



The Wine Steward's

RED COLLECTOR

WINE CLUB

March 2020

WINE: 2015 David Arthur 'Meritaggio'

SOURCE: Napa Valley

GRAPES: 44% Sangiovese, 29% Merlot, 24% Cabernet Sauvignon, 3% Cabernet Franc

ATTITUDE: Sumptuous vivacity – or the other way around

FOOD: *Cinghiale* – or pork roast, in a pinch

FACTUAL TIDBITS: David Arthur wines must be represented as “Napa Valley,” while their vineyard lies at least 1,000 above the actual valley floor. Why don't they declare their “Pritchard Hill” location on the label as an appropriate sub-appellation? Because their neighbor Chappellet, an original inhabitant of the mountain 'burbs, owns the term and applies it to their own flagship bottling. Thus, Bryant Family, David Arthur, Kuleto, and – yes – Chappellet itself (usually) utilizes the more generic and inaccurate “Napa Valley” appendage. But I've made my point: This is elevated stuff. – and in more ways than one. While this producer also makes magnificent, varietally-named Cabernets, David Arthur's 'Meritaggio' utilizes a significant amount of Sangiovese to effect a “New World Super Tuscan.” Sangiovese brings jazzy lift to the more “ponderous” Bordeaux varieties included here. Delicious in a modern way? Yes. Alternative to conventional Cab? That, too.

JIM'S WHIMS: As is true for many of our longtime favorites, over our twenty years we have put some energy into keeping track of this delicious wine, as its wholesale source is often changing. “Meritaggio” hasn't been on our shelf for many a year, but having just rediscovered its goodness we're pleased to welcome it back. No Cabernet lover will dismiss this as “light” and “out of range.” The charming, syrupy cherries of Sangiovese wouldn't permit that, even if there's an extra, lifted levity to this particular club selection. Please note Wine.com's \$64.99 rate, then check out ours:

47.99 / 43.19 for all wine club members



WINE: 2016 Star Lane Cabernet Sauvignon

SOURCE: Happy Canyon of Santa Barbara

GRAPES: 87% Cabernet Sauvignon, 5% Petit Verdot,
4% Merlot, 2% Malbec, 2% Cabernet Franc

ATTITUDE: Uniquely GREAT

FOOD: Steak, Duck Breast, Lamb Chops, Aged Gouda

FACTUAL TIDBITS: Happy Canyon of Santa Barbara is a recently-created sub-AVA of Santa Barbara County. Star Lane has resided here longer than that designation, and to my mind is the original reason why this area should be so recognized. Where are we? Let's name some landmarks. When you're driving south on Highway 101 and have passed Pismo Beach, then Santa Maria, you're next bisecting the beautiful vinelands of Los Alamos. Then comes Buellton and its proud inhabitant, Pea Soup Andersen's. Stop here.

You're deep in Santa Barbara's wine country. Look west: That's Santa Rita Hills, famous for Pinot Noir. Turn around: Now you're looking at (or imagining) Ballard Canyon (home of Stolpman), then Los Olivos and Santa Ynez, then – finally, to the far eastern part of the valley, Happy Canyon of Santa Barbara. Jim and Mary Dierberg came from Missouri – very well-financed – to set up shop here. Besides their several hundred heads of cattle they oversee grapevines, emphasizing the Bordeaux varieties. They, and more recent arrivers, have proven that Napa and Sonoma aren't California's only premiere Cabernet places!

JIM'S WHIMS: I love the Santa Barbara wine area for its ability to handle nearly any grape on the list. Its cooler sections were famous sooner, with Pinot Noir and Chardonnay being the stars. Later on, its warmer interior engaged the interest of the so-called Rhone Rangers. Grenache, Syrah, and Mourvèdre took root. The Bordeaux grapes, including unfairly-accused Merlot, took longer to stake their claim. In Happy Canyon it has finally happened.

I have visited the remarkable, virtually-unvisitable Star Lane site three times now, so this pick is personal. For years I have charted the progress of this Cabernet, and believe the 2016 is one of the best yet. A prevailing idea of "sagebrush" ruggedly happens in all Star Lane vintages, but this time the message is more darkly elegant. A grapey/blackberry scent also seduces. A flowing mouthfeel renders flavors of ollalieberries and nuances of black olives and grilled toast. This is an intelligent pleasure from a wine place that has officially ARRIVED.

49.99 / 44.99 for all wine club members in the mood

The Wine Steward's

World Class

WINE CLUB

March 2020



WINE: 2013 Scarbolo Refosco

SOURCE: Venezia Giulia, Italy

GRAPES: 100% Refosco

ATTITUDE: Ol' softie

FOOD: Charcuterie, Grilled Chicken,
Blue & Parmigiano cheeses

FACTUAL TIDBITS: Here is our first-ever provision of a Refosco. There are few to encounter in our market, and even fewer that we deem functional. THIS one is compelling. Refosco is native to the Venetian wine area and is also found in other parts of Italy's northeast. The wines from this dark-skinned grape can be quite tannic, but two techniques were applied to this one to help with that. Once crushed, the must (combination of skins, seeds, and juice) underwent a typical two-week fermentation. At this point a new wine would typically be pressed off, bidding "Arrivederci!" to the tannin-conferring skins. Counterintuitively, this producer lets the fully-fermented wine remain on the skins for yet another two weeks before the pressing. I get it: Tim and I used to press off different bins of the same wine at different times for different effects. Pressed after just one week, Batch #1 would taste very fruity and easygoing. Batch #2, pressed a week later, would be far more astringent. And Batch #3? Do you think the tannins were magnified? Nope, they'd eased up. The wine was suddenly softer, though you'd expect the opposite. I mentioned the application of TWO techniques to this lovely wine. The second was patience. This seven-year-old 2013 is Scarbolo's fully-settled current release!

JIM'S WHIMS: Please note our food pairing suggestion above, especially the "Charcuterie" part. We have a smoked ham in our cooler known as "speck" that would be lovely with this wine, as would any good salumi. Furthermore, serve this wine not at room temperature but at a 60-degree cellar temperature. At least start out that way and see how you prefer it. At my desk, right now it's a little TOO easygoing. My hunch is that a slight chill will firm it up to food-worthiness. We hope you enjoy this uniquely good, deeply-colored and -fruited red.

33.99 / 30.59 for Wine Club Members



WINE: 2015 Koyle 'Royale' Carmeneré

SOURCE: Alto Colchagua, Chile

GRAPES: 85% Cabernet Sauvignon, 12% Malbec, 3% Petit Verdot – all organically grown

ATTITUDE: Complexity for the Thinker,
Texture for the Drinker

FOOD: Roast beef

FACTUAL TIDBITS: A month back, we gave this winery's very successful 'Reserva' to our Tuesday Night Wine Club members. This 'Royale' represents Koyle's *best* efforts with the Carmeneré grape. While we've told this varietal's story before, it certainly doesn't get old. Carmeneré figured heavily into Bordeaux's acreage before the phylloxera root louse scourge of the mid/late nineteenth century. When a solution was found and it came time to replant, Carmeneré was omitted, with but few exceptions. Its dependability as a crop was in question; an economical concern that's nearly ALWAYS the deciding factor.

In the meantime, however, cuttings of Carmeneré along with several other French varieties were shipped overseas to help establish Chile's wine situation. Here, the Carmeneré vines were misidentified as a clone of Merlot for about ONE HUNDRED YEARS! Not until the 1990's did an ampelographer (who is tasked with identifying grape varieties based on a vine's traits and the shape and color of its leaves) get it right: "Hey you goofs: This isn't Merlot!" Merlot being the first of the Bordeaux grapes to ripen and be harvested, late-ripening Carmeneré was often picked way too early, yielding terrible green flavors. Now, finally, Chile is getting it right!

JIM'S WHIMS: While it was certainly picked at a more correct point of maturity, this intriguing red might still be called "green" by some. There is in fact a fine line between effective Carmeneré and underripe versions, and the line moves depending on the taster. My personal criteria? I call a Carmeneré "correct" when green bell peppers have yielded to smoky, roasted red ones.

This Bordeaux grape is probably the most exotically scented and flavored member of its family (Loire Valley Cabernet Franc might cry foul) and it can take some getting used to, but the appeal to the casual consumer is its texture. No other player in the group offers such a silky – almost creamy – palate. Hold your nose while drinking this if you must, but I insist: You're gonna love the way it feels!

28.99 / 26.09 for beloved wine club members

The Wine Steward's

CALIFORNIA

(*West Coast*)

WINE CLUB

March 2020

WINE: 2017 CasaSmith 'Porcospino' Primitivo

SOURCE: Northridge Vineyard, Wahluke Slope, Washington St

GRAPES: 100% Primitivo

ATTITUDE: Irrepressibly Happy

IF it MATTERS: 92 Points from James Suckling

FOOD: Red-sauced pasta, hamburgers ...



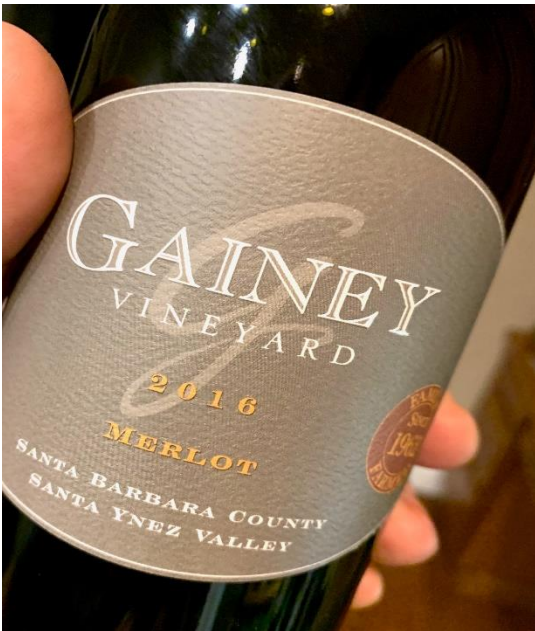
FACTUAL TIDBITS: Primitivo is genetically identical to Zinfandel, but its sojourn in Puglia, Italy (thought to have begun in the 1700's) has induced a clonal mutation. The clones of Zinfandel and Primitivo look farther east to Croatia as their origin, where "Tribidrag" is believed to be the original grape name. Stay tuned, for there seem to be new findings per this story by the decade!

CasaSmith is one of the many labels under the Charles Smith winemaking jurisdiction. All that he fashions in Washington State expresses delicious ebullience, whether it's a \$10 Riesling or a \$150 whopper Cabernet. This particular label applies itself to Smith's Italian varietals. We had a hard time choosing between this Primitivo and his Sangiovese. The Barbera was another contender. Why did the Primitivo emerge as the winner?

JIM'S WHIMS: Zinfandel / Primitivo doesn't occur on every wine lover's shopping list. While its vibrant acidity is admirable, its propensity for overripe jammy-ness gives the lover of balance MORE wine than he or she prefers. From the right place, the right clone, and the right winemaker we can access a rarer, more refined - yet still delightfully-fruited - rendering. Having finally identified such a rarity, we thought it important to choose it over Smith's other Italian-style offerings for your club.

Enjoy this happy red that barely resists being silly or stupid with its grinning, flavorful levity. Consider the rarity of such a successful, drinkable Primitivo/Zinfandel/Tribidrag! Smile!!

19.99 / 17.99 for all wine club members – very competitive!!



WINE: 2016 Gainey Merlot

SOURCE: Santa Ynez Valley, Santa Barbara County

GRAPES: 94% Merlot, 6% Cabernet Franc

ATTITUDE: Honestly-sized and -flavored

FOOD: Beef dishes, especially the braised treatments

FACTUAL TIDBITS: Merlot's late 20th Century ascendance to the "TOP Five Favorite Varietals" list was abruptly reversed in 2004, when one brief yet memorable utterance in the movie *Sideways* condemned it to market purgatory. That film was set in Santa Barbara County's wine country, and it is a fitting rebuttal that The Wine Steward has "clubbed" this Merlot from the exact same region not once, but THREE times now. We're not doing it for novelty. We're doing it because this wine is honestly GOOD.

Don't forget: Merlot is currently the most-planted grape in Bordeaux, France – a place ten times the size of the Napa Valley, which can also bottle lovely renderings of the unfairly-maligned varietal. Sometimes I think it is Washington State's best wine type. Are there shitty versions of Merlot? Oh, there are plenty, but there's not a well-loved varietal that DOESN'T have its shitty versions. Grow Merlot in the right place and treat it with respect in the vineyard and the winery, and what do you get? This: A Class Act.

JIM'S WHIMS: Meridith and I went back and forth on whether we should "club" this wine. Naturally, she as the salesperson was eager to do the deal, but she also appreciated my apprehension about handing your group a balanced, elegant, not so over-the-top Merlot. A lot of you would like a little more jam in your glass than this offers. Well, I'm asking you to be thoughtful here.

Consider the classical framing. Ponder the dark fruit scents and all the surrounding impressions of dark smoke, green herb, chocolate, and freshly-turned damp earth. Feel the velvety, lithe, juicy palate that's begging for a serious meal. Think about this wine's sensory connection to Bordeaux, rather than to Paso Robles, Lodi, or some other more heat-induced wine region. Get over it. Get into this. – And celebrate the value. - *Jim*

19.99 / 17.99 for all Wine Club Members



The Wine Steward's

Wine Adventurer's WINE CLUB

March 2020

WINE: 2014 Montaña Reserva

SOURCE: Rioja, Spain

GRAPES: 90% Tempranillo, 7% Graciano, 3% Mazuelo

ATTITUDE: Poised, perfectly poised.

FOOD: Slow-Roasted Lamb

FACTUAL TIDBITS: Rioja could be called “The Napa Valley of Spain” for its renown, tradition, and treatment of Spain’s noble grape Tempranillo. Fortunately, Rioja is about four times the size of Napa, thereby providing beautiful wine value such as what’s in my glass at the moment. While this region is starting to adjust its way of classifying its different levels of wine quality, this bottling from Familia Montaña represents the Old School way of designation. Historically (for the last hundred years, at least), Rioja labels have emphasized the aging process. Classifications such as “Crianza” and “Reserva” say nothing about specific vineyards or sub-regions. Rather, the thing to value is how long the wine is aged. This actually runs counter to the general European wine value of “location,” and that’s why we’re seeing gradual changes. I, too, can adjust my perspective when the reasons are strong, and will be open-mindedly respecting this more appropriate regard for *terroir*. – But in the meantime, I’m romantically attuned to Rioja’s insistence on elevating cellar aging as the main idea. Bring on the *reservas*!!

JIM’S WHIMS: Here is our second vintage of an under-the-radar beauty. Think of how you actually regard someone you find attractive. Is their appearance, their way of talking and moving, and their overall personality frontal and obvious? Sometimes, perhaps. – But I know you have probably appreciated more subtle beauty as well. The elegant. The soft-spoken yet profound. The reassured. These are the people not striking you at first glance or utterance, but growing on you until you can’t stand it anymore. All of a sudden you’re urgently blurting out embarrassing spontaneities, declaring eternal affection and devotion. I understand: Enjoy this wine.

20.99 / 18.89 for lovers of *suave*



WINE: 2017 Poggio Nibbiale di Buchheim

SOURCE: Morellino di Scansano, Tuscany, Italy

GRAPES: 85% Sangiovese, plus Cabernet Sauvignon, Montepulciano, Canaiolo, and Petit Verdot (all organically grown)

ATTITUDE: Quintessentially TUSCAN

FOOD: Medium Rare Ribeye

FACTUAL TIDBITS: This wine is made in a church. Really. Well, it's actually a restored medieval cellar BELOW the church of San Giovanni Battista in Scansano. Sangiovese ("The blood of Jove") rendered in the belly of San Giovanni? How perfect! "Morellino" is the local name for the Sangiovese grape, perhaps alluding to the dark and tart morello cherry.

And where is "local"? Yes, we are in Tuscany, but closer to the coast and south of more famous Montalcino, Montepulciano (the place, not the grape also utilized here), and Chianti. Because of its obscurity relative to those more famous places, Morellino di Scansano can deliver great value – if you can find it. You've just found it.

JIM'S WHIMS: I know we've been showing you quite a bit of Tuscany of late. The trend is based not so much on preference but opportunism; we've been SHOWN a lot of good values from there in recent tasting appointments with vendors, but I'm sure an adjustment is pending; other goodness is bound to be coming upstairs in a vendor's wine bag any time now.

In the meantime, please recognize the honesty happening here. While Sangiovese can be medium-bodied and more red than purple in color and flavor, This wine's southern situation and assistance from more potent grape varieties darken and enlarge. It is easily the equal of many a more-expensive Chianti Classico Riserva. It deserves good food and can even handle some time in your cellar, so stock up!

19.99 / 17.99 for wine club members at home with their humanity



The Wine Steward's

'Here 'n There'

White Wine

WINE CLUB

March 2020

WINE: 2018 Toscolo

SOURCE: San Gimignano, Tuscany, Italy

GRAPES: 100% Vernaccia

ATTITUDE: Quinessential Italian white wine clarity

FOOD: Fish, Charcuterie, Pork Chops, Cream-Sauced Pasta

FACTUAL TIDBITS: We're about to embark on a 6-class series about Old World wines, where much will be said about Europe's emphasis on location. Your average French wine label, for example, doesn't represent grape varieties. Instead, the geographical source of the fruit is in big, bold type. Italy plays along – sort of. In many instances the grape name IS represented, but it is fused with its famous growing area. "Barbera d'Alba," for example, is a regional designation efficiently - or confusingly - reporting that the wine is made from a grape called "Barbera" as grown in a place called "Alba."

Similarly, this "Vernaccia di San Gimignano," is made of Vernaccia and grown in the area surrounding the ancient Tuscan hill town of San Gimignano, famous for its many *torres* (towers). This wine is famous in its own right, even mentioned by Dante in his "Divine Comedy."

JIM'S WHIMS: Like many Italian whites, good Vernaccia intentionally keeps its distance. Its deliberate coyness allows for the food alongside (you ARE eating, aren't you??) to have its say. Sometimes that's hard for me. I often wish Vernaccia would display a little more character, but I get it: Such Italian whites are more about acidic effect than flavor.

That said, THIS Vernaccia has a voice of its own, by this tongue's read. Lemon, grapefruit, almond blossom, salt and pepper (yep) . . . they're all in there, playing nice with your pasta!

16.99 / 15.29 for all wine club members



WINE: 2018 Cuatro Rayas

SOURCE: Rueda, Spain

GRAPES: 100% Verdejo, organically grown

ATTITUDE: Spicy, Pungent Pink Grapefruit Pizazz

FOOD: Fish tacos

FACTUAL TIDBITS: Verdejo's most well-known home of Spain's Rueda region is barely an hour's drive from Madrid. Because of the proximity, it is that capital city's most popular by-the-glass white; a "Say ahhhh!" foil to the summer heat and perfect accompaniment to the ubiquitous servings of *gambas al ajillo*. I admire the grape's ability to keep its nerve despite its hotter growing region, and am surprised Livermore and Lodi aren't noting this attribute and cultivating it (there might be *a little* in Lodi, but note that "Verdejo" is not the same as Portugal's "Verdelho").

In Rueda, Verdejo might see an addition of Sauvignon Blanc or Viura (Macabeo), but purists consider the practice inappropriate and misguided. Verdejo is its own great grape, resplendent with citric nerve and melon skin pungency. Don't mess with it!

JIM'S WHIMS: Wines have their trends. When I first fell hard for Spanish wine about sixteen years ago, Verdejo and Albariño were the whites from there to know and pursue. Albariño has maintained its luster, now Spain's most famous white. Verdejo has withdrawn somewhat from the world wine stage, which has this Verdejo lover scratching his head.

What's not to like? This wine screams with character. There is no shortage of sass, no lack of vibrancy, no dimness of droopy, ploppy plonk. This is Vvvvvvvvverdejo, dammit!

17.49 / 15.74 for all wine club members

The Wine Steward's

Tuesday Night

WINE CLUB

March 2020



WINE: 2018 Finca el Origen
'Reserva' 'Estate' Malbec

ATTITUDE: Simple hedonism

SOURCE: Valle de Uco, Mendoza, Argentina

FOOD: Not essential, but asado-style beef
is the Argentine way

GRAPE: 100% Malbec

FACTUAL TIDBITS: In less than twenty years Argentina has become Malbec's greatest proponent in the wine world. The Mendoza region, starting at an elevation of about 3,000 feet, is its most referred-to vineyard location. Now, like Napa with its Rutherford and Oakville and Carneros neighborhoods, we are more specifically referring to Mendoza's sub-regions. It is widely felt the most intensely characterful (and colored) examples of Malbec come from Mendoza's southern section of the Uco Valley. Focusing our lens even further, we can identify Uco's most celebrated vineyard – Vista Flores – as the source of this beautiful bargain. Located at no less than 3,900 feet up in the Andean foothills, this vineyard is the coveted fruit source for many a producer, but THIS winery actually owns the plot.

JIM'S WHIMS: We're not in the market for nuance and discretion here: This is a power wine. That theme begins with the daunting, opaque purple-black color. It continues with the scents of dark fruits, meat, and (yes) fresh asphalt; prettily decorated with a violet florality. The bulky mouthfeel is muscular; full on the mid-palate and aggressively-tanned in the finish. Your solution for this requisite astringency: BEEF.

11.49 / 10.34 for all wine club members



WINE: 2018 'Selected by KERMIT LYNCH'

SOURCE: Languedoc, France

GRAPES: Grenache, Syrah, Carignan, and Cinsault

ATTITUDE: Flavorful gracefulness

FOOD: Lighter grilled fare

FACTUAL TIDBITS: Our industry has historically referred to the south of France's massive Languedoc region as that country's "Wine Lake." The implication: There was tons of fermented grape juice to source from here, and none of it of remarkable quality. As Wine Adventurer Club members were shown as recently as January, we are now regarding the Languedoc with more respect – because many of its producers are. The land has always been cheap to attain relative to more famous Burgundy, etc., yet its Mediterranean climate and myriad soil types offer the thoughtful winegrower a chance to fashion flavorful and balanced - while warmheartedly fruit-forward - wines.

Actually, "fashion" is a key word I'll employ again, another way: The Languedoc has simply never been "fashionable" until recently. Those stuffy sorts in need of names like Bordeaux and Burgundy would look down their noses at anything from here. Just like the new age of thoughtful Languedoc producers, REAL, unstuffed wine lovers now recognize the great possibility for delicious value from here. We present "Exhibit A."

JIM'S WHIMS: While his name is prominently featured on this particular label, Kermit Lynch is not so much a winemaker as he is an identifier and importer of French and Italian wines grown with respect for the land and made with honest methods. The Wine Steward has, in turn, been choosing certain Kermit Lynch imports to represent on our shelves. This second layer of selection happens by my visiting Kermit's own retail shop on certain Mondays, the day when it's actually closed. Our wholesale rep Daniel unbolts the door to admit me, and quickly relocks behind us. He and I wander the dimly lit displays of sleeping bottles to choose about a dozen-and-a-half things to taste, locate a corkscrew and some glasses (and a big spit bucket), and get down to work.

This happened again just last Monday, resulting in this tasty, characterful club selection. Many of you have enjoyed its "cousin bottle," Kermit's always-successful Cotes du Rhone. This more recent addition to his offerings is a little more "vibrant" in the nose and lithe on the tongue, and no less flavorful with its berry and *herbes de Provence* qualities. Daniel will visit our store for an event on April 1st, if all goes well, for a reenactment of last Monday. Twelve other wines will be savored that evening, so stay tuned!

12.99 / 11.69 for all wine club members