

November 18, 2016

My Love for Howell Mountain and the Lamborn Vineyard Continues!

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Yikes its November! I hate to say it but the holiday season is upon us and the phones are lighting up.

Every year since 1990 I have sent out to my clients my top recommendations in different categories' and I will indeed do that later this month again, but I wanted to get out in front of the top request on the phone lines, and that is for that extra special bottle for the most important person or clients. While having dinner with my wife last Wednesday, we drank the above wine and I turned to her and said "this is phenomenal wine!" This is my #1 wine of the year from California. We get thousands of phone calls this time of year for the exact same old handful of expensive Napa wines, these conversations bore me to death as do most of those wines. In fact I just tasted 13 of the greatest and famous California Cabernets some that cost a \$100-150 more. This wine blows them away.

Sorry for the long story...but it's worth it!

Howell Mountain is a long way from my beloved Bordeaux but both places occupy very special places in my heart. Zinfandel was my first love and my first visit to Napa Valley in 1980 was to Burgess Cellars on Howell Mountain which was the original Souverain estate. Burgess made great Zinfandel and Cabernet and a few years later I tasted other Howell Mountain Zinfandels that blew me away from a small place named Lamborn.

Fast forward to the year 2008 and a hundred of visits to Napa as well as 25 visits to Bordeaux under my belt. A great customer wants to get into the wine business and sell California wines in Asia and hires me a consultant. We start from scratch tasting hundreds of small boutique

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California properties, when I mention this to a customer he asks me if I know the wines from Lamborn and I say not since the Zins I had in the 1980's. He tells me they are making great, powerful Cabernet and I should check them out. Thanks Dennis!

While on a short Napa vacation with no wine business planned to make my wife happy; I beg her to let me call Mr. Mike Lamborn to see if we could meet for a quick taste of his wine. He is home and say's yes! It is very pretty on Howell Mountain and everyone ends up very happy. The 2006 was indeed is a deep and very powerful expression, my initial thought was that it may be too powerful for the Asian palate; but then again you need to have some serious wine in the portfolio!

I have tasted hundreds of Howell Mountain wines in my career and they are known for their power, none better than the Superstar of the mountain itself Randy Dunn and his Dunn Vineyards wine. The first great bottle of Dunn wine I tasted was actually a 1987 Howell Mountain Cabernet given to me by Joe Montana after I told him I have never tasted one. In fact Randy Dunn is a family friend and helped make the first Lamborn wine in 1982.

We signed up and Lamborn as our first account and it has ended up being the top selling Cabernet in our portfolio ever since as well as the most expensive, which in Asia (tough market) is testimony alone to the quality! Their Cabernet just keeps getting better every year and this is no surprise. 100% all estate fruit, located 2200 hundred feet above the valley floor and above the fog the vines see longer hours of sun, while cooler nights and the ocean breezes are perfect for tremendous color, concentration of fruit, freshness and acidity. Only around 900 cases are produced.

Then, you add to the equation one of the most talented winemakers in the history of California wine making the wine; Heidi Barrett, who made wine at Screaming Eagle and Grace Family, a great vintage like 2013

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and you have a wine of spectacular quality and the reason for this email. The Lamborn's are also wonderful people so it a pleasure to support them.

I know that almost all the time I am selling you Bordeaux, but I'm not a one dimensional wine guy. So I was thinking, what wine from Bordeaux would I compare to this Lamborn Cabernet. The answer came to me quickly...Big juice with layers of saturated, delicious, dark-ripe purple fruit, big but rounded tannins, great freshness and structure, and thank goodness not dominated by gobs of new oak. Ch. Pontet Canet from Pauillac is that estate! Because of its exuberant California fruit it is maybe a Ch. Pontet Canet on steroids, but in any case, great wines sharing their best qualities. Almost a mystical combination if you will of Alfred's fantastic 2009 that is loaded with sweet fruit and his monumental 2010 that shows you the power of the great commune of Pauillac. Alfred is in my contacts and may indeed read this.

The wine will age wonderfully, but as Kim and I just experienced, like most California wines it is delicious young with some air. Buy some for your cellar and for your best friends and customers.