

ONE BOTTLE: The 2009 Commanderie de la Bargemone Rosé

by JOSHUA BAER

If you live in Santa Fe you may have noticed that May is the month when the lilacs bloom. Santa Fe is always beautiful, but the blooming of the lilacs is the kind of annual event that deserves its own festival.

Lilac blossoms come in three colors: eggshell white, intimate pink, and a deep, thick violet that manages to be simultaneously antique and modern. In Santa Fe, the violet blossoms are the most common but there are just enough white and pink blossoms to keep the violet blossoms from becoming monotonous. While the colors of the lilac blossoms get all the attention, it is their smell that makes lilac season so enjoyable. About a week into its bloom, the lilac blossom starts to throw off aromas of dry wheat, ripe Comice pears, and mesquite honey. If you have never stood in front of a blooming lilac hedge, closed your eyes, and inhaled the aroma, then this is the year to do it. No matter what kind of life you are living, your soul will thank you for the experience.

Two winters ago, I was on a walk near our house when I passed by a lilac hedge that was a block long. I had walked by the hedge many times. Each May, it was my favorite place to stand, close my eyes, and inhale.

The first thing I noticed about the hedge was that it was smaller. Then I saw the cuttings on the ground. Most of the cuttings were the size of twigs but a few were the size of a baseball bat.

After I got back from my walk, I asked my wife if she knew the people with the block-long lilac hedge. She said she had spoken with them once. I asked her if she would mind going over and asking them if we could have their lilac cuttings. I did this because I am terrible—pathetic, really—at asking people for favors. Whenever I ask a favor, I keep thanking the person in advance, which makes people nervous. This is a fault I have tried to correct but the fault is buried so deeply in my psyche that I cannot get rid of it. My wife, on the other hand, is highly skilled at asking people for favors. There is something about her eyes, about the way they almost cross, that makes people want to give her whatever she wants.

About an hour after my wife went to ask the people with the lilac hedge if we could have their cuttings, a pickup truck pulled into our driveway. A man and a woman got out of the truck. The man had a friendly smile. The woman looked like a movie star. The bed of their truck was stacked with lilac cuttings.

My wife came up the driveway. “Where do you want them?” said the man. My wife took the man and the woman to the place where I chop wood. After the four of us unloaded the truck, I thanked the man and the woman for letting us have their cuttings. “No, thank you,” said the woman. “This’ll save us a trip to the dump.”

After they left, I started thinking about all the food I could grill over the lilac wood, but then I got nervous.



What if lilac wood was poisonous? What if we invited our friends over for an inaugural lilac-wood grilling, built a fire in the Weber, grilled some lamb chops and sliced fennel, sat down to dinner, and everybody went into convulsions?

Wikipedia said that *syringa vulgaris*, the common lilac bush, was a “flowering woody plant in the olive family (*Oleaceae*) native to woodland and scrub from Southeastern Europe to Eastern Asia.... The genus name *Syringa* is derived from Greek *syrinx* meaning ‘a hollow tube or pipe’ ...and refers to the broad pith in the shoots in some species, easily hollowed out to make reed pipes and flutes in early history.”

I liked the part about the reed pipes and the flutes. That was reassuring. But what got my attention was the word “syringa.” Like most residents of Santa Fe, I had spent time driving up and down Siringo Road. After reading about lilacs, it was easy to imagine Siringo Road in the old days, lined on both sides with lilac hedges.

That night, we grilled rib steaks over lilac wood. The smoke was fragrant but not perfumed. I could not identify any traces of lilac in my steak but my steak tasted better than any beef I had eaten. Over the next few months, as we grilled all kinds of beef, lamb, chicken, and fish, I got to know the idiosyncrasies of lilac wood. It is a temperamental wood, so you have to wait for the coals to look like they are dead, but the results are worth the wait. Eating food cooked over lilac wood is a lot like drinking a great wine: the flavors are clearly ambiguous and ambiguously clear.

Which brings us to the 2009 Commanderie de la Bargemone Rosé.

Commanderie de la Bargemone is located in the south of France, just outside the village of Aix en Provence. In the glass, Bargemone’s Rosé is a transparent copper backlit with flashes of gold. The bouquet is an unspoken promise. On the palate, the wine keeps that promise. The finish may be the Commanderie’s best aspect. It lingers for an extra moment before it disappears.

You can buy the 2009 Commanderie de la Bargemone Rosé at Liquor Barn for \$17 or at Susan’s Fine Wines and Spirits for \$16. Most of the garden variety French rosés taste the same each time you drink them. That consistency can be comforting but after a while it begins to lower your expectations. The 2009 Commanderie de la Bargemone Rosé is just the opposite. With each sip, this wine renews your expectations—and then it exceeds them. ♡

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