

BEST WINES FOR EVERY KIND OF DISH: BURGERS, PASTA, PIZZA, SALADS

# FOOD & WINE

APRIL 2014

How to pair

*wine with food*

5 simple ways  
to make a  
great match  
every time

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to eat &  
drink on the  
California  
coast

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## Finding the Great Wineries of the Future

CHARLES BANKS, THE ONETIME CO-OWNER OF NAPA'S SCREAMING EAGLE, TELLS WHERE HE SEES UNTAPPED WINERY POTENTIAL AND EXPLAINS WHY \$12 SOUTH AFRICAN CHENIN BLANC MAY BE THE WORLD'S BEST WINE DEAL.

INTERVIEW BY RAY ISLE PHOTOGRAPHS BY JEREMY & CLAIRE WEISS/DAY19

**Q. What was the first wine you ever fell in love with?**

**A.** It was on my first wedding anniversary. We went to Carmel, to this place called The Cheese Shop, and the owner asked what we liked to drink. My wife said: "We want a white to drink while we're on the beach watching the sunset. And we like Chardonnay." So he gave us a bottle of Au Bon Climat, and it was awesome. Clean and beautiful, not oaky and buttery. A simple \$20 Chardonnay.

**Q. In 2006, you became co-owner of Screaming Eagle, Napa's most sought-after cult Cabernet. Was that at all intimidating?**

**A.** Yes! Before we bought the property, Jean [Phillips, the former owner] showed me around, and everywhere I looked, I saw all this room for improvement. But back at my hotel, it was like, What am I thinking? Am I nuts? You can't just show up out of nowhere and make Screaming Eagle better.

sell out anyway. I love their G Major 7 Cabernet Sauvignon and their Cab Franc, but everything they do is first class.

**Q. After you left Screaming Eagle, your next step was buying Mulderbosch. What excites you about South African wine?**

**A.** South Africa has momentum. I believe we can make some of the greatest value wines in the world there. With Mulderbosch, I met [wine importer] Andre Shearer of Cape Classics in '08. He told me Mulderbosch's owners had quit putting in effort—and it's a tragedy, because the wines have the potential to be phenomenal. I wasn't really interested in going from Screaming Eagle to \$12 Sauvignon Blanc, but Shearer laid out such a compelling story for South Africa, and the future of South African wine in particular, that I canceled our family's spring break and my wife and I flew over. I fell in love the first day we were there.

**Q. What will you focus on?**

**A.** I view our future at Mulderbosch as Chenin Blanc. It's like the Gargiulo of South African grapes—it should be famous, but it isn't. It's bright, minerally and expressive. There's no place in the world that can make Chenin like South Africa. And certainly nowhere I can produce a \$12 bottle of Chenin from 65-year-old vines and still make money on it.

**Q. Not Pinotage?**

**A.** Johann Rupert [the winemaker of South Africa's Rupert Wines] insisted on tasting me through a bunch of old vintages of Pinotage so I could really understand it. Three hours later, I told him, "Here's the thing: I understand it, and I still don't like it."

**Q. You're a fan of Gargiulo Vineyards. It's next to Screaming Eagle, but its wines cost far less. Why?**

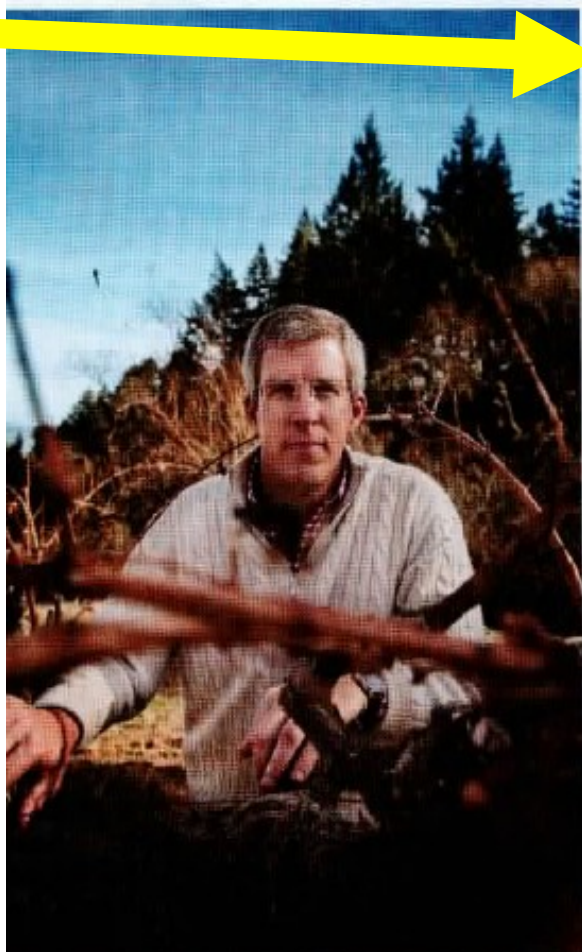
**A.** One, they were never really on Robert Parker's radar. [High scores from the wine critic often drive up prices.] Plus, Gargiulo is hard to pronounce—that actually hurts to a degree. Third, the Gargiulos aren't really self-promotional. But they're so kind and such great hosts that their wines

PERCENTAGE OF VINEYARDS CHARLES BANKS TORE OUT THE FIRST DAY HE CO-OWNED SCREAMING EAGLE?

70%

WHAT HE WAS THINKING:

"I better not be making a mistake."





## BANKS ON "CHEMISTRY-SET WINES"

"Most people don't realize that you can put things like tannin dust into wines, or xanthan gum to change the texture. Who wants to drink that?"

**Q.** Last year, you purchased Mayacamas Vineyards, one of Napa Valley's iconic Cabernet producers. It was in rough shape, right?

**A.** The first time I ever went there was in '06 or '07. I was with Bill Harlan of Harlan Estate, and he said, "We're going to make a quick run up Mount Veeder to see this winery that's for sale, Mayacamas." I thought, One of my favorites! But when we got up there, we were shocked by what we saw. It was more than disrepair; it was like the place was in a time warp. It was going to take years of work. I remember Bill saying something to the effect of, "I'm too old for this. There's no way I'm taking this on."

**Q.** It's definitely the land that time forgot up at that winery. Would you say that's true of the wines, too?

**A.** They're different than the big, lush,

ripe Cabernets that have been popular for the past 20 years or so. They're old-school California Cabernets, elegant and balanced. But that topic has become such a lightning rod—people take all the fun out of wine by saying you have to like only one style. It's like saying: "I only like one kind of movie. I only like comedies. I'm never going to see another movie if it isn't a comedy."

**Q.** Mayacamas is definitely remote, but Bob Travers, the former owner, lived there for 40 years. Any chance you'll move in?

**A.** No. For a lot of reasons. One, I'd like my wife to stay married to me.

**Q.** You're involved in five properties in California, a company in Burgundy, and two wineries in South Africa. Is that it?

**A.** There's also Cultivate, which is a global wine business my wife and I set up. We use the winemakers from our various properties to make phenomenal everyday wines, and we donate at least 10 percent of the gross revenues to charity. We also just purchased Trinity Hill, in New Zealand's Gimblett Gravels region.

**Q.** And what's the place you're most intrigued by that you haven't invested in yet?

**A.** Argentina. I've had some higher-altitude, more balanced Malbecs that are incredibly complex—Colome's, for example. The same goes for wines from Argentina's cooler climates, too. And the Noemia wines from Patagonia are remarkable.

## 7 great bottles

### 2011 CULTIVATE WONDERLUST CHARDONNAY (\$13)

"We've donated \$490,000 to charity since the Cultivate program started, which is pretty cool. This is an unoaked Chardonnay from Chile. It has an amazing level of freshness and acidity for the price."

### 2011 AU BON CLIMAT SANTA BARBARA COUNTY CHARDONNAY (\$20)

"I've had this wine from so many vintages, and it's one of the most underrated wines in California. Beautiful, fresh—talk about several decades of winemaking talent all rolled into one wine."

### NV SCARPETTA BRUT ROSÉ SPUMANTE (\$28)

"I love to open bottles with friends. Their assumption is that whatever it is, it must be expensive. So I love pulling out something like this Scarpetta. It looks expensive and tastes expensive, but isn't."

### 2011 STOLPMAN STA. RITA HILLS ESTATE-GROWN SYRAH (\$30)

"Syrah is one of the most drinkable wines in the world, and this one from California shows you why, at a fair price. It delivers exactly what I want in a Syrah: balance, freshness, acidity, ripeness—but not too much ripeness—and not too much oak."

### 2010 A.A. BADENHORST FAMILY WHITE (\$39)

"This wine's a little funky, in a great way. It shows what the South African Swartland region is all about."

### 2008 MAYACAMAS VINEYARDS CABERNET SAUVIGNON (\$75)

"This is built to age. It has that great, old-school Cabernet nose—a minty-menthol character that really defines Mayacamas. If you like traditional Napa Cab, Mayacamas is one of only a handful of options. And the '08 just nails it."

### 2010 GARGULO G MAJOR 7 CABERNET SAUVIGNON (\$125)

"There's a slight valley between Screaming Eagle and this property—not much distance. Similar soil, great location and great people. If I had to pick one of its wines, it'd be this one."

PERCENTAGE OF GROSS REVENUES THAT BANKS'S CULTIVATE WINES GIVES TO CHARITY:

>10%

AMOUNT CONTRIBUTED SO FAR:

\$490,000