Salmone sotto Sale, which is sweet, salty, and citrusy ... the perfect dish to be enjoyed with a nice cold glass of crisp, dry white wine. The most recent bottling of Pinot Grigio from Middle Ridge is an excellent choice that beautifully compliments the deep flavor and rich texture of our cured salmon."

INGREDIENTS:

1 cup kosher salt
½ cup sugar
1 tbsp grated orange zest
1 tbsp grated grapefruit zest
1 tsp grated lemon zest
1 tsp lime zest
1 2-3 lb skin-on salmon fillet,
pin bones removed & thin
edges trimmed

*Makes hors d'oeuvres for 15-20
people, or a first course for 8-10
people*



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DIRECTIONS:

In a small bowl, combine the sugar & salt, stirring to combine thoroughly. In another small bowl, combine the citrus zests.

Lay a sheet of aluminum foil large enough to extend beyond the length of the salmon on a clean working surface. Spread a third of the salt mixture along the center of the foil to serve as a bed for the salmon. Place the salmon skin-side down on the salt and distribute the citrus zest evenly across the salmon. Pour the remaining salt mixture over the salmon, covering the fillet entirely. Fold the foil up to contain the salt, then place another sheet of foil over the salmon & crimp the sheets together firmly, creating a tight package in which the salt mixture is in contact with all surfaces of the salmon.

Set the foil package on a baking sheet. Place another baking sheet on top of the foil-wrapped salmon & weigh it down with bricks. This will aid in pressing the water out of the salmon as it cures. Refrigerate the salmon for 24 hours.

Unwrap the salmon & remove it from the curing salt, discarding the foil & the cure. Rinse the salmon in cool water & pat dry with paper towels. To remove the skin, place the salmon skin-side down on a cutting board. Holding a sharp, thin, flexible knife at about a 30-degree angle, cut between the flesh & the skin. When you can get a grip on the skin, pull it back & forth against the knife to separate it from the flesh, being careful not to tear the salmon. Set the salmon on a cooling rack & refrigerate for 8 to 24 hours in order to allow the salt concentration to equalize & continue to dry the salmon. Wrap the salmon in parchment paper or plastic wrap & store in the refrigerator for up to 2 weeks.

To serve, thinly slice the salmon using a bias/diagonal method, which will create elongated – almost transparent – slices. Arrange the salmon on a platter garnished with fresh dill and accompaniments such as crostini, crème fraiche, capers, fish roe, finely minced red onion, or whatever you enjoy!