



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

SUMMER 2012



We had plans to interview Blue himself but, unfortunately, right before our get together Blue transitioned to where all dogs eventually go ... and we know he is running around in dog heaven, sniffing the grape vines and drinking out of a refreshing creek that bubbles up just for him.

We asked John to share his memories of good times with Blue, and he was happy to oblige.

*"Mornings, I never used an alarm clock. Blue would come to the side of the bed and just sit and stare at me until I sensed he was there. And ever so slightly he would fidget to make sure I didn't doze back off. I would reach out with my eyes closed, tap the top of his big head and say, 'snooze button'. He would reluctantly lie back down for ten minutes, and then get back up, stare and fidget some more until I got up.*

*As springtime arrived in the office, he would go outside where he knew I could see him from my desk. He'd roll onto his back and do an upside down dance to his own tune, I couldn't help myself. It always made me go out and give his big belly a good rub. He knew all the while he had succeeded in getting me out in the fresh air where we belonged.*

*When I think back over the fourteen years we shared, I'm amazed at the number of life events he was part of – family reunions, weddings, births, assisted living*

*(Continued on page 3)*

# Spotlight On... BLUE'S CREEK VINEYARD

Blue's Creek Vineyard, owned by our friend John Wayland, happens to be our favorite source for Pinot Grigio grapes. The vineyard, tucked away behind gates in Temecula's wine country, acquired its unique name thanks to John's labrador retriever, Blue. "On the property there's an area where he liked to go and drink out of a little creek, so we called it Blue's Creek," says John. "He would ignore his water dish and run outside just so he could drink from the creek. And when the vineyard was planted, we decided to name it after Blue, too. Of course, Blue always had to supervise the planting and fertilizing, and anything else that is happening."

Our 2011 Pinot Grigio is from the fourth harvest we've purchased from John. "I remember the first year we bought the grapes. It was John's first harvest, and it was such bright fruit," says Winemaker Chris. In fact, the wine from that harvest won the Silver

Medal at the Orange County Fair Commercial Wine Competition. It's almost unheard of for first harvest grapes to be that good. "It's been fantastic and the vintage just gets better and better," says Chris.

John purchased the property two decades ago but didn't feel the time was right to plant until 2006 – then he jumped right in. *(Continued on page 3)*



# OVERHEARD

## @MIDDLE RIDGE

### OVERHEARD...ON THE RADIO

Winemaker Chris was invited to chat on the *The Wineguys Radio* with co-hosts Keith Miller and William Davis.

*Wineguys Radio* airs in Denver, Colorado via Clear Channel on Saturdays 11am-12pm (and on [wineguysradio.com](http://wineguysradio.com)).

**Chris:** Temecula fruit has very special qualities. We're about 23 miles from the ocean, so the valley is well situated for diurnal temperature variations and the nice, cool breeze that comes in from the ocean. You get some really, really hot days and some really, really cool nights. The result is a wonderful acid balance with the tannins, and great fruit flavors and aromas.



*(The guys taste the Middle Ridge Meritage.)*

**Keith:** William, what do you think of the wine?

**William:** It's smooth. There's a lot of the classic Merlot characteristics -- black cherry and plum. There's a lot of cocoa, too. And there's a distinct oaky-ness.



**Chris:** For all of my red wines, I have a standard protocol of 24 months in oak, minimum. And that's just to make sure that everything rounds out nicely. And then I typically let it set for another year in glass, so you're looking at anywhere from 30 to 36 months to market for me . . .

**William:** You have a customer to take care of and you have to take care of your wine.

**Chris:** You bet, otherwise you're going to put out stuff people aren't going to like, and you're going to wind up with a lot of inventory on your hands.

**William:** Yes, indeed!



The entire conversation is posted on our website under the *News* menu.

### OVERHEARD...AT THE COLLECTIVE

As family, friends and fans gathered at *The Collective* to taste Middle Ridge's latest releases, our wandering conversationalist "overheard" a lot -- mainly about us and our wine. Let's check it out!

Want to contribute to the dialogue? Give us a shout out on our Facebook Fan Page. We would love to hear from you.

ON NEW RELEASES

Tracy Spiwa and Mark Stock



**Tracy:** *The Reserve Petite Sirah* is very smooth.

**Mark:** *I'm certainly not a wine expert, so I'm not sure how to characterize it.*

**The Wandering Conversationalist:** *It just tastes good?*

**Tracy and Mark:** *(laughter) Yeah!*

Keith and Jaymece Harrison



**Keith:** *We were the very first members at The Collective. We love Chris' wine.*

*(They taste the TPG Pinot Grigio.)*

**Jaymece:** *You know what? I'm not a Pinot Grigio fan, but I really like this one. It's very flavorful, and smooth. I like it!*

ON WINEMAKING & WINES TYLES

Sig Dellhime



*"Chris is one of the most fun people I've ever met. I've known him for over ten years. And what I like is how he understands wine chemistry and how people will react to the taste. He has a very good sense of what people will like."*

Anita Worthen



*"I think Middle Ridge Wines are absolutely wonderful. I like European-style wine, and that's why I like Chris' -- they're balanced instead of being out there in your face." (Tastes the Reserve Petite Sirah.) I like it! It's smooth and round and full without being heavy on the alcohol."*

# Recipes

## Steamed Tilapia with Meyer Lemons served with risotto

*This dish is a mixture of light and healthy, with a little hardness. Enjoy with a Middle Ridge Pinot Grigio!*

### Tilapia

1 fillet per person (5 – 6 oz)  
Meyer lemon, cut into thin slices  
BBQ sauce or hoisin sauce (which itself is the secret ingredient in many BBQ sauces)  
Sea Salt

*Coat the fish lightly in BBQ (or hoisin) sauce. Salt lightly on both sides. Place the fish in a steamer top and cover with lemon slices. Cook for about 6 minutes until fish readily flakes.*



### Risotto

Allow ¼ cup dry rice per person. The ratio of water to rice should be approximately 2:1. There are two ways to make risotto: the right way... and then the way that has dinner on the table in 30 minutes. We'll use the latter version.

1 cup Arborio rice  
2 cups chicken stock or vegetable stock (home-made is always great, however, we have found that Better than Bullion brand does a pretty decent job)  
½ onion or two shallots diced finely  
3 tbsp olive oil  
1 head kale (washed twice, dried and roughly chopped)  
½ cup of the best Parmesan you can afford (it's expensive, but worth it)

*Heat the olive oil on medium heat, add onions and stir until translucent. Then add the rice; again, stir until translucent. If you have white wine lying around, quickly deglaze the pan. Add stock and let simmer until the liquid is just above the rice. Add the kale, give a stir and cover. Cook on low heat for five minutes, and then turn off heat and let rest for ten minutes. For extra richness, add a pat of unsalted butter. Add cheese at the table.*

## Blue's Juice

¾ cup Cognac  
4 bottles Pinot Grigio  
(we recommend Middle Ridge's Blue's Creek Vineyard Pinot Grigio)  
2 cups orange flower water  
4 tbsp fresh pressed lemon  
1 cup honey & 1 cup water mixed together (use warm water to mix, then cool)

*Mix all the ingredients together, garnish with daisies or yellow flowers, and start the party!*



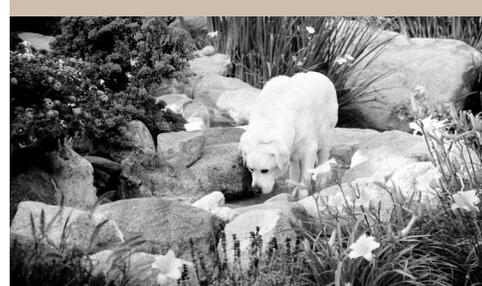
## Spotlight On... BLUE'S CREEK VINEYARD

(Continued from front cover)

"It was one of those endeavors where you think hmmm, what the heck, I'll do it even though on paper it looks pretty crazy," laughs John. His south facing property catches the cooler breezes, which makes ideal growing conditions for Pinot Grigio. The climate, combined with meticulous pruning that brings out the fruit's delicate flavors and scents, creates grapes that are second to none. "I enjoy having the first pick of the grapes each harvest. I still use the same winemaking practices for Blue's Creek wine that I did back in 2008. That's because it pops out the aroma profile," says Chris. "Give the wine a good swirl, then take a big sniff and you'll get all the characteristics of a great Pinot Grigio – nice pear, juicy grapefruit, and crisp lemongrass. It makes for a fantastic, well-balanced wine that's especially great to enjoy on the deck on a hot summer day!"

"And I'm very, very fortunate to have winemakers like Chris who are supportive of the local growers, because I know they can buy grapes cheaper elsewhere," says John. "But what I'm hoping to end up with is the best of the best. And it will show up in the wines. It's a win-win for all involved -- the winemaker gets the accolades, and I get someone who buys my grapes year after year."

We couldn't agree more!



(Continued from front cover)

*center trips, home improvement projects, memorials and parties, surgeries and chemo. Then there were the tens of thousands of miles of travel to cool and faraway places. Blue was born for the 'road trip'. He never complained on which way we were headed, as long as we were headed somewhere.*

*For his size and breed, Blue reached his 'life expectancy' several years ago, and it made me more determined to treat each day as a gift. God bless you, True Blue!*

*Love, John"*

Events In Review  
TAPAS WITH CHRIS  
March 2012

**Middle Ridge wines available at:**

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

*In Idyllwild at:*

- Café Aroma Bistro
- Restaurant Gastrognome
- Creek House Restaurant
- Idyll Awhile Wine Shoppe & Bistro

*Online:*

- [www.middleridge.com](http://www.middleridge.com)

*At selected Southern California restaurants:*

- FarmShop LA
- THE US GRANT Hotel
- Highland Springs Resort

**L I N K S**

-  **Middle Ridge Website**  
[www.middleridge.com](http://www.middleridge.com)
-  **Facebook:**  
[www.facebook.com/middleridgewine](http://www.facebook.com/middleridgewine)
-  **Twitter:**  
[twitter.com/middleridgewine](http://twitter.com/middleridgewine)
-  **YouTube:**  
[www.youtube.com/user/MiddleRidgeWinery#p/u](http://www.youtube.com/user/MiddleRidgeWinery#p/u)

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](http://www.middleridge.com)

As always, The Tapas with Chris (and Wine Club Pickup) event in March was a ton of fun and a huge success. The upstairs room at The Collective was packed elbow to elbow with Wine Club members and friends. Everyone enjoyed the fantastic Spring Tapas menu made for us by Tamara Johnston and Crispin Courtenay. In case you weren't there, here is what you missed:

- Cold pea soup with mint, topped with hand-made crème fraiche
- Grape Mule\* Salad (macerated grapes, rosemary, shallots and balsamic reduction)
- Sauteed pork with a red wine reduction, served with baby potatoes and a small salad
- Lavash topped with smoked gouda, leeks and diced ham
- Mule\* gelato

\* *What are all these references to "Mule" you might ask? Check back with us in September and find out!*  
*Hint: You can keep an eye on our Facebook page, too.*

Everyone also loved checking out the new kid on the block. We introduced Lily Rock Cellars whose TPG Pinot Grigio is a refreshingly light wine with lots of tangerine aromas and a mild sweetness. A lot of people told us that this is another fantastic "deck wine" to keep on hand for the summer!

# Conversations with Chris

by Johanna Lack



Who doesn't love blends? It seems that when grapes come together they merge the best of their qualities to make something really special.

For Winemaker Chris Johnston, the blending of Temecula Valley and Paso Robles grapes is a winning combination. So I caught up with him to find out why the grapes from these regions go together so deliciously well.

**Me:** *The wines from these two areas have some really unique qualities, don't they?*

**Chris:** That's right. Last year when we released our 2008 reserves, there were two Cabernet Sauvignons – one from Paso Robles and one from Temecula Valley. They were identical in the way they were made – the pH and acid were similar, and the yeast was the same. The whole winemaking process was consistent. But you noticed differences right away, especially when you tried them side by side. The Cabernet Sauvignon from Paso Robles had an earthy aroma, while the Temecula Valley Cab Sauv was fruitier. It was the same with the two Merlots we released.

**Me:** *What gives wines from different regions their distinctive aromas and tastes?*

**Chris:** Everything that affects the grape while it's growing impacts its aromas and tastes. It's often referred to as the region's the terroir, which loosely means "a sense of place". Vineyards in the same area have similar soil, weather conditions, and farming practices, which all contribute to the unique qualities of the crops from that region.

**Me:** *But most people really enjoy blends, don't they? I know I do.*

**Chris:** Blends are so popular because you can really tell where the winemaker is coming from and what he or she likes to express in their wine. Different smells and tastes can be highlighted. That's why I like working with a combination of Paso Robles and Temecula Valley fruit. You put the wines from these regions together and you get something really wonderful.

**Me:** *How do you express yourself in your blended wines?*

**Chris:** I am always about the aroma. I love the smell of wine and how it impacts what you taste. When you have the right balance of fruit and oak and combine it with good mouth-feel and structure, you appreciate not only the wine, but how it complements food. You taste the wine and think maybe it'll go with venison or lamb. Or, oh, this one came out so good it'll go well with a rib-eye steak. I want to help people learn to smell and taste wine and begin to develop a sense what foods go well with it.

**Me:** *And how did you express yourself specifically with the 2009 Dark Canyon Cab Sauv and the 2009 Meritage?*

**Chris:** Both are very aromatic! With the Dark Canyon, I was looking for something that would give it structure, so the blend of the two different regions did that. In 2009 the colors, aromas and flavors of the wines from both regions were wonderful. It has cassis and blackberry aromas; a nice, smooth mouth-feel; and firm yet gentle tannins.

With the Meritage there are lot of cherry aromas, strawberries, blueberries, blackberries, and the same smooth mouth-feel. I love to balance tannins with good acids and a long finish. I like tannins that stand up to whatever food you're eating, especially if it's a nice, juicy steak. That, along with a good glass of wine, and I'm set!