

The Opera House International Wine of the Month Club Selection for October 2011

## **Cooper Vineyards Petit Verdot 2009 & Coopertage Blanc 2009, Louisa, Virginia**

### October is Virginia Wine Month

Since the beginning of our wine club, we have chosen a Virginia wine to be featured during the month of October – in honor of Virginia Wine Month. Over the years we have featured grape varieties that most people think of as grapes that do well in our finicky climate – frost in late spring, summers that can be beastly hot, September rains, Indian ‘summer’ and the early arrival of winter weather. One of this month’s selections is a lesser known grape variety that is primarily grown in Bordeaux, France. Petite Verdot produces full-bodied, extremely deep colored wines with peppery, spicy flavor characteristics, and high tannins. Cooper’s Petit Verdot has vibrant aromas of raspberries overlapping hints of chocolate, coffee and red currants. It exemplifies the variety with a layered tannic finish. It will go well with filet mignon or grilled red meats with the charred, smoky flavor that is found when meat is cooked on the grill. Our other selection is a blend of 52% Viognier and 48% Chardonnay. It has citrus flavors backed by creamy oak and ends with a lingering apple butter finish. It pairs well with roasted chicken and Asian cuisine.

The history of the Virginia wine industry dates back to the English settlement in Jamestown. The Jamestown settlers had such hopes that Virginia would become a major source of wine for the British Empire that in 1619 they signed into law a requirement for each male settler to plant and tend at least ten grape vines. Every effort to grow vinifera, or vines of European origin, met with failure from an unknown pest – Phylloxera. The booming tobacco trade diluted British interest in the possibilities of American produced wine.

Thomas Jefferson cultivated European grapes for more than thirty years with little success, but was convinced that one day, the vines would flourish. His fellow countryman, George Washington, also grew grapes at Mount Vernon with similar disappointing results.

In the 1820s, wines made from Native American grapes found favor with the wine consuming American public. In 1873 at the Vienna World’s Fair, a Virginia wine made from Norton grapes was named ‘best red wine of all nations’. A subsequent gold medal for Norton at the Paris World Fair of 1899 brought much attention to Virginia made wines. In the late 1800’s, it was discovered that European vinifera could be grafted onto native vines with the result of producing wines from more widely acclaimed grapes. Prohibition promptly brought all wine production to a screeching halt in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The industry was slow to recover and even 17 years after the repeal of Prohibition, Virginia had only 15 acres of commercial wine grapes.

In the late 1950s, experimental plantings of vinifera showed promise. Six new wineries sprang up and the Virginia wine industry was underway. A renewed effort to grow European Chardonnay was successful at the Waverly Estate in Middleburg in 1973. In 1976, Italian wine pioneer, Gianni Zonin hired Gabriele Rausse to grow and harvest vinifera grapes near Charlottesville. He established Barboursville Vineyards and then helped other vineyards to do the same. By 1995, Virginia had 46 wineries, in 2005, 107 wineries and today, almost 200. Only California, Oregon, Washington and New York have more wineries than Virginia. Virginia wines have rightly won international acclaim. Travel and Leisure magazine proclaimed Virginia as one of five up and coming wine regions that “should be on the must visit of any adventurous wine traveler” (the other wine regions to visit are New Zealand, Chile, Italy and Spain).

**We should raise a glass or two of Virginia wine in celebration of Virginia Wine Month.**

Enjoy your Petit Verdot from Cooper Vineyards on a cool October night...the Coopertage on a lazy fall afternoon.

Cooper Vineyards is a family owned vineyard of 36 acres located between Charlottesville and Richmond.