

WINE TALK: Black Chicken - a plump, voluptuous 2012 Zinfandel at chop239

MARCO PORTO, chop239 1:57 p.m. EST February 6, 2015



(Photo: Quentin Roux/Sun Times)

As we get in the cooler months of winter, I like hearty food with a hearty complex wine.

My wine choice is the 2012 Robert Biale Black Chicken Zinfandel.

For more than 70 years, beginning in 1937, the Biale family has grown Zinfandel and a variety of produce on their farm located on the outskirts of the town of Napa.

A large population of white leghorn chickens once produced a steady supply of eggs that a young Aldo Biale regularly delivered around town to customers. Most of the Zinfandel grapes were sold to Napa vintners, but some grapes were reserved so Aldo could make homemade wine for family and relatives.

In 1953, Aldo meet his future wife, Clementina, while on a trip to Italy where his mother, Christina was from. Aldo and Clementina were soon married and began raising their family in Napa in 1954.

Along with the eggs and produce, a teenaged Aldo began discreetly selling his homemade wine to a few wine-loving Napans.

Because his rural home phone was a "party line" frequented by nosy eavesdroppers, enterprising Aldo used a code name whereby his customers could order wine without revealing his secret Zinfandel operation.

Thus "Black Chicken" was born — the nickname for a jug of homemade wine from young Aldo's barrels hidden in the barn.

In 1991, Aldo and son Robert formed a partnership with childhood friend and wine salesman Dave Pramuk, and winemaker Al Perry to produce and market a special Zinfandel from the old vineyard they named "Aldo's Vineyard."

Cultish following

With history, grapes winemaking and sales in place the new winery, Robert Biale Vineyards, gained recognition and a cultish following by Zinfandel fanatics.

The winemaker for Biale's is Trester "Tres" Goetting, a 26-year veteran Napa Valley enologist and viticulturist.

His most recent winemaking stint was with highly-respected Krupp Brothers Winery/Stagecoach Vineyards and Valley of the Moon Winery's new top tier Zinfandel program. He has also produced the custom wine for the prestigious Post Ranch Inn at Big Sur.

He couldn't be happier, and Bob Biale appreciates having a fellow vineyards/"vit" guy help to size up these older and sometimes quirky Zinfandel vineyards with their dry farming, deep roots, big trunks, and sometimes-mixed varieties.

The 2012 Robert Biale Black Chicken Zinfandel is a plump, juicy and firm wine, this is one irresistible bird – a Zinfandel brimming with fruit, spices and an Oak Knoll district perfume of concentrated blackberry compote, bright raspberries, clove, five spice, black tea, toasted brioche, and notes of caramel and vanilla.

What a voluptuous wine.

This wine is on the chop239 Wine List for \$99 a bottle. Pair this beauty with chop239's braised short rib and I promise it'll be a match made in heaven. Enjoy.

Marco Porto owns chop239 at the Esplanade. He is a wine connoisseur, and along with Laura Owen of CJ's on the Bay and Adamo Serravalle of Marco Prime and DaVinci's, is a regular contributor to this column.

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