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SCHAEFER ON WINE: Rediscovered treasures from the wine cellar

By Dennis Schaefer

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Here's hoping you rang in the new year with a bubbly toast and plan to repeat that (the bubbly, I mean) as many times as necessary to make it a refreshing regularity in your household this year. In the process of ringing out the old and welcoming in each new year, I take an introspective tour of my wine cellar and, inevitably, find some stellar bottles that I just didn't find a thematic spot for in the wine column. Yes, I know, an embarrassment of vinous riches. So here is a cool and disparate set of wines that I found very tasty.

- Habit Red Wine, Santa Ynez Valley 2012 (\$40): Winemaking at Habit is Jeff Fischer's second job. Most folks know him as the main character in the TV series "American Dad." But he takes Habit as seriously as his day job. You can tell from just one taste of this blend of cabernet franc, merlot, cabernet sauvignon and petit verdot. It shows plum, black raspberry and cassis on the nose. You can tell this is a deep-dish wine from the get-go. Big on the palate but mellowed with time in the bottle, the flavors are black raspberry, black cherry and cassis along with graphite, crushed rock and grilled Italian herbs. Though cab franc and petit verdot are outliers in Santa Barbara County, they really work well in this context. With its intensity and concentration, it has the wow factor written all over it. It will drink well over the next 10 years.
- Habit Pinot Noir, Santa Rita Hills, La Encantada Vineyard 2013 (\$50): The one mainstream wine Mr. Fischer makes is pinot noir and this bottling is a very pretty one. The nose is alluring with strawberry, bing cherry, rhubarb and rose petal. Almost delicate in the mouth (a quality I crave in red Burgundies), it nevertheless delivers on a panoply of flavors: red berry and cherry fruit again framed by sandalwood, spice and a certain saline quality. The sweet (ripe fruit) and savory coexist here in such a way that it's an almost universal accompaniment to your daily dining table. I turned to the back label: 13.1 percent alcohol. It told me everything I needed to know about graceful pinot noir. Another glass, please.

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Wine expert Dennis Schaefer's column appears every other week in the Food section. Email him at food@newspress.com.