THE THREEFOLD ORIGIN OF BLOWOUT

I have wanted to make a wine like this for years. The origin was around 2008, when I learned that a Lambrusco that I liked was made in a tank and that its bubbles came from a secondary fermentation in tank— not bottle— and that the wine then had to be bottled under pressure to preserve the bubbles. The technical name is Tank Transfer Charmat. The wine was good— even very good. Not super serious, but it was delicious, refreshing, and it had good bubbles. Not the big fish-eye bubbles of soda, nor the fine, powerful bubbles of Champagne, but something in between. And the bubbles persisted a while— and when they disappeared, there was still a subtle and delightful pétillance that did not fade. I was charmed and made curious. Could we do something like this at Scholium? This was in fact how I came to be involved with the amazing Bechtold vineyard in Lodi: I thought that its deeply colored Cinsault would be perfect as the base wine for a New World tank-fermented Lambrusco. The first 1MN we made from the vineyard was in fact destined for the Lambrusco Project. In order to test the base wine and see if it would make good Lambrusco, as soon as it finished fermenting, I borrowed by friend's Soda Stream (they had just hit Napa) and gassed up the wine. Delicious. And then I had another thought? Why not just carbonate the wine? Secondary fermentation is not only tricky, it requires *patience*.

I had heard that you could not do this; that no carbonation of wine resulted in good bubbles. I had already come to suspect in general the proffered wisdom about what one could or could not do— but I knew this: I had never had an even remotely good wine that was made with carbonation. Think Cook's Champagne, if you can.
So I had this idea: what if the problem with the quality of all carbonated wines was the quality of the base wine? What if the process were so despised that it never occurred to anyone to carbonate anything except for dreck, the castoffs of even the lowest level wine making? It tastes terrible? Add some sugar, carbonate it, and you suddenly have cheap party wine for the soon to be inebriated.
We never carbonated the Cinsault. There was too much else to do at the winery. And thank goodness, for now we have 1MN. I finally got the opportunity to experiment in 2012 with wines from the Red Hook winery. My friend Charles, who owns the amazing Von Bar on Bleeker in New York, signed up to help us. Darren and Christopher and I put together a white blend meant to mimic the complex, aldehydic, high acid wines of Jerome Prevost and lugged kegs of the wine to Von where we tried to use Charles' beer lines to carbonate the wine. It never worked well enough, though some clients still ask for the "Von-Secco" blend out of tap.

The project was reborn a little bit more than a year ago. I had invited my beautiful friend Lisa to a party and wanted to meet her beforehand. She was getting her hair blown out for the big event and invited me to pick her up at the blowout salon. Not only had I never been to one, I did not really know what

they were. I was absolutely amazed to arrive on my bicycle, and while I was locking it up outside, witness a stream of women walk in, looking, let us say, *normal*, but emerge looking *fabulous*. I suddenly realized where all these glamorous women came from on Friday evenings; they emerged from the blowout salons, as if the salons were a Detroit for female allure.

But even this was perhaps not the most amazing: most amazing is that I was welcomed into this world of women. Sat down. And was offered a glass of "Champagne." What? When Lisa was finished, I asked the hostess what the sparkling wine was. It really wasn't bad, especially for free, in a modern beauty parlor. She looked at me blankly, then disappeared into the bowels of the salon and returned with a bottle of Moët. "I don't know," she said, "I think they give it to us." Then I noticed that there were few well-placed vacant Moët magnums and jeroboams, and I grasped that some portion of the LVMH marketing budget was wisely devoted to supplying free champagne to prosperous young women preparing for an evening out. I was amazed at the brilliant insight. Lisa and I put our heads together and decided that the Scholium Project should not be left out of this bay of glamor and good feeling. Thus was born BLOWOUT.

Now for some technical and critical notes:
The wine is 80% Verdelho and 20% Grüner Veltliner from the Lost Slough Vineyard in the Sacramento River Delta, near Walnut Grove. The vineyard is cool and breezy, with terrible shallow clay soil that restricts root growth. The owner and his vineyard manager planted the Grüner for me about ten years ago; this is the first year that the vines have been even close to mature enough to allow us to make some wine. We harvested all of fruit at once on August 11, when the acidity was still really high, and brought it to our friends at Wooden Valley Winery. It was 10 tons of fruit, more than we could process in a single day at our little winery. We crushed the fruit to press under the chilling and protection of lots dry ice, pressed super rigorously to capture as much acidity as possible, with a final yield of only 114 gallons per ton. We fermented the wine in sealed and refrigerated stainless steel tanks with lucky cat banners on them, and used lots of SO2 to inhibit malolactic fermentation. For the first time ever in my winemaking, we filtered the wine long before bottling and aged most of the wine free from lees and with most of its microbes sent packing. The microbial population grew back up of course, we did not store the wine under sterile conditions— so the filtration was a kind of resetting of activity and cleaning and polishing of the wine. All very new to us. We did this in September, blended all of the components in November, filtered again, and brought the wine to PunkDog winery in Napa, where they had a bright tank— capable of pressurizing bubbles into a liquid— and a bottling line designed to package wine coolers— and so capable of putting a carbonated wine into bottles without losing bubbles. It was an amazing process— and in so many ways the opposite of the newly and widely fashionable Méthode Ancestrale or Pet Nat, short for Pétillant Naturel. The Méthode Ancestrale is the continuation and completion of the first fermentation, but that takes place in a sealed bottle, as the yeast consume the rest of the sugar in the wine and produce more alcohol and CO2. Because the bottle is sealed, the CO2 gets trapped in the bottle and becomes bubbles when the wine is eventually opened. Méthode Ancestrale depends on bottling the wine before it is finished fermenting and on *not* filtering the wine. It is much less controlled than the Champagne process and is simply an interesting and natural extension or variation of the utterly basic fermentation that turns the juice into wine.
In contrast to this ancient and rustic method of Pétillant Naturel, we call ours Pétillant Industriel, or, the Méthode Futuriste. We take this name from the difficult Italian thinker Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, who advocated the abolition of pasta from the Italian diet. He promoted a cuisine based on speed and technological intervention, intended to free his nation, through the belly, from "the dungeons of history" and the "trembling traditionalists" who held it back. While we do not crave the stamp of his authority, it is good to have a theoretical scaffolding for the forced carbonation of a beverage.