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**WINE** Wine Wednesday: Donelan Family Wines

POSTED BY CHRIS CHAMBERLAIN ON WED, FEB 20, 2013 AT 10:27 AM

While I tend to be a bargain wine shopper, generally looking for economical finds in the \$12 to \$20 range, I do appreciate a well-crafted wine in the upper price levels. I respect the time put into making a real artisan wine, but some things seem a little over-the-top to me when it comes to presentation.

So it was with some trepidation that I opened a box with two very nice wines that had been graciously provided by **Donelan Family Wines**. The first thing I noticed was that both bottles were sealed with heavy wax caps over the cork. Generally, I can't stand packaging like that. It's a royal pain in the tuchus to break and pry off the seal, and the odds of getting chunks of wax into the bottle are high, so you really need to strain and decant the juice.

But wait a minute? Who's the real expert here? I'm guessing it's the folks at Donelan, a family operation that seeks out some of the best vineyards in Northern California to source world-class grapes that they blend into award-winning wines. Maybe I shouldn't be in such a hurry after all.

Donelan is known for its syrahs, and I'm a big fan of this varietal. The full-bodied grapes that produce a very dark fruit-forward flavor profile are favorites around my household, but subtlety isn't the main characteristic I look for in \$15 bottles. However, the 2009 Walker Vine Hill Russian River Valley Syrah from Donelan exhibits exactly the sort of nuanced character that benefits from careful handling and some time to open up in a decanter. Good thing they slowed me down!

Tasted right out of the bottle, the intense flavors were way too tight. The wine needed time to breathe while I was finishing up the steak au poivre that was in the skillet. The peppery notes of the wine worked very well with the filet, and in fact, Donelan's syrahs are known for being particularly food-friendly. Cherry and blueberry notes pair well with any sort of dark sauces, even a rack of barbecued ribs, if you'd like.

Slightly younger, but no less interesting is the 2010 Cuvee Christine Syrah from Sonoma County. These grapes are from high on a hilltop and have been slower to mature than the valley grapes. While this wine is perfectly drinkable now, it will only benefit from a little more time in repose. Provided you're not like me, the type who doesn't even want to wait to pry off the wax capsule ...

The Cuvee Christine is a beautiful dark garnet color in the glass, and the aromas of savory spices are very pleasant on the nose. The flavors aren't quite as dark and chewy as the Walker Vine Hill, but it was still a fine companion to a maple-glazed pork chop.

Donelan Family Wines are fairly new to the Nashville area, but they are becoming more widely available in wine stores. Figure that both of these wines will set you back around \$45 a bottle, but good things come to those who wait. Take your time. Crack the wax and let it breathe. You'll be glad you did.

Tags: Wine, Wine Wednesday, Donelan Family Wines, Syrah



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