

The Wine Steward's

RED COLLECTOR

WINE CLUB

February 2020

WINE: 2013 Terra Valentine 'Amore'

SOURCE: Napa Valley, mostly from Piero Antinori's Atlas Peak vineyard (eastern hills of Napa)

GRAPES at PLAY: 90% Sangiovese and 10% Syrah

TREATMENT TRIVIA: 16 months in French oak, 678 cases made

CHEESE: Vella Aged Dry Jack from just over the hill

WHAT TO KNOW: Terra Valentine occupies a "castle" way up Spring Mountain on Napa's western side. For this particular wine they head downhill, across the valley, and 1600 feet up again to Atlas Peak. Here, they access the vineyard of Piero Antinori, famed pioneer of Tuscany, Italy's Super Tuscan breed. Want a real Super Tuscan at a bitchin' price? Scroll down to the World Class Wine Club notes for more information. Want a Super Tuscan-inspired wine from California? Stay right here.

JIM'S WHIMS: While we don't guarantee it, your club is supposed to be getting Cabernet Sauvignon or blends thereof most of the time. In the interest of not boring you to death, we offer this rare departure. Terra Valentine is best known for their Spring Mountain Cabernets, but I'm glad they also make love – I mean "Amore". While Sangiovese tends toward "redness" in color and flavor effect, "Amore" goes a bit darker. Its mountain sourcing certainly contributes, but I'm sure the Syrah addition does, too. The nose of this wine is seductive: Sultry, bloody, ironic, brushy, meaty scents straighten out your nose hairs to full attention. You anticipate a nervy palate feel, but are instead happily surprised by luxurious silkiness. This wine is like a velour robe against your bare skin, as you pad barefooted toward the hot tub. There, "Amore" awaits.

Happy Valentine's Day.



WINE: 2016 Meyer Family 'Fluffy Billows' Cabernet Sauvignon

SOURCE: Oakville, Napa Valley, Baby!

GRAPES at PLAY: 100% Cabernet Sauvignon

TREATMENT: 22 months in French oak, 50% new

IF IT MATTERS TO YOU: The former partners in a little concern known as "Silver Oak"

CHEESE: Something bold

WHAT TO KNOW: We are "clubbing" this wine yet again for myriad reasons. First off, it's personal: Tony, the dude who shows and sells Meyer Family wines to us, is one of the most "real" people in the industry and we appreciate the relationship. Second, it's historical. The Meyers are original partners in one of the Napa Valley's greatest stories, Silver Oak, and their Meyer Family wines reflect a return to "quaint" and "under the radar," leaving shops like The Wine Steward to tell THEIR story. Next up: This is Oakville Cabernet Sauvignon happening at the lowest conceivable price within that revered high-rent Cabernet district. The QPR is strong! Finally, as we endeavor to show your club significant reds of various styles, we present this to you as classically-built, seriously durable Napa Valley Cabernet, the likes of which is less and less available in these days of whopper wine domination. When is the last time you saw "13.8% alcohol" on a Napa Valley Cabernet label?!

JIM'S WHIMS: This is compact Cabernet Sauvignon, meaning it will take some time to unwind into your curl-up-on-the couch smoothie of a drink. Can't wait that long? Decanter. Ribeye.

- But seriously, of the various things we show you from month to month, this veers heavily toward the "Cellar Me" side of the spectrum. Over time, the cedar and dried cherries will announce themselves while the tannins relent.

Or screw it: Get a ribeye.

The Wine Steward's

World Class

WINE CLUB

February 2020

WINE: 2015 SUPREMUS by Monte Antico

SOURCE: Maremma, Colline Pisane, and Colli Fiorentini in Tuscany, Italy

GRAPES at PLAY: 75% Sangiovese, 15% Merlot, and 10% Cabernet Sauvignon

TREATMENT TRIVIA: 14 months in French barrique (we call them “barrels”), 70% of which were new at the time. They are older now.

CHEESE: Parmigiano Reggiano – and we have some.

IF IT MATTERS: 95 points James Suckling, who gushed, “Best ever.”

WHAT TO KNOW: You might think this is really super, and possibly from Tuscany, and you would have nailed it: This is, in fact, a Super Tuscan. Even so, as much as we bat around that term, “Super Tuscan” is not an official Italian wine designation. It is a rebellion: An upstart category created some decades ago, meaning to allow winemakers in Tuscany some beyond-Sangiovese freedom. The most famous examples of Super Tuscan are Sassicaia and Ornellaia. The prices for those wines, conversely, are infamous. The accolades for those wines, per that pricing, can be superfluous. The value found in less-famous nor infamous or superfluous Supremus is tremendous.

JIM'S WHIMS: I showed up here way too early to write these notes, and they are beginning to make less and less sense as I contemplate my second visit to Starbucks. What remains clear as a bell, however, is the beauty of this wine in its glass beside the keyboard. Supremus has never happened at The Wine Steward. In other vintages it has played like a bullshit “wannabe Super Tuscan” with its little price and show-off bottle size. In the excellent Tuscany vintage of 2015 it works. – And so, it's in your club.

I'll be back in a few.

WINE: 2014 'Barrua' by Agricola Punica

SOURCE: Isola dei Nuraghi, Sardegna, Italy

GRAPES at PLAY: 85% Carignano (Carignan), 10% Cabernet Sauvignon, 5% Merlot

CHEESE: While a bold wine often demands a bold cheese, we encourage the opposite treatment here. Try a mild one, like Mahon from Spain's Balearic Islands.

WHAT TO KNOW: Carignan / Carignano (also called 'Mazuelo' in Rioja and 'Samsó' in Catalunya) is usually a bit player and only rarely stars on its own or as the first ingredient of a blend. That's too bad, because the grape is vital to wines from here in Sardegna, the South of France, and in several wines of Spain. "Barrua" gives us an all-too-rare chance to understand Carignan's role.

While red wines of Sardegna are less known to many, the people behind "Barrua" are among Italy's wine elite. A venerable yet forward-looking producer in Sardegna – Santadi - is one important partner. Another is Giacomo Tachis, often called "The Father of Super Tuscan" wines, as he has collaborated on the creation of the three best known bottlings of the genre: Sassicaia, Solaja, and Tignanello. That his talent would be redirected to Sardegna, nearly 200 miles west of Italy's mainland, is notable. "Barrua" is, in effect, a "Super Sardegnan."

JIM'S WHIMS: I am excited to bring this to you. I love Barrua's collection of lessons for the wine student, and at the most essential level I love the wine itself. "Love" initially happened about three weeks ago when a couple industry friends and I spent a good deal of time sniffing and sipping this one wine, rather than rapidly hopscotching across a whole line of distracting tastes. The attention we gave this 2014 Barrua was rewarded by one wine experience after another. That is, Barrua had more than just one thing to say. The sequences of experiences provided exactly what great wines can do: Provoke conversation, keep the taster engaged, wonder about a great food pairing, check my cellar for how many empty spaces remain for purchases of more of this . . .

Carignano / Carignan challenges the first-time taster with more-than / other-than fruit sensations. Essentially, it's a little bit grumpy with certain earthy aspects. It is the lowest voice – the bass voice – of the choir of grapes used in a Mediterranean wine. Grenache is often employed as the starring, higher-voiced soprano requiring the stability, the grounding, the importance of Carignan for validity. In Barrua, Carignano finally gets to control the show.

Smell your glass of Barrua again and again. You should encounter chaparral, pomegranate, unsweetened chocolate, Worcestershire sauce, grilled strawberries, graphite, potpourri . . . And your sip is one of intellectual pleasure. Intelligent sex. Rustic elegance.

I'm writing this – and tasting Barrua – at 6:04 a.m. on Valentine's Day. I am aroused.

The Wine Steward's

CALIFORNIA

(*West Coast*)

WINE CLUB

February 2020

WINE: 2015 Seven Hills Cabernet Sauvignon

SOURCE: The Walla Walla Valley, Red Mountain, Wahluke Slope, and Yakima American Viticultural Areas of Washington State's Columbia Valley

GRAPES at PLAY: 83% Cabernet Sauvignon, 5% Cabernet Franc, 4% Petit Verdot, 3% Merlot, 3% Malbec, and 2% Carmenere.

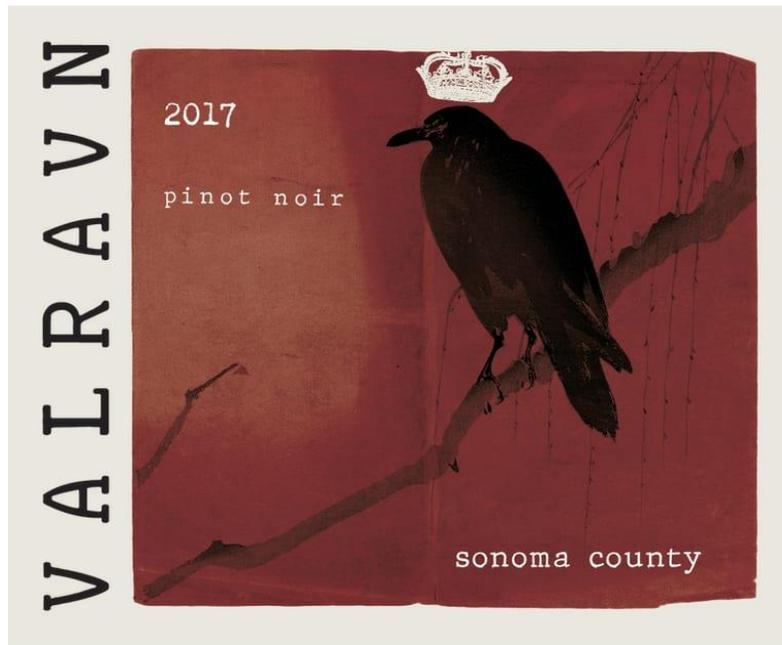
TREATMENT TRIVIA: 23 months in American, Hungarian, Russian, and French oak, 35% new.

CHEESE: Cheddar / Aged Cheddar

WHAT TO KNOW: Washington is not California, nor is it Oregon. Its vineyards happen nowhere near the sea, but in the state's eastern half. Dry. High desert. Sometimes less than seven inches of rain per year. Dramatic diurnal shift (the difference between day- and nighttime temperatures). Longer summer day (and therefore more sunshine) than California's, based on the latitude. Lower land prices allowing for a better QPR (quality-to-price ratio). A place excelling with an impressive bandwidth of varietals: The Bordeaux, the Rhone, the Italian, and more. A place whose producers are endlessly curious with trying the untried. Truly America's land of wine opportunity.

JIM'S WHIMS: This is *real* wine. What do I mean? It does not stoop to, pander to, ingratiate by employing sweetened, manufactured, inauthentic wine qualities to appeal to the wine drinker more accustomed to guzzling Pepsi Cola. This is real wine. This is real Cabernet. Real WASHINGTON STATE Cabernet. It comes to you only halfway; YOU must take the next steps. YOU must engage IT, make the investment of inquiry, wonder about cellaring and food preparing and – especially – SMELLING your wine with the hope and expectation of something more than and other than plain old blackberries and cherries. Approach this wine anticipating those fruits AND sagebrush AND freshly-turned dark, damp earth AND charcoal briquettes AND peppercorns. Taste this wine appreciating more than just fruit by admiring TANNINS and ACIDS that make you HUNGRY.

I guess I'm hungry. . . . Or this wine tastes exceptionally good at 6:47 a.m.



WINE: 2017 ValravN Pinot Noir

SOURCE: Sonoma County

GRAPES at PLAY: 100% Pinot Noir (unlike many of the more-groceried, less-truthful versions)

IF IT MATTERS TO YOU: This wine is too cheap

CHEESE: Cremeux de Citeaux triple cream, of which we'd like to sell you thirty pounds or so

WHAT TO KNOW: This honest-to-goodness wine comes from the boys who used to make the Banshee wines. So adept were they at making honest Pinot Noir at an approachable price, they were able to sell off that successful brand and buy Corvettes. They were also smart enough to NOT sign a non-compete agreement with the new buyer, allowing them to turn right around and make this Pinot that very much honors the old Banshee style. They were not smart enough, however, to give it a name we can confidently attempt to pronounce, so I must ask you to not read these notes out loud.

JIM'S WHIMS: There are a few bullshit brands of Pinot Noir out there. I even sell one or two of them here to attract the tentative churchgoer. If he or she attends The Wine Steward long enough they're bound to get religion, and ultimately join the Cult of the Crowned Crow. That's right: The label design for this (DON'T SAY IT OUT LOUD!!!) ValravN also makes absolutely no sense.

I'm glad these guys can make good wine.

The Wine Steward's

Wine Adventurer's

WINE CLUB

February 2020

WINE: 2018 Perazzeta 'Mercurio'

SOURCE: Tuscany, Italy (more precisely, in Tuscany's southwest . . . the Montecucco area).

GRAPES at PLAY: 50% Sangiovese, 30% Cabernet Sauvignon, 20% Alicante Bouschet.

TREATMENT TRIVIA: NO small barrels

CHEESE: Aged Pecorino . . . We sell a KILLER one infused with TRUFFLES

WHAT TO KNOW: This charming red is a result of the ongoing relationship we treasure with Tom Kelly and his diminutive import company Small Vineyards. Tom's the guy who visits our Mezzanine each July to present two hours' (and fourteen wines') worth of Italy to rsvp-ing wine wonderers. What happens behind the scenes: Tom and I get together twice a year to taste about two dozen smaller productions to which we and only a few other wine operatives are made privy. These are "direct imports," brought over from Italy only as we approve-of and order them, and when they're gone they're truly gone. Mercurio is one such wine.

JIM'S WHIMS: Tuscany's more famous wine regions include Chianti Classico, Montalcino, and Montepulciano. Head a little south and west of those to get to the source of this wine, Montecucco. I used to own a Montecucco clock but ended up smashing it with a baseball bat. The damn thing just wouldn't shut up.

Yes, that's silly. And so is this wine. It smiles. It is warmheartedly relentless with comforting southern-style fruit. Do southern Tuscans speak with a southern drawl? This wine does. Here, the restrictions of Chianti (you must use a certain percentage of Sangiovese) and Brunello di Montalcino (you must use 100% of that Blood of Jove or the G-men will getcha) are discarded like undergarments flung from a speeding car's window. "Cabernet Sauvignon?" Why not! "Alicante Bouschet?" What the hell! Here, my friends, is liquid laughter. Drink it as such.



WINE: 2016 Lafage 'Narassa'

SOURCE: Côtes Catalanes, Roussillon, France

GRAPES at PLAY: 80% Grenache and 20% Syrah

TREATMENT TRIVIA: "Semi-Ripasso" treatment *a la* "Baby Amarone." 80% aged in concrete, 20% aged in large-format oak.

CHEESE: L'Amuse Aged Gouda (we sell it, of course)

IF IT MATTERS: 91 points Robert Parker's Wine Advocate

WHAT TO KNOW: We are very near Spain. In fact, this area (as the wine region name implies) is known as "French Catalonia." Political borders mean nothing to grape vines, nor to this winemaker who also handles several projects in Calatayud and other Spanish regions. For Jean-Marc Lafage, it's all about being comfortable with old Grenache vines, the main players in "Narassa." Côtes Catalanes is also the playground for some American winemakers, notably Dave Phinney of The Prisoner fame. No wonder: This warm Mediterranean place naturally confers sexy exuberance on its wines.

JIM'S WHIMS: While I grimace and growl at wines enduring plastic surgery behind locked facility doors, I fully approve of those enriched by nature itself. I openly, unabashedly confess: Ripe, old-vine Grenache / Garnacha is what Zinfandel USED TO BE for me: Delicious, generous wine sex.

. . . And a little church: Slate is one of those mineral types you can detect in the nose and the feel of a wine, with its refreshing, endearingly-gruff reprimand to the hilarity of Grenache's tendency to romp. It – and the old vine sourcing – is why this wine works. Sure, it's saucy – but it's also reverent with structure. I'm going to ask it out.

The Wine Steward's
'Here 'n There'
White Wine

WINE CLUB

February 2020

WINE: 2018 Weingut Frank Riesling

SOURCE: Herrnbaumgarten, Austria

GRAPES at PLAY: 100% Riesling (but no anti-freeze)

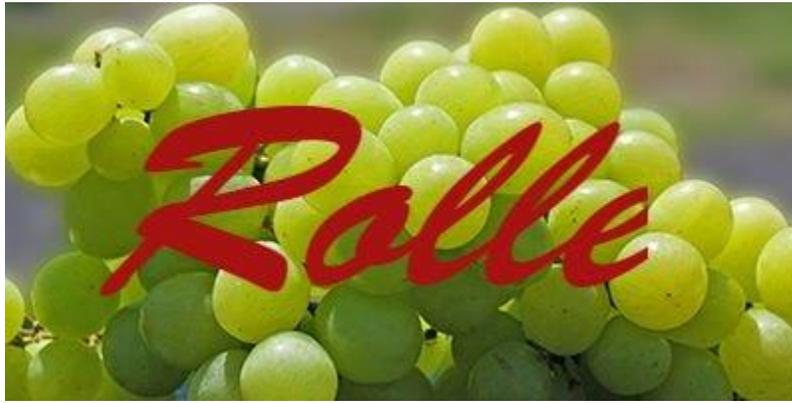
IF IT MATTERS TO YOU: This wine is dry

CHEESE: Bergamino di Bufala, because we sell it.

WHAT TO KNOW: Here comes a test of your open-mindedness. I did not make this wine club selection lightly and am fully aware of Leslie's fear of petrol-like Riesling fragrances. I imagine Leslie is not alone in her fear. Perhaps she should start a Riesling-Fearing support group and gather the like-mindedly timid (I love you Leslie - Group hug!).

This choice was made with full conviction, a sense of duty to your wine horizon expansion, and – admittedly - a selfish desire to drink a lot of this *schtüffe*. If "Riesling" appearing on the label frightens you, brandish your Sharpie and cross it out, and write in "Grüner Veltliner." That's what we're usually showing you from this producer, and the wine itself behaves similarly: A modicum of fruit and an abundance of vibrant acidity, plus a wicked little rumor of black pepper. Austrian Riesling is terrific, virtually dry wine you clubbies should embrace!!!

JIM'S WHIMS: Taste this wine with me this weekend, head downstairs and out our back door, march into Andy & Yu's back door (via the same parking lot) and demand to know why they don't have this on the menu. I cannot imagine a better wine for Chinese food. This is yet another extremely limited offering from The Wine Steward; especially limited because it is a Small Vineyards "direct import" wine we tasted and spoke for several months back. All we have is all there is, unless you want to head to Austria for more. I am very excited by this wine. VERY. I am going to spend some alone time with it *right now*. Goodbye.



WINE: 2018 Domaine Gavoty 'Grand Classique' - which means nothing whatsoever

SOURCE: Côtes de Provence, France

GRAPES at PLAY: 100% Rolle (read the fine print)

IF IT MATTERS TO YOU: This is not a rosé

CHEESE: Tuna fish

WHAT TO KNOW: When you see 'Provence' on a wine label in our store it is bound to represent a dry *pink* wine. This is the region that really got that wine category ball rolling for us. Those rosés tend to make use of Grenache and Cinsault, but one particular WHITE grape often appears in the *cepage* (ingredient list): Rolle. What the hell is this southern French white also found on the island of Corsica? There's a good chance you've actually had it before, sporting a more familiar name: Vermentino. Yep, same grape, different name. Tuscany and Sardinia simply did a better job of getting it to your patio sooner!

JIM'S WHIMS: With just one grape variety in play, there is a marvelous myriad of fragrance and flavor sensations to enjoy here. The nose speaks simultaneously of white peaches, citrus peel, fresh herbs, and sea-breezy brine. The palate feel is sharp yet soft, full yet lean, long yet clean. Terri Garr once asked Gene Wilder if he'd like to go for a "Roll in zie hay." As I watched this scene of Young Frankenstein my jaw involuntarily dropped. I think I drooled. That has never happened again, until having *this* Rolle right here at my desk, and now I need a paper towel.

"Tuna??" C'mon, we're talking *Salade Niçoise* here!! - And our tuna ROCKS!!!

The Wine Steward's

Tuesday Night

WINE CLUB

February 2020

WINE: 2017 Koyle Gran Reserva Carmenera

SOURCE: Los Lingues, Alto Colchagua, Chile

GRAPES at PLAY: 85% Carmenera, 10% Tempranillo, 5% Petit Verdot

IF IT MATTERS TO YOU: 91 points, James Suckling

CHEESE: Fourme d'Ambert Blue – I don't eat much blue, but love this one!

WHAT TO KNOW: If you didn't already know it you should: Carmenera is "The Lost Bordeaux Grape." There was a good amount of it planted there before the Phylloxera root louse scourge of the nineteenth century but when it came time to replant, Bordeaux pretty much jettisoned it from its program. Precious few Carmenera vines remain there today. During that same period of the 1800's cuttings of Carmenera and other grape varieties were shipped off to Chile to get that country's wine program off the ground / into the ground. For an entire century, the Carmenera planted there was misidentified as a type of Merlot, harvested like Merlot, and treated like Merlot. Merlot treated like Merlot can be really good. Carmenera treated like Merlot can really suck. Not until the 1990's when Chile's Carmenera was properly identified it *really* sucked. Since then, properly treated, it has gotten better and better. Here's the proof: Beautiful color, peppery fruit, creamy textures. Koyle is back!!

JIM'S WHIMS: Where have you gone, Alfonso? You came from the south, from the vineyards of your family, to show us your tallness and beautiful wines. To reside in Napa to launch your winery's program in a new land. To visit The Wine Steward to so affably present your Carmenera and Syrah and Cabernet. To lounge in my backyard where your child chased my chickens, as we shared glasses and latin-accented observations. Where have you gone, Alfonso?

At least we have your wine, once more.



WINE: Ursa 'Major'

SOURCE: Sierra Foothills

GRAPES at PLAY: They won't say, but there are six of them. I'm guessing: Zinfandel, Barbera, Tannat, Sangiovese, Touriga Nacional, Blaufrankisch, and Roter Veltliner. Oh wait, that's seven.

TREATMENT TRIVIA: American oak, 20% new, for 24 months.

CHEESE: Whiz

WHAT TO KNOW: When it comes to the pursuit of fine wine, the Sierra Foothills are a bit cursed by heat. The other problem is some of the local yokels there are really lousy winemakers. Two other factors can be redemptive, however. The nights here cool down substantially, allowing the fruit to retain its vital-to-good-wine acidity. Even more important is the soil. There are many options in this department, and nearly all of them are mineral (you might say "ROCK") based. I'll never forget the time when Andre Tchelistcheff and I were having a beer in Osaka, Japan and he declared: "Soil trumps climate." Actually, I never had a beer with Andre Tchelistcheff (he's dead) and I've never been to Japan. – But he did say that.

JIM'S WHIMS: While robust with warm weather-induced fruit, this 'Major' is being clubbed for the third time for that gratifying aspect AND the refreshing elements of acidity. For the casual wine consumer, "acid" is a four-letter word from which to flee. Stop, you. Come back here. Right now. Acidity is why you can drink a whole glass of otherwise very ripe red wine.

If I'm sounding a little reckless today, consider: The website for this wine recommends leftover kung pao chicken as a food pairing.

Touché.