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# A Rich, Velvety Red

by: ELIN MCCOY

in: DRINKING



1.23.12 - I'm hunting for Valentine's Day wines early this year, and my first pick is the rich, full, velvety red blend 2008 Lasseter Family Winery Amoureux from Sonoma. What could be more in keeping with the day's romantic sentiments than a wine whose French name means lovers and whose label features a bee sipping nectar from a red rosebud? Its backstory has an appropriate dose of romance too.

The wine's bold blend includes about two-third Malbec, a fair amount of Cabernet Sauvignon, and small dashes of Merlot and Cabernet Franc. Hollywood couple John and Nancy Lasseter, who bought their estate on the outskirts of town of Glen Ellen a decade ago, say they selected the wine's name because they first discovered and fell in love with Malbec while honeymooning in Northern California wine country.

All the Lasseter wines, first released publicly last year, have poster-style labels that tell some kind of story, perhaps reflecting John Lasseter's role as Academy award-winning director and chief creative officer of animation giant Pixar. The bee is a reference to his first animation project, "The Adventures of André and Wally B." (Wally B is the pesky bee.)

If the Malbecs you've tasted have mostly come from Argentina, be prepared for a different kind of style. To me, Argentine examples are often just big and red, with bland, smooth-fruit flavors, but not much character. Most of the single varietal California **Malbecs** I've sampled don't have much complexity.

Amoureux is much more interesting, with spice and raspberry aromas from the Cabernet Franc, some structure and tannin from the **Cabernet Sauvignon**, and a seductive plush texture partly from the **Merlot**. Like the 27-acre estate's other wines — I'm also a fan of the Enjoué Rose — it's more Old World than New.

But while this red is great for a Valentine's Day main course, you need something to toast and finish the dinner. Look for those in the next two weeks.

Zester Daily contributor Elin McCoy is a wine and spirits columnist and author of "The Emperor of Wine: The Rise of Robert M. Parker, Jr. and the Reign of American Taste."