

*Happy New Year to all beloved wine club members, new and veteran.
You represent the vanguard of our resistance against the chain and warehouse stores.
We appreciate all you do for us, including buying more of the wines you love!*

Jim and da Stewards

The Wine Steward's

RED COLLECTOR

WINE CLUB

January 2020

Intense, delicious darkness . . .

2017 JAX CABERNET SAUVIGNON – Napa Valley

Kirk Venge, borne of another great Napa Valley winemaker Nils Venge, made you this wine. So did a grape called Cabernet. 100% of that landed in this bottle, with no help from usual suspects Merlot, Cabernet Franc, and so on. What also contributes to the project is location. We are visiting the far northern part of the Napa Valley – Calistoga - where a certain devastating fire started right at harvest time. Thankfully, most of Napa's fruit had been picked and put to bed, out of harms way. By the smell of it, so had the grapes for this Cabernet; I smell no smoke taint. I smell a whole lotta stuff I'd enjoy by the fireplace, however!

The point of this wine . . . the usefulness, that is . . . certainly accommodates "couch" and "hearth" as much as it might be applied to prime rib or lamb chops. Upon smelling it, you'll recognize a style for which Venge and his sire are famous: Full-throttle, no-holds-barred monster movie quality fruit power. Leather; wet and sweet. Jerky; soft and salty. Compote, of some kind of haunting, concentrated fruit or another. Graphite ("Huh??") also finds a place in your crowded nostrils to provide a very necessary, alternatively relieving sense of lift.

On the palate, we get undisputed gratification. I challenge you: Just try not to be gratified. If you're embarrassed about looking gratified, take your glass into the bedroom closet, close the door behind you, and indulge. It's okay; this is big wine: No more, no less. We expect more complexity from something leaner, more elegantly fluent in the language of *herbes* and *cassis* and *pain grille* (actually, there's some of that in here). Let's gulp - with a modicum of caution - a delicious, big-ass, mo-fo of a Cabernet and save the *frou-frou* for another day.

51.99 / 46.79 for all wine club members



Anna Monticelli

A TWS First . . .

2017 ILARIA MALBEC – Napa Valley

I believe this is the first-ever provision of a Malbec to your club (someone with more remaining brain cells may correct me). The grape is one of the five main red “Bordeaux varieties,” though that French region actually has very little in the ground. More Malbec happens further south in Cahors, a wine region whose bottlings feature 90% to 100% of the variety. Of course, these places are nudged out of renown by more recently emerging Argentina as *the* world power of Malbec. You can spend eight bucks for a decent (though rarely undoctored) Argentine example and – thanks to Paul Hobbs and Laura Catena, among others – alternatively arrange financing for Malbec magnificence at over \$200.

With Argentina’s “ownership” of the varietal, the Napa Valley historically utilizes Malbec as only a bit player; a supporter of Cabernet Sauvignon. Finding a varietal version from here is very unusual but it happens now, at long last. Ilaria is the small-production project of Anna Monticelli. Her name may not be as familiar as those of Napa rock star winemakers Heidi Barrett or Thomas Rivers Brown, but her resumé deserves admiration. She worked at Chateau Cheval Blanc during its 100-point wine-producing harvest of Vintage 2000. She also held the assistant winemaking reins at Bryant Family for several years. Nowadays she is enlisted by Piña for the crafting of their small-lot wines.

We have “clubbed” Anna’s Ilaria Cabernet Sauvignon on at least three occasions, unaware until just last month that she also makes a little Malbec (232 cases in 2017). Grown mostly in Napa’s southeast subregion of Coombsville and proudly 100% varietal, the wine spent 22 months in French oak barrels, 50% of which were new.

Now, a little secret about Malbec and Yours Truly: We rarely get along. Too many varietal examples of the grape are acidic-ly “green” to my nose and mouth. Anticipating a more comforting, New World-style drink from such a dark wine, my senses are instead upset by clanging nerve. This transcendent example from Anna successfully combines Malbec’s propensity for “dark refreshment” with just enough “padding” of ripe fruit richness to attract me. Now, with all the juicy benevolence a 15% alcohol Napa red can provide, I’m actually grateful for the countering crunch of Malbec’s acidity. Without that sense of “lift” my palate would too quickly tire of such dark gratification.

We hope you enjoy this rarity . . . and please don’t tell anyone what I usually think of Malbec!!

41.99 / 37.79 for all wine club members

The Wine Steward's

World Class

WINE CLUB

January 2020

The Black Wine is BACK

2016 CASA SILVA 'S38' CABERNET SAUVIGNON – Los Lingues, Colchagua Valley, Chile

Encore. Repeat offender. Same wine, new vintage. – And that's okay, when greatness for the price is identified and replicated the next year 'round. – Not that it always works the next year. Wine is persnickety. Unlike the liquor industry's consistent products you can brew and bottle up all year long (beer, gin, vodka, tequila), wine is very inconveniently subject to Mother Nature's mandate of VINTAGE. No two wines are alike, even from the same producer. - Even from the same particular plot from the same producer. VINTAGE is the consistent VARIABLE, making this wine buyer's job a full-of surprises joy and / or a true pain in the ass.

'S38' erupted onto our Wine Steward scene only last year; a 100% Cabernet Sauvignon from one designated parcel belonging to the thoughtful Chilean producer Casa Silva. I bought that wine for your club because its effect of nearly-creamy dark fruit and compelling, oh-so-Chilean tarry / smoky / roasted elements screamed "CLUB!" It was a wonderfully decadent "Mea Culpa" for all the spare, ethereal, and evasive European reds we'd been bringing you.

Can lightning strike twice? Never, not with wine; not precisely. Here comes Casa Silva's next example of S38, named for a block of grapevines the winery considers special enough for a single bottling (only 250 cases of this come to the United States). This 2016 follow-up to last year's provision is a little different. If it wasn't, I'd be suspicious of winery intervention (some producers fabricate and manipulate like crazy to give you SAMENESS, regardless of vintage). This wine with the same name, same fruit source, and same winemaking ideal remains firmly, undeniably, resolutely "club worthy" in quality. In style it departs ever-so-slightly from "hedonism" toward "classicism".

The first time you longtime members savored this, the wine was more frontal; gratuitous with richer textures, a skosh more ripeness. This time there is absolutely no departure from the first impression of "Wow, that's dark!" and "Man, that's fragrant!" Nor is there any difference in, or departure from, the exotic flavor spectrum of roasted pepper, cassis, black cherry, and bitter espresso. What's different this time is the framing; the structure. There's more this time. This slightly less "nummy-num" red wants to say more later. It wants to last longer. It is built that way, this vintage. It is what happened in one particular block of 100% Cabernet Sauvignon vines in Vintage 2016.

I celebrate that. You are welcome to join me.

35.99 / 32.39 for all wine club members



Producers of a ‘Curmudgeon’ make a Friendlier Version
2017 CADET de La BEGUDE – IGP Méditerranée, France

We are headed to Bandol, a Southern French region uphill from the Mediterranean Sea. Local exponents of this hitherto unfamiliar place are Berkeley importer Kermit Lynch and Restaurateur Alice Waters, who have each in their own way placed before you bottles of Domaine Tempier Bandol (among others brands). This is a place devoted not entirely, but especially to the Mourvèdre grape variety; one of the wine world’s only places with that emphasis.

To call a red wine “Bandol” on the label one must grow the grapes within the region and use a minimum of 50% Mourvèdre in the blend. Most producers here prefer to use at least 75% of that local icon, as does the Tari Family at Domaine de la Begude. Their Bandol is wonderfully typical; grumpy in its youth with misbehaving tannins and a firm refusal to crack a smile of fruit. You must age it for some years to “civilize” the wine.

Impatient for something more ready to drink (tonight!), Famille Tari also renders “Cadet de la Begude,” a wine better-behaved in its youth, promising to “be good” (sorry, I had to). This utilizes equal parts of Mourvèdre, Grenache, and Cinsault. This “*cepage*” (list of grape ingredients) disqualifies it from being called “Bandol,” though the grapes are all grown there, 1300 feet above sea level with a splendid view of the sea itself. The concession for a more ready-to-drink wine is the use of the less place-specific term ‘IGP Méditerranée.’ “IGP” stands for “Indication Géographique Protégée,” the E.U.-accommodating term taking the place of the older “Vin de Pays” appellation.

However mundane the placename, the wine compensates with authentic Southern French charm. It is rich in color, redolent with lavender and cherries, and downright delicious with spice and black fruits. A delicate memory of chocolate follows, and so should a good grilled meal!

29.99 / 26.99 for all wine club members

The Wine Steward's

CALIFORNIA

(West Coast)

WINE CLUB

January 2020

Good Behavior

2017 GUNDLACH BUNDSCHU 'Mountain Cuvée' – Sonoma County

So, what do you want? The ingredient list? Fine, here it is: 74% Merlot, 7% Cabernet Sauvignon, 7% Cabernet Franc, 7% Petit Verdot, and 5% Malbec; a simple cut-and-paste from the good ol' winery website. In other words, you could have looked THERE, right?

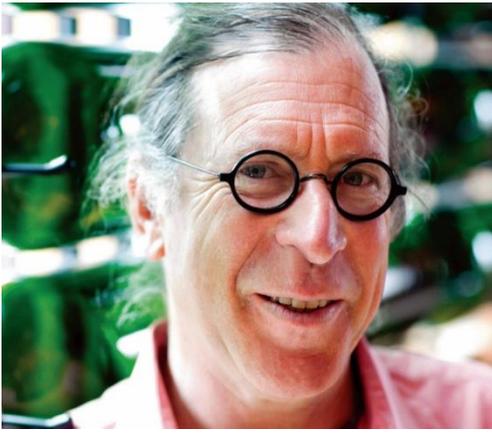
That's useful data, WIDELY AVAILABLE data. So what am I good for? Why am I keyboarding while my taco-bound flank steak marinates? I who write these notes and you who read them are in for something beyond the tech-sheet-provided data. We're looking beneath and beyond those (not always accurate) facts and figures to find the real idea of the wine before us. Basically, I'm trying to validate my job here, so please play along.

Let's set the stage as we pull the cork by telling or reminding you Gundlach Bundschu wine labels have represented not just one, but three centuries. Tucked against the hills east of downtown Sonoma, this producer has observed a lot of wine trends and – to my palate – resisted hopping onto their various bandwagons. This is one of those old-timers sticking to its stylistic guns.

And so, Gundlach Bundschu's 'Mountain Cuvée' has been poured for Yours Truly year after year, always fulfilling my anticipation of a "conservatively-made" red. Every time, the color is forebodingly dark. The nose says as much about freshly-turned, damp, loamy earth as it does about blackberries and dried herbs. The flavors in the mouth speak eloquently but moderately of black cherries and plums, and – most predictably – these flavors are FRAMED, RESTRAINED, and CONTAINED by a very deliberate and intentional acid / tannin structure. I didn't go to Catholic school. Those who did might remember a certain, rather "administrative" nun upon tasting this wine. I DID attend US Marine Corps boot camp, so perhaps the little bit of "discipline" inflicted here makes particular sense to me.

But let's say this wine is for all of us at this time of year. Some of you are "going without" all January long. Go for it. For the rest of you, The Wine Steward recommends this deliciously disciplinary wine to start the new year on a strait-laced, back-to-good-wine-basics note. These are dark, cold, and often-rainy nights; perfect for a brooding yet flavorful Bordeaux-style blend and the appropriate meal to go along. Your food should be rich with protein and savory flavors, incorporating onions, root vegetables, mushrooms, and the like. Now, behave yourself.

19.99 / 17.99 for all wine club members



A Wistful Moment

2018 BONNY DOON 'Le Cigare Volant' – Monterey County

This is the 35th expression of Winemaker Randall Graham's venerable Rhone-style blend. – And there is so much more to say than that.

My memories of Bonny Doon include driving north from Aptos (during our family's week in a vacation rental), turning east from Bonny Doon Beach (purported to be clothing optional), and quickly gaining nearly a thousand feet of elevation before arriving at a solitary tasting room. That remote mecca for good and unusual wines is long gone. So are those beach house days.

I recall attending the popular Rhone Rangers event at Fort Mason – a grand affair – and jostling to reach the table where costumed Bonny Doon staff members were pouring Randall's wines. They no longer hold that event; not there, at least.

I remember Randall himself visiting The Wine Steward on several occasions to show us his latest, and once to pour those for WineBar visitors. I hope we'll see him again.

Then there was the newsflash that Bonny Doon was transplanting to our own Livermore Valley, an event sure to help our region's stature and progress toward better wine quality. Just abruptly came the dismaying news it wouldn't happen after all.

Two weeks ago I tasted this wine, loved it, learned the price, and instantly committed it to your club. A week later came the latest Bonny Doon newsflash: Randall Graham has just sold his winery.

So, with many personal memories of this one producer, and as yet another chapter of its story ends, I present you with the 35th vintage of Le Cigare Volant. Its name remembers the hilarious but true law enacted in Chateauneuf-du-Pape forbidding the landing of flying saucers in its vineyards. To the French, a flying saucer is a "flying cigar," hence "Cigare Volant." The law remains in place to this day, and has never been violated, or so we're told.

In the past, this was Bonny Doon's more expensive flagship wine. With its former inclusion of Mourvèdre it was a sturdier, more ageworthy wine, but hard to embrace in its youth. This 2018 - utilizing 52% Grenache, 35% Cinsault, and 13% Syrah - marks a style (and dramatic price) shift. This Cigare is already smokin'! Approach it as you might a fully-ripe California Pinot Noir to appreciate its floral / fresh-fruited / incensed scents, to admire its juicy cherry / dried herb / cranberry flavors, and to salivate and derive an appetite from the snappy, nervy finish.

This was awarded 93 points by Wine Enthusiast Magazine, which also positioned it at #19 on their Top 100 Wines of 2019 list. Randall would say that doesn't matter to him, but that original Rhone Ranger says a lot of things . . .

21.99 / 19.79 for all wine club members

The Wine Steward's

Wine Adventurer's

WINE CLUB

January 2020



In the Spirit of Brunello

2018 BRUNELLI 'Poggio Apricale' – Toscana, Italy

This might be the third submission of this wine to your club (a different vintage and therefore a different wine each time, of course). Its repeat performance is due to its dependability of providing one basic impression to your senses: TUSCANY.

Tuscany is the beguiling region where lunches last for hours, cypress-lined country roads to old stone castles are never conveniently straight, and red wine needn't be huge in color or mass to be profound. I'm about to elaborate on these oh-so-Tuscan truths at our upcoming Italian Wine Event (February 5, rsvp-only) but this wine happens in the meantime, hopefully calibrating your palate.

This uses Tuscany's "noble" grape Sangiovese, for the most part. 85% of Poggio Apricale consists of "The Blood of Jove," as the grape name implies. Sangiovese vibrantly declares "redness" with a high soprano voice. It bears NO resemblance to Cabernet Sauvignon and doesn't try to. Sangiovese is best known in volume - by a whole glass, not just a taste - and with food (go figure: It's Italy's quintessential grape).

This particular wine comes from Montalcino. Heard of it? That's where famed, \$60-and-up Brunello di Montalcino comes from. This producer makes that great wine, and we often carry it. It costs more because Brunelli's older vines are committed to the project, and it spends years, not months, mellowing away in the cellars. Here's your chance to savor "Baby Brunello," costing far less but still insisting - like some proud Italian Mama - that you sit down and pay attention . . . for at least two hours with a great meal. THAT'S how to know this wine, inconveniently and wonderfully.

It grew on you last year. It will again.

18.99 / 17.09 for all wine club members



The Rise of the Languedoc

2018 CHATEAU de MUS – Languedoc, France

This wine doesn't get out much; an under-the-radar, small production goodie that we are honored to exclusively represent in California (I believe). The 2018 is our second provision of Chateau de Mus.

The Languedoc Region of France is historically known for providing that country with its jug wines, often label-less and featuring naught but the alcohol content for advertisement. That was the general expectation for this huge swath of land along the Mediterranean, and therefore the main provision. Recently and gradually, however, a respect for what the Languedoc has to offer the thoughtful winemaker – a terrific climate, myriad soil types to choose from, and alluringly low land prices – has caused an attitude of opportunism. Very good wine can be made here and offer outstanding value.

Chateau de Mus, a venerable wine site acquired by its current owners just fifteen years ago, is the perfect example of this new level of respect. A location laden with archeological evidence from several ancient eras now also hosts a modern winery where fruit is treated with more care than ever before, *via* greater attention to bacteria-inhibiting cleanliness, temperature control to preserve fruit flavors, and oxidation prevention. These things didn't used to matter so much in the Old World's rustic, backwater locations. Now, they add up to a wine like Chateau de Mus "Gold Label."

Here is 70% Syrah, 20% Grenache, and 10% Mourvèdre; three Southern French "usual suspects." The Syrah and Mourvèdre are aged in neutral-flavored (used) casks, but the Grenache is kept in stainless steel tanks of much larger capacities. This latter treatment happens with the awareness that Grenache easily oxidizes in smaller volumes and more air-permeating settings, just one indication of the new Languedoc appreciation for what it has, and what can be achieved with a little respect. While some huge-production wines of the area remain mundane or awkwardly flavored, or rustically flawed, we present a Languedoc red with a finesse and elegance any historically-respected region of Europe would be proud to call its own. At present, it is fairly "coy" with its black fruits, spice, licorice, and herb scents and flavors, and you can sense the "tighter" textural feel of a wine destined to declare more later. Indeed, this quietly gratifying wine is built to last for a few years; another attribute not traditionally anticipated from the place once considered France's "wine lake."

This uniquely good, virtually impossible-to-find wine that's full of surprises epitomizes The Wine Steward's reason for being. We hope you will exploit us!

24.99 / 22.49 for all wine club members

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

January 2020

"Who?" "What??" "Where???"

CANTINA di GAMBELLARA VINO SPUMANTE BRUT – Lessini Durello

Some of the best wine values seem to happen from producers and places who have no sense of marketing nor – apparently – an awareness of how good their wine is. The bottle of bubbly we're putting before you certainly LOOKS attractive, so a good label designer was definitely employed. – But what's the winery name? Is it "Lessini" or "Durello" - the two most boldly-declared terms on the bottle front – or???

It turns out this is the production of a cooperative, a winery dozens (actually, *hundreds*, in this case) of small local growers pool their resources to own and operate, each being rewarded per the amount and quality of the fruit contributed. Such places often have no marketing departments, saving *you* money and leaving *me* to tell you: The name of this operation is "Cantina di Gambellara." They are located in Vicenza, within the general area of the Veneto in northeast Italy.

As is common on European wine labels, those big bold letters actually represent the region, Lessini Durello. As is not uncommon on Italian wine labels, the name of the grape is incorporated into the wine region name. You are drinking a wine made entirely of the Durella grape. Why the difference in spelling? I don't know. Go to Venice, head out to the Veneto's vineyards, and ask around. You can tell us when you get back.

In the meantime, rejoice in this beautiful, charming, delicious, endearing, delicious, frothy, delicious bottle of joy. Made like its neighbor Prosecco with the "Charmat" method (the second fermentation more inexpensively happening in large tanks rather than individual bottles), this gives that neighbor a run for its money. In the nose I sense lime leaves and a delicate creaminess of white stone fruit. The palate is graciously round, with the implication of delicate sweetness . . . more creaminess is to be savored here. The wine is designated as "Brut," implying dryness, but that gentle creamy thang has you wondering, but not really worrying: This is phenomenal, frothy fun.

Embrace value where it happens, however unlikely the source

13.99 / 12.59 for all wine club members

Bringing it home . . .

2017 ENKIDU 'E' SAUVIGNON BLANC – Sonoma County

Across The Pond and well up France's longest river, the Loire, a certain wine is made from Sauvignon Blanc. So are thousands of others along the way, but Didier Dagueneau pushed more buttons and caused a stir. His wine – to badly abbreviate – corralled terroir-driven fruit and gave it a special treatment. Dagueneau is gone now, too soon, but his namesake wine is still rendered by reverent disciples . . . and emulated by thoughtful Sauvignon Blanc producers the world over.

Not-as-romantically put: Sauvignon Blanc is one of the wine world's McVarietals. That is, its occurrence is geographically ubiquitous. Places like Bordeaux and the Loire Valley have grown it for centuries. Other enterprising regions newer to the wine map are including it on their "Let's plant it and see what happens!" list for at least two attractive reasons: Sauvignon Blanc can provide a pretty big crop without forsaking varietal identity . . . and you've heard of Sauvignon Blanc. Now let's speak more admiringly of this grape. We like it for its value. You can get good, identifiable Sauvignon Blanc for a sweet price. We like it for its raciness. On the world's wine stage it usually plays opposite to richer Chardonnay, in a good way. We like it for its ability to say a slightly (sometimes dramatically) different thing per where it's grown. Considering this, we could provide your club with nothing but Sauvignon Blanc for six months straight and never run low on uniqueness. Northern Italy, New Zealand, Sancerre, South Africa, Chile . . . They all apply their tweaks on the type. – Then there's the winemaker's options of treatment, but we'll get to that in a minute.

We've recently provided a Sauvignon Blanc-based wine from Bordeaux to your club. Earlier in 2019 you were given TWO different examples from New Zealand. Now let's come home to hand you a Sauvignon Blanc grown and made two hours' drive from our store, in Sonoma County. The small and thoughtful producer Enkidu assembles this from grapes of several Sonoma vineyards, but they point out two that prevail in effect. One plot located high above the Dry Creek Valley provides the Musqué clone of Sauvignon Blanc, which is pungently fragrant per its name, and also contributes zingy nerve. Another Sonoma Valley vineyard is valued for its richer stone fruit contribution. Then there is this winemaker's decision to amplify the textural feel with barrel fermentation. Twenty years ago California producers would have called that a no-no: "Chardonnay goes in barrels. Sauvignon Blanc's rightful place is the stainless steel tank!" Whereas the fruit-preserving, temperature-controlled tank remains the varietal's most popular resting place, small-production examples (250 cases in this case) might see concrete eggs or barrels instead. Since each vessel yields a different effect, some producers now apply all three to one Sauvignon Blanc! While some of this Enkidu saw some tank fermentation, a larger component headed for USED (no longer flavored) barrels. The sum of the parts – different vineyards plus treatment – is a decidedly "plump" example of a wine often anticipated to be more vibrant. There is no shortage of "zing," but those mangos and passionfruits are richly conferred. If you've had a Dagueneau Pouilly-Fumé you might connect this to that (aside from what you paid for Dagueneau): Nerve . . . plus cushion. Considering that, Enkidu is "beyond" hot day sipping wine. It is more of a cocktail wine, meaning it has a richness appealing even to the Chardonnay drinker. – But you'd really honor it with food: Think seafood. - And how is seafood's leaner effect enhanced? With butter and / or grilling, a bit like adding a barrel treatment to inherently zingy Sauvignon Blanc!

18.99 / 17.09 for all wine club members

The Wine Steward's

Tuesday Night

WINE CLUB

January 2020

Worth a detour, once again . . .

2017 SOBON ESTATE 'A Premium Blend' – Amador County

“Do whatcha gotta do”: This wine got here in my car to save on freight and get your price right. A trip from Truckee to Pleasanton included a long detour, one I was happy to take – once again.

Many of you have discovered Amador County's Shenandoah Valley as a not-far-from-Sacramento wine place that's fun to visit. This Sierra Foothills region is in what we call California's 'Gold Country.' 1849 was the year of the big discovery, remembered by a highway traversing it, and a certain football team. It's a rare thing these days: A place fully devoted to viticulture . . . and a few flocks of sheep. No shopping outlets. No big box stores.

A producer subsisting here longer than most, Sobon Estate, made you this wine - again. My personal attachment to this area inspired another trip to drive this wine from there to you. My mom grew up in nearby Sutter Creek, where I've spent many a Christmas and several graveside gatherings. The place and its surroundings are a geographical marker on my heart. To keep participating with that place from afar – even with this bottle – might mean more to me than it ever will to you.

So, let's talk about the wine itself. This is the second or third provision of the simply-named Sobon Estate Red we've given your club. It comes entirely from Amador County – not from Lodi, not from Paso Robles, and not from anywhere else in California's bargain wine melting pot – and consists of 40% Malbec, 15% Petite Sirah, 15% Tannat, 15% Zinfandel, 8% Syrah, and 7% Barbera. Its tiny 408-case production insists: I am a REAL wine.

In the nose there is the nostalgic dampness of tobacco, the warmth of stewed plums, and the vibration of candied orange peel. I'm suddenly in the mood for Peking duck. On the palate, the simultaneous senses of gratifying “sauce” and activating “citricity” (don't drink and type, my friends) team up to provide your palate with love and angst. What's the normal human reaction to love and angst? Sometimes, a just-as-powerful appetite. As sustaining as this fully ripe blend is on its own, it fully welcomes food – especially because of that nervy acidity persisting within the wrapping of fruit ripeness.

This has been a bestseller for The Wine Steward for at least three vintages now. I do not wonder why.

13.99 / 12.59 for all wine club members

A lot of wine, in every way . . .

2018 BABYLON'S PEAK SHIRAZ – South Africa

I'd bore you death by describing how many times I've tasted and immediately dismissed inexpensive wine samples from South Africa. At the same time, you should know we've been ever-so-hopefully tasting one submission after another, hoping there might someday be a surprise; a wine forsaking funk and delivering more than-expected value.

You're looking at it.

Shiraz is the same as Syrah. South Africa and Australia are fond of the former term. What's more important to know about this grape that happens all over the world is its wonderful / confusing way of making a very different wine based on where it's grown. If you plant Syrah / Shiraz in a hot place like Australia's Barossa Valley or California's Paso Robles AVA you're anticipating a rich, jammy red. A beckoning scent of hot pie on the windowsill is part of deal. The mouth-filling textures seal the deal.

Grow Syrah / Shiraz in a cooler place such as its Northern Rhone birthplace and you're willingly forsaking the sexy, cheek-filling textures for exotic scents and flavors. Cool-climate Syrah is more texturally linear, more fragrantly exotic. It might be no "bigger" than Pinot Noir in size, yet it fascinates the wine lover who spends more time smelling his or her wine.

Syrah / Shiraz Location #3: In my tasting experiences of this varietal I've found there to be a rare, wonderful "in-between" style location. Monterey County's Santa Lucia Highlands, Santa Barbara's Los Alamos, and San Antonio, Chile can achieve a certain beautiful version. It's happening HERE in this particular corner of South Africa as well: A beautiful "fusion" of Syrah's capabilities. Resplendent, intense color. Concentrated scents of blackberries, blueberries, tar, and dried dates. Jammy fruit on the palate, accompanied by a textural richness implying a more expensive wine. It wonders if you eat grilled lamb chops. It hopes so, because it would like to sing in that duet.

This wine kills it. I'm happy surprised and proud to have found it for you.

13.99 / 12.59 for all wine club members

