

The Wine Steward's

The COLLECTOR

WINE CLUB

April 2024



Let's Hear it for BLENDS!

Members of this club are no strangers to blended reds. Even those titled “Cabernet Sauvignon” can and often do include other grape types. — But nearly all exclusively utilize the so-called “Bordeaux grapes”; Cabernet assisted by Merlot, Cab Franc, Malbec, and so on. This lovely, ready-to-cook-for Sonoma red also makes allowances for varieties *outside* the Bordeaux Family. Ingredients: 55% Cabernet Sauvignon, 19% Malbec, 16% Syrah, 6% Petit Verdot, 4% Viognier. The Viognier, by the way, is co-fermented with the Syrah component. This is to especially amplify Syrah’s smoky and grapey qualities with the white grape Viognier’s florality: An aroma booster.

There’s a lot happening in the nose of this multi-grape Sonoma blend. One sniff references bright red and purple fruits. Another evokes more dusky impressions of dried tobacco. Chocolate, meat, and even sliced citrus might also be imagined. The palate is medium-full in “body size,” with crisp acidity adding an element of refreshing lushness. There is good length as well. Long after your gratifying sip, the memory of the wine is felt with dust, leather, and vanilla.

While fruit is a foregone conclusion, there is much to **2018 ROWEN RED** that is complex in a savory way. This latter sense, along with the aforementioned acidity, makes the wine a shoe-in for the dinner table — or the cheese board happening later, if you’re doin’ the French “thing”!

Wine.com price: 63.99 TWS price:
59.99 / 53.99 for all wine club members



A Damn Good Glass of Wine

This red is noticeable – because of or in spite of the elaborate label design. Get inside the bottle to discover what really counts about 2019 SLEIGHT of HAND CELLARS ‘The Conjuror’: You’ll encounter a ready-to-drink, deep and complex drink of red wine!

Here, Cabernet Sauvignon and Cabernet Franc play the main roles, along with bit player Merlot. The Cab is certainly felt with the power happening here. The Franc is just as apparent with that idiosyncratic, nearly-peppery nose. I believe that grape along with the Merlot can be thanked for the gentleness of the palate feel. Cabernet’s “savage beast” is thereby soothed.

It’s funny how a good wine can be missed amid tastes of several others. I debuted this bottling at our recent Washington State sit-down event. While attendees were impressed with the value happening here (relative to other pricier submissions) ‘The Conjuror’ didn’t sell very well compared to the numbers we saw for darker, heftier Long Shadows wines.

THEN I presented it as a “By The Glass” offering on our WineBar menu. Unavailable within the 5-Red tasting flight; you had to commit to six ounces if you wanted to play. All of a sudden, ‘The Conjuror’ took off: Wine DRINKERS realized its goodness by enjoying it “in volume”.

As said before, this is more ready to enjoy than some of the wines we show you, though I suppose you could cellar it for a few more years. As we’re getting a weird early-May rainstorm as I write this, I’m very in the mood for short ribs, root veggies, and a WHOLE GLASS of this lovely Washington red!

39.99/ 35.99 for all wine club members

The Wine Steward's

World Class

WINE CLUB

April 2024



An Investment in Great Raw Material

Dan Kravitz – an American – is the main reason why we’ve heard of Domaine Pegau Chateauneuf-du-Pape and other small-production French wines. That’s because from 1980 to 2007 his energies were solely devoted to importing. In 2007 he went deeper, investing in an old vineyard in the southwest France locale of Maury, a mere 20 miles north of Spain and 20 miles inland from the Mediterranean Sea. The purchase of this plot was the beginning of Kravitz’ own wine, to which we’ve been observant (and sometimes buying) for some time now.

2021 DOMAINE CABIRAU ‘2nd Effort’ is an up-a-notch culmination / realization for this Yankee invader. It consists of 62% Grenache and 38% Syrah, with very little help from wood (only very large and nowhere-near-new *foudres* were employed). If you read the fine print on the back label you’ll be reminded that much of Europe’s wine scene received a slap on the hand from Mother Nature. Crop sizes were reduced by frost, often dramatically. This panics the accountant and the proprietor, but the natural “thinning” certainly didn’t hurt the wine. The concentration of dark and savory fruit and spice flavors is especially gratifying this year! Jeb Dunnuck thought so, with a **94-point rating!**

The place you’re tasting, Maury, until just recently was better known (if known at all) for its Port-like fortified sweet wines. They still make those there, but more of the wine world wants dry reds these days, and the old vines of the place are happy to oblige. “Maury Sec,” the appellation appearing on this bottle, is the differentiating new name for a very old vine wine region – respected by an American!

31.49 / 28.34 for Wine Club Members



A Part of Tuscany New to You?

We present a wine type you may never have heard of, **2016 GRUMARELLO by TENUTA ARTIMINO**, which hails from Carmignano. “Where?” you ask, “I’ve heard of Chianti and Montalcino, etc., but what’s up with ‘Carmignano’?”

Your mystification is warranted. As old and historically important as this Tuscan sub-region ten miles northwest of Florence is, it consists of no more than 270 acres of vines; a wine appellation smaller than some vineyards! You (and we) hardly ever see a Carmignano.

The reds from here including GRUMARELLO are typically based on Sangiovese, Tuscany’s signature grape. What sets Carmignano apart is the tradition of including Cabernet Sauvignon. Yes, this is happening a lot these days, whether a Tuscan producer is adding Cab to his Chianti Classico or utilizing it as the base for his Super Tuscan. — But I used the word “tradition”: Little Carmignano has grown Cabernet Sauvignon for HUNDREDS of years, all the way back to when the Medici Family ruled the local roost. We’re told that grape came from France as royal wedding gift, way back when!

This particular Riserva from Artimino also employs Merlot and Syrah, so feel free to employ the “Super Tuscan” allusion. Based on its depth of nose and heft of flavor and body, GRUMARELLO certainly plays to the idea. This is a big and gutsy, fully mature and ready-to-drink red and received the coveted **Tre Bicchieri award from Gambero Rosso!**

34.99 / 31.49 for Wine Club Members

The Wine Steward's

Pacific Coast

WINE CLUB

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Vibrant Darkness

2022 SEAN MINOR 'Nicole Marie' RED is an unlikely blend of 50% Merlot, 25% Zinfandel, and 25% Petite Sirah. You simply don't see that particular grape-gathering all that often. The ambiguous "North Coast" place attribution is a little annoying to this lover of "locale". Not even the "trade" area of the winery's website elaborates. It has me guessing that whereas there could be a bit of Napa juice in here, it would be too expensive for the producer to overcommit to that high-rent wine valley. I'm betting Sonoma, Lake, and Mendocino Counties are contributing more.

What doesn't annoy me a bit is the honest goodness of this wine. Its color glows darkly. Its exuberant fruit is fully ripe and / but it remains lively with crisp acidity. Cherries, blackberries, baking chocolate, and a hint of baking spice (mace?) happen generously and with metered poise.

Those descriptors may have you anticipating a sweet wine experience. Remember, "dry" and "sweet" are opposites in Wine Speak, whereas "fruitiness" can occur at either extreme or anywhere in between. This is a DRY red exhibiting a lovely purity of fruit. Pairing it with burgers or quickly-grilled steaks – or portabellas – will especially reveal its goodness!

A Very Nice Value for
20.99 / 18.89 for all wine club members



I am your Density

2021 NOVELTY HILL MERLOT from Washington State's Columbia Valley is an excellent indicator of what happens "up there."

First, understand that most of Washington's vines experience a situation very alternative to those of Oregon's Willamette Valley. The casual consumer rushes to a quick definition but should pause here: Oregon's primary wine region can see 50+ inches of rain per year. We are headed to a Washington State wine place that might be blessed with a mere 10 inches OR LESS per year, along with a very different "high desert" arrangement of temperatures.

Next, know that aside from all the "s---" that's said about Merlot – especially in one 20-year-old movie – it is a very important wine grape. It's the most planted variety in Bordeaux, France. Several other wine countries also cultivate it. Merlot matters. Washington may well represent America's best foot forward with the varietal. Novelty Hill, at its modest price point, fortifies the concept. Here is mouth-filling density of dark, charred plum and cherry fruit that indulges the eater of steak. Right now at our WineBar there is no steak, but Novelty Hill Merlot is on the menu and making the peeps very happy.

You're in the presence of wine goodness, and we are proud to have identified it for you!

24.99 / 22.49 for all members

The Wine Steward's

Wine Adventurer

WINE CLUB

April 2024



By a Master

About 15 years ago Yves Cuilleron himself was in my backyard eating an enchilada. Two hours thence, he was part of a 3-man group representing Northern Rhone wines on our mezzanine. Yves and friends were making their annual West Coast visit and we'd captured them for an event! It's reassuring to me that, whereas so many friends and wine relationships have come and gone, some actually return to roost. What goes around may in fact come around.

I'm talking about the return of wines made by Yves Cuilleron to our shelves and, now, our wine club. Perhaps you've never heard of him, but Yves has been a vital force in the renaissance of the Northern Rhône region. He and a few peers of similar age and drive represent a generation of winegrowers/winemakers appreciating the possibilities of a pain-in-the-ass-to-farm, steeply terraced wine region. The birthplace of Syrah, long neglected, had new caretakers.

Enough about him. Let's speak to the region represented on the back label. **2022 YVES CUILLERON 'Les Vigles d'à Côte'** hails from the Collines Rhodaniennes appellation. To keep it easy, let's call this the "Côtes du Rhône of the Northern Rhône." The placename might not roll off the tongue, but the Syrahs from here are easily-afforded and affably ready to enjoy. To drink Northern Syrah at this price point ten years ago was hardly fathomable. It's happening now. Northern Rhône wine lovers – and lovers of grilled lamb – rejoice!!

22.99 / 20.69 for club members



Farewell, Tom

The purchase of this wine for your club represents our final business transaction with a longtime wine rep and dear friend. Tom Switzer has sold wine to The Wine Steward ever since we opened nearly twenty-five years ago. Now he's moving on, leaving behind an unfillable vacancy. There's no one like Tom.

Tom and I actually visited this Right Bank Bordeaux producer back in 2008 along with its importer Charles Neal. I remember the setting for the chateau as more beautiful in a pastoral way than the more famous but mundane Left Bank landscape. There were more trees along with actual topography. Also attracting me was a less-famous and thereby less pricey Bordeaux rouge, costing far less than those of Pauillac, Margaux, *et al.*

2016 CHATEAU LESTRILLE 'Capmartin' is 80% Merlot and 20% Cabernet Sauvignon, a not-unusual *cepage* for this side of the Gironde. This affordable red is actually the winery's "up a notch" bottling, and making it even better is this particular vintage. 2016 was the provider of gratifyingly dark "substance" to its reds; not just in Bordeaux but in most of the European wine regions. Throw a dart at a grouping of Brunello di Montalcino, Chateauneuf-du-Pape, and Rioja (and so on) and you'll assuredly hit a good wine.

This red demonstrates terrific value for a Bordeaux rouge, as does nearly every wine Charles Neal imports. "Imported," I should say, because Charles has also relinquished his wine sourcing role. We will continue to access his finds, however: He has sold his book to a wine rep who's been working for him. Staying connected to Daulny Sancerre, Combiér Crozes-Hermitages, and Roger Perrin Chateauneuf is a priority for us . . . and I'll find SOME way to remain connected with friend Tom!

22.99 / 20.69 for Wine Club Members

The Wine Steward's
'Here 'n There'
Uncharted Whites
WINE CLUB

April 2024



"The Lip Stinger"

That's actually what "Picpoul" means in the Occitan language which preceded French in that country's southern parts. While this grape variety also grows in the Rhône Valley and even California these days (in Paso Robles, etc.), we are presenting you with its best-known location. In fact, the region's name incorporates that of the grape: Here is **FLORES PICPOUL de PINET**.

Picpoul's dynamic citrus fruit qualities are augmented in Picpoul de Pinet by an undeniable briney-ness. That is directly attributable to location. The vineyards of the area happen adjacent to a large saltwater lagoon barely separated from the actual Mediterranean Sea by a thin strip of land. Shellfish farms – and flamingos – occupy this lagoon southwest of the city of Montpellier.

It's one of those places on our globe where the local wine really does mate perfectly with the local food product (shellfish). While fleshy on the midpalate, this wine is consistently NERVY from nose to tongue to finish (what's your mouth feel like once you've swallowed?!). You could compare it to the Loire Valley's Muscadet and Galicia, Spain's Albariño per this dynamic effect!

14.99 / 13.49 for all wine club members



WHAT'S in a NAME?

Let's start with the easy part: This no-oak white wine, **2020 VALCKENBERG PINOT BLANC**, is delicious. I would not have bought this for you without tasting it first. That's the criteria for all of our club picks of course, but in the case of providing a 3.5 year-old white I'd be sure to be "picky". Credit the limestone/loam soils of Rheinhessen, Germany AND the screwcap finish for providing the freshness you're enjoying.

"Pinot Blanc" is the best-known name for a grape with several titles. In Northern Italy it will answer to "Pinot Bianco" when called. In Germany it's more often called "Weissburgunder" or "Weisserburgunder". Want to get really confused? Pinot Blanc used to be Pinot Noir, until someone perusing his Pinot Noir vineyard noticed one cane on his red vine growing white grapes and propagated that part of the vine to officialize a new variety.

From the glass on my desk I'm smelling almond blossoms and apple pears. I'm tasting meyer lemons and polished rocks. I'm savoring the lush, nervy feel that ends with a rumor of white smoke. I'm wishing for fish!

18.99 / 17.09 for all wine club members

The Wine Steward's

“Curious?” Club

WINE CLUB

April 2024



A Tasty, Unencumbered Value

2021 MONTE OTON is “unencumbered” in that it’s made entirely of Garnacha, without any help from usual accomplices Syrah and Mourvèdre. Yes, “Garnacha” is the same as France’s “Grenache,” and perhaps we should be more often using the former name as the grape originated very near the Spanish source for this particular wine.

Monte Oton is also unencumbered by the employment of oak. That lack of “encumbrance” saves the producer, The Wine Steward, and ultimately YOU a bit of money. However, this isn’t just about economizing. Garnacha/Grenache often performs BETTER without the oxidative experience of barrel aging. And this is a special place for the grape. Campo de Borja, along with nearby Cariñena and Calatayud, calls longtime resident Garnacha its signature grape. Stands of centenarian vines are not uncommon, and most of the wineries here are commonly-owned cooperatives – another contributor to the low pricing.

This is what I call a “crunchy” red, with its enliveningly snappy impact on your palate. It indulges with its complexity, while the textural impact is more about refreshment – not richness. Stringent “testing” at my desk has shown this to be an ever better wine a day after opening. Monte Oton rounds out and deepens a bit with air. I’m enjoying the Day II experience right now: The nose is explosive with thyme (“tomillo” in Spanish), black cherries, and white pepper. The mouth has become more lush with its smoky dark fruit. If I had a Weber grill in here this wine would be fully honored with meats therefrom; a little char and a bit of smoke are great Garnacha enhancements!

11.99 / 13.49 for all wine club members



Rightness

We made an educated guess with this purchase which proved successful, per my palate. **2021 VITE COLTE 'La Luna e I Falò' BARBERA d'ASTI** was offered to us as an untasted prearrival promotion. That's not my favorite way to buy, but this importer has been incredibly reliable with quality over the years; hence, the "educated guess."

We are taking you to Piemonte in northwest Italy for that region's SECOND most important red varietal. Barbera bows only to Nebbiolo in prestige here. It is appropriate that both Barbera and Nebbiolo are exploited here, for each has a different message. Nebbiolo often lacks color, while Barbera possesses purpleness in spades. Nebbiolo expresses strawberries and potpourri aromatically, while Barbera persists with the theme of "purple" with darker fruits and, perhaps, a certain meaty-ness. Nebbiolo's palate feel is undeniably tannic in theme. Barbera is the rarer red wine expressing ACIDITY.

This 'Superiore' (meaning longer aging time and the mandatory use of barrels) nails all of those features, and per what I've tasted over the years represents very good value considering what we're (you're) paying. The big difference between Vite Colte and its price point peers is the richer midpalate. This retains the appropriate, food-craving "shine" of acidity whilst incorporating a bit more "love" of body.

Rich foods – pizza, *Pasta Bolognese*, lasagna – will gladly accompany!

17.99 / 16.19 for all members