

The Wine Steward's

The COLLECTOR

WINE CLUB

June 2025



The Sonoma Difference

Sonoma Cabernets play differently than those of Napa – or Washington, or anywhere else. Their fruit is tinged with a sense of earth; damp loam, perhaps. It's hard to elaborate beyond generalizing, however, as producer styles vary widely. Let's just say that “earthy-fruity” thing happens in these two Sonoma Cabs. **2022 SINEGAL SONOMA COUNTY CABERNET SAUVIGNON (54.99 / 49.49)** could be named more site-specifically, as all the fruit comes from Wildwood Vineyard in the Sonoma Valley, which happens between Glen Ellen and Kenwood. Within the vineyard there's an over-700 foot elevation change as it creeps up the Mayacamas Mountains. We don't know exactly where within that slope these grapes were harvested, but this wine's softness suggests the source was closer to the valley floor. Sinegal's house styling may also be pushing the affability. Tangy plums and cherries are joined by clove and tobacco and a comforting sense of – yes – unsweetened chocolate-y earth!

Three prominent wine critics virtually agree on the goodness of this wine with **95 and 94-point ratings** and effusive praise. I only discovered their weigh-ins upon sitting down to write these notes, having already tasted and admired it with its vendor over a month ago. We're heading not far from the Sinegal Cab's source, but we've definitely climbed. **2021 FAR MOUNTAIN CABERNET SAUVIGNON (59.99 / 53.99)** comes from the old, head-pruned vines of Alta Vista Vineyard, within Sonoma's Moon Mountain District on the backside of Napa's Mount Veeder. Here, “earth” is represented more as ROCK, texturally; this is an unabashed MOUNTAIN wine with more durable / time-requiring structure. Other features of “mountain” are dried herbs, scrub, and wild berries. If you're drinking this soon you'd better mate it with a juicy steak. Otherwise, collect a few bottles and age them over the next decade or so!

The Wine Steward's

BUBBLY!

WINE CLUB

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Back to the Real Deal

Thank you to the many who attended our recent sparkling wine event, and for your generous orders. If you're also members of this BUBBLY Club there's a good chance you already have some **DELAHAIE BRUT ROSÉ (41.99 / 37.79)** as it was the evening's best-selling Champagne. I hope another bottle is not a bad thing?!

This is made entirely of red grapes: 80% Pinot Noir and 20% Pinot Meunier from Champagne's vaunted Montagne de Reims and Marne Valley subregions. 18% of that Pinot Noir component was red wine, applied for color enhancement and body. After blending, the second fermentation happened in individual bottles (*Methode Champenoise*) where the wine remained *en tirage* (on the lees) for a longer-than-required 28 months. That, my friends, is a good thing.

The red wine addition and a relatively high 11 grams per liter *dosage* both contribute to the richness of this lovely rosé, yet the chalk-derived acidity keeps the experience fresh and crisp. Wild strawberries and cherries indulge, while citrus fruits counter with bracing nervousity. Delahaie provides Yin AND Yang!

Let's acknowledge that the price of this wine is lower than your club subscription (which includes sales tax, by the way) and say we'll be making this up to you in the coming months. Cheers!

The Wine Steward's

World Class

WINE CLUB

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LIGHT to DARK

- Actually, that's the theme of our WineBar's Red Wine Flight this week: As you work your way through the five wines they go from lighter to darker. **2024 ASCHERI (31.99 / 28.79)** is that flight's first entry, with a delicacy of color surprising all eyes. — But employ your NOSE to realize the real gist of this barely-red, hopefully served at a cooler cellar temperature. That's where the real fun of the Pelaverga varietal happens. The label represents a typical Italian way of calling a wine: "Verduno Pelaverga" names location AND grape. Verduno is actually located within Piemonte, Italy's most famous region of Barolo (that placename is employed only for Nebbiolo). The little commune of Verduno is pretty much the world's only champion of the Pelaverga Piccolo variety, which has become the darling of somms and other wine geeks in recent years. It is NEVER dark in color, but is always uber-expressive with heady strawberry and pepper scents. Please apply a Pinot Noir-style glass to fully realize the beauty of this less-is-more rarity!

There's a pronunciation lesson on the back label of **2022 CHATEAU TOURNEFEUILLE (33.99 / 30.59)** for the tongue-twisting name. The velvety textures of this Right Bank Bordeaux are certainly easier on the tongue! 60% Merlot and 40% Cabernet Franc come from a neighbor of acclaimed Chateau Petrus and Chateau Cheval Blanc. The *cepage* (grape ingredients) emulates that of Cheval Blanc, the Bordeaux "Miles" was drinking from a soda cup near the end of Sideways. The fragrance of Tournefeuille is suavely elegant with spice, mint, coffee, and earthy cherries. The palate is lush; medium-bodied in size, where the theme of elegance persists. This lovely Bordeaux impresses not with size but with sophistication. It's a class act. (and we'll be fixing the price average in the coming months, by the way!)

The Wine Steward's

Pacific Coast

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BACK TO CAB

‘Y3’ represents the less-expensive line of wines from JAX Vineyards. The tasting room is in a very familiar urban setting: Hardly a block from San Francisco’s Oracle Park. The wines are made in a more-anticipated location: The Napa Valley. At the winemaking helm is none other than Kirk Venge, who also makes hedonistically-styled wines under his own label. **Y3 CABERNET SAUVIGNON (22.49 / 20.24)** employs some Napa fruit and augments with Sonoma and Lake County grapes. Of the two Cabernet Sauvignons we’re providing this month, Y3 is the more modern. Dark in color, jubilant with ultraripe blackberries and espresso, rich and lush in texture; this is a delicious people-pleaser!

Before going any further, let me acknowledge that this Cabernet isn’t as flashy, as stylistically-modern, or as “cocktail” in style as the other. That said, **2021 PAGE MILL CABERNET SAUVIGNON (18.99 / 17.09)** is less expensive, alternatively CLASSICAL in style, and a rare success. Now I will elaborate – on that last part. I love my Livermore Valley, where I’ve resided since 1990. I learned a bit about winemaking (and -growing) during the first decade of my sojourn. Tim and I worked with a wide range of grape varieties at Livermore Valley Cellars where, after our projects began to achieve “normalcy” and local voice, I began to form opinions on what I liked from our valley and what was less successful. In the years since, those opinions have strengthened with more exposure as a wine-tasting buyer for TWS. I’m anything but quiet per my conviction that Mediterranean varieties – particularly the Rhônes – should be further exploited. I tend to remain diplomatically silent on another point: 19 times out of 20, I don’t prefer the flavors our valley imposes on Cabernet Sauvignon. Here, though, is a wine I keep putting in my mouth; not for fruit-forwardness but for well-balanced and “classical” varietal truth. For the nostalgic, this is REAL “pre-1997 vintage” Cab, right along with its American oak enhancement. And, FYI, it loves air!

The Wine Steward's

Wine Adventurer

WINE CLUB

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THE SOUTH OF FRANCE

2023 TERRES FALMET MOURVÈDRE (20.99 / 18.89) is a rare 100% varietal wine from a part of the world where blending is more customary. On our shelf it is joined by varietal Cinsault (rare in and of itself), Carignan (a grape I'm noisy about), and – finally – a blend, all from the same producer. These four reds hail not from the Rhône Valley but a place farther to the west; nearly Spain, in the Languedoc subregion of Saint-Chinian. The “hundred percenters” can't proclaim that name on their labels; archaic wine laws only permit certain *blends* to proclaim “Saint-Chinian.” No matter: That mineral-rich Mediterranean location is evidenced in the nose and mouth of this vibrant Mourvèdre. A grape better known for coming from Bandol, Mourvèdre expresses pepper, windblown dried herbs, raspberries, and blackberries. It's a wine that loves air, and often tastes and feels more “comfortable” the next day – if your bottle has any remaining!

Stephane Ogier is best known for his 100-point Northern Rhône Syrah masterpieces. Lucky for consumers (and this wine buyer) he also renders something far more “available” in price. Truly, quality happens in both his benchmarks and in this affordable Côtes du Rhône. Grenache gets involved here, since we're drinking a Southern Rhône-derived red. – But Ogier's admiration for Syrah is indicated by a nearly 50% inhabitation of that grape. I taste a lot of Southern Rhone reds priced in the low-\$20's; Côte du Rhône and otherwise. While virtually all are Grenache-based, each has a different voice. This medium-bodied example speaks with eloquent elegance rather than alcoholic in-your-face-ness. The nose is plummy, woody, and garrigue-y. The palate feel, especially as felt from a Pinot Noir glass, is seamless. A quiet warmheartedness humbly calls you back for repeated sips. Friends, the **2022 STEPHANE OGIER 'Le Temps Est Venu' (22.49 / 20.24)** is a class act!

The Wine Steward's
'Here 'n There'

Uncharted Whites

WINE CLUB

June 2025



TWO JUICY NEW WORLD WHITES

I spent Memorial Day weekend playing tourist in Seattle. Like so many other cities, there's an older industrial area seeing a revival *via* restaurants, art studios, and tasting rooms. We did some time in 'SODO,' mainly at the Nine Hats tasting room. That's the "second label" brand for Long Shadows Vintners; the name representing its unique multi-winemaker arrangement. Visitors can head through a side door to access Nine Pies. We did, and minutes later our tasting room setting included a terrific New York-style pizza to accompany the many good wines we were trying, including **2023 NINE HATS PINOT GRIS (18.99 / 17.09)**. While Oregon Pinot Gris happens in cooler climes with significant rainfall, this Washington State example sees more warmth and far less precipitation. It's therefore more fleshy than the better-known Willamette Valley renditions, with generous fruit weight. Besides the pizza pairing, I believe this richer Pinot Gris would work well with pork roast or grilled salmon!

It's been quite some time since we provided a Chardonnay. Maybe I consider the varietal too "ubiquitous" for a club that features more novel deliciousness. This exception happens because it DOES represent "novel deliciousness" for its location, style, and price. **2022 CREDARO 'Five Tales' CHARDONNAY (13.99 / 12.59)** hails from the Margaret River region of Australia. We're very far west of that country's better known wine places such as Barossa Valley and Adelaide Hills, in a much cooler, coast-influenced area. – And that's great for Chardonnay. Only 2% of Australia's wine is produced here, yet Margaret River makes 20% of the country's "premium" wine. Now, if you're anticipating the buttery/oaky style, reset your expectations and have a sniff: The fruit is vibrant, nearly shiny with citrus and golden apples; not plodding. The textures are brisk and juicy. I don't drink a lot of New World Chardonnay, yet I can't stop slurping this one. The final novelty: Have another look at that price!

The Wine Steward's

“Curious?” Club

WINE CLUB

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They Both Have ‘G’

Grenache is called ‘Garnacha’ in Spain, and maybe the latter name should be the default as the grape was born here. In fact, it probably originated in this particular wine’s regional source of Cariñena. Where’s that? Draw a line from Madrid to Barcelona; Cariñena is in the middle – the middle of nowhere. The sum of lack of renown and the wonderful asset of very old vines provides you with a great value here. **2020 VAQUERIZAS GARNACHA (16.49 / 14.84)**, a wine we’d never heard of until a few weeks back, gratifies with dark color, deep fragrance (black cherry, pepper, thyme), and a soft, luxurious palate. Serve this at cellar temperature on a warm evening with protein (and veggies) arriving from the grill. Glassfuls of this will assure you: Spain’s got it goin’ on!!

2019 CUMULUS CELLARS ‘GSM’ (14.99 / 13.49) is a lithe, refreshingly-structured red from an area we’ve barely represented in our 25+ years. We tend to know Oregon wine for its provision of Pinot Noir (and Pinot Gris, Chardonnay ...) coming from the Willamette Valley. This blend of 37% Grenache, 34% Syrah, and 29% Mourvèdre hails from the Rogue Valley. The more southern and thereby warmer region accommodates grape varieties the cooler Willamette Valley might not reliably ripen. While fully ripe, this red happens “modestly” on the palate due to a discreet application of treatment (no new oak / larger-format barrels) and a tinge of “development”. Those acids are screaming for pork tenderloin or grilled portabellas or both. Feed it!!