

THE RED COLLECTOR

WINE CLUB

July 2019

Seven Months Later?!

2016 ILLARIA CABERNET SAUVIGNON – Napa Valley

It was only last December when the 2015 vintage of this delicious Cab was landing in your club bag. The provision of its 2016 iteration just 7 months later indicates Napa's 2015 dilemma; that was a terrific vintage but very short in supply, the last of three drought years when Mother Nature declared, "That's it! That's all you're getting!" Thus, this 2016 is happening on the market a little sooner than usual.

"2016 already?" Don't fret. I have yet to taste a 2016 Cab that wasn't already appealing in its youth. While one shade darker in color than the typical, sappy 2015, 2016's have lots of "sauce" to go along with their violet / blue-fruited message. In one word, 2016s are DELICIOUS.

This our fourth club submission of Illaria Cabernet. The first was the 2011, a great success in a very challenging vintage. The next was the 2013, from a year when it was pretty hard to screw up your Napa Cab. Then came the 2015, and now this. Like the Salvestrin of last month, Illaria has become a small producer firmly fixed on our radar, having established its reliability at a nice price ("nice" for Napa Cab, that is!).

Winemaker/Proprietor Anna Monticelli did the UC Davis thing with her final year happening offsite at the Sorbonne University in Paris. Then came her 2000 vintage stint at Chateau Cheval Blanc followed by assistant winemaking gigs at Napa's Seavey and Bryant Family wineries. Nowadays she's Piña's winemaker, and under that roof her own Illaria project happens.

This 2016 of which 320 cases were made utilizes 77% Cabernet Sauvignon and 23% Merlot. The sub-appellations of Atlas Peak and Saint Helena were both sourced. Robert Parker's Wine Advocate gives it a 93-point rating, as does Jeb Dunnuck (formerly of Wine Advocate) with his own publication. While former vintages of this Cabernet have been admirably dark, this 2016 is the most "happily" dark. Black and blue fruits abound, happening generously yet intelligently in the nose and on the palate with the coolness of graphite, a welcome "check" to the reckless flavor delivery. This is an endearing Cab, useful now depending on your tannin tolerance and the rareness of your ribeye; extremely durable for later use as well. It should hang onto its fruit while softening up for the next 7-8 years. Again.

55.49 / 49.94 for All Wine Club Members



At Sequoia Grove from the early '80's until just last harvest, Michael's now "all-in" for Trujillo Winery.

The Essence of WINE SHOP . . .

2016 MADELYN CABERNET SAUVIGNON – Napa Valley

Check out the historical timeline on Sequoia Grove Winery's website and you'll see that Michael Trujillo, just relocated from Colorado and rather untried in the industry, came aboard as assistant winemaker in 1981. Just last harvest (2018), Michael finally resigned from his position as Director of Winemaking and President of Sequoia Grove in order to commit entirely to his own "Trujillo" wine brand. Like Ted Edwards of Freemark Abbey, Michael Trujillo is a rare example of long-term commitment!

Michael intends to grow his namesake winery to a 2,000 case production and no more than that, across six or so different bottlings. The top-of-the-pyramid "Trujillo" wines are more expensive and durable. The "Madelyn" label named for his daughter is committed to more ready-to-drink offerings. This Madelyn Cabernet, certainly drinkable OR age-able, is at the top of that respective pyramid.

Most of its 348-case production will be sold through Trujillo's tasting room itself, and our hearing of it happened mostly by accident. Our ability to actually afford it is due entirely to the forbearing partnership of Michael Trujillo himself, who provided an attractive-enough-for-club-budget wholesale price. He's visited The Wine Steward, discovering we'd be authentic advocates for his wine if he couldn't be representing it himself in the tasting room.

Michael's *modus operandi* with Cabernet is to source not one, but several Napa Valley places for one blend meant to portray the attributes of each. For Madelyn he went to the mountains for structure and durability, and to the valley floor for easygoing irresistibility. This is 78% Cabernet Sauvignon, 9% Petite Sirah, 6% Merlot, 4% Malbec, and 3% Petit Verdot which saw a 27-months in (70% new) French oak barrels.

Delicious now but age-able for at least 5-7 years, we recommend you taste and assess your club bottle NOW. Enjoy the rich, people-pleasing, true-to-place effect here. THEN, help us: The Wine Steward bought several more cases than necessary to accommodate Michael's deal price. We think enough of you will come back for more to justify this partnership between two small businesses and one great winemaker.

Finally, Michael would like you to know of an upcoming event at the winery itself, a Wine and Tapas Festival with Wines by Trujillo, Tapas by local Chef David Verzello, and Music by local musician Justin Diaz. This happens next Saturday, 7-20 from 1-4pm at 661 Main St. St. Helena, CA 94574. Tickets are \$75 for non members, \$50 for members of Trujillo. You can buy tickets directly through the tasting room at 707-965-2946 or online at <https://trujillowinesandtapas2019.eventbrite.com>

54.99 / 49.49 for wine club members

The Wine Steward's

World Class

WINE CLUB

July 2019

A Rare Library Provision

2005 MALVIRA 'San Michele' – Barbera d'Alba Superiore, Piemonte, Italy

While it's not unusual to discover an aged Rioja in your club pack, few other wine regions of the world will do this for us/you. Everyone is compelled to turn his or her product into money sooner than later. We were therefore delighted to be shown a special "library" release of a 14-year-old Barbera from the great producer Malvira. This is one of your rare chances to buy and immediately appreciate a "Phase II" wine!

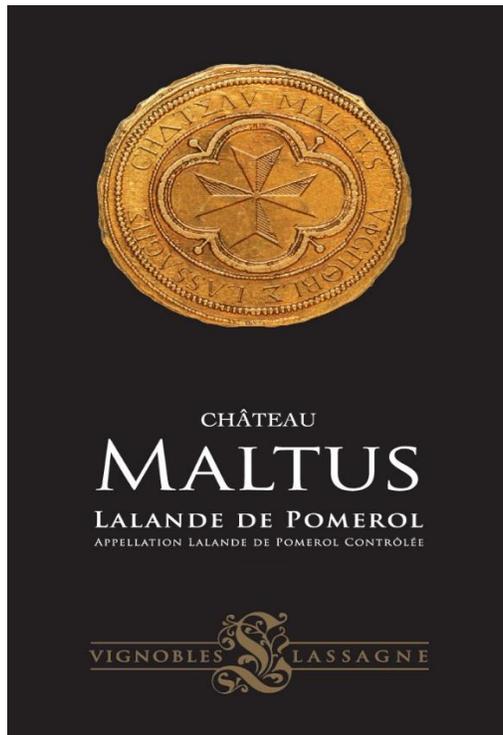
We are visiting Piedmont, Italy, located in that country's extreme northwest, not far from France. Here, Nebbiolo is the headliner grape; carefully aged then reverently sipped during birthdays and holidays. The great examples are represented by the placenames Barolo and Barbaresco. Alternatively, the Barbera grape might be called the Piemontese's "weekend wine," one rung down, but from a great plot and a great year it can be profound in its own right.

This is compelling wine, and we'll elaborate on that, but let's first note a novelty: Malvira's 'San Michele' vineyard was torn out and replanted in 2008. Until then, the slope played host to 90-year-old plants. Along with the calcareous clay soils of the San Michele vineyard, very old Barbera vines did the work for the bottle before you.

Now, to fully know this wine you'd better cook for it. While it's a major time investment, a roast would do the trick. Meat requiring hours – not minutes – tends to mate best with aged reds. All that delicious meat falling off the bone will pair brilliantly with this aged Barbera. The varietal is especially showy with its shiny acidity even after a decade and a half of calming down. The "energy" happening in your mouth anticipates the richness of protein.

Think about food and wine: Why do we do it? Naturally, we drink wine because it tastes good - and can adjust our attitude, often positively! We eat because we are hungry. Pairing the two can be a relatively brainless pursuit of mere sustenance, OR a venture in which you're fully invested. When you're fully invested your aim is this: To improve on / amplify / glorify the qualities of each component. That is, the right wine makes the food tastes even better. The right food brings out qualities in the wine you might otherwise miss. – And there's another thing going on when you're having wine with food: You're bound to be in less of a hurry. At the table you have more time to get fully acquainted with the wine. Your thoughtful, unhurried patience is sure to be rewarded with a better appreciation.

36.99 / 33.29 for all wine club members



Encore, unsurprisingly!

2016 CHATEAU MALTUS – Lalande de Pomerol, Bordeaux, France

It is not unusual for us to show you a subsequent vintage of the same wine - when we love it once again. It is not surprising for us to show you a particular Chateau from Bordeaux from both 2015 and 2016, as both years were tremendous for the region. It is no shocker that we're bringing you this particular Bordeaux, two years in a row. "Maltus" is the top wine for its producer. Fewer than 450 cases were made. We admire its importer. We love the wine.

Is all that data "justification" enough?

Lalande-de-Pomerol is a satellite of more prestigious (and more pricey) Pomerol itself. The producer of this wine is actually located in Lussac-Saint-Emilion, with his newer project 'Maltus' representing a more recently-acquired plot. The blend is typical for the Bordeaux's Right Bank: 80% Merlot and 20% Cabernet Franc, as aged in French Oak barrels for eighteen months.

This wine weights in at a modest 13.5% alcohol and does a lot with that. It is darker and currently youthfully "narrower" than its more opulent 2015 counterpart. Like many 2016's, this will probably accommodate more cellaring if you were to put down a few bottles for later.

Cherries, dark plums, chocolate, licorice, and a cocoa-like earthiness happen in both nose and mouth, awaiting a good prime rib dinner. That can happen soon, or at least six years from now!

38.99 / 35.09 for all wine club members

The Wine Steward's

California Wine Lover's

WINE CLUB

July 2019

Washington State Over-Performer

2016 RYAN PATRICK 'Rock Island Red' – Columbia Valley, Washington State

Longtime club customers are acquainted with our occasional departures north for finding you good club wines. There's been nary a complaint over the years; a tribute to your open-mindedness and your recognition that wine goodness can happen elsewhere.

Let's first jettison a misconception. Lots of California sippers imagine Washington to be similar in appearance and wine style to Oregon, just because both states are north of us. Nope: Oregon's vineyards are mostly coast-affected, happening on the western side of that state. That cooler, wetter place therefore favors delicate Pinot Noir, nearly-Alsatian Pinot Gris, and Burgundy-style Chardonnay. Washington could be no more different. Most of its vineyards are located in the eastern third of the state. Some of its sub-regions see no more than six inches of rain per year. The days are warmer and the nights colder, and the benefits of this "diurnal swing" are richer, riper fruit (from the heat) and the retention of good acid/tannin structure from the much cooler nights. This is very un-Oregon-like **high desert**.

How does a vine subsist on such low amounts of precipitation? Irrigation. - And NO, that's not a bad word. Think of the Napa Valley's watering system: Mother Nature does much of it, with over thirty inches of rainfall per year, when SHE wants to apply it. With elaborate water delivery systems accessing snowmelt from the Cascades (there's a lot of water on Mount Hood!), Washington State winegrowers water when THEY deem it best and necessary. Drip irrigation turns on to sustain the vine and further ripeness, and back off again to maintain intensity of flavor. Another Washington State Difference: The length of the summer day. At a very un-Napa latitude the sun sets much later up there. In June and July, critical months for fruit development, Washington enjoys more hours of sunlight. Is this "better" for the wine? Maybe. Is it going to give us a "different" wine package of color, aroma, and flavor? I'm certain of it.

Finally, the price for an acre of good vineyard land in Washington is vastly different from that of well-known California regions. The winegrower's costs are therefore lower, and the value to you the consumer should be better. With a little air, "Rock Island Red" says more than most Napa Valley reds costing \$10 more. This combination of 47% Cabernet Sauvignon, 47% Syrah, and 6% Merlot (a very "Washington" recipe) is a bold declaration of color, scent, palate feel, flavor, and length of memory. The application of 18 months in less-than-shy American Oak is perfectly suitable per the "noisiness" of this indulgent wine. Black cherries, grilled toast, lavender, hickory, saucy body, and lively snap all happify the mouth. Certainly, this is a wheelhouse wine for so many of you! **21.49 / 19.34 for Wine Club Members of all kinds!**



A Nice Guy Concedes

2017 RIGHT HAND MAN SYRAH by McPRICE MYERS – Central Coast

This wine has been on our radar for months now, languishing in the “considered” list of club wine ideas. What kept it from landing in your bag sooner was a cost that didn’t quite work. We held out, keeping it on the list but never committing until a discount concession was finally made. Now everybody’s happy.

And you’re about to be. This is the kind of Syrah that should scare no one away. It is of a style somewhat referencing the French Syrahs of the Northern Rhone, based on its deep, meaty / spicy / peppery perfume. What keeps the California wine lover engaged is the ripeness of blue and black fruits. The additional sense of violet fragrance should appeal to “you both.” Fully ripe, yet lithely balanced; this wine does a lot for its moderate price.

Right Hand Man is the work of McPrice Myers, who picked up the wine bug while working for Trader Joe’s in Orange County. That was a long time ago, as we’ve been checking in on his winemaking for about a decade-and-a-half at this point. “Mac” is particularly fond of the wines of the Rhone Valley, using them as inspiration for his own Paso Robles / Central Coast bottlings. While he emulates the French way of winemaking he knows he can’t fully replicate Rhone wines here, and doesn’t try. All McPrice Myers wines display a more New World style of graciousness, but they do remember their French inspirations with a certain element of restraint, a sense of when to let up; keeping the tongue unwearied and thirsty for more.

The fruit for this lovely gulper is derived from both Los Alamos (Santa Barbara County) and the west side of Paso Robles, 10 percent of which remained uncrushed “whole clusters” (inducing a more blue-berried “pop” of fruit). 88% of the blend is actual Syrah, while 6% of it is attributable to Syrah’s offspring Petite Sirah. Honoring a Northern Rhone tradition, 6% of the white Viognier grape is also invited to add fragrance and acidity to “the party.”

While Right Hand Man would easily be enjoyed on its own as a cocktail wine, I admonish you lovers of grilled lamb loin chops to involve that rich and smoky protein in the experience. Little time, expertise, or embellishment is required for this preparation. Coarse salt, black pepper, olive oil, and fresh herbs like thyme or rosemary are the simple pre-treatments (last night I used tarragon). Give each side of the little chops a shot of flame, then finish with the pieces arranged vertically on their bone sides.

We hope our “holding out” for a better price – and Mac’s price concession – is worth it to you!

20.99 / 18.89 for all wine club members (if there’s any left)

The Wine Steward's

Wine Adventurer

WINE CLUB

July 2019

A more significant version of the Tuesday Night Wine Club entry

2016 PÍO del RAMO 'P' CRIANZA – Jumilla, Spain

Some reds are so packed with textures and flavors - plus the alcoholic heat of warm places such as Jumilla, Spain – that you must let all of those things get a little settled after uncorking. Think of a whole family piling out of station wagon after seven hours of containment! Do smell and taste this wine right away, but then note the way all the jumbled components quiet down and agree to work together. This is **that** red.

“P,” from the Iberian Peninsula’s southeast corner, is a blend of 60% Monastrell (better known as Mourvèdre), 15% Petit Verdot, 15% Syrah, and 10% Cabernet Sauvignon. The extravagance of these outspoken varieties is complemented by eight to ten months in French and American oak barrels. Another player in this party is the place Jumilla, which is pretty freaking hot during the summer day. Two other qualities of this location keep it valid for quality wine: A dramatic temperature shift to chilly nights and the presence of limestone in the soil, both of which ensure a sense of briskness and nerve in what might otherwise be a flabby red with stewy flavors.

We call Monastrell / Mourvèdre a “Rhone” grape since it is better known as coming from the South of France. Syrah is another of the family. Alternatively, Petit Verdot and Cabernet Sauvignon are both in the Bordeaux family of grapes, making this a rather unlikely union you’d only rarely see in France (like the Beaupre Rouge we recently showed you). In hot Jumilla, getting the two groups together makes a lot of sense. The Rhone varieties bring the cherry / berry liqueur and jammy fruit textures. The Bordeaux players provide the discipline; the structure essential to keeping this wine behaved. The result is serious deliciousness. This is terrific steak wine, once it’s aired out a little. ... But we already talked about that!

By the way: This “P” Red and its little brother “Betola” are the wine finds of new importer friends. Jose of España Wines paid us his first visit just two weeks ago with these and other wines from this Jumilla producer. The Wine Steward aims at loyalty and efficiency by working mainly with a core group of importer / distributor / broker allies, but we always keep our eyes (and mouths) open for unexpected wine experiences. Thus, this!

19.99 / 17.99 for all wine club members

Tug of War!

2015 AR GUENTOTA 'Soul of Cuyo' MALBEC – Mendoza, Argentina

We recently handed your club a Malbec NOT from Argentina's most famous Mendoza source, but from the much more elevated region of Salta. That wine, to my mind, was thoughtful in an alternative way; not decadent but crisp and crunchy: Lively and complicated without over-weightiness.

Now we're bringing you the perhaps more-anticipated Mendoza product, from that region's heart of Lujan de Cuyo. You might call this source the "Oakville of Mendoza," considering the pedigree of the neighbors; Catena and Viña Cobos (Paul Hobbs) and others. From here, we are expecting Malbec with more saucy weight, more New World familiarity.

And you're getting it. There was no way AR Guentota was going to squeeze into our / your wine club budget without some serious concessions from all sides. The importer did his part, Paul of Wine Warehouse (the distributor) is helping out, and The Wine Steward is also participating by paying a little more than usual to get this wine into your club pack.

Why? Because I visited this winery about 13 years ago and this producer's concern for quality has yet to diminish for me. Secondly, this Malbec FINALLY does what so many Malbec lovers hope for every time they pull a cork from a bottle, yet rarely get. Upon tasting this today, I fought hard to get it at least somewhere NEAR wine club budget. Sometimes, when the wine is great and the customer is worthy, you haggle all you can then finally relent.

This is the significantly up-a-notch Malbec from Belasco de Baquedano, sourced from the winery's 100-year-old vines. Let's give it a sniff: Raspberries and blackberries are the fruit lover's references here, but beyond that gracious effect are the rugged grumpiness of tree bark and the hedonistic sauciness of whiskey. The palate is rich and smooth, yet activated with Malbec's ever-agitating acidity. Ever think about how we treat beef before, during, and after cooking? To that rich protein we apply a sauce or a marinade which employs the liveliness of vinegar. A1, Chimichurri, Worcestershire . . . all of these bring wonderful flavors, and beneath those the abrupt, tangy-clangy, nervy carrier of vinegar is felt.

Where am I going with this? Am I saying Malbec is "vinegary," and therefore a great mate for beef? Not quite, but I am detecting a lively, pre-vinegar acidity in Malbec which can provide much the same effect as those sauces / beef decorations. Yes, Malbec works well with beef because it's a big red wine. What you're rarely also told is that Malbec works well with beef because of its citric / acidic snappiness. That's harder to relate to in your head, but in your mouth it's absolutely true, and works miracles with meat.

23.99 / 21.59 for all wine club members

The Wine Steward's

Here n There Whites

WINE CLUB

July 2019

This Doesn't Suck. – Again.

2018 REGUEIRO TRAJADURA / ALVARINHO – Vinho Minho Regional, Portugal

By my count (the accuracy of which you should always question), this is the fourth vintage of 'Regueiro' that has come to your club. Would this be an automatic occurrence; a foregone conclusion? Nope. Every time I try a new version we're back to start, sniffing and tasting as objectively as possible, regardless of history and vendor friendship (this is harder than it sounds).

One year after another, when this wine hits my twitching nostrils and watering tongue, Regueiro impresses: Immediately. Slam dunk. If it's summer, it's got to be Regueiro (seems we're on our way to an advertising jingle!).

Ironically, this fantastic summer white hails from a cool, damp, and often downright rainy wine region in Portugal's far north. It qualifies as a "Vinho Verde," but "Vinho Minho Regional" is also legally acceptable and, I imagine, the producer's appellation of choice based on lack of stigma. "Vinho Verde" causes suspicion and derision among certain "casual consumers." This wine deserves better.

70% of the blend is Trajadura, often spelled as "Treixadura," a grape credited with conferring lemony scents and a bit of body. The other 30% is Alvarinho, called "Albariño" just across the Minho River in Spain. No doubt, Alvarinho is providing the limey-ness happening here. White nectarines may be another contribution. The vines for both varieties are typically trained *via* the pergola system, an overhead canopy under which you can easily walk if you're shorter than 6'. This way-off-the-ground arrangement allows for a lot of moving air beneath the leaves, as mildew always threatens the crops in this damp location.

I can imagine a salad with grilled shrimp atop as a summer evening pairing.

I can also imagine "clubbing" Regueiro again next year, with zero complaints from the membership!

15.99 / 14.39 for all wine club members

Rub your eyes

2015 DANIEL CHARDONNAY – Sangiacomo Vella Ranch Vineyard, Carneros

Rub your eyes and you'll correctly read again: Your White Wine Club is seeing a California Chardonnay! Yes, that's a rather "unclubby" provision from some adventurous perspectives, but we couldn't help it; a rare opportunity presented itself.

"Rare opportunity? Jim, what's so rare about vendors trying to sell you California Chardonnay?"

Elaboration:

This Chardonnay was not made in the thousands, or even hundreds of cases. 150 cases were all that were crafted.

This Chardonnay was originally meant to sell for \$50 per bottle. As this label is coming to an end, its propagator is eager to achieve a faster ending by offering a few good wine shops some tantalizing wholesale prices. That's how DANIEL Pinot Noir happened for the California Wine Lover's a month or two back. That's how THIS is happening for YOU now.

This Chardonnay is a great example of its type. Generous? Rich? Ripe? Full-Bodied? Yes, it's all of those things, DONE RIGHT. Thus, our mandate is satisfied.

The Sangiacomo Vineyard of Carneros is quite large. In fact, it's actually a series of vineyards under one owner's control. The Vella Ranch parcel, with its mineral-conferring silt and loam soils, was planted in 1997 with the Old Wente Clone of Chardonnay. The vineyard produces exceptionally small clusters with small berries, and this effect was exaggerated in the drought year of 2015. What this delivers to the wine itself is an intensity of body and flavor that needs little help from winemaking. This Chardonnay is NATURALLY generous based on its special source and drought-starved fruit.

The golden color indicates the concentration. The heady scent of honey and lemon does, too. Note what I just said: "Honey and Lemon." One of those descriptors denotes richness, the other levity. That's the magic of this great wine. As big as it is, it remains lithe – and that's special, and the two-for-one effect continues in the mouth. The palate feel is broad, yet the width is divided by a down-the-middle laser of lemony pizzaz.

This is when you buy up for the lobster, or at least jumbo prawns, and incorporate a lot of butter. The fat of the wine will match the richness of the protein, while the citric tang will provide relief and prolong the eating and drinking experience.

I have no "I'm sorry's" to declare for this provision of a rare, world-class Chardonnay. Alternatively, I'm humbly grateful for your attention and support.

21.99 / 19.79 for all wine club members while this lasts

The Wine Steward's

Tuesday Night

WINE CLUB

July 2019

Can You Tell the Difference?

2017 PÍO del RAMO 'Betola' MONASTRELL / SYRAH – Jumilla, Spain

Several months ago we showed you “Laya,” a red wine also employing Monastrell (Mourvèdre) from the same general southeastern Spain area. We have had to re-order it several times, as many of you have returned for more. Laya is priced a bit lower than this blend from Jumilla (“who-ME-ya”) and is perhaps even a little darker and bigger in the mouth.

But this wine is “better.” Perhaps. It all depends on your approach to and assessment of wine. If the power of color and alcohol-derived body comprise the whole of your criteria, then Laya is your wine. If you think a little harder than that, appreciating elegance and balance and complexity, Betola's your baby!

70% of the blend consists of Monastrell, the mainstay grape of this area of Spain. “Why not 100% Monastrell instead?” Because – to my mind and mouth – Monastrell can be TOO much of itself; too meaty/beasty/forest floor-y on its own. The addition of 30% Syrah is enough to tame the savage Monastrell beast while still allowing it to express itself. Syrah itself can have a lot of attitude, but it usually “behaves” better with curvy textures and exotic-yet-enticing fragrances.

The bottle of Betola on my desk was opened three days ago. Right at uncorking it seemed a little rough in its delivery, but a few minutes of swirling calmed it down. Yesterday it was at its smoothest and best, with all of the flavors intact. Today, as I access the mostly-poured-out bottle, the wine remains valid – if not just a tad tired. This unusual tolerance of three days of “pouring abuse” is due to Monastrell's capacity for handling oxidation better than most other varietals; one reason for its inclusion in Grenache-based Chateauneuf-du-Pape and other Southern Rhone blends. So give it a little air and help it (and your wine appreciation) with the addition of food. Meats from the grill are especially ideal.

WANT AN EVEN BETTER WINE FROM THIS MAKER? Scroll up to read about “P” Red Wine appearing this month in the Wine Adventurer Club!

12.99 / 11.69 for all wine club members



Before me, standing in Aniñon



What's behind me, at the top of Aniñon

It's personal

2016 FIGARO 'Tinto' – Calatayud, Spain

Draw a straight line between Barcelona on Spain's northeast coast and Madrid at its center. Halfway between the two you'll locate the small city / large town Calatayud. If you are traversing this country and need a good hotel with a very satisfactory restaurant check into Meson la Dolores. Cool place.

“Calatayud” also represents the wine region adjacent to the city, mainly to its west. Drive out of town for ten or so minutes on an abandoned road and tiny pueblos will appear out of nowhere. “Cervera de la Cañada” and “Villaroya de la Sierra” are two you'll pass, but you must get off on an even more forsaken one-lane road to arrive at “Aniñon”. Along the way you'll see parcels of cherry and peach trees, olive orchards, and plots of very old Garnacha (Grenache) vines.

This is the land of cooperatives. Each of these pueblos and myriad more has its own facility, co-owned by all of its local growers according to their respective production and provision of cherries, peaches, apricots, almonds, olives, and – of course – wine grapes. While the typical home in these ever-deteriorating ancient villages is nothing to write home about, every village can boast of a church employing “Mudejar” architecture. The “absorbed” or “conquered” Moors and their offspring were charged with building these as the Christians slowly recovered Spain. Curiously, these Christian churches demonstrate many Moorish features. I get a kick out of the irony.

And I'm a big defender of Garnacha, the wine of the people; exuding rusticity with no apologies. “Figaro” comes from the little cooperative of Aniñon, a humble but fully functional winery I've enjoyed visiting no fewer than five or so times. This 100% Garnacha (Grenache) may have seen a short stay in used barrels, but only for a little softening, not oakiness. New wood is no good for fruit-forward Garnacha – or its nice low price.

We have “clubbed” Figaro at least four other times in our fifteen years of knowing it. Per that long awareness I can report that this little winery in the middle of nowhere is getting better and better with

quality. “Old vines” are reporting in with a briary/brambly scent. The heat of the place is felt via the vibrant, nervy nose of citrus peel. Garnacha, the grape itself which was actually “born” near here, is known by the black pepper, raspberry, and cherry voices.

This wine gives flavorful pleasure, yet simultaneously snaps the tongue to attention with juicy acidity. The latter effect is your “call to food”. Head for The Wine Steward for some of our Spanish *Jamon Serrano* or *chorizo* to accommodate. All this wine wants is PROTEIN! Grilling good meats will also work!

And after all these years it’s still just:

9.99 / 8.99 for wine club members