

Wines Of The Week: Champagne Krug Grande Cuvée And Ridge Vineyards Lytton Estate Syrah

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Deciding when to open a bottle of particularly age-worthy wine is one of the most potentially fraught decisions that collectors can make. Pop the cork too early and you run the risk of encountering a wine that's closed, or dominated by its structure, or in the dreaded "dumb phase," with a lack of much character at all before it enters its eventual maturity. Wait too long, and the wine will be irredeemably lost, the tannins dried out (if it's a red), an oxidative nuttiness dominating (if it's a white), the fruit faded and tired (both).

These two Wines of the Week, however, both possess the ability to age for at least a decade, but deliver a tremendous amount of pleasure right now. And while dumb phases are difficult if not impossible to accurately predict, I don't foresee either of them suffering from one in any particularly debilitating fashion...or at all.

My white Wine of the Week, then, is the Krug Champagne Grande Cuvée 167th Edition. It's composed of 47% Pinot Noir, 36% Chardonnay, and 17% Pinot Meunier; based on the 2011 vintage with supporting roles played by wine from a dozen other years heading back to 1995; and it remained on the lees for seven years prior to being disgorged. But even that

doesn't tell the full story of this supremely elegant wine, because in total, 191 individual wines have been blended to craft this haunting expression from one of the most highly respected Champagne houses in the region.

It's phenomenal: An effusive nose starts off with hazelnuts and preserved lemons, which are joined by yellow and red apples, fresh-baked brioche, French toast, and sweet spice at the edges. On the palate, intensely vinous flavors of lemon oil and preserved lemon, green apple, a hint of lime, lemongrass, and ginger emerge. Through it all, a deep seam of salty minerality, zippy and energetic, is reminiscent of Puligny-Montrâchet in character. Laser-point bubbles are almost nervous with energy yet subtly assertive: This is a study in elegance and wonderful concentration. The 167th Edition is serious stuff, and built for the cellar, though it's amazing right now, especially alongside dishes with a bit of fat or saltiness. And while you could easily hold onto it for another couple of decades, there's really no need to, as it's thoroughly delicious already.

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My red Wine of the Week comes from half a world away from Champagne: The Ridge Lytton Estate Syrah 2014, from Sonoma County's Dry Creek Valley. Like the Krug, this has all of the structure and length on the palate to age gracefully, but delivers enough enjoyment right now to not require it in any way.

Like the great Syrah-based reds of the Northern Rhône Valley's Côte-Rôtie, this one is composed of a blend of Syrah and Viognier—in this case, 94% of the former and 6% of the latter. The organically grown grapes were harvested by hand, fermented using indigenous yeast, and the resulting wine was aged for 21 months in American oak ranging from one to three years of age.

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The results are fantastic, with blackberry, plum, baking spice, and the slightest note of sweet meat on the nose preceding a palate of balance and power, with a distinctly savory edge to the blackberry, cracked black and white pepper, spice-rubbed smoked bacon, black licorice, and an almost briny finish that begs for pepper-crusted steak. Drink it now or lay it down for ten years—the decision is really a matter of personal preference rather than any sort of requirement predicated on the inherent character of the wine itself.

Both of these Wines of the Week will be equally rewarding in their youth or with several years of evolution in the cellar. Whenever you drink them, the pleasure will be substantial.

Krug Champagne Grande Cuvée 167th Edition

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The Krug Champagne Grande Cuvée 167th Edition is an age-worthy wine that is absolutely stunning right now, too
(Credit: Krug Champagne).

Krug Champagne

Ridge Lytton Estate Syrah 2014 Dry Creek Valley, Sonoma County

Beautiful aromatics, with blackberry, plum, baking spice, and the slightest note of sweet meat on the end. These precede a palate of balance and power, with a distinctly savory edge to the blackberry, cracked black and white pepper, spice-rubbed and smoked bacon, black licorice, and an almost briny finish that begs for pepper-crusted steak. SRP: \$46



The Ridge Lytton Estate Syrah 2014 boasts both plenty of fruit and a savory bass-note that promise a long life ahead, and incredible food-friendliness right now (Credit: Ridge Vineyards).

Ridge Vineyards