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Wines Of The Week: Complex Chenin Blanc, Classic Cab, And Virginia Whiskey



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Spirits

I cover wine, spirits, travel, and food, and consult on wine. Follow me on social media @FDTreport

Even as we seem to be entering a new phase of the pandemic, and sheltering in place restrictions are being slowly loosened in some parts of the country, large gatherings of family and friends aren't really an option, the classic crush of people rushing to the beach will have to wait until next year, and neighborhood barbecues and pot-lucks are more or less out of the question.

But that doesn't mean that you have to sacrifice all of the usual drinking pleasures of the season. My Wines of the Week today—plus a phenomenal whiskey from Virginia—are all delicious examples of what American wine producers and distillers do so well.

My red Wine of the Week is the Lail Vineyards J. Daniel Cuvée 2016, a monumental wine of power and finesse that is a magnificent expression of the flagship bottling from one of America's most historic producers.

Lail Vineyards, which is helmed today by Robin Daniel Lail, traces its roots back to 1879, when Captain Gustave Niebaum, her great grand-uncle, founded Inglenook Vineyards. Inglenook is now owned by Francis Ford Coppola and produces fantastic wines in its own right, but Lail Vineyards remains in the original family. I have great respect for their entire lineup of wines, including Blueprint and the absolutely phenomenal “Georgia” Sauvignon Blanc 2017.

But the J. Daniel Cuvée 2016 is a show-stopper, a pure Cabernet Sauvignon that brings together fruit from Mole Hill Vineyard on the Howell Mountain Estate, Vine Hill Ranch Vineyard in Oakville, and the Heimark Vineyard in Calistoga. It was made by the legendary winemaker Philippe Melka, aged for 20 months in 75% new French oak barrels, and limited to 955 cases.

This is an immensely delicious wine, with aromas of cigar tobacco and forest floor joined by bay laurel, black and red currants, pencil shavings, and a hint of cocoa powder. The palate, however, is where this really shines, with a bright pulse of acidity lifting magnificently concentrated flavors of black licorice, currants, violets, kirsch, raspberry liqueur-filled dark-chocolate ganache, and coffee oils, all underpinned by a deeply savory undertow of olives. The finish lingers with notes of flamed orange oils and a hint of espresso and singed vanilla pod. This is majestic, and while it’s great already (preferably after a stint in the decanter), it promises another 30 or 40 years of evolution ahead.

Lail Vineyards J. Daniel Cuvée 2016

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The Lail Vineyards J. Daniel Cuvée 2016 is a beautiful flagship wine from the legendary producer. BRYAN GRAY

