

Quilting with Wine Labels, No. 12

JANUARY 3, 2016 BY ARMCHAIRSOMMELIER



A continuing series on wine labels, and the wines that wear them, under the macro lens.

I love to take photos of pieces of things with my macro lens - pieces of wine labels seemed like a natural extension of that inclination. It's a lot of fun to see the colors, and especially the textures, on a wine label that you wouldn't ordinarily see (or maybe even notice). It's almost as fun as drinking the wine. Almost. So, I thought . . . why not stitch the photos together into a quilt?

Voila! My week in wine labels.

Herman Story Syrah Larner Vineyard 2008: 4 stars / 92

From the Larner Vineyard in what is now the new Ballard Canyon AVA of the Santa Ynez Valley in Santa Barbara County. I prefer my Herman Story wines with a bit of age on them - time does nothing but favors for these wines. Definitely not a wine for the pinkies-out crowd, this is a handsome and powerful wine. You can smell it from across the room. Black fruit for d-a-y-s. Licorice and spice and everything nice. All laid out on

a placemat of minerals. But do yourself a favor, eh? Decant this puppy. Decant all the Herman Story puppies. \$35ish.

Herman Story wine labels are a master-class in awesome. All of them different, and evolving with each vintage. This one is the interior of an old pick-up truck (I remember something about a mid-90s Ford) that the winemaker, Russell From uses to drive around to his various vineyard sites.

Cresti Fattoria Carpineta Fontalpino Do ut des 2012: 4 stars / 91

A Super Tuscan blend of 34% Merlot, 33% Sangiovese, and 33% Cabernet Sauvignon. The Carpineta Fontalpino vineyard is located in Tuscany, very close to the town of Siena. Do ut des is Latin, and basically means quid pro quo. But, apparently, the Italians don't use quid pro quo - instead they use do ut des. I wish I would have cellared this one for another couple of years. Intense. All kinds of really bright red fruits and roses. A super value for a Super Tuscan at \$35ish.

The Do ut des label features a beautiful rose - this is a macro capture of part of that rose. Why a rose? Dunno. If wineries would put their label stories on their websites (see my comment below), I would. ??

Phifer Pavitt Date Night Sauvignon Blanc 2014: 4 stars / 90

Grapes were sourced from Juliana Vineyards in Pope Valley (east of Calistoga and Howell Mountain in Napa Valley). Fermented in stainless steel tanks. Lemon chiffon color. Nose is a bowl of citrus fruits. More intense aromas as it warms. Well balanced, with super minerality. Flavors of lemon, honeydew, chalk, and fresh green peas. Young, peppy acidity. And and absolutely explosive pear on the finish. Impressive! \$30.

Phifer Pavitt Date Night Cabernet Sauvignon 2011: 4 stars / 92

Grapes were sourced from Temple Family Vineyards Lakespring Ranch in Pope Valley (east of Calistoga and Howell Mountain in Napa Valley). 98% Cabernet Sauvignon and 2% Petit Verdot. Aged for 18 months in 75% new French Oak. Clear garnet color. Tons going on in this glass - eucalyptus, cedar, tobacco, leather, violets, smoked cherries. Tannins are assertive, but in a helpful kind of way. Almost a double finish - vanilla, and then a coconut encore! Every sip got better than the last. This is evolution in a glass. Superb. Date Night's got Moxie in spades! \$80.

Why Date Night? Suzanne and her husband, Shane (Phifer and Pavitt, respectively), made the decision to open their winery on a Date Night. Who among us hasn't made a big decision on Date Night? I totally get it. Date Night lends a certain clarity to thought that's absent when you have a toddler creating wall murals with Sharpie markers, or a teenager whose primary means of communication is an eye-roll, followed by four foot-stomps and a door slam.

I received both of these wines as samples from Phifer Pavitt, so I reached out to them for the story behind the nifty cowgirl on the labels. In a nutshell, during the construction phase of Phifer Pavitt's home and winery, the proprietor, Suzanne's "uniform" was jeans and a t-shirt with cowboy boots (because you never know when you might find a rattlesnake nest) and cowboy hat. This is my kind of uniform. Though, if there's even a

remote possibility I might find a rattlesnake nest, I'm swapping my cowboy boots for steel waders. Suzanne's Uncle George (he's actually Suzanne's husband's uncle), an accomplished graphic artist who designed the Yosemite Conservancy CA license plates, drew some sketches of her and thought they'd be great for the wine label. Suzanne wasn't especially keen about having her own image on the bottle, so she asked Uncle George if he could modify the sketch to be more vintage (think Dale Evans, and all the other pioneering women who weren't afraid to roll up their sleeves and get their feet wet). Voila! Meet Moxie. Isn't she great?

Moxie was a little bit challenging to photograph on the Cabernet bottle. The black lines on the dark purple background gave me fits! Moxie also has a lasso (photographed on the Sauvignon Blanc bottle), which made me think of Wonder Woman, another strong woman with Moxie (and a pretty great pair of boots)!

Phifer Pavitt Winery is Napa Green Winery Certified - the tasting room was made from 100-year-old reclaimed redwood and it's insulated with recycled blue jeans. If you haven't seen it . . . you really need to visit their website and take a gander. Tours and tastings are by appointment only. And the next time I'm in Calistoga, I'm so making an appointment!

As I photograph more and more of these wine labels, and attempt to find out a little bit more of their stories, I've come to an important conclusion - wineries really need to include their label stories on their websites. Wine labels are the ultimate first impression. They connect the wine to the consumer - they're part of a wine's story. And people love stories.

Salud!