

When Life Gives You Corked Wine...

By Cindy Lemos, the WinoGal



Ah July: longest days of the year, backyard BBQs and FIREWORKS! It is my favorite month, perhaps because I was born on the 4th of July, like our great country. In keeping with a great American pastime, this month we are going on a Road Trip!

California has many wine regions, including our own Temecula Valley. From the well known Napa and Sonoma wines to Mendocino with its crisp Chardonnay grapes to Santa Rita Hills - home of amazing Pinot Noir, and Paso Robles with those spicy Zinfandels.



Although I have been infatuated with many wines, the stand out is Duckhorn Merlot from Napa Valley. Much maligned, merlot is a versatile grape - often blended with Cabernet Sauvignon to mellow it - merlot exhibits a smooth, round feel in your mouth when created by a master. Duckhorn's merlot is just that, with lush berry and plum flavors combined with spice and sage notes. I pair my merlot with grilled salmon and asparagus - try it this summer!

Next stop, Foxen Vineyards in Santa Ynez. Run by two self-proclaimed "hippees", Dick Dore' and Bill Wathen have grown Foxen from their initial days using one old wine press into the go-to destination for amazing Pinots and Syrahs. They retain their original style with a tasting room located in an old open barn on the side of Foxen Canyon Road.

Although hard to pick just one, my favorite is Foxen Pinot Noir Julia's Vineyard. Velvety smooth, it rolls over your tongue with amazing ripe black cherry flavor mingled with sweet currants, just enough oak to balance the fruit and sexy cinnamon-clove spiciness. Incredible paired with the best filet mignon, it is just as good relaxing by the pool on its own, no food required!

*Coming home to Temecula, a favorite destination is the outdoor patio at Thornton Winery. Ask any pourer of my preference and you will hear: **Thornton Winery Estate Syrah**. Made from Temecula grown grapes, it is a masterful blend of cherry/berry and plum with a hint of pepper infused cocoa. So smooth, it rolls over your palate and begs you to take another sip!*

With summer's heat also comes the occasional storing mishap - rendering a "corked" wine. All is not lost... but if your wine smells moldy or otherwise bad, dump it! If it's simply not as good as expected, turn it into Sangria. My recipe: add 1/3 cup each of Gran Marnier and maraschino cherry juice, thinly sliced orange, lemon and blood orange slices and a handful of cherries. Let sit for a couple hours and service over ice - yummy!

Cheers to your summer wine journey... and when life gives you "corked" wine, make Sangria!