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Enjoying Life with "Slow Food," part 2

A couple of years ago, we wrote a piece about the Slow Food Movement and how it relates to wine. We proposed that part of the allure of wine—and particularly Cantiga wine—is that it represents an antidote to the modern, frenzied lifestyle. Founded in Italy in 1986 by Carlo Petrini, the Slow Food Movement promotes some of the key ideas we stand for at Cantiga: preparing and eating locally and seasonally-grown foods, supporting family farms and artisan food producers, gardening, preserving biodiversity (through seed banks and cultivation of heirloom varieties), celebrating regional culinary traditions, and encouraging ethical, organic and non-GMO farming and food production practices.

Our son was recently assigned a book report on *The Omnivore's Dilemma* (young reader's edition), by Michael Pollan. Intrigued, I read the book along with him as it seemed pertinent to this conversation. The book discusses various types of food production chains, and how North America is dominated by the industrial food complex which places profit above human health, animal welfare and the environment. It is a system that favors the production of cheap crops (predominantly corn, wheat and soy), caters to a demand for pre-packaged convenience foods, and leads to a nutrient-poor diet. According to Pollan, the shorter the food chain (the closer we are to the source of our food), the healthier and more sustainable it is. Growing, raising, hunting and foraging our own food is the closest we can get, but these practices are time consuming and don't often fit our modern lifestyle. And so the author urges us to support our local, small family farms wherever possible. If we are to return to health—both human and environmental—a community-based food system is our only sensible way forward. Michael Pollan's book is a fascinating, eye-opening read, and we recommend it to all.

As we pointed out earlier, community-based food production is central to the Slow Food Movement. We are proud to live near Sacramento, the farm-to-fork capital, and we are grateful that in the Sierra Foothills we are surrounded by small family farms that produce an abundance of ripe, flavorful, organic fruits and vegetables. Our appreciation for these choices increased even more, during a recent family trip to Greece.

Let me begin by saying that culturally, the Greeks live by slow food. I spent extensive amounts of time in Greece during my late teens and twenties, and I remembered fondly how Greeks place such emphasis on cooking and eating. Greek cuisine is innately healthy, fabulously delicious, and traditionally prepared slowly from scratch and then enjoyed at length. Typically, Greeks return home at lunch time for the main, home-cooked meal of the day. The evening meal is also cooked from scratch (possibly left over from lunch), and eaten sociably, late in the evening. It is not unusual for groups of friends to spend 2-3 hours over a meal, enjoying each other's company. In the villages, people often gather in the square in the evening, and food and drink are part of the social fabric. I also recall how, 30 years ago, bread was baked fresh every day by the local baker, meat was purchased from small, specialty butchers, and the food chain was largely community-based.

While visiting Greece last month, I was happy to see that culturally, at least on the surface, the Greek approach to food hasn't changed much. However, I also observed that village culture is rapidly disappearing, as families move to the large city centers for work. Sadly, the economic changes that are reshaping Greek society are also affecting the food chain. I first suspected this when I tucked into a traditional Greek tomato and cucumber salad and found it utterly devoid of flavor. Definitely not how I remembered Greek salads! This was the case, unfortunately, with most salads we had on the trip.

More light was shed on the situation when we visited one of the wineries on Santorini and had a very informative conversation with two young men who worked at the winery. They shared with us how agriculture

has changed in Greece due to government policies. Large farms are heavily subsidized, to the detriment of small farmers. The result of this practice has been the rise of an industrial food complex where small farmers cannot compete, and the public is robbed of healthy, flavorful, local produce. This phenomenon calls to mind how the United States government heavily subsidizes the production of corn—a policy that has had a profound influence on the American diet. One of our young Greek colleagues shared with us that he was attempting to make it as a small farmer, but was finding it extremely difficult to break into the distribution network because of the monopolies. We discussed with him how in California, small farmers are trying innovative approaches to local distribution, such as CSAs (community-supported agriculture) and farmers markets. He felt that this was not an option in Greece—the monopolies would shut down these efforts.

Our observation of the broad reach of industrial food practices, even in Greece where these practices seem so anti-Greek, made us realize how much work it will take to shift back to community-based food production. It also drove home the reality that it will all come down to the consumer. If we choose to say “no” to industrial food, and to put our money where our mouths are, we can bring about change. It is about supply and demand.

We encourage you to enjoy these summer wines in the context of slow food! We will offer some suggestions for seasonal and sustainable meals along with the wine descriptions, below. To good wine, food and friends!

Included in your summer shipment:

2016 Grenache, Estate (New release)

Harvest Brix: 25.6 pH: 3.8 TA: 5.15 Alc: 15.1% RS: 0.0% ML: 0%
Cases produced: 213 Aging: 2 years in mostly neutral European oak

Our Grenache is a dry, Spanish-style red wine with abundant strawberry characteristics. Its relatively light body and fresh fruit quality makes it a perfect warm weather wine. One of our favorite dishes to pair with this wine is Spanish paella. This is definitely “slow food”—it is a time commitment, but is oh, so worth it. To increase its sustainability, you can find locally grown zucchini, tomatoes, bell peppers and onions this time of year, at your local farmer’s market. Consider opting for wild-caught seafood instead of farmed, as well as free-range chicken.

2013 Petite Sirah, Estate

Harvest Brix: 26.6 pH: 3.56 TA: 6.95 Alc: 15.1% RS: 0.0% ML: 0%
Cases produced: 201 Aging: 3 years in mostly neutral European oak

We are pleased to include our current release of this exquisite estate wine. This wine demonstrates how a bold, rustic grape can be made in an elegant European style if the acidity is preserved and the wine allowed to age. This wine is outstanding with wild game, such as venison or bison, if you are able to obtain some. Try a side of wild rice pilaf and some seasonal greens.

2010 Library Zinfandel, Herbert Vineyard (older vintages offered for some club levels—see below)

Harvest Brix: 26.3 pH: 3.37 TA: no data Alc: 15.6% RS: 0.0% ML: 0%
Cases produced: 236 Aging: 3 years in mostly neutral European oak

As a special treat, we are pulling some amazing, rare Herbert Vineyard Zinfandel out of our “Library” for you. Always a favorite, our zinfandel continues to improve and grow more complex with age. This wine is wonderful with grilled meats and also shines with Italian food. Summertime presents so many delicious options; try cooking organic pasta tossed in olive oil and topped with garden fresh diced tomatoes and basil, some garden-grown sautéed summer squash, fresh ground black pepper and grated Parmesan.

Our mid- and upper-tier clubs will receive a mix of vintages of Library Herbert Vineyard Zinfandel:

Professional Winos (6-bottle): 1 x 2010 Zinfandel, 1 x 2006 Zinfandel

Ambassadors of Oenos (12-bottle): 2 x 2010 Zinfandel, 1 x 1008 Zinfandel, 1 x 2006 Zinfandel