

## **Carménère grape once thought extinct**

The Carménère was once one of the major varieties in the Médoc region of France.

The Errazuriz 2009 Carménère, 750 ml \$14.99 (left) and the Korta Barrel Selection 2008 Carménère, 750 ml \$16.99.

But even under the best of circumstances, it was a difficult grape to grow in Bordeaux, since it needed more heat to ripen than other Bordeaux grapes. It was also susceptible to "coulure," a disease that caused the grapes to drop long before they were ripe.

In the 1870s, the phylloxerae (vine-munching, aphid-like insects) plague destroyed several million acres of European vineyards, and finished off Carménère for good. Or so everyone thought. What they didn't realize was that the Carménère vine was brought to South America in the mid 1800s by French winemakers.

The local South American wine growers thought Carménère was Merlot and they planted it accordingly. They went so far as to intersperse it with the Merlot grapes, even though its pink-red flowers and off Merlot taste indicated otherwise. The two varieties were often inter-planted and were used in the creation of Chilean Merlot.

In 1994 a French ampelographer (an expert in identifying and distinguishing vines), Jean Michel Boursiquot, had an "aha!" moment and discovered the truth and DNA testing confirmed that the grapes were indeed Carménère. The lost grape of Bordeaux was alive and flourishing in Chile and has been more successful in Chile than it ever was in Bordeaux.

Carménère produces medium- to full-bodied wines with medium tannins and plenty of herbal accents with earthy, smoky and cherry notes. Merlot is a much mellower grape with well-rounded tannins and very fruity notes like berries, plum, currant and black pepper.

Carménère is in fact a long-lost cousin of Cabernet Sauvignon having notes of green pepper and general herbaceousness in common. The flavour profile of Carménère makes it a good blending partner with Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon.

Carménère comes in several styles, but the most common one is ripe and spicy with dark red fruit notes. It has a soft, velvety texture on the palate, with accents of black pepper, possibly smoke and tar or herbs and green pepper.

It is medium-bodied with good structure and acidity, with soft round tannins on the finish.

When pairing wine with food you need to consider the ingredients being used. While highly versatile for pairing with food, Carménère goes particularly well with dishes containing these ingredients:

- Herbs and spices: oregano, rosemary, thyme, garlic, fennel, red and black pepper, curry powder, saffron, paprika, anise and cumin.
- Cheeses: gruyère, romano, oka, parmegiano.
- Fruits and vegetables: black and green olives, mushrooms, tomatoes, green pepper, eggplant, onion, sweet potato and corn.
- Meats and fish: lamb, stewing beef, pork sausage, chicken, duck, rabbit, wild boar, venison, all depending upon the preparations.

There are some dynamite Carménère brands at NB Liquor right now. My top picks are:

- Errazuriz 2009 Carménère, 750 ml \$14.99
- Korta Barrel Selection 2008 Carménère, 750 ml \$16.99
- Alka JF Lurton 2003 Carménère, 750 ml \$72.29

Written by Tammy Brideau-Lirette, product advisor for NB Liquor's Vaughan Harvey Blvd. store in Moncton.