

The Wine Steward's

The COLLECTOR

WINE CLUB

December 2023



BUSY SEASON RAPID-FIRE WINE WONDERINGS...

(Thank you in advance for understanding the brevity; there's a lot on my plate this month!!)

Here is our third “clubbing” of Laird’s ‘Jillian’s Blend,’ represented now as the 2018 iteration. Per my experience of this red over the years, the producer is getting better with it, vintage by vintage. The 2017 was more darkly focused than the bottling before, and THIS time around we’re enjoying that dark fruit AND confronting a tannic structure enabling further aging. That wasn’t the original idea with “Jillian’s,” I’d submit. Rather, it was modeled to be merely a drink-now concoction. Now you can cellar it – or ribeye it (I know, a common refrain!).

Anyway, I’m impressed. Your two first ingredients are Cabernet and – notably – Syrah. Remember Mi Sueño’s ‘El Llano’ red blend (now the proprietary wine of one particular restaurant group, unobtainable by ourselves)? It also represented these two uncommon bedfellow grapes. Two different kinds of “dark” are thereby brought to nose and mouth; a lot of classic Napa Cab blackcurrant and cassis qualities AND the smoky meaty-ness for which the Syrah is responsible.

Laird was one of Napa’s first “custom crush” facilities and remains one of its largest. These folks intentionally overbuilt to accommodate other small producers wishing to avoid the overhead of building their own wineries. Today, Laird plays host to over SIXTY such small artisanal producers!

If you enjoy Jillian’s, you should check out their delicious Carneros Pinot Noir. Members Mike and Ginger already have, reacting with an order for several more bottles!

(still) 44.99 / 40.49 for all wine club members



This One's Easy:

2020 UPCHURCH 'Counterpart' received 96 points from Robert Parker's Wine Advocate, whose glowing review will save me some writing . . .

"Made from 87% Merlot with 13% Cabernet Sauvignon, the 2020 Counterpart is fresh, finessed and layered on the complex nose. Aromas of black cherries, spiced plum and a delightful mineral essence waft from the glass with a dusty frame of black raspberry, while impressive oak essences of cinnamon and cardamom entice and seduce the nose. Full-bodied, the wine is still tight, with a focused frame, pure and succulent tannins and energetic acidity, all brilliantly balanced and matched. The palate continues to somersault with a delicate mineral tension before offering elegant and pure oak essences over the long, lingering, juicy finish. The wine rested in all-new French oak barrels. Only 4,560 bottles were made. Bravo. This is stellar juice!"

Do the math:

"4,560 bottles" is the equivalent of less than four hundred cases. That's why - while I've known about this beautiful Washington State red for a while - it has only recently made it to the California market.

Upchurch is the work of Chris Upchurch, founding winemaker of DeLILLE Cellars. All that he handles is grown on Red Mountain where his little winery and tasting room are located. You should visit sometime, even if you're staying in Walla Walla, an hour's drive east. Your trip will be rewarded with tastes of great Upchurch wines that NEVER come south!

58.99/ 53.09 for all wine club members

The Wine Steward's

World Class

WINE CLUB

December 2023



Another Northern Rhone . . .

Yes, we recently provided another red from here. I hope the repetition of type won't cause burnout, but enrich your experience of the category instead. The opportunity of this provocative **2021 Sylvain Badel 'Promesse' Saint-Joseph** - a 100% Syrah - occurred in a recent tasting appointment and the importer had very little to sell. In fact, it was a "commit now or never" situation, and we spoke for all he had.

That importer is Gregoire Montot, a Frenchman who has only recently transplanted to the East Bay Area. He works only with small and thoughtful producers such as Sylvain Badel. The Syrah grapes come from the Saint-Joseph sub-appellation of the Northern Rhone, an area considered to be one quality "notch" above neighboring Crozes-Hermitage, and more affordable than vaunted Cote-Rotie and Hermitage. Sylvain's grandfather was a vineyard owner who both sold grapes and made wine but his father threw in the winemaking towel, choosing to sell off all of the carefully-tended fruit. Before he passed away, Grandpa asked Grandson to return to making some wine. The nickname on this particular Sylvain Badel bottling honors that request.

Please show this to your nose and mouth from a wide-bowled Pinot Noir glass. The pepper, potpourri, and musky/meaty fruit will appreciate it!

34.99 / 31.49 for Wine Club Members



“Is it 9 a.m. yet?”

As a matter of fact it's 9:07, so I'm eagerly uncorking this for my first ever experience of the 2019 version of a wine I've always loved. Yes, I actually bought this “blind,” having learned over the years that Castello di Bossi *never* makes a bad ‘Berardo.’ They’d rather preserve the brand’s integrity by skipping a vintage or two, and often do just that.

2019 Castello di Bossi ‘Berardo’ Chianti Classico Riserva is never a big wine per color or heft. It compensates with an intensity of oh-so-Tuscan **character**. My mid-morning experience of the just-opened bottle is showing me a wine with a very long tale to tell. In other words, I'm feeling something quite age-worthy on my palate; an acid/tannin combination I often generalize as “structure.” The cherry fruit, albeit reluctant in these early minutes of sniffing, is joined by a feature I always admire in ‘Berardo’: *Sottobosco*. That's yet another generalization applied to many good reds of the region; a savory mixture of scrub, dried herb, and/or underbrush. *Sottobosco* – and not necessarily the fruit – is the real “tell” of this Tuscan beauty.

100% Sangiovese as grown in the producer's Berardo Vineyard, as rendered in small and larger-sized barrels . . . you're in the presence of a very cellar-worthy Tuscan beauty; a value when compared to more-pricey Brunello di Montalcino, grown just a little south of here. I'd stock up if I were you.

38.99 / 35.09 for Wine Club Members

The Wine Steward's

Pacific Coast

WINE CLUB

December 2023



This messy office...

I had my first taste of this **2020 Novelty Hill 'RSR' Red** two days ago, deemed it appropriate for your club, then recorked and added the bottle to an army of many others on the wine-stained table in my messy office. As disorganized as the place might appear, I have a hard time discarding a nearly-full bottle I might be writing about at some point in the near future. Sometimes there's something to be learned from a wine that's seen the "abuse" of time and oxidation. From this 'RSR' that's relatively new to me, I've just learned plenty.

This morning's experience of a good red that's been open more than 48 hours is a Cabernet/Merlot/Cab Franc blend that's even better now. While the first "glance" showed me lots of validating flavor, a bit of air has helped a medium-bodied wine fill out to something more sensuously-textured. The nose has developed as well: Dark fruits along with lively cherries are joined by a savory/smoky effect and velvety fine-grained tannins. There's something about California AND Bordeaux happening here, simultaneously.

. . . Which makes perfect sense if you buy into the frequently-proposed idea that Washington State reds can intimate both of those famous wine places. Yes, we're taking you north once again; our latest excuse for changing your club's name from "California" to "Pacific Coast"!

22.99 / 20.69 for all wine club members



A Rare Repeater

Yes, we clubbed this very wine 28 months ago, and now “re-present” it with zero reservations or apologies. A Cabernet as good as **2017 Romeo ‘Sempre Vive’** deserves the encore, and *you* deserve the repeat performance. After all, is it really the same wine? Arguably, your experience of “the same wine” is never the same, even a day or a bottle later. It’s in a different place the second time around and so – perhaps - are you, the receiver!

This is such a rare occurrence these days; a single vineyard Napa Valley Cab with such authenticity of flavor and sturdiness happening at a very attainable price (my only complaint is a label design that tries too hard). Romeo, per the high-rent source and inherent quality, is a helluva value.

The appearance is impenetrably dark; purple-maroon. The nose confers blackberries, cedar, grilled bread, and windblown dried herbs. On the palate there is impressive mass and minerality; an enervating element of “wet rock.” This acid/tannin combination causes salivation, invoking hunger. A marinated and grilled portabella mushroom sprinkled with Parmigiano Reggiano would answer the call. Naturally, so would a good steak.

23.99 / 21.59 for all members

The Wine Steward's

Wine Adventurer

WINE CLUB

December 2023



It's Remarkable . . .

Therefore, I shall remark.

I just finished writing about Romeo's Sempre Vive Cabernet Sauvignon in the Pacific Coast Wine Club section, where I commented on the rarity of such quality happening at such a nice price. That very good Napa Valley red travelled a maximum of two hours to arrive here.

Now consider: Here is a very nice, albeit differently-styled Cabernet costing even less, arriving here from ANOTHER CONTINENT. How in the world does that happen?? Certainly, several factors are facilitating, but I'd rather avoid that rabbit hole and investigate the actual wine.

The **2019 Viña Tarapacá Gran Reserva Cabernet Sauvignon** (pew!) is grown in Chile's Maipo Valley. The northeast-facing vineyards from which it is sourced experience a dramatic diurnal shift of temperatures. That is, the heat of the summer day which confers ripeness is sharply contrasted by a very cool nighttime that preserves acidity. "Diurnal shift" is a prized component of *terroir*.

Here we have a Cabernet that's distinctly "Chilean" with its place-unique display of bay leaves, plum, and chocolate scents. Might there be some Carmenere hidden in the blend? No one's talking, but that roasted red pepper aspect is unmistakable, yet well-contained amid the other contributions. The palate feel is soft and long, with familiar flavors of plum and cherry enhanced by more exotic tamarinds and wet smoke. This is a pleasing yet tantalizing wine experience!

(and our price ROCKS!) 19.99 / 17.99 for club members



A Place Rarely Visited . . .

The 2021 ‘Pietranera’ by **Mauro Vanucci** comes from the less-discussed Tuscan subregion of Carmignano, about ten miles northwest of Florence. It is “less-discussed” only because it consists of hardly more than 270 acres of vines and thereby produces a “less-discussable” amount of wine. That said, Carmignano has produced wine for many centuries and, interestingly, was blending Cabernet Sauvignon into their Sangiovese long before “Super Tuscan” became a hyped-up “brand” of the region.

Another Bordeaux grape is involved in this particular Carmignano-derived blend. ‘Pietranera’ is comprised of 80% Sangiovese and 20% Cabernet Franc. As neither grape is known for darkness, this blend is rather a celebration of redness and fragrance. The middleweight frame supports enlivening cherry fruit with but a rumor of herbaceousness.

Pietranera is a graceful red, best understood as a whole glass poured alongside a meal of rich protein. I often point it out and will again: Sangiovese, albeit medium in size, performs remarkably with foods which are bigger, providing “cut” and relief. Hence, the classic pairing of Chianti (apparently, Carmignano used to be part of the actual Chianti Zone) and the massive morsel *Bistecca alla Fiorentina!*

22.69 / 20.42 for Wine Club Members

The Wine Steward's
'Here 'n There'

Uncharted Whites

WINE CLUB

December 2023



The Dependability of Reckless Gascogne Blanc

We bring you yet another example of a wine type which rarely fails; white wine from Gascony, France. The **2022 Olivier Gessler Cotes de Gascogne Blanc** should appeal to any white wine appreciator of clean and vibrantly-fruited juice!

Gascony (the anglicized term) is historically better known for Armagnac, but in more recent decades the vineyards supporting that spirit are also utilized for wines such as this. Gessler is a Gascogne Blanc lesson in one bottle, as it contains ALL of the wine type's usual suspects. Colombard, Ugni Blanc (Italy's Trebbiano), Gros Manseng, and Sauvignon Blanc all contribute.

Delicate seafood dishes and salads will appreciate the enhancement of this wine's citrus and daisy petal hilarity. It just occurred to this preferer of good Gin: Besides the absence of more alcohol and juniper, these are qualities I might find in a good G&T. No wonder I so enjoy advocating Gascogne Blanc!!

15.99 / 14.39 for all wine club members



Another Nice Wine from a Friend . . .

You could sniff and sip this from a skinny white wine glass to appreciate its mineral and lemony brightness. Alternatively, you could show it to your senses from a more grandiose venue, a broad Pinot Noir bowl. From the latter you'll sense a little more enrichment – with no loss of acidic energy – which attests to its warmer southern Burgundy source of Macon.

“White Burgundy? So this is Chardonnay?” Nope, this is the OTHER white Burgundy made from Aligoté; **2022 Coteaux des Margots Aligoté from Macon, Burgundy, France**. Astute white wine club members will remember we provided the same producer's Chardonnay just two or three months ago. We thought it would be nice to show you the alternative.

Aligoté is a little rarer in our market, more often staying home for the locals to drink. It tends to behave more simply than Burgundy's Chardonnays, and typically costs a bit less. Aligoté is rarely cultivated where more lucrative Chardonnay will flourish. Instead, the farmer commits his lower-lying, less desirable plots to this stepsister grape. However, with more respect a better wine such as this can happen.

Importer Paul Duroussay is our kind of wine provider. He actually shows his wares to us personally, and works entirely with small producers. He's even part of the actual family making the wine before you, coming from the village of Pierreclos where Coteaux des Margots resides. When possible, Paul returns to help with harvest, then he returns to us with even more French wine finds!

ANOTHER BURGUNDY BARGAIN...

21.99 / 19.79 for all wine club members

The Wine Steward's

“Curious?” Club

WINE CLUB

December 2023



(It's not German)

No, we're not taking you to Germany, but to France for an honestly good Bordeaux. I know that's already happened in your club a couple times of late, but 'tis the season: Chilly nights call for more hefty plates of food with sturdy Bordeaux alongside!

This hails from that vast region's so-called "Right Bank." The soils are more clay-enriched on this side, accommodating the Merlot grape. **2020 Chateau German Cotes de Bordeaux, France** is based on Merlot, with minor contributions from Cabernet Sauvignon and Cabernet Franc. I believe all three of those are singing audibly. The Cabernet Sauvignon brings incensed depth and the substance of structure, while the Cab Franc amplifies and floralizes the fragrance. The dominating Merlot gives roundness and friendly fruit, plus a finish of scrubby herbaceous-ness.

The Wine Enthusiast awarded it 92 points, saying:

"The wine's fulsome black fruits are packed with tannins and a spicy, smoky character. This is a solid wine, with a good future. Drink from 2025."

(The reviewer was also told he was trying a \$30 wine).

14.99 / 13.49 for all wine club members



Not all that is Tuscan is Sangiovese . . .

Welcome to **2019 San Felice ‘Perolla’ from Tuscany, Italy**. This is the entry level wine for a producer who renders many other bottlings. We have carried several good things from San Felice – Chianti Classico Gran Selezione, Brunello di Montalcino, and the like – and have even featured them at a presentation-style event on our mezzanine. Not all, but most of their wines favor Tuscany’s famous grape Sangiovese as the main ingredient. Little ‘Perolla,’ which saw naught but stainless steel tanks (no barrels) during its brief upbringing, includes a little Sangiovese but emphasizes others.

Here we are sniffing and sipping 50% Merlot, 20% Cabernet Sauvignon, 20% Ciliegiolo (I’ll provide free pronunciation lessons), and a mere 10% Sangiovese. Prepare yourself for a nose-full of ripe red fruits and potpourri. The following experience on your palate is bound to be juicy-licious. The omission of oak allows for a fresher, more buoyant delivery of energetic berries and cherries. Perolla doesn’t try to be “purple”. It doesn’t need to. It’s delicious.

James Suckling awards this vintage of Perolla 91 points, remarking:

“Very soft and delicious with sour cherries, light chocolate and some cedar. Medium-bodied with medium, round tannins and a delicious finish. Drink now.”

(He stole “delicious” from *my* notes).

15.49 / 13.94 for all members