

The Wine Steward's

THE RED COLLECTOR

WINE CLUB

January 2019

LOYALTY, FIDELITY, RESPECT ...

2015 DeLILLE CELLARS 'D2' – Columbia Valley, Washington State

Just as we showed you Ilaria Cabernet last month for the third time, we are bringing you another club frequenter this month around. I've lost count, but I believe DeLille's 'D2' has happened in your bag on at least three other occasions over the years.

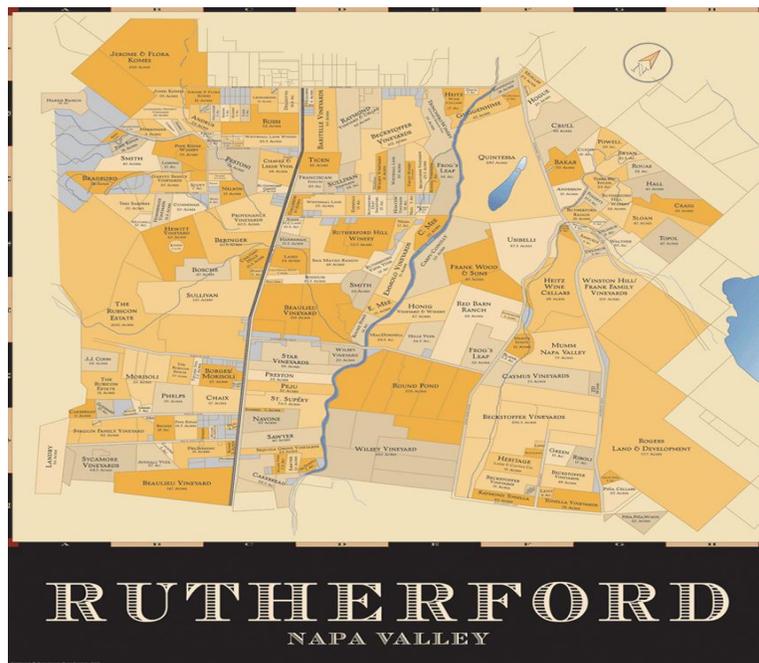
Loyalty, Fidelity, and Respect are all reflected in this wine, and by all concerned: Producer, Wine Retailer, and Club Member.

DeLille maintains a house style that somewhat bucks the trend in Washington State winemaking. Their pursuit of elegance and balance seems to "respect" the European way of doing wine rather than emphasizing jammy fruit and dramatic oak impact. This blend of Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, and Petit Verdot even remembers its inspiration with the name 'D2,' a reference to the autoroute leading through the classified-growth Left Bank side of Bordeaux. To know this allusion is to understand the wine's "fidelity" to an original wine idea; modest in volume yet profound in character.

The Wine Steward's own "respect" is manifested by a longtime commitment to DeLille. We like what they do. We admire their consistency. We applaud their not trying to impress with bombast. In an industry where brands come and go and rise and fall based on fruit thrill and whopper ratings this great winery's steadfast adherence to its ideals is noteworthy. ... And so, even in a year when Robert Parker's Wine Advocate confers not 93 points but a "mere" 90 rating, we remain loyal.

Besides, the wine's freaking great – in a conservative and ageworthy way. I think you can and should age some for up to eight years or so. – And that's where **you** come in, as loyal wine club members looking to us to identify wine goodness of many kinds. Remain loyal to us with your support and we'll keep up the good work!

40.99 / 36.89 for All Wine Club Members



Perfection

2015 SULLIVAN CABERNET SAUVIGNON – Rutherford, Napa Valley

If you do the math by adding up the prices for this month's wines you'll see we're providing over-the-top value here - as long as you enjoy the juice itself, of course. Now, know that this offering from Sullivan is actually meant to sell for about \$110. BAM.

Sullivan has been around since the early 1970's and has "quietly" been on my wine radar since the 1990's. Based on my very infrequent tastes, I'd identify the Sullivan house style as conservative and enduring. From the drought year of 2015 when everyone's crop was lighter but dramatically more flavorful, the best of both worlds happens in Sullivan's estate Cabernet. In the nose and mouth of this beauty you can fully recognize RUTHERFORD, if the aura of that wine place is more than just b.s. to you. It is for me: I always expect a "red brick dust" from the more honest wines of Rutherford, along with an almost-Tuscan sense of sanguinity. One thing is undeniable: This tastes like "real" Cabernet.

What 2015 adds to Sullivan's typical house style is concentration and depth. The scents and flavors remain representative while becoming enrobed in the textural sauciness of the vintage. The head is attracted by complexity and place truth while the heart is entranced by the (restrained) generosity.

And so, this is perfect wine – and I never say such a thing without several more paragraphs of justification but this time around that's unnecessary; the wine tells you it's perfect - and you're not spending \$110 for it! Respecting the provider's request, you'll have to discreetly inquire about OUR/YOUR price.

XX.XX / XX.XX for wine club members

The Wine Steward's

World Class

WINE CLUB

January 2019

Exclusive (nearly)

2015 CASA SILVA 'S38' CABERNET SAUVIGNON – Los Lingues, Colchagua, Chile

Cabernet, like Chardonnay and Sauvignon Blanc, happens virtually everywhere these days. Inspired by the success of France's Bordeaux and California's Napa Valley benchmark examples, the rest of the wine world has optimistically planted accordingly to get in on the action. Sometimes the copycat attempts are disastrously bad. Sometimes they taste like knock-offs; not too bad but not original. Then, there are a few places such as Chile where *terroir* and attitude are doing something refreshingly unique.

We're blessed to have a very well-versed authority on Chilean wine close at hand. Elizabeth "Lizzy" Butler speaks perfect English whilst demonstrating impressive "fluency" on the subject of Chilean Wine. She knows the past, present, and the possibilities of that wine country; an ultimate advisor on the worthy topic. Lizzy sent me a bottle of this special edition Cabernet a few months ago. Its maker, Casa Silva, is already known to us as a conservative / faithful representative of affordable Carmenere and the like. Here is something more important.

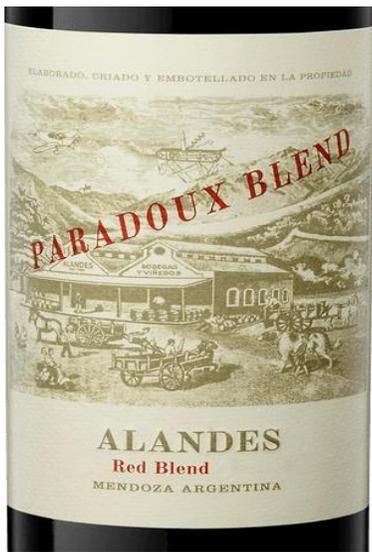
... "More important" because this is the very first vintage of the wine to ever come to the United States, and with only 250 cases making the trip we're pretty darn close to "exclusive" with it.

... "More important" because this is Casa Silva's single block (#S38) 100% Cabernet Sauvignon they're putting forward as an ultimate example of Chilean Cabernet from their Los Lingues Vineyard.

... "More important" because . . . well, just look at it: There's some pretty intense color going on here. Smell it: With Cabernet happening in so many of the world's wine regions we can rejoice in the fact that it doesn't behave the same in every one of them. Napa has a set of signature scents, as does Sonoma, Bordeaux, Australia, and so on. Here, to the nose, is CHILE resplendently portrayed. Black fruits are joined by that oh-so-Chilean mystique of smoked red pepper and freshly-trimmed ivy hedge. Taste it: There is significant body and corresponding lively liveness. The wine is gracious enough for stand-alone sipping yet truly deserves the accompaniment of seared flank steak, Ratatouille, or beef empanadas.

We're glad Lizzy brought this to us, and we hope to bring her to YOU once again at one of our popular mezzanine tastings. Stay tuned, and in the meantime enjoy this limited-edition wine from Casa Silva.

35.99 / 32.39 for all wine club members



An Unusually French-Looking Label from Argentina

Class in your Glass

NON-VINTAGE BODEGA ALANDES ‘Paroudoux Blend’ – Mendoza, Argentina

This month’s World Class duo representing South America provides a bit of a stylistic switcheroo. More often than not, Chile presents us with the more complex and savory Bordeaux-like reds, but the S38 is more modern and direct with its fruit, at least in its youth. From Argentina we expect the more one-dimensional impact of Wham-Bam fruit power, yet this treat from Bodegas Alandes takes a discreet step back from bombast, saying a lot with a slightly quieter voice.

Full disclosure: I’m not the biggest fan of 100% Malbec, even from its greatest proponent Argentina. With noteworthy exceptions, unaided Malbec disagrees with itself – at least to my mouth – with a conflict between redness and greenness. The full-blown ripeness of black fruits rarely goes unaccompanied by a pickle-ish angularity on the mid-palate, begging for another grape to furnish some filling. Thus, many of our Argentine submissions to your club are blends: Malbec, certainly not without its qualities, getting some help from its friends. While French-looking labels are commonplace in Chile (Bordeaux is especially influential there), “Paradox” is an unusual look for Argentina. So is the practice of blending vintages, as applied here.

This composite of 20% each Malbec, Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Petit Verdot, and Merlot consists of lots from the 2013, 2014, 2015, and 2016 vintages. It hails from three sub-regions of Mendoza’s southernmost area, the Uco Valley. Less than four hundred cases of “Paradox 3^{ème} Édition” were bottled in September of 2017 after a 12-month rest in French Oak.

The nose is a comforting message of suaveness somehow remembering both Bordeaux and Tuscany with red and black fruits, dried herbs, and a hint of iron. The mouthfeel is soft, long, and “important” with a reserved elegance. You can sense “good breeding” here, and a wine that will slowly develop and remain valid for about ten years, though it would easily enhance a braised or roasted winter meal tonight!

91 points – Robert Parker’s Wine Advocate.

35.99 / 32.39 for all wine club members

California Wine Lover's

WINE CLUB

January 2019

Do You Smell Your Wine?

2017 ENKIDU 'E' PINOT NOIR – Sonoma County

Grocery store shelves are loaded with products identified as “Pinot Noir,” yet when you observe their color you may wonder how they got so dark. If you happen to sniff them you're surprised at their toasty impact of caramelly vanilla and potent, jammy fruit. When you taste and – especially - **feel** them in your cheeks you're indulged by a thick richness not anticipated from a varietal known for delicate discretion.

Indulged.

That's the problem! Those Pinots have been deliberately “manufactured” to *indulge* the casual cocktail wine drinker. So what if they don't accurately represent the real idea of the varietal? You've had a hard day at work and now, finally, your senses are happily sated. “Call it Pinot or anything else: I like it!”

You like it.

That's the dilemma! What's lost in the industry's eagerness to please is the actual truth of varietal. What you're liking from Meiomi (there, I said it!) has little to do with actual Pinot Noir. Technically they SHOULD identify these fabrications otherwise - but then how would they sell?

It's for wine ambassadors like TWS to drag you out of the “overmade wine” rut and show you a less fabricated, more accurate example of Pinot Noir. What you may miss is the saucy fat of the faked-out versions, but what you gain is honesty, accuracy, and subtlety. – Which all sounds like bullshit; like The Emperor's New Clothes; like a dog-wagging. In a day and a culture where “less is more” is under suspicion and forsaken for “more is more” I will sum up my answer with a question: Do you smell your wine?

“Huh?” you may reply, but it's a simple question and your answer will be telling. I have stood before groups of dozens of wine tasters for whom we have poured world class wines, observing with great frustration that many folks – once served their precious pour – immediately drink the stuff. This is an injustice to the wine, and especially to Pinot Noir where sometimes more than half the pleasure is derived by SMELLING the stuff! I contend that there is more pleasure in this delicate yet more honest Pinot if you appreciate your wine more **comprehensively**; that is, spend some significant time sniffing it! How about indulging your NOSE once in a while?!

My, what a rant! All that and I didn't say a thing about the producer or his wine! Ah, but if you get my point you'll know why we chose this for you – as soon as you start sniffing.

22.99 / 20.69 for Wine Club Members



Winemaker / Proprietor Ed Sbragia.

Ed spent over 30 years at Beringer where before taking on the role of head winemaker he worked under Myron Nightingale - another name to know. Before Myron and wife Alice headed for Beringer they had perfected the technique of inoculating Semillon with the noble rot to make a Chateau d'Yquem-style dessert wine. This happened in the lab of Livermore's Cresta Blanca Winery, where Wente's Arroyo Road facility - and restaurant and golf course – now reside. Yes, a technique developed HERE headed for Napa and was applied to Beringer's famous "Nightingale" bottling. We thought you should know!

The Other Under-Shown Variety

2015 SBRAGIA 'Gino's' ZINFANDEL – Dry Creek Valley

As dramatically explained above, Pinot Noir isn't provided to your club as often as we'd like because we fear the general audience may disregard it as "light". On the other hand, Zinfandel is just as infrequently shown for the opposite reason: Zin has a way of being TOO much of a good thing. To the rescue in this case are two critical, Zin-affecting factors.

First, this is the eponymous label for longtime veteran winemaker Ed Sbragia, who knows a thing or two about delivering flavor with just enough restraint. After all, for decades he headed up the production at Beringer, winning Wine Spectator's Winemaker of the Year award TWICE.

Second, this Zinfandel named for Ed's grandfather Gino is sourced from the Dry Creek Valley region. There is hardly a Zinfandel produced from there – no matter how full in flavor and body – that doesn't also demonstrate structure; a delineated firmness of form. What also helps its cause is the typical inclusion of Carignan and Petite Sirah in Dry Creek Zins, a practice applied to "Gino's". These two additions confer extra color and guts without which Zinfandel's tendency for jammy-ness might overwhelm the palate.

This colorful wine is downright exotic in the nose, transcending Zin's typical fruit with nuances of black pepper, bramble, and tea tree oil. While rich in body, Gino's knows when to stop, putting on the brakes with the right amount of tannic restraint.

We hope you admire this rare submission: \$34 at the winery, 29.99 at Wine.com, and far less at The Wine Steward.

24.99 / 22.49 for all wine club members

The Wine Steward's

Wine Adventurer

WINE CLUB

January 2019

Setting the Mood

2011 FAMILIA MONTAÑA RESERVA – Rioja, Spain

We – and therefore you – are no strangers to Spain's most famous wine region Rioja. Our WineBar and sit-down event menus have often featured its noble Tempranillo-based reds, and Rioja has repeatedly landed in no fewer than four of our six monthly wine clubs, enabled by its broad price range (and that it occasionally happens as white wine). We have also hammered home the fact of Rioja's unique propensity for durability, and that these cellar-worthy reds from can cost far less than age-able Barolo, Bordeaux, or Burgundy. Lay down some good yet affordable Rioja from one of the better vintages and at its uncorking ten years later you'll not be disappointed.

Here is a Rioja younger than old yet older than young, and in a beautiful place of drinkability. Montaña Reserva employs 90% Tempranillo as well as 7% Graciano (for color, lift, and intrigue) and 3% Mazuelo (also known as Carignan, which adds a "bass note").

We could talk about its scent, referencing the usual Rioja descriptors like plum, tobacco, dried cherries, and a nostalgic tinge of damp leather. We could discuss its flavors, pointing out the usual Rioja descriptors like plum, tobacco, dried cherries, and a nostalgic tinge of damp leather.

Or – less typically – we could turn our attention to the less-frequented topic of texture. Yes, let's! This Reserva, at nearly eight years of age, is as much about "feel" as it is about aroma and flavor; maybe even more so. There is BODY, along with a suaveness, a mellowness, a mildness, and an unobtrusiveness at play here that's accommodating and irresistible. With so many other wines we're inspired to identify flavor. With this quintessential Rioja we're wonderfully distracted by a seamless and seemingly timeless textural experience.

Savor it. – Especially with roasted lamb shank!

20.99 / 18.89 for all wine club members



Years later, FINALLY ...

2015 COLLE MASSARI 'Rigoletto' – Montecucco, Tuscany, Italy

I'm bound to be more excited about this offering than you are – until you taste it and then the thrill should even out. About nine years ago I visited this producer on the ONLY trip I've taken to Italy (France and Spain get far more of me). I returned with the intention to show this wine to your club, but its California inventory was surprisingly insufficient. Before long the mystery was solved: Colle Massari's importer – my host on the Italian trip – had gone out of business. For the next several years there was naught but radio silence *per* Colle Massari.

Then, finally, literally last week: This bottle was produced from the bag of a vendor representing a different importer who'd now assumed its representation. It had been so long I had to rub my eyes to be sure I recognized the label, but sure enough: THIS was what I'd tasted and enjoyed in Italy nearly ten years ago. A taste of the new 2015 release brought me right back to the original experience.

And where exactly had I been for that **first** taste? Montecucco is in the Tuscan sub-region known as the Maremma, south of Siena and adjacent to the coast of the Tyrrhenian Sea. Like the Montalcino, Montepulciano, and Chianti regions to its north, Montecucco features the great Tuscan grape Sangiovese. 'Rigoletto' uses 70% of that along with 15% each Montepulciano and Ciliegiolo (I'm pleased to offer pronunciation lessons for that latter variety).

Like so many Sangiovese-based reds, Rigoletto is "medium" in body, preferring a textural effect of energy over enrichment. Compensating for this lighter-than-cocktail-wine palate feel is the abundant fragrance of red fruits (cherries and strawberries) and delicious, food-loving "flow" in the mouth which ends with tannins comprising moist earth and warm nuts. That grippy little farewell suggests you involve protein. *Charcuterie* will work, as will beef or sausage-oriented red sauced pastas.

Rigoletto, it's very nice to see you again!

19.99 / 17.99 for all wine club members

The Wine Steward's

Here n There Whites

WINE CLUB

January 2019

Not Your Everyday Chardonnay!

2016 NOVELLUM CHARDONNAY by DOMAINE LAFAGE – Pay d'Oc, France

Just like the Pirate Code, it's less of a rule and more of a guideline: We don't normally show you Chardonnay. The ubiquitous McVarietal simply isn't the stuff of "club" with so many other white wine adventures to embark on. Vermentino, Furmint, and Gruner Veltliner shouldn't be crowded out by the wine you already know so well!

And yet, for years now I've flirted with the idea of showing you this Novellum Chardonnay. To my nose, tongue, and sense of wonder it goes up and away from "normal" Chardonnay, meaning it transcends and departs from so many notions firmly established in our mutual perspective on of the grape. A delicious novelty is certainly a club qualifier!

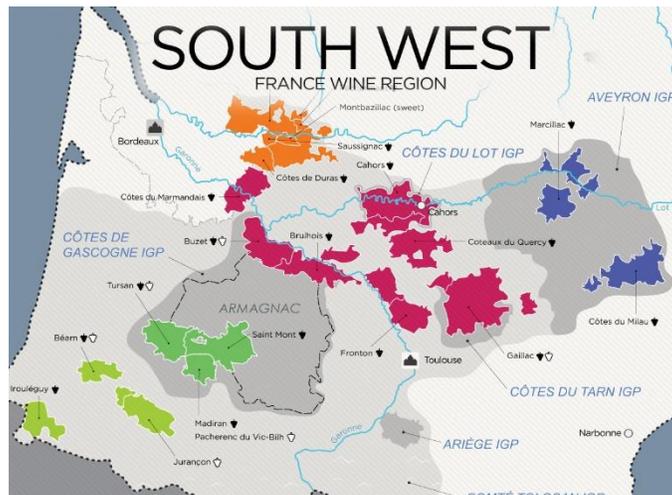
Once the grapes for Novellum were crushed, 100% of the juice headed for stainless steel tanks where a temperature-controlled fermentation assured the preservation of fruit. **Then** it gets a little more interesting: 30% of the new wine heads for French oak barrels for a bit of vanilla-enrichment. The other 70% remains in stainless steel where the lees of another winemaking project concerning Viognier are introduced to the sleeping wine. "Lees?" That's the sediment composed of expired yeast cells that settles to the bottom of every fermentation, whether in a tank or a barrel. Many wines are intentionally removed from their lees, post fermentation. Some wines remain on that creamy substance, as the proximity is meant to add textural character (you can ramp up this effect with *batonnage*, the routine of stirring the lees back into the wine above). THIS Chardonnay, post-fermentation, borrows the lees from a Viognier fermentation. That's weird – and makes perfect sense. Viognier is known for two things: Fragrance and oiliness. If we wanted to enrich good 'ol but predictable Chardonnay with a contribution that wouldn't overwhelm the original idea, hell, bring on some Viognier lees!

Robert Parker's Wine Advocate awards this affordable white no fewer than 92 points, remarking:

"A sensational wine that will compete with wines five times the price, the 2016 Novellum Chardonnay is the real deal and actually reminded me of a Chardonnay from Mark Aubert in California's Sonoma County. White peach, crushed rocks, spice and brioche notes all emerge from this medium to full-bodied Chardonnay that has depth, layered texture and length. Buy it."

Did anyone just read that?!

13.99 / 12.59 for all wine club members



I Love This Wine

2017 HAUT-MARIN ‘Cuvée Marine’ – Cotes de Gasgogne, France

Perhaps this is an odd placement for the dead of winter. I can imagine many a picnic and pool party including endless, ice-cold splashings of this lively, heat-beating white. Yet there’s a place for it right now, even if you haul it up to the chilly Sierras. Like the Loire Valley Sauvignon Blanc we offered last month, this brisk white wonderfully matches the refreshing “shock” of snowball-square-in-the-face!

We’re taking you to France, and south of that country’s more famous region of Bordeaux. This is Gascony, or “Gascogne,” as the French would have it. The vast tracts of vines here were originally destined for Armagnac production. Many producers have since diversified to still, unfortified winemaking and that’s where this wine comes in.

‘Cuvée Marine’ indicates the most important ingredient: The dirt of the place, replete with fossilized marine life. That’s right, we’re prioritizing site over specific grape varieties for once, because it matters at least as much! If your vineyard happens in clay or in limestone or in slate or in decomposed granite those things are as carefully considered by the landowner as what particular grape he/she chooses to plant there. What we’ve observed from wines like Chablis and other great wine places with an ancient “marine” influence is an extra amount of briny nerve. Coincidentally or conveniently or naturally, wines borne from ancient seabed such as ‘Cuvée Marine’ perform brilliantly with (less ancient) seafood of all kinds.

The other ingredients contributing here? The grape varieties Colombard, Sauvignon Blanc, and Gros Manseng are frequent contributors to Gascogne Blanc.

Smell a celebration of dancing fruit unable to remain on the ground. Taste all things citrus, over and over again. Taste again. And again. Remarkably for a wine of this nice low price, the effect ENDURES.

11.99 / 10.79 for fun-loving wine club members

The Wine Steward's

Tuesday Night

WINE CLUB

January 2019

Seriously Good

2015 DUAS QUINTAS by RAMOS PINTO – Douro, Portugal

It took a lot of haggling to get this to a wholesale price low enough to accommodate your club's budget, but that's what we try to do all the time on your behalf.

Here once again is a wine perhaps TOO serious for your club, following a theme established by some recent Rhone wine submissions. What I mean by that: Duas Quintas ("2 Vineyards") deserves careful consideration above and beyond the typical "Tuesday Night" application of concern. This wine isn't careless. This wine should give you pause!

Its color insists upon your more careful attention with a striking, youthful maroon/purple hue. Now smell it, breathing deeply: A myriad of good things happen. Wet stone and damp, freshly-turned earth are immediately obvious, then violets, jammy blackberry fruit, and herbs like lavender and thyme intrude. Note that this dry wine comes from the land of "real" Port and uses the same varieties (Touriga Nacional and Touriga Franca are the main components). If you've ever smelled good Ruby Port you'll recognize a resemblance. Now for a sip. Taste this wine AND feel it. The signature effect of the Douro Valley – an earthy sense of dryness – is accurately displayed, and then comes the shiny fruit to happily that more stoic effect. Your tongue should be slightly disturbed yet somewhat gratified, and anyone who likes good food will turn to the cookbook's section on roasting and braising meats. Yes, this is brilliant FOOD WINE and is best honored in that capacity.

We offer two more bits of data meant to wine you over to 2015 Duas Quintas:

90 Points from Robert Parker's Wine Advocate:

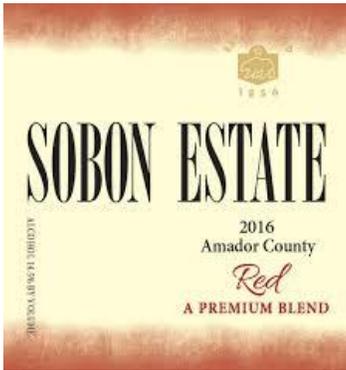
"... has a wonderfully fresh feel that lifts intensely flavorful fruit . . . beautifully supported by acidity ... drink date 2017-2028"

90 Points from Wine Spectator:

"This fresh, full-bodied red shows focus, with firm, integrated tannins guiding the plum, wild raspberry, and sandalwood flavors underscored by graphite, pepper, and spice accents. Drink now through 2023."

Like I said: Serious.

14.99 / 13.49 for wine club members



Another Trip to the Gold Country

2016 SOBON ESTATE RED 'A Premium Blend' – Amador County

One of our favorite customers has relocated to the Sierra Foothills - a not-unfamiliar story - yet remains faithful to The Wine Steward. When I'm going to be in Rob and Lisa's neck of the woods I'm to let them know in case they need a wine drop. That's exactly what happened just yesterday, and once a case of their favorite Chardonnays was safely delivered to their new Nevada City digs I headed south on Highway 49 for yet another Gold Country destination: To Sobon for your club wine.

As familiar as I am with the region (Mom grew up in Sutter Creek) I had no idea that traversing it from Nevada City to Sobon's home of Plymouth would take nearly two hours. The payoff was the scenery, a lot of reminiscing, and a nice "pick-up only" wholesale price for your club wine.

I made the same trip for this same wine for your club two years and two vintages back. That "Red" was so admired by our membership that we asked Tom Quinn of Sobon to show us the 2016. Tom married into the winery's family and became their sales guy; the face on the Sobon name to The Wine Steward, so to speak. Out in the field he's an energetic advocate for the brand, but he also gets to sit in on the pre-bottling blending trials back at the winery itself. He's especially pleased with his contribution to this particular vintage of Sobon's 'Premium Red,' where he voted against the usual inclusion of Barbera this time around. He feels the omission makes a big difference for this 30% Syrah, 30% Zinfandel, 30% Cabernet Sauvignon, and 10% Petite Sirah.

I agree. The wine is a little more calm, less racy than its predecessor. The warmth of the Shenandoah Valley (in Amador County) is demonstrated by ultra-ripe strawberries and plums. Leather, tobacco, allspice, and citrus peel also contribute. As potent as these heat-induced flavors may be, there is a litheness of balance – a vibrancy - happening here as well. Your un-numbered tongue remains slightly startled and thereby engaged.

The Sobon folks report that a variety of Asian dishes work with this flavorful blend, including teriyaki chicken, moo shoo pork, and Peking duck. I'd say anything grilled will also work in a pinch – especially ribs!

12.99 / 11.69 for wine club members