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Trelia Food & Wine

Hidden Madera County Wine Gems...

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California's Central Valley is not often on the radar of wine consumers from outside the area. Typically known for its copious contributions to the jug, box and grocery shelf wine production, the region is becoming home to several upcoming and already established wineries that are changing the commercial thinking of the area. Westbrook Wine Farm has been on the "must have list" for many discriminating cellars and winelists throughout California. Oscar Ramos (Fresno State Graduate) has stayed in the valley rather than follow his dreams in the safe areas of Paso Robles or Napa Valley where many graduates head. Oscar is well on his way to producing what may be the Central Valley's break out label, Ramos-Torres. But as with any winemaker they are at the whim of the availability of high quality fruit to make magic in the cellar.

Quality is on its way. In 1999, agriculture innovator Ralph Fasi set out to do just that. His 42 acres of organically farmed Syrah grapes planted along the San Joaquin River may just be what a lot of up and coming local winemakers need. What sets this vineyard apart from others in the region is Ralph's commitment to quality. Not to get into the nitty-gritty of his high tech vineyard operation as it would be lengthy. Instead here is the link www.agrovice.com.

Last night I had a chance (not my first) to try his 2005 and 2006 side-by-side as a gift from him. The 2005 vintage was the first I took a crack at. Upon opening it was rather difficult to figure out the wine, it wavered between oak and earthy aromatics but as it sat in the glass for a few minutes it started to open to sweet tobacco, coffee and coco powder held up with a sweet blackberry fruit core. The minerality is much different from Syrah produced in other regions, a much more fertile density to it. An aromatic that runs through many wines from the valley floor region. The oak used was of obviously quality bursting out with a nice toasty vanilla character. The mouth feel was medium bodied with more of a "Old World" structure of fine, yet tight tannins and ample acidity. Flavors of black cherry and candied plum are generous and very pleasant, not cloying at all. The finish dries nicely returning to a profile more like the earthy, coffee notes that are more apparent on the nose. Overall a very well made wine with some good possibility of gaining great secondary life in two to three year. ***(*)

The 2006, although a very different wine than the 2005, had many similarities. The nose was much more fruit forward with much less Oak apparent, more in the back ground. A slightly jammy black raspberry fruit core jumped out of the glass upon pouring. The minerality of the wine was very similar to the 2005 yet not as integrated, it actually took a little time and effort to find it. The flavors were also a bit sweeter and upfront on the mouth. Black cherry and light plum flavors take over the palate with very similar acid structure while the tannins were much softer and not nearly as drying. The mouth feel

was slightly denser, but by no means heavy bodied. The 2006 is definitely much more approachable and drink friendly. ***

Both wines are very unique examples of premium winemaking from benchland Madera County fruit and very worth while, if just for the experience of knowing the piece of earth it is grown on...

These are Roasted Lamb wines (not that most reds aren't). Something simple like fingerling potatoes and roast leg of lamb would be fabulous, otherwise I would be looking for unique red meat options like squab, ostrich or venison also simply prepared.

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