

## perspective

When you reach the highest levels of any field or profession, it is not unusual to find concepts and issues that you have in common with other milieu that you may have previously found to be completely dissimilar. At some of their more profound levels, literature study can become more mathematical, and mathematical research finds itself increasingly rooted in philosophical reasoning.

Wine production is no different from those areas mentioned above, as it maintains more kinship with the culinary world as both reach for the highest levels of their respective expression. Initially when discussing wine production, conversations revolve around such banalities as type of barrel, time in barrel, yeast and malo-lactic fermentation. While important, these elements should only be seen as techniques employed to create a palatable bottle of wine. Similarly in food, knife aptitude, types and amounts of seasoning and temperatures play important roles, yet only simply address general protocol in the production of a dish.

Once those fundamentals have been honed and perfected, it is necessary to look elsewhere to reach the next level. At that point, provenance of raw materials plays the most important role and is by far the most pivotal differentiating element between good and great. Coincidentally, as one succeeds in finding such ingredients, the technical side plays a lesser and lesser role.

We see a very common example of this in sushi production. When working with the most coveted belly of ahi tuna (toro), it is most likely that the chef will simply opt to slice it and plate it alone, void of any other ingredients or components. Conversely, when faced with fish that might fall somewhat shy of perfection, he or she may reach for green onions and ponzu sauce to compensate for the shortcomings of the raw materials.

This tenacity towards provenance importance is also illustrated in a recent discussion with Alain Ducasse who is universally thought to be the greatest chef of our time. At

the end of the interview, Ducasse was asked what would be his ultimate meal. Upon some short reflection, he simply answered, “Rouget. (*A fish called red mullet found in the Mediterranean.*) The whole fish, quickly grilled on both sides with no salt or other seasonings...plated as a whole fish with no garnish.” Faced with the simplicity of his response, the interviewer seemed surprised and caught off guard. While grasping for other closing remarks, Ducasse politely interrupted with a smile, “but it has to be caught from where it swims around rocks, not sand...it makes a difference.”

In both of the abovementioned circumstances, technical proficiency plays a role, but is really secondary in importance to the raw ingredients used. A sushi chef will always maintain a perfect workstation, and an ample arsenal of razor sharp cutlery. Similarly, the grille referred to by Ducasse was undoubtedly at an ideal temperature with the cooking time executed at just the right second. At the winery as well, there are reasons why our tanks are on five foot stands, we only use short hoses and control the flow rate of liquid through them and why we only bottle by gravity during the waning cycle of the moon. Those practices should only be seen as secondary or tertiary in importance, however, to the work that is carried out all year long in the vineyard.

It is only through the careful selection of our vineyard properties, and the isolation and study of our vineyard blocks that we can seek to arrive at their full potential. Calculated composting, complex cover cropping practice and deficit irrigation, matched with a tremendous amount of crop reduction and canopy management are the critical components to our strength as wine growers. That strength will ultimately set us apart from the others in the school, who will be content in their habitat surrounded by sand.

- Greg Brewer, winemaker