



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

SPRING 2012

Barrel Tasting... MIDDLE RIDGE STYLE

It was a stormy November night in Temecula, but Middle Ridge Winery hummed with activity. Guests arrived and were shown to the barrel room, where the warm glow of strung lights set the tone for an exploration of the senses – from aroma tables specially prepared by Winemaker Chris Johnston, to the stunning photography and gorgeous jewelry crafted by Idyllwild artisans, to the sounds of smooth jazz created by a combination of acoustic guitar and electric saxophone.

Middle Ridge's Chief Canuck Crispin Courtenay (what does that title mean, anyway!?) flambéed bacon-wrapped dates in a Meritage wine reduction while Wine Club Member Steven Levesque was handed the "wine thief" and served up a steady stream of Lodi Old Vine Zinfandel from the barrels into waiting glasses.

Guests were encouraged to swirl and sniff the wine in their glasses and compare it to those on the aroma table – a lineup of specially prepared wine samples with aromas of everything from green olives to lavender to fruits like blueberry, red cherry, and black cherry. Some of the aromas were "paired up" to demonstrate the subtle difference between similar scents – like key lime and "regular" lime, and between lemongrass and lemon. And then there was the elusive scent called linalool – often described as a perfume, or floral scent.



Photos by: Carl Kravats

"The aroma table helps level the playing field between new and experienced wine drinkers," Chris said, as he explained his interest in sharing the aroma table experience with others. "Each white wine sample on the table is made from the same base wine. The only difference is the addition of one ingredient to each glass. It's the same with the red wine samples – the base wine is the same in every glass, and only one different ingredient is added to each glass. The ingredients, or recipes, are based on standards developed at UC-Davis and used in training winemakers and judges."

And a new aroma table was introduced at the barrel tasting – a comparison of the aromas generated by different levels of toasting of the oak barrels. Guests got to smell the difference between the use of lightly toasted oak, a light+ toasting as well as medium, medium+, and heavy.

"This was the best event I've ever been to at a winery," commented Wine Club Member Jeanie Jones. "Middle Ridge throws the best parties. And Chris makes learning about wine fun."

It was an evening of good friends, good eats and drinks ... and a class in Wine Appreciation 101.

IDYLLWILD

Wine in the Pines

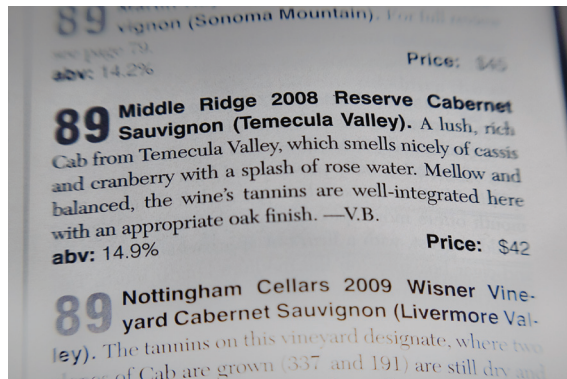
OVERHEARD @MIDDLE RIDGE

MIDDLE RIDGE WINE HAS STARTED ANOTHER CONVERSATION.

We were excited when Wine Enthusiast Magazine decided to review our 2008 Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon, Temecula Valley. It's one of Winemaker Chris' favorite wines, and apparently the magazine's editor liked it as well.



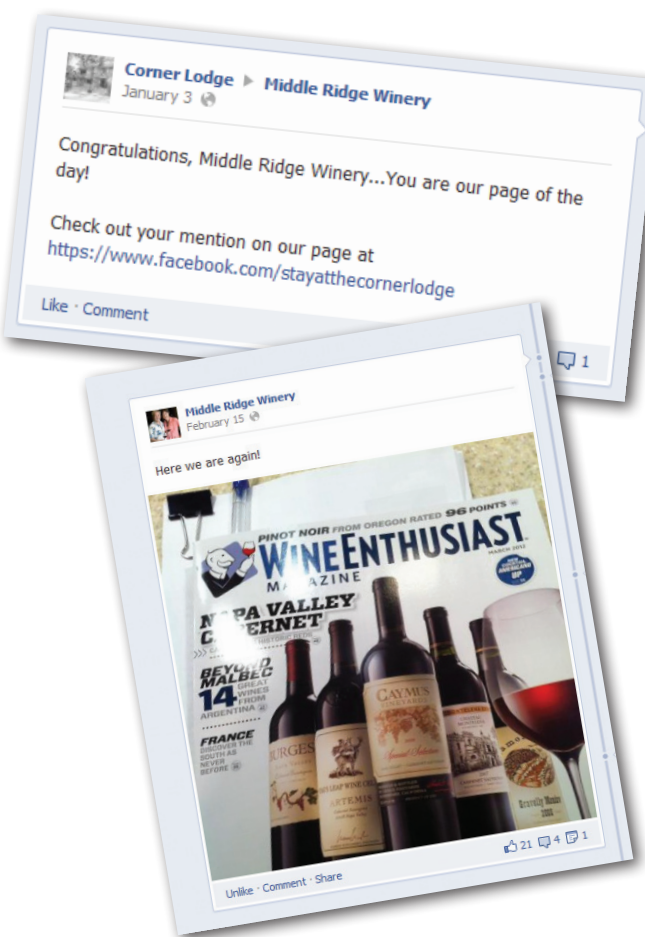
Photos by: Carl Kravats



Photos by: Steven Levesque

This little blurb has created conversations here, there and everywhere.

OVERHEARD...ON FACEBOOK



OVERHEARD...AROUND TOWN

We listened in on Middle Ridge wine club members Ronna and Renee as they checked out the Wine Enthusiast review.



Renee: *They really hit it right – it really does smell like cassis and cranberry.*

Ronna: *But an 89? Come on, would it have hurt to give it one more point to make it 90? I think it's at least a 90. Drink it slowly. This is my last bottle.*

Renee: *No worries. I'll buy you some more.*

Ronna: *Uh, no . . . big worries! You can't buy any more. It's all sold out!*

Renee: *Now that's a bummer!*

Ronna is right! We're sorry to say the 2008 Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon, Temecula Valley is completely sold out. But Chris says, "Don't despair! We just released the 2008 Reserve Petite Sirah. It's incredibly smooth with lush plum and blackberry aromas that open up to licorice and floral scents. It's a rare treat that can never be repeated now that the vineyard has been lost to a herd of horses! And, it was aged for 31 months in French oak. I'd rate it a 95 myself, actually. But here's a tip: Join our wine club, and you'll never miss out on any of our wines."

To see what else is cooking at Middle Ridge, check out our Facebook page or the links listed on the back page of this newsletter.

Conversations with Chris

by Ashley Ludwig

This winter on the mountain, the air was brisk with snow, heavy with pine, and the sky close enough to touch. Winemaker Chris Johnston shared his take on why Idyllwild is the perfect place for him and his winemaking adventures.

Me: The seasons of Idyllwild are so dramatic – breathtaking, really, with the sheer cliffs and pines. Is that what inspires you?

Chris: I’ve always loved it here. I was born and raised in Orange, California, but Idyllwild is very special to me. When I was young, I studied violin at the Idyllwild Arts Academy (known back then as USC-ISOMATA – Idyllwild School of Music and the Arts). The instructors had us practice all day with only one short break and a half hour for lunch. We did that for two weeks straight, with concerts on Sunday. It was intense!

But just listen to the musicians that come out of that place. They’re amazing!

I also fell in love with the beautiful views in Idyllwild. The air. The people. There’s nothing like it. More recently, I played with the Cypress Pops Orchestra – I’m juggling too many hats to play with them now, though.

Me: Do you still play the violin?

Chris: (He winks.) The tuxedo still fits!



Photo by:

Me: When did you decide to relocate to Idyllwild?

Chris: We finished our mountain home in 2005. It’s a wonderful property, overlooking the Arts campus. And, of course, it’s the home of the Middle Ridge Innovation Lab. Almost immediately after the house was completed, I started making wine – which is a 5,300 foot challenge!

Me: What is the most challenging part of making wine a mile high?

Chris: It’s the mountain air. It’s so dry that wine evaporates through the walls of the barrels at an unusually fast rate – up to a liter a week! “Topping off” the barrels – to keep them full and avoid problems caused by excessive oxygen in the barrel – becomes a regular task. It makes you bottle earlier than you’d like sometimes. It’s one of the reasons we moved the barrels to Temecula, leaving the lab in Idyllwild.

Me: You’ve taken some high altitude winemaking courses – always learning!

Chris: That’s right. The Extreme Grape Growing seminar! It was about growing grapes in cold weather climates. However, the seminar focused on varietals that most wine drinkers don’t know, like the St. Croix. The aroma and taste profiles are different enough to catch people by surprise. So for now, I’m happy to keep doing what we’re doing – buying grapes from our friends in Paso Robles, Temecula and Lodi. We work with some fantastic grape growers. But we’ve got lots of great long-term plans, too. So, we’re good!

Me: You are! I think every wine club fan would agree.

Chris: I’ll drink to that!



Events In Review

Middle Ridge wines available at:

Middle Ridge Winery at The Collective
28544 Old Town Front Street
Temecula, CA 92590

In Idyllwild at:
Idyll Awhile Wine
Shope & Bistro
and selected restaurants:
Café Aroma
Creek House
Restaurant Gastrognome

Online:
www.middleridge.com

At selected Southern California restaurants:
FarmShop LA
THE US GRANT Hotel
Highland Springs Resort

SUSTAIN IDYLLWILD

February 2012

"Going green" is a way of life for many Idyllwild residents, and now students of the **Idyllwild Arts Academy** will be starting their own green programs thanks to Christina Lee Nordella, president of **EarthWitness Foundation**, and Brian Cohen, the new president and headmaster at the Academy.

"We admire Christina's and Brian's commitment to education and resource conservation," said Winemaker Chris. "And, of course, I have a particular fondness for the Idyllwild Arts Academy. I studied the violin there

when I was a teenager. So when Christina called and asked if Middle Ridge would sponsor an artists' reception to support sustainability projects at the Academy, we said 'Yes!' right away."

The reception was held at **Quiet Creek Gallery** and featured an art exhibit with works created by students and instructors from the Arts campus. Everything else was "local" too – music, food and, of course, the Middle Ridge wine!



Photo by: Steven Levesque

Brian Cohen, Christina Lee Nordella, and Chris Johnston.

FARMSHOP LA ARTISAN MARKET OPEN HOUSE

January 2012

FARM SHOP

est. 2010

When Jeff Cerciello and Michel Darmon teamed up to create FarmShop LA, we knew it was going to be a winner. Everything about the restaurant speaks to their expertise and experience at places like the French Laundry, Ad Hoc, Bouchon, and Per Se. The newest

addition to the restaurant is their Artisan Market which opened in January. It showcases a meticulously curated selection of goods, including Middle Ridge wine! We enjoyed talking to, and sharing our wine with, everyone who came to the open house. We made lots of new friends . . . and Middle Ridge has lots of new fans!

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

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Middle Ridge Website
www.middleridge.com



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