

The Wine Steward's

# RED COLLECTOR

WINE CLUB

March 2021



**WINE:** 2015 Miner Family Merlot

**SOURCE:** Stagecoach Vyd, Napa Valley

**ATTITUDE:** Cowboy

**GRAPES:** 89% Merlot,

7% Cabernet Sauvignon, 4% Petit Verdot

**FOOD:** Roasts, short ribs, campfires

**FACTUAL TIDBITS:** Miner Family Winery was recently represented to you as a Cabernet Sauvignon from the 2017 vintage. This Merlot is two years older. With that age difference we are trading away youthful dark color and corresponding juvenile fruit scents and flavors for a little more development and – I'd say – intrigue. The fruit source for this wine is also more specific and particular. Stagecoach Vineyard, in the hills above and to the east of the Napa Valley proper, confers something very “place demonstrative” - scents, flavors, and textures - to the various red wines it spawns. While some wine lovers enjoy any good red providing an impressive mouthful, many of us delight in wines that very obviously declare their geographical source. Nearly every Stagecoach-derived wine I've tried does this – and my hope for honest-to-locale-ness is thereby satisfied.

**JIM'S WHIMS:** Stagecoach Vineyard, beginning with its history-inspired name, gives me a “Cowboy wine”; barely tamed, rugged, and – who knows – smoking a Marlboro? A Cabernet OR a Merlot or Syrah from here nearly always yields brawny, sun-drenched tannins, sagebrush, tobacco, and maybe even a sense of barbecue. Of course, there is also fruit; *place-accompanying* fruit.

This 2015 verging on “Phase II” in development wishes for a slow-cooked meal of meat of some kind. My rule of thumb: Young, bold, and forward-fruited reds belong with meats we cook fast (i.e. medium-rare ribeye off the grill). More complex reds which have been given the time to mellow (this Miner Merlot) deserve a meal that's correspondingly slow to “develop” – or cook. Cold winter nights also enhance this pairing!

44.99 / 40.49 for all wine club members



**WINE:** 2016 Jonata 'Todos'

**SOURCE:** Ballard Canyon, Santa Ynez Valley

**ATTITUDE:** Comprehensively Inclusive

**GRAPES:** (Deep Breath): 60% Syrah, 10% Cabernet Franc, 10% Cabernet Sauvignon, 10% Merlot, 5% Petit Verdot, with dabs of Petite Sirah and – yes – Viognier.

**FOOD:** Duck, Lamb, Grilled Portabellas

**FACTUAL TIDBITS:** Jonata is the OTHER Ballard Canyon producer we've consistently done some work with over the years. Stolpman Vineyards, of course, is the first we handled from there. "Where??" Yes, I should elaborate on this location for those new to the name. When you drive south on Highway 101 into Santa Barbara County and have passed Santa Maria and Los Alamos your next glance at civilization is Buellton. Anderson's Pea Soup and the Windmill Inn and The Hitching Post II are all here, some figuring into the Sideways film. Stop: West of you is the famous Pinot Noir and Chardonnay-growing sub-appellation Santa Rita Hills. East of you is the Santa Ynez Valley and sub-appellations Happy Canyon (more remotely east) and nearer Ballard Canyon. Solvang is its nearest actual town, but Ballard Canyon itself features naught but vineyards, horse ranches, and but one or two actual tasting rooms. Jonata was established here, after Stolpman and others, by none other than the folks who also own Napa's vaunted Screaming Eagle. I am not supposed to tell you that. I may be in big trouble.

**JIM'S WHIMS:** Before the hitmen arrive to wipe me out, let me NOT apologize for this other-than-Cabernet provision. I can't imagine that's all you drink, nor can I imagine repeatedly writing Red Collector Club notes that tell you, "Drink this bold Napa Cab with a good ribeye." Knowing that what most of you REALLY prefer is a riper, darker, complex, and more substantial red regardless of variety, I'm very confident with this selection. 'Todos' happened for your club once before with nary a complaint!

Note that the first two ingredients are known for their extravagant scents, especially when grown in a not-too-hot region like Ballard Canyon. Syrah is certainly having its say with the black fruits and cured meats connotations, and I imagine the Cab Franc is to thank for the deep red rose petal scents. While fully ripe, this wine wonderfully furnishes cool AND warm weather complexity and enough mineral structure to hold it all together. . . . And do feel free to pair it with a ribeye.

**52.99 / 47.69 for all wine club members**

The Wine Steward's

# World Class

## WINE CLUB

March 2021

**WINE:** 2015 Celler Piñol 'Portal'

**SOURCE:** Terra Alta, Catalunya, Spain

**GRAPES:** 50% Garnacha, 20% Carignan, 10% Merlot,  
10% Syrah, 10% Tempranillo

**ATTITUDE:** Gruff, Developed Boldness

**FOOD:** Rich foods, especially proteins like  
baby back ribs, burgers, and stews!



**FACTUAL TIDBITS:** The region of Terra Alta is lesser known than its adjacent neighbors to the north Priorat and Montsant. Winemaking has happened in this rugged land southwest of Barcelona for just as long, but renown is only beginning. The big difference maker - modern and innovative winemaking - is newer to Terra Alta. This 'Portal' blend represents both native grape varieties and a couple (Syrah and Merlot) which have been more recently incorporated. This is typical whether you're drinking a Priorat, Montsant, or a wine from here in Terra Alta; Garnacha and Carignan will be emphasized but frequently embellished. What's important to the global wine lover is that the PLACE remain detectable in the glass. Terra Alta, as its name suggests, is higher than Priorat. It is hotter during the day and colder at night. It features – especially – calcareous (limestone-including) clay. Elevation, diurnal shift, and soil type all combine to provide a robustly ripe red wine experience. And then there's the AGE of this wine . . .

**JIM'S WHIMS:** For 'Portal' to have the best chance of succeeding in your nose and mouth you must be in the mood, and so must your food. Let's start with your personal anticipation. This red, once blatantly and more simply "forward-fruited" is now donning a dimension of maturity. The cherries and plums are still massive but the development of 6 years is adjusting them from "fresh off the tree" to "sun-dried" in style. A mineral ruggedness typical of the location is emerging. This is a "Phase II" wine!

Your food (you ARE eating, aren't you?!) should play along. The bold, gruff fruit and brash textures of Portal need a suitable partner: BOLD foods are asked to participate. Rich protein with the addition of smoke and char is the best answer, whether ribs or grilled sausages. You and your wine both deserve to complete the experience with a little work at the Weber!

29.99 / 26.99 for Wine Club Members



**WINE:** 2017 Gust (pertaining to “wind”) Syrah

**SOURCE:** Petaluma Gap

**GRAPES:** 100% Syrah

**ATTITUDE:** Serious

**FOOD:** Rich Cheeses, Lamb (you knew that was coming)

**FACTUAL TIDBITS:** Two very cool things just happened in Sonoma County.

The first is a newly-approved appellation for a place that has long produced great wine, the Petaluma Gap. Until this more site-specific clarification in 2018, the region was but part of a much larger vineland swath known as “Sonoma Coast” within which there are too many variations to identify a general theme of soil and climate. Even more demarcated Petaluma Gap has its variables, west to east, so let’s tell you the precise place we’re visiting: The hills east of Rhonert Park and Cotati- and west of the town of Sonoma.

The second cool thing is the birth of “Gust” one year earlier, a project involving two sisters that have long produced great wine. Yes, Megan and Hillary are Clines, active with their parents for many years at Cline Family Winery. Their involvement there continues while a “next generation urge” to create something new is also now nurtured. The family has long owned land in what is now called Petaluma Gap and more recently planted much of it to Chardonnay, Pinot Noir, and Syrah. We recently tasted and bought all three, loving the goodness of these minimally-handled wines from a special “gusty” and hilly place.

**JIM’S WHIMS:** Once more we assume the right to bring you “World Class” wine even when it’s domestically-derived. It happens this time because, while this Gust Syrah sports California-style darkness and heft, it possesses wonderfully Old World attributes as well. Here is a Syrah you’ll best know from the wide bowl of a Pinot Noir glass. From that broad stage you should view vast black fruits, black olives, black pepper, and black asphalt, and black just-about-anything-else; I suppose violets are actually purple, but they’re nearly “black” in this case! The mouthfeel is quite powerful, with tannins that creep up and grab the tongue; reluctant to finally relent. This is easily moderated by good food (heard that before?!).

The Wine Steward is so happy to be on the ground floor with this new project from a great place and – just as importantly – wonderful and trusted wine folks.

**39.99 / 35.99 for Wine Club Members**



The Wine Steward's  
**CALIFORNIA**  
(*West Coast*)  
WINE CLUB

March 2021

**WINE:** 2017 One Stone Cabernet Sauvignon

**SOURCE:** Paso Robles

**GRAPES:** 80% Cabernet Sauvignon, 15% Merlot,  
5% Petit Verdot

**ATTITUDE:** A particular Cabernet type I like

**FOOD:** Smoked or braised *stuffe*

**FACTUAL TIDBITS:** Ancient Peaks Winery is based in the southernmost section of the ever-more-popular Paso Robles region, not far from where you scale then descend the Cuesta Grade into San Luis Obispo. Its more moderate temperatures and fossil-ridden soils provide the possibility for a more balanced and energetic Paso red, which is successfully achieved in this charismatic Cabernet.

“Ancient Peaks? I don’t see that anywhere on this label!” Right. This is a special project with a cool mandate, a side business of sorts. For each bottle of this alternatively-labeled wine sold, a portion of the proceeds is donated to *Dream Big Darling*, a non-profit that provides mentorship programs for the next generation of female leaders in the wine and spirits industry. Think that’s cool? Try the wine!

**JIM’S WHIMS:** Big, jammy Cabernets might be fun and more understandable, but what’s happening in One Stone Cabernet is something less prevalent on grocery store shelves and – to this palate – more REAL. The scent and flavors are actually more representative of what you taste when plucking an about-to-be-harvested Cabernet Sauvignon grape from its vine: Pepper (black peppercorn and green bell). Black olives (the shriveled-up brine-cured kind). Herbs (Sage? Oregano? Thyme?).

I like this wine for its departure from the “chain store” norm and its “accuracy-to-grapeness.” In a way, it resembles the Bordeaux varietals and blends of Chile, with their more complex “green” and “red” flavor inclusions. What keeps One Stone solidly “Californian” and even “Paso Robles-ian” is its textural richness. There is a ripe, nearly-sweet mouthfeel to alleviate your fears of something too angularly Old World. There is a lot going on here in the nose, flavor, and feel. While it can be enjoyed *sans* food, it really wants a place at your table laden with the same kind of “complexity”!

**19.99 / 17.99 for all wine club members**



**WINE:** 2017 Embankment Merlot

**SOURCE:** Alexander Valley

**GRAPES:** 100% Merlot (so we're told)

**ATTITUDE:** Goldilocks

**FOOD:** Roasted meats

**FACTUAL TIDBITS:** The Alexander Valley is Sonoma County's loudest retort to Napa. Certainly, Dry Creek and Knights Valley and Chalk Hill and Sonoma Valley, all within this vast AVA, should be permitted to chime in but for my mouth Alexander Valley says it best and most often: "We can do Cab and Merlot as well as you guys - and differently!" Embankment is but one labeling "fork in the road" for the wine empire of Nick Goldschmidt. This winemaker/proprietor with a dizzying list of industry credentials, past and present, has actually avoided our notice. I get the idea that along with Nick's wine know-how there is enough business savvy to identify other-than-California markets to exploit. Good for him, but I'm glad this Merlot stayed home.

**JIM'S WHIMS:** Merlot happens twice this month, also seen in the Red Collector Club as the wonderful Miner Family example. This "kind" of wine happens at least FIVE times this month, within the twelve I chose for the various clubs. A Bordeaux varietal that "says so" with unhurried, unembellished, unusually honest goodness is happening here.

Merlot is NOT a wine from which to flee, regardless of one memorable two-second-long disparagement in the movie Sideways. It is one of the two most important red grapes of Bordeaux, and actually wins on acres planted. It is more accommodating in feel and suaveness than Cabernet, often playing the role of soothing the 'Sauvage' beast in a Cab-oriented blend.

THIS Merlot does as it should; it soothes. It suavely slides across your palate with silky seduction. It sticks out nowhere and satisfies in every location of your senses from eyes to nose to mouth to nummy-in-your-tummy (until your third bottle). This Embankment Merlot is notable for trying not to be, if that makes any sense.

Here's to wines that are "just right!" - as I imagine an "all-growed-up" Goldilocks might declare!

**21.99 / 19.79 for all members**



**WINE:** 2017 Belezos Crianza

**SOURCE:** Rioja Alavesa, Spain

The Wine Steward's

# Wine Adventurer's WINE CLUB

March 2021

**GRAPES:** 95% Tempranillo, 3% Mazuelo,  
2% Graciano

**STYLE:** Supple & Soothing Value!

**FOOD:** Roasted Lamb Shank, Manchego

**FACTUAL TIDBITS/WHIMS:** Once more we bring you one our – and now your – favorite reds of the wine world, Rioja. I believe our best-selling foreign wines in the \$15 to \$30 range are Rhone reds and now this Spanish type. Rioja is the name of the region, Spain's most famous. This wine land roughly four times the size of the Napa Valley is divided into subregions Rioja Oriental (formerly "Baja"), Rioja Alta, and this even more northerly place of Rioja Alavesa, which is actually considered part of the Basque Country. This particular example sees the "Classical Rioja" treatment of AMERICAN oak aging. Tempranillo, "The Cabernet of Spain," is in charge here. Assisting the cause is Mazuelo, better known as Carignan, and Graciano, a native grape I call "the Petit Verdot of Rioja" for its provision of darkening complexity.

**JIM'S WHIMS:** These notes are about five or seven days late in getting to you. Some of you have already picked up your club wines, uncorking them unedified by the input I'd ideally provide. My bad. In the meantime, though, ONE couple among you has already already polished off their Belezos Crianza and apparently loved it without hearing from me: Lex and Sandra just ordered *a whole case* of this lovely wine, also reporting that they drank it over the course of two nights and it held up very well.

That's my experience as well, with a bottle remaining uncorked for three or four days here at TWS and drinking marvelously the whole time. Remember the notes on "reduction" I wrote last month, referring to the Sylvain Badel Northern Rhone Syrah? Tempranillo also has reductive tendencies, meaning it craves air. For this to fully bloom on Night #1, uncork and decant it at the same time you're starting the four-hour process of roasting a lamb shank. – Or skip the decanting for two or three nights of inexpensive Rioja pleasure!

**20.99 / 18.89 for Lex & Sandra and the rest of you beloved wine club members**



**WINE:** 2018 Podere San Cristoforo 'Amaranto'

**SOURCE:** Maremma Toscana, Italy

**GRAPES:** 100% Sangiovese

**ATTITUDE:** Precision and Purity

**FOOD:** *Si!!!*

**FACTUAL TIDBITS:** While we have been longer aware of Tuscany's wine places Chianti, Montalcino, and Montepulciano, *Maremma* must be factored in. As the name implies, this is the province's westernmost, sea-adjacent area. The weather is milder / less continental than interior Tuscany, and the wines from here (including several of the most famous "Super Tuscans") accordingly behave with a bit less "severity". Sangiovese, which reigns supreme farther inland, might be entirely omitted from the Maremma red blend in favor of Bordeaux varieties and even Syrah. 'Amaranto,' however, insists we remember we're still in Tuscany as a 100% Sangiovese "monovarietal" (unblended wine).

**JIM'S WHIMS:** If there is one reason for reading these notes it's to learn that you **MUST** eat with this wine. I insist! Treating it as a stand-alone cocktail could apply some unalleviated grief to your palate and a lack of appreciation for what 'Amaranto' is meant to be.

"Why would I want a wine that hurts my mouth?"

The high-acid Sangiovese grape is meant to confer energy, zest, and an urgent scramble for food, particularly proteins. This favorite Italian wine declares that not all great wines are stand-alone wines but are meant to be fully understood as a partner to the meal. Without trying to sound disgusting, this varietal named for "The Blood of Jupiter / Jove" means to accompany something bloody. Wild boar is the Tuscan ideal but so is *Bistecca Fiorentina*, the super-enhanced local ribeye steak ideally rendered medium-rare. Such a pairing gives your palate a wonderful see-saw ride between energy and resolution. This wine – and especially YOU – deserve that experience.

**20.99 / 18.89 for Wine Club Members**



The Wine Steward's  
'Here 'n There'

# White Wine

WINE CLUB

March 2021

**GRAPES:** 50% Antão Vaz, 25% Arinto, 25%  
Síria = 100% Delicious Confusion

**WINE:** 2019 Barrancôa

**SOURCE:** Alentejo, Portugal

**ATTITUDE:** Tropical

**FOOD:** Soft cheeses, Mac 'n Cheese

**FACTUAL TIDBITS:** The large Alentejo region of Portugal is located in that country's southeast section. This warmer inland place is "The Lodi of Portugal" to my mind, with its mixed agriculture provisions beyond winegrapes. It is also the world's largest producer of corks, as harvested from the *quercus suber*, or cork oak, trees. Of all of little Portugal's many wine regions Alentejo generally provides the "friendliest" product. While a Douro red is famous for its curmudgeonly stoic tannins, reds from Alentejo offer an olive branch of ripe friendliness to the tentative consumer. This is also a bastion for the uniquely red-fleshed grape Alicante Bouschet, and we've just put an Alentejo example on our shelf!

**JIM'S WHIMS:** One more little Portuguese Wine 101 factoid for you: "Branco" is "Blanco," or white wine from Portugal. While Alentejo is better known for reds, this rarer Branco proves whites from there can also succeed. Get past the mysterious ingredients of which 99.9% of you have never heard, and get a chilly glass of this wine near your nose.

The nose has an actual "feel" this time around; one of lanolin or waxflower. The actual scent or perfume, though, is floral/tropical. I'm reminded of something I'd smell in a florist shop or a bouquet from there. Tropical flowers AND fruit? Perhaps, especially in the rich but energetic mouth. Can a peach be tropical? Can a banana be citric? I'm enjoying this Portuguese puzzler, and hope you are, too!

12.99 / 11.69 for all wine club members



**WINE:** 2019 Cochon 'Cuvée Sophie' Pinot Gris

**SOURCE:** Willamette Valley, Oregon

**GRAPES:** 100% Pinot Gris

**ATTITUDE:** Evasive tangy white fruits and ...

**FOOD:** White fish dishes, pasta alfredo

**FACTUAL TIDBITS:** Behold, yet another offering from the world of our friend Adam Webb. It's easier to identify the man himself than his pantheon of label brands of which "Cochon" is but one. He is bound and determined to confuse us with other monikers such as "Odisea" and "Gardienne des Vignes," but let's just say everything Adam makes is very good, fairly-priced, and ordinally happening in 200-or-less case amounts. Adam's main fruit sourcing happens in Northern California, but his Oregon-based business partner scouts around his own turf to find fruit for more projects.

Pinot Gris is historically Oregon's "house white," though Chardonnay is starting to challenge that notion. As an old soul wino I'd like to see good ol' PG retain its title, hence this provision. This is technically a Burgundian grape, as it's actually a mutation of Pinot Noir. However, its most famous iterations hail from Alsace, and from Italy where it sports the "aka" Pinot Grigio.

**JIM'S WHIMS:** While he's never said as much (and may never), I'm thinking Adam is aware of the eroding reputation of Oregon Pinot Gris and is determined to combat that with a more "intellectual" version. Indeed, one factor of "early Oregon" Pinot Gris was residual sugar; not enough for perceived sweetness but enough to round the mouthfeel and enhance the stone fruit and melon flavors. This example is a more modern-day, smarter departure.

Evasion, not generous provision, is the message here. You're compelled (I hope) to hunt down this wine, because it sure isn't going to seductively dance in your direction wearing Carmen Miranda-like fruit basket headgear. No, this is blank wine – on purpose. It is blank until you inquire more deeply, perhaps adding a little body heat to your clutched glass, and only then do discreet white fruits furtively emerge. The palate feel is VITAL to the experience of Cochon Pinot Gris: You are meant to experience minerality; a clean, rocky feel ending with chalk. This makes you hungry. I think you ought to grill some shrimp and report back to me.

**18.99 / 17.09 for all wine club members**



The Wine Steward's

# Tuesday Night

WINE CLUB

March 2021

**WINE:** 2018 Flaco Cabernet Sauvignon

**SOURCE:** Vino de La Tierra de Castilla, Spain

**GRAPES:** 100% Cabernet Sauvignon

**ATTITUDE:** Rustic Ripeness

**FOOD:** L'Amuse Gouda cheese, etc

**FACTUAL TIDBITS:** Does it seem unusual to see Cabernet from here? After all, hasn't The Wine Steward persisted in teaching Tempranillo is "The Cabernet of Spain"? Perhaps we weren't expecting this, but many of us will be happily surprised by the novelty AND the inherent value of Flaco Cabernet.

We are bringing you to a hot and dry area about sixty miles south of Madrid. As a matter of fact, we are closer to the oh-so-historic city of Toledo. This is "anything goes" wine country based on the lower price of land, and that's certainly why someone took a gamble with not-entirely-"Spanish" Cabernet Sauvignon. I'm glad they did.

**JIM'S WHIMS:** We enjoy the visits from about three dozen different wine reps but only a few are in the inner circle, having earned more of our respect and time – and business activity. Among these few is Felipe, who – based on this status – is allowed to mess with me. Thus he did about three weeks ago, bringing upstairs a sample bottle disguised in a brown paper bag for me to taste "blind". This is not how we usually do things. Normally, I'm shown the bottle and maybe even the pricing before actually tasting; full disclosure. This time I was meant to assess more objectively. I sniffed and sipped and wondered, "Am I tasting a riper, more southerly wine from Italy? Perhaps Greece? Then my second-guessing started: "Does Felipe even sell Greek wine? Is this a California wine from a warmer, but not TOO hot place?" Amid my growing confusion one impression remained stable: My enjoyment of this "Whatever it is" wine. Finally unveiled, I groaned: "I've tasted this!!" Felipe knew that Flaco and I both deserved to become reacquainted another way. I heard the price and said, "Book it!"

Brawny, sun-drenched cherry fruit, smoke, leather, herbs... I'm puttin' the bag back on!!

**10.99 / 9.89 for all wine club members**



**WINE:** 2018 Secreto Cabernet Sauvignon

**SOURCE:** Colchagua, Chile

**GRAPES:** 85% Cabernet Sauvignon,  
15% Hush Hush (“Secret”)

**ATTITUDE:** “Where’s the Beef?”

**FOOD:** Skirt Steak of Tri-Tip

**FACTUAL TIDBITS:** Secreto is a particular fork-in-the-road label for Viu Manent, the Chilean producer long represented in our “Bang for the Buck” section. We are taking you to the Colchagua Valley, about 80 miles south of this incredibly long and comparatively skinny country, where Bordeaux grapes as well as Syrah have the capacity to impress at both the bargain price level and as a museum-quality wine. The 15% “Hush Hush” ingredient simply represents the winery’s right to apply other varieties per the particular vintage. Merlot or – certainly – Chile’s “Lost Bordeaux Grape” Carmenere are probably common finishers of this wine.

**JIM’S WHIMS:** The obvious thing to say this month: We’re giving you TWO Cabernets. And why not? You all know and like Cabernet, right? What the hell, I’ll probably be handing you yet another from Amador County NEXT month!

The point is, even “foregone conclusion varieties” like King Cabernet are meant to differ per where they’re from and who’s handling them. Terroir and Culture and (especially at this low price point) Market all figure into why this month’s two Cabs couldn’t be more unlike. Both of these are 2018’s. Examine the color difference (you may not be able to, but I have both Cabs open at the same time): The Spanish wine is more advanced in color than the Chilean. Ironically, the Chilean is 6 months “older” based on the earlier Southern Hemisphere harvest time. The Chilean gives more youthful dark fruits and requisite tannins.

It’s another kind of “very good for the price,” and we hope you noticed!

**12.99 / 11.69 for ALL wine club members**