

Spellbound is the name of a series of wines brought to us through the efforts of Rob Mondavi. Rob comes to us with a passion for wine and winemaking, and some very respectable credentials, being the son of Michael and Isabel Mondavi and the grandson of the world famous Robert Mondavi.

As I studied material for this article, something on one of the pages caught my eye. It was a picture of Rob Mondavi, and he appeared to be asking, "Where are those delicious wines that we can drink every day?" The question was like putting forth a mission statement because Rob and his team set out to create wines that we are as comfortable drinking while watching a sunset as while celebrating a lifetime achievement. Thus a wine called Spellbound was born, and the name is indeed appropriate because the wine is fascinating.

I had the pleasure of tasting Spellbound Wines at last year's Bottles and Barrels event at Habersham. They will be available for tasting again this year at the very same event, the weekend of May 8th and 9th. The featured wines will be Spellbound Chardonnay, Petite Syrah, Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon, and a very special Prosecco from the Villa Sandi winery. Let's see what we can look forward to on tasting weekend.

From the 2013 Chardonnay tasting notes we discover that the wine features bright and lush tropical fruit flavors such as pineapple, banana, guava, and kiwi. If you have some fresh shrimp from our very own Lowcountry, prepare same with your favorite recipe and enjoy with Spellbound Chardonnay. Are there other food pairing suggestions? Probably hundreds, but why not start right here in the Lowcountry.

Spellbound Petite Syrah is next. According to the vineyard and harvest notes as written by Rob and Lydia Mondavi and Geoff Whitman, the source for the Petite Syrah grapes for the 2013 Spellbound was the Lodi and Central regions of California. The rich soils in this area allow the vines to produce slightly larger berries and the larger berries produce a high juice-to-skin ratio. This is important because the tannin profile is reduced while the dark, luscious, and juicy fruit remains the signature of this top selling wine. I can appreciate why Rob and his team made the effort to reduce the tannin profile because Petite Syrah grapes possess powerful amounts of tannin which may be offensive. I am now hooked because Spellbound Petite Syrah can be enjoyed with braised meats and short ribs.

The 2013 Spellbound Merlot from California is our next wine. Allow me to quote from the winemaker notes. "The balance of fruit and oak in wine is essential. Oak lends lovely components similar to the caramelized sugar atop a crème brulee or the nuances of a decadent flan. It is our desire to find a balance between the oak and the brambly fruits of the Spellbound Merlot. Short fermentation times allow for maximum color and extraction while softening the influence and creating mouth-watering tannins. These winemaking techniques guarantee that Spellbound Merlot will be juicy and ripe and not to overpowering." Spellbound Merlot would be an excellent accompaniment to lamb or a tender beef cut. Do not be afraid to serve Spellbound with pink seafood such as salmon or some of our very own Lowcountry shrimp. The list goes on to include preparations made with bacon, pancetta, mushrooms, and truffles. Quite a variety here.

The 2013 Spellbound Cabernet Sauvignon will be available for tasting at the Bottles and Barrels event. According to the tasting notes, this is a wine that showcases lush texture and bold dark fruit flavors with a slight hint of oak and spice. Combine this with cedar and tobacco aromas and voila! You have a perfect opportunity to consume the wine on its own or with your favorite food. The Cabernet being offered at the tasting is on the young side, therefore in this category my favorite food would be in the beef arena. It could be a steak, a burger, beef short ribs or other braised dishes. Other folks may choose a lamb dish or even a portabello mushroom preparation. As you can see, the varieties are quite numerous.

The last wine to be offered at the tasting will be the Villa Sandi Prosecco. Thus is a wine from the Valdobbiadene Prosecco DOCG area. The Villa Sandi Winery dates back to 1622 and represents a combination of art and agriculture of the Venetian landscape. The winery is owned by the Moretti Pologato family and it is home and headquarters where for generations the ancient tradition of winemaking has been handed down from father to son. Make a special effort to stay at the tasting table to sample the Prosecco. After sampling the wine, try to imagine a wine that can be served as an aperitif, at the end of a meal, or any course in between. This scenario is repeated in several of the readings that I scanned in preparation for this article. The conclusion is to keep a few bottles available (Villa Sandi, of course) for any occasion where sparkling wine is appropriate.

Spellbound Wines and Villa Sandi Prosecco can be purchased locally from retailers and in restaurants.

Bottles & Barrels, a Southern Living Inspired Event, takes place May 8th and 9th in the

Habersham Marketplace. For more information visit www.bottles-barrels.com

Enjoy the tasting table on Saturday.