

Wines of Idaho's Snake River Valley

Posted by [Karsten Boone](#) on November 26, 2013 at 11:25am



#SipIdaho.

Move over potatoes, grapes are coming. Idaho's state slogan was "famous potatoes", it has evolved to "great potatoes, tasty destinations"; undoubtedly, at least in part, due to the wonderful wines being produced along the Snake River Valley. With a climate akin to the Columbia Valley in Washington State, and elevations similar to Spain's Rioja region, Idaho produces primarily Bordeaux and Spanish varietals, with a smattering of German vines. While some wine was produced here as far back as the 1860's, prohibition wiped out the industry by 1919. In the last 25 years, Idaho's wine industry has regrown, and is now producing some truly exceptional wines.

And so, the Wine Council gathered in Temecula, California, to taste a sampling of Idaho wines—which, outside of Idaho, can be difficult to find. Our mission: to find the wines that best represented their varietal or blends, along with their best pairing, and ultimately, our favorite wine of the group. All the wines were produced by Idaho wineries, some with Idaho grown grapes, some with grapes from Washington State and Oregon.

Best Embodiment of its Varietal: [Vale Wine Co.](#)'s 2010 Merlot (\$20), grown in the Snake River Valley, the Wine Council found this to be the best representation of its varietal. A complex, medium bodied wine with deep cherry and plum flavors and hints of spice, just as it should be. This is a wine worth seeking out. Quite delectable on its own, this Merlot paired perfectly with Idaho's Arno Perfection Confection's chocolates and with Carmen Michelli's German Chocolate cupcake with cherry filling (chocolate and sweet cherry bring out the best in so many things).



Favorite Wine of the Group: the winner for the night, [Movance Winery](#)'s 2009 Pinot Gris (\$20). Pinot Gris, associated with Burgandy, should be straw-colored, it was. Pinot Gris should be refreshingly acidic and taste of honey and fruit, think pears, apricots, apples. It did. We found this paired wonderfully with Todd & Susan Montgomery's brie with pear marmalade with hints of rosemary. The grapes were grown near Salem, Oregon, but produced in Idaho following the winery's recent relocation.

We tasted two blends, both exhibiting all the tastes, aromas and colors expected of their components. Each was a tasty blend, an unexpected dinner table companion at a welcome



price.

[Split Rail Winery](#)'s 2012 Terminal Post, (\$16), a Snake River grown blend of Chenin Blanc, Viognier, Muscat Blanc, Sauvignon Blanc and Riesling. Blends should contain tastes of each, and this one fit the bill. All the wines for this blend should taste of citrus and stone fruit (peach, pear, apple), with viscosity from the Viognier, acidity and floral scents all around. We found this to be a well-balanced wine with floral and musty aromas, creamy and crisp, with flavors of citrus and pear. Paired with a [butternut squash soup](#), with heat from birds-eye chili and a citrus-mint pesto, the wine and soup both rose to the occasion.

[Pend d'Oreille Winery](#), 2009 Bistro Rouge (\$14), a blend of Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot with a some Syrah and a bit of Cabernet Franc. Each varietal has flavors of plum, cherry, with bell pepper and mint. This blend represented its constituents well, with satisfying fruit and spice, it was medium bodied. [Beer Braised Brussels Sprouts](#) with sausage and bell pepper brought out the sweetness of the wine and complimented its own spice.

Two other good examples of their varietals:

[Clearwater Canyon Cellars](#)' 2010 Malbec (\$25). Clearwater Canyon Cellars located in Lewiston, Id., got these grapes from Rattlesnake Hills in Washington State, about 3 hours to

the west. Malbec should be inky purple with rich aromas of fruit and tobacco, tasting of berries and spice. We found this was a good representation. The mint in Carmen Michelli's Chocolate Fudge and Andies Mint cupcakes was a great match.



[Colter's Creek Winery's](#) 2010 Reserve Chardonnay (\$15): Just down the road from Lewiston, Id., this estate grown Chardonnay is a crisp wine with hints of oak, tasting primarily of peach and citrus. Chardonnays run the gamut, some thick and oaky and other's tangy with citrus. This Chardonnay positioned itself somewhere in-between. On its own, we found this wine to be okay at its price point. A little salt brought out the best in this wine. Paired with Idaho's [Clear Spring Foods's](#) smoked trout, it rose to the occasion. It paired as well with [Arno Perfection Confection's](#) chocolate with sea salt, a surprise for a Chardonnay.

We have found that pairings which contain some of the wine's own flavors (berry, peach, mint) and those which intensify the wine's softer flavors (salt, chocolate) work very well.

Snake River Valley, an up and coming wine region, is producing some exceptional wines. These are worth seeking out, both for the taste and for their relative rareness. Most

of the wineries we tried produce 300 cases annually, or less. You won't find them yet at your local Bev-Mo. But they are a treat on your dinner table. And, you might want to add some Idaho [potatas bravas](#) to the mix.