

The Wine Steward's

THE RED COLLECTOR

WINE CLUB

May 2019

Return of a Classic

2014 RAMEY CABERNET SAUVIGNON – Napa Valley

I'm just now realizing the nifty-ness of what we're giving you this month. The Kenefick Ranch Cabernet is decidedly modern in its big-fruited declaration. This Ramey guarantees diversity with a message that's far more "classic".

In fact, that's a term I unwittingly used no fewer than three times in my three lines of tasting notes upon first smelling and tasting this. The impression was simply that strong.

First, a qualification. Sometimes our/my use of "classic" implies barely-ripe; not the idea this time. This wine is fully ripe, as are all the delicious 2014 Napa Cabs I've savored. The "classicness" of Ramey's Cabernet compared to other more bombastic renditions is what it does with its ripeness: It keeps it down to drinkable size. This wine isn't huge, nor is it light. It is in no hurry to impress, yet has a quality akin to that of aged Rioja – a commanding presence of assured calm. It seems to assume you're a lover of great wine, confident in your ability to identify greatness herein. Size doesn't matter when complexity and length of effect are so generously and eloquently declared.

The prevailing fruit is not blackberries but plums and currants. The oh-so-classic Napa Cab quality of olives also chimes in for extra dimension. Dust – another allusion to the classical – happens as well. This 80% Cabernet Sauvignon, 11% Merlot, 6% Malbec, and 3% Petit Verdot shows suave suppleness with its palate feel; after half a glass you realize you're in the presence of nobility, in no rush to declare itself.

I'd also note that because of a good relationship with Ramey's people we are benefitting from a better-than-normal wholesale price on this lovely wine. So are you. Look around at the prices from other reputable sources and consider coming to The Wine Steward for more of this beauty.

54.99 / 49.49 for wine club members



Dr Tom Kenefick, forsaking his scrubs

Potent Darkness

2015 KENEFICK RANCH 'Chris's Cuvée' CABERNET SAUVIGNON – Calistoga, Napa Valley

The fun of this club is the prevalent theme of Cabernet Sauvignon and Cabernet blends with a different tweak on that theme each time. Who wants the same wine, one month after another? Certainly, no adventurous club member does! This time around we're providing fully ripe, intensely-fruited "modern-style" Napa Valley Cabernet. You should be able to age it for five or six years, but with a medium-rare ribeye you can cut loose with this baby TONIGHT.

Doctor Tom Kenefick, a retired neurosurgeon who served his residency at the renowned Mayo Clinic, purchased a 125 acre plot in the extreme northern Napa Valley in 1978. The existing vineyard was still being farmed by horse and plow (the former owner threw in the horse as part of the deal) and many of the vines had been planted in the late nineteenth century. With a surgeon's meticulousness Tom proceeded to revamp the vineyard, replanting to mainly Bordeaux varieties with a courteous nod to several Rhone ones. Four decades after the acquisition Tom still oversees the maintenance of this Calistoga plot. His own Kenefick Ranch winery retains ten percent of the vineyard's production, while customers such as Cade, Caymus, Eisele, Nickel & Nickel, and Venge vie for the remaining fruit.

"Chris's Cuvée" is named for Tom's son, now active in the Kenefick Ranch operation. It is sourced entirely from the estate and consists of 85% Cabernet Sauvignon, 10% Merlot, and 5% Petit Verdot. The production in this notoriously dry year was a mere 2.6 tons per acre. The payback for this chintzy yield was smaller berries that gave a darker, more deeply-fruited wine. To the nose there are visits of espresso, blackcurrant, oregano, and melted black licorice. The palate is rich and luxurious. The fruit lingers for a significant stay on the tongue. As ripe as it is, the wine remains contained with a good acid/tannin balance. When Wine Spectator conferred its 92-point rating, it had it right by saying: "A not-shy style, but there's a lot to like here."

Winery price: \$65. TWS does better for You:

59.99 / 53.99 for wine club members

The Wine Steward's

World Class

WINE CLUB

May 2019

World Class . . . Tannat??

2016 BODEGA GARZON 'Single Vineyard' TANNAT - Uruguay

I love unlikelihoods, and this submission is full of them.

The Tannat grape is especially championed in the obscure southwestern French wine region of Madiran. It figures that *foie gras* and *cassoulet* are so avidly consumed in the same place, as it takes extreme proteins and / or substantially rich stews to conquer the astringency of Madiran's expression of Tannat. Indeed, with Italy's Sagrantino being the only worthy challenger, Tannat is probably the most TANNIC varietal in the world. With this tongue-daunting reputation, why in the hell did Uruguay decide to give Tannat a try and ultimately identify it as its national grape variety? I'm not clear on this, but I imagine the Tannat flag was only slowly hoisted up the flagpole; small, experimental efforts must have succeeded early on, leading to more bold ones, and then – finally – the marketing department's endorsement: "No one else is doing what we Uruguayans are doing with Tannat. Let's exploit that!"

I invite you to check out the front page of the website for Bodega Garzon. You'll instantly realize that vast sums of money have been devoted to impressing the world with a Tannat the rest of the world cannot or will not aspire to. The vast winery facility equipped with all the bells and whistles is impressively apparent. The surrounding landscape of undulating vineyards connotes a "cannot fail" location. Behind the scenes, however, lies another asset; that of talent. Overseeing a gifted crew of winemakers and enologists is a consulting winemaker famous for his work the wine world over. Alberto Antonini, of all people, is employed as Bodega Garzon's shepherd. This Italian is known for his brilliant assessment of prime locations in Italy, the United States, Canada, Chile, Armenia, Argentina, and Australia among others. He and his people are less-known for leaving their proprietary fingerprints all over the wines they inspire. Rather, they observe and value what those extremely varied locations inherently offer, and do all they can to bring that to bottle. Beyond the obvious goodness of this glowingly-tinted, fragrantly-appealing, and eminently-drinkable Tannat is the heartening assurance that future vintages will provide more of the same – and probably even better - considering place, talent, and (evidently!) funding.

While bold in its declaration, I'd call this a drink-now wine. To the nose comes the comfort of tobacco accompanied by black cherries and violets. The mouth is full and broad, juicy and rich, and gorgeous with fruit, smoke, and chocolate tannins. Who knew?!!

29.99 / 26.99 for all wine club members

Bordeaux's Next Great Year

2016 CHATEAU CAPBERN – Saint-Estephe, Bordeaux, France

The best way to beat the pricey Bordeaux system is to buy lesser-known names from the great vintages. Hence, this terrific wine. 2015 and 2016 were both awesome years for Bordeaux. 2015 is akin to 2009 with its easygoing, fully-ripe fruit emphasizing 'redness' over 'purple-ness'. Alternatively, 2016 may be the next 2010: This year goes darker and sturdier with its ripeness; a decidedly "purple" vintage. A side-by-side tasting of Chateau Capbern alone makes my point. With a strong memory of the 2015 I just opened the 2016, poured it, and declared "Whoa!" at first sight. This is a PURPLE Capbern! The nose is potent with licorice, espresso, boysenberries, and sweet graphite. The palate is taut in its youth yet any forward-looking taster will understand the potential of this impressive packaging. The wine is BUILT.

While inspired by many sources, my notes are always custom. I never cut and paste from other places. The following list of accolades, shamelessly re-represented, is provided to wow you with its unprecedented depth. This time around, it makes a hell of an impression!

Critical Acclaim

Jeb Dunnuck 94 points

Made by the stellar team at Calon Ségur, the 2016 Château Capbern is fabulous stuff that readers should snatch up. Based on 69% Cabernet Sauvignon, 25% Merlot, 4% Cabernet Franc, and the rest Petit Verdot raised in 60% new French oak, this deeply colored Saint-Estèphe offers textbook crème de cassis, lead pencil shavings, crushed tobacco leaf, and damp earth. Deep, medium to full-bodied, concentrated, with fine tannins and everything in the right places, it's going to benefit from short-term cellaring and keep for upwards of two decades.

James Suckling 93 points

Very pretty fruit with dark berries, plums and currants. Hints of sweet tobacco. Medium bodied, firm and silky. Lovely, juicy finish with delicious acidity at the end. The 18 per cent of fabulous cabernet franc in this makes it special. Hard not to drink now, but better in 2023.

Wine Enthusiast 93 points

Although this wine is dense, it already has a charm to its richness and structure. That comes from the relatively high proportion of Merlot in the blend as well as the juicy fruit of the Cabernet. Made by the team of Calon-Ségur, the wine will develop relatively quickly, and should be ready to drink from 2023.

Robert Parker's Wine Advocate 92 points

The 2016 Capbern is a blend of 69% Cabernet Sauvignon, 25% Merlot, 4% Cabernet Franc and 2% Petit Verdot aged for 18 months in 60% new and 40% one-year-old oak. Deep garnet-purple colored, it leaps from the glass with cedar, blackberries and blueberries with wafts of tobacco, bay leaves and scorched earth. Medium to full-bodied, elegant and vibrant in the mouth, it possesses lovely poise and an earthy finish.

Decanter 92 points

This shows a great combination of deep, intense cassis and loganberry fruits and chalky, almost chewy, tannins. There is a slow creep of power, but with a sense of lightness in the touch. This is a reliable property, known as Capbern Gasqueton until 2013, that has delivered another hugely drinkable vintage - the IPT of 78 is similar to the 2014. The blend of 69% Cabernet Sauvignon, 25% Merlot, 4% Cabernet Franc and 2% Petit Verdot spends 18 months in 60% new oak.

Barrel Sample

Wine Spectator 91 points

A core of gently mulled plum and blackberry fruit is infused with perfumy bay and tobacco notes, while a light alder hint weaves through the finish. Some sneaky grip too, so while accessible, this has a few years of life ahead.

The Wine Steward's

California Wine Lover's

WINE CLUB

May 2019

Getting Uppity about Pinot Noir – But only momentarily, and to make a point.

2015 DANIEL PINOT NOIR – Ferrington Vineyard, Anderson Valley

Of all the prevalent wine types, Pinot Noir has a way of separating the casual consumer from the more attentive wine lover (sometimes each of us is one or the other!). The pleasure of great Pinot doesn't always happen with dark color and viscous richness. Many of the Pinots which DO achieve those features are doctored-up to appeal to the mainstream. Honestly great Pinot isn't always for the mainstream; sometimes only the thoughtful take the time to disregard a lighter color and swirl, sniff, and ponder. The provision of this club wine is especially for the thoughtful, but it also happens with the hope of turning more "casual" club members into "truly fascinated" ones. All of this said, I'll now get off my high horse to become more inclusive. Here's some data that should impress ALL of you:

Just 100 cases were made. Your club is accessing **25%** of the total production.

This is single-vineyard Pinot Noir from the Anderson Valley's (think Goldeneye, Roederer...) Ferrington Vineyard. The typical per-ton cost of fruit simply doesn't accommodate the retail price you'll see at the end of this write-up – **especially in smaller-crop 2015**. Someone is losing. You are winning.

Wine Enthusiast rates this a whopping **95 points**; also highly unusual for the soon-to-be-announced price.

The winery's own rate is over **\$50**. Ours is not, while we have some to sell you.

So, now that **everyone's** listening I'll suggest why this is special as a **wine**. Here is Pinot perfectly representing its Anderson Valley source, one of California's only regions approximating the Oregon style. What's so "Oregon" about the Anderson Valley style? A more complex mixture of fruity and savory flavors. That is, raspberries and cranberries are complemented by tea leaf and forest qualities. Then there's the **feel**, a unique textural meeting of ripeness and enlivening acidity. Yes, this wine is fully ripe AND / BUT it remains dynamic with nerve, making Daniel more suitable for food **and** ensuring durability. You can cellar this wine with more confidence than you might most other California Pinots at this price.

If you do crack this open early-on be sure to try it with rich proteins such as roast duck or grilled pork tenderloin. Serve it in GOOD Pinot Noir glasses (we sell these) so it can proclaim itself entirely.

Finally, appreciate the deal we've gotten you . . . Everybody happy?

22.99 / 20.69 for Wine Club Members of all kinds!



I'm a participant, in a tiny way

2016 TABLAS CREEK 'Patelin de Tablas' – Paso Robles

Whether its well-known or appreciated, something remarkable happened to Paso Robles in 1990. An international wine perspective and good financing – both rare in the region back then - happened courtesy of Tablas Creek Vineyards. Paso has benefitted by its presence ever since.

This is a partnership between Robert Haas of Vineyard Brands (a significant wine importer) and Chateau de Beaucastel of Chateauneuf-du-Pape, France. Applying their collective world view of wine to a California real estate search, they finally settled on the Adelaida District of western Paso Robles to launch Tablas Creek Vineyard. Clones of Grenache, Syrah, Mourvèdre, and the like were brought from the French property to plant here. A particular sense of winemaking style came along, and a region with a reputation for over-the-top, pruney red wines and clumsy, anything-but-refreshing whites had a new resident showing the way to balance and brightness.

Tablas Creek was the first (or among the first) to add the southwestern French grape Tannat to some of its red blends, supplying tannic backbone to wines that might otherwise lack it in these warmer climates. Alternatively, they added Picpoul to the whites for brightening lift. Grenache Blanc also made it to California because of them. As a side business, the Tablas Creek nursery propagates and sells Beaucastel-based clones of Rhone varieties to many other wineries and vineyard owners. Visitors to the tasting room can also access these, as there are often young grapevines displayed for sale just outside the door.

I have bought a few of those vines, likewise propagating them and spreading the Beaucastel / Tablas Creek message throughout my own Livermore Valley neighborhood in my own little way. Some of the product of those offspring has figured into our own Domaine des Plus-de-Vie Rhone-style red blend.

'Patelin de Tablas' implies that the grapes for this come mostly from neighbors of Tablas Creek, also planted to their clones. Ever-adjusting proportions of Rhone varieties contribute. This 2016 vintage uses 52% Syrah, 31% Grenache, 1% Counoise, and 6% Mourvèdre. In style and quality 'Patelin' approximates a good Cotes du Rhone Villages red. Spice and fruit all happen with good balance. There is enough generosity to satisfy the cocktail wine drinker's palate, but the creative chef will be inspired to exalt some special dish with its addition to the table. Don't go overboard, Chef; keep it simple! While 'Patelin's' lift will give liquid relief to grilled meats and vegetables, stick to the simple Provencal treatment of olive oil, *herbes de provence*, salt, pepper, and garlic. The smoke and this great wine will do the rest!

(91 points Wine Enthusiast)

20.99 / 18.89 for all wine club members

Wine Adventurer

WINE CLUB

May 2019

Success!

2010 DON DAVID "Reserve" MALBEC – Calchaqui Valley, Salta, Argentina

Your favorite wine buyer (I'm hoping) has an issue with typical Argentine Malbec, and therefore rarely supplies it to you in pure, 100% varietal form. To my mouth, Malbec doesn't completely agree with itself. This Bordeaux blending grape should, perhaps, remain just that: A bit player. As a solo act it can fail, with a dissonant disagreement between green-ness and redness. You feel properly indulged by Malbec's fruity frontal features, but the longer it's in your mouth you start to wonder, "Is my mouth truly happy?"

Don David Malbec received a coveted placement on Wine Spectator's Top 100 list last fall. I didn't know until long after tasting it, choosing it for you, and looking up its background. Accolades play only a back-up role (at most) with our wine selecting. What **really** surprised me about this inexpensive value? Agreement. Darkness to the eye. Dark, fresh fruit to the nose. Dark crunchy, mouth-filling fruit on the palate.

Typical Argentine Malbec already impresses the wine student with Mendoza's elevations of 3,000+ feet. With Don David we're taking you north from there to the area generally called Salta, where vines happen even higher. In Salta's sub-region of Calchaqui (the source for your club wine) the vines begin at 5,500 feet – a figure unheard-of anywhere else in the wine world. This is high desert at its most extreme. Days are hot and nights are correspondingly frigid. The soils are poor. Vines that struggle here provide smaller crops with an intensity of color, flavor, and texture indicative of that effort.

... And because of a certain economic factor, all this goodness is happening for well under \$20.

I thought about why I like this Malbec and so few others. Most, to me, "CLANG". They jangle with nervy green-ness while flirtatiously promising sumptuous purple-ness. This wine has "CRUNCH," another tactile effect of refreshment in the midst of indulgence; the better kind. A carelessly-taken sip of Don David pleases with its saucy fruit. The "crunch" part happens for the listening taster sensing the anything-but-green framework holding this wine together.

That's too much dissection. Let's just say this Malbec should work for the guzzler OR the wine student, for once! Especially for the price ...

17.99 / 16.19 for all wine club members



Chateau Beaupré . . .



and

Sophie Bougneres!

Read the fine print

2015 CHATEAU de BEAUPRÉ ‘Le Chateau’ – Coteaux d’Aix en Provence, France

That’s right: Please note the wine’s origin – Coteaux d’Aix en Provence – and savor the surprise. At least, I hope you’re surprised, for nearly every time you see that name in our local wine market it’s applied to a bottle of **pink** wine. Yes, Aix en Provence is most famous for its evasively-flavored and irresistibly-delicious dry rosés. Let me tell you, it took a lot of courage for the importer of the rosé from Chateau de Beaupré to include their RED wine in his latest shipping container. The lesser-known never sells as well!

Maybe we contributed. Exactly one year ago, eight of us abandoned ship (our Rhone River cruise ship) in search of rental cars in Arles. Achieving those, we headed east for about 45 minutes, making a few wrong turns along the way but ultimately locating the barely-discernable driveway for Chateau de Beaupré. I’d never been here, but had been championing their great rosé for enough vintages to rate an appointment.

The lovely Sophie Bougneres was there to meet us, and first led us through the estate’s vineyards. It was a warm day, and we were glad to head next to the cool of the tasting room in an old stone winery building. Naturally, we tasted and loved the familiar rosé, famous as the “house wine” of the Palais de l’Élysée (the French “White House”). We tried a white wine we’d never heard of as well, and then came this – a nice surprise: 50% of this red nicknamed ‘Le Chateau’ is Syrah, common to the area. The other 50% is devoted to a grape you might not expect to see in Southern France, Cabernet Sauvignon. Provence reds rarely come to our California market but they often do access Cabernet. We’re just unfamiliar with the notion. “Bordeaux fused Rhone?” That’s a new one.

The effect you might anticipate actually happens: Syrah is perceived in the nose *via* the attractive floral, meat, and cherry qualities. Cabernet Sauvignon declares itself with herb and cedar. The palate is medium-to-full in size, while providing good, refreshing acidic lift. Here again the two grapes might be recognized. Syrah makes Cabernet a little more cheery – “southern French” in attitude – while Cab insists on instilling the importance of dryness with graphite and earth.

Upon our return from France I thanked Beaupré’s importer for the hook-up, and told him if he ever brought in this *rouge* we’d be supportive with a wine club placement. Lo and behold . . . a rarity occurs.

This is a terrific grilled meat wine, one that will show more fruit when juxtaposed with the protein. Do try!

20.99 / 18.89 for all wine club members

The Wine Steward's

Here n There Whites

WINE CLUB

May 2019

Success!

2018 BOKISCH GRENACHE BLANC – Vista Luna Vineyard, Lodi

I'm always on the lookout for good Grenache Blanc. - A difficult quest, as too few are attempted in California where this variety should actually perform quite well. Another challenge is the wine's propensity for turning resinous a year or two after its release; an effect that doesn't thrill me. Getting FRESH and VERY GOOD Grenache Blanc was finally achieved **here**, however, and it's no surprise to me that it happened *via* Bokisch.

Markus Bokisch farms significant acreage in Lodi, a wine region where quality varies greatly. Markus' attention to detail is key to his better fruit. Also enabling is his unique resumé. As a child Markus spent his summers with his family in Spain, where good wine was shown to him early on (responsibly diluted with a splash or two of H₂O). Later, he and his wife Liz moved to Spain and worked in the wine industry there, particularly in Catalonia. Upon returning to California he planted in Lodi; cultivating an array of Spanish varieties such as Tempranillo, Garnacha, Monastrell, and Albariño. That his Garnacha Blanc (Grenache Blanc) turns out so well might be ascribed to his Catalonian experiences, for it is there that this mutation of the red Grenache originally occurred. Just south of Priorat is Terra Alta, the homeland of Garnatxa Blanca, as Catalans spell it. Markus' reverence for the place certainly inspired his naming his own primary vineyard in Lodi "Terra Alta," which is the source for this wine.

Garnacha Blanca is oxidation-prone. Inert stainless steel tank-aging is the best preventative. That said, this example actually saw both tank AND a bit of barrel time. Without a little oak and the lees contact that goes along, Grenache Blanc can be a little too neutral in character. The Bokisch treatment complicates the wine in a good way. Gardenias, mangos, stone fruits, and lemon rind all perform an intricate dance of juicy lushness on your thirsty tongue.

We're pleased to provide this Grenache Blanc, and to be working with this thoughtful grower at long last.

19.99 / 17.99 for all wine club members

PAIRINGS FOR THIS ITALIAN WHITE:

Ricotta, radicchio, and walnut ravioli with cheese sauce

Fettuccine with borage, anchovy, and potato pesto

Spaghetti alla chitarra with anchovy and fennel sauce

When in Rome . . .

2017 CINCINNATO ‘Castore’ – Lazio, Italy

Upon popping into an enoteca to evade Rome’s summer heat you might be served a glass of Frascati. Another likely provision would be a white such as this, made from the Bellone grape.

The fruit for ‘Castore’ is grown an hour’s drive southeast of the city itself. While many of us place a higher value on wineries which are family owned, one should never write off what a good cooperative winery can accomplish. Cincinnato is one of the latter, a co-op consisting of 126 individual growers and a total of 250 hectares of vineyards. Most of these growers wouldn’t have the acreage or financial means to start his or her own winery. The co-op resolves this, and while this form of organization used to be notorious for sub-par quality, in the right place and under good management the low-overhead situation can make for very good juice at very reasonable prices. That’s happening more and more often in these modern days of cleaner facilities and more “educated” winemaking.

. . . And it happens here in this 100% Bellone. The wine was temperature-control-fermented in stainless steel tanks, the same inert and airtight containers where it spent its brief pre-bottling nap. Malolactic fermentation, the process which would unnecessarily “enrich” the textures, was kept from happening.

The result is a bone-dry refresher redolent of ripe fruits such as nectarine, apple, and citrus. Yes, that’s lotsa fun, but without some kind of “control” all of this fruit might over-indulge. Keeping this wine in check and more complex is an additional yet vague component of bitterness; a tinge of herb. This little bit of resistance keeps the tongue intrigued and thirsty for another inquiring sip.

We hope you enjoy what we assume is your first-ever experience of Bellone, an oh-so-Roman refresher!

15.49 / 13.94 for all wine club members

The Wine Steward's

Tuesday Night

WINE CLUB

May 2019

Argentina's "NOT Malbec"

2017 LA POSTA 'Armando' BONARDA – Mendoza, Argentina

Let's first note a nice price adjustment. At our recent Chile / Argentina sit-down event we presented this wine at 16.49 per bottle. Those submitting a big enough order got it for 14.79. Now, because of the power of wine club purchase, we are lowering the regular price to that discounted event rate AND your wine club discount makes it even better: 13.31!

Now let's address the grape variety, certainly new to many of you. Bonarda is Argentina's "other" red grape, second only to Malbec in acreage. I'm betting it sneaks into many a bottle of Malbec even when producers insist those wines are 100% varietal. – And it should, as Bonarda has certain qualities that can only help Malbec's cause.

Like Malbec, Bonarda displays bold, purple color. After that, it departs with a more floral, grapey fragrance and a less severe, more careless palate feel. A little coffee might be detected in the farewell finish. It's a juicy red you might even slightly chill on a warm summer night, just before salmon heads from the grill to the table.

Bonarda is the same grape as the now-rare Douce Noir of France's eastern, sub-alpine Savoie region. A more useful fact: It is also identical to what we in California call Charbono. Charbono is a rarity here these days but there remain some ancient vine stands, particularly in northern Napa, and are exploited by Tofanelli, Robert Foley, Shypoke, and a few other keepers of the flame.

While critical ratings never interfere with our own appraisals of the wines we offer you, we'll often reference them for fun. This little red from 80-year-old vines has been positively "thumbs-upped" by Wine Enthusiast with a 90 point rating. Vinous says the same, while James Suckling weighs in with a 91.

Savor it, carelessly. Bonarda's endearing attitude encourages that!

14.79 / 13.31 for wine club members



Yada Yada Yada Never Tasted so Good . . .

2016 GOTA de ARENA – Vino de Castilla y León, Spain

This new project isn't yet supported with tons of marketing material (tech sheets). My information on Gota de Arena will therefore be less specific, but should at least provide an "environment" for this wine.

We know it is 100% Tempranillo. We know it was aged in French and American oak. We can tell you the pH and the acidity numbers, and then your eyes will begin to glaze over. You'll forsake these YADA YADA YADA details and just drink the stuff, so let me try to keep you in play with the "environmental" stuff.

The fruit for this wine is sourced from the Zamora Province. Within that general area is a famous Tempranillo place known as Toro. Its wines are always intensely dark and texturally gratifying, with significant alcohol helping that but – hopefully – not throwing a lot of obvious "heat". While Gota doesn't come specifically from Toro, proximity factors in. Look at this wine: It is very colorful and opaque. Smell it: Sweet earthiness, espresso, black cherries, and a sprig of mint all beckon. Slurp it: The palate is rich and gratifying, so much so that we welcome the tannic resistance accompanying all that dark richness.

The wine represents an area a tech sheet could never quite reflect. I have visited here more than once and can attest: The summer days are freaking hot, while the evenings cool off considerably. That temperature swing called "diurnal shift" is critical to providing ripeness WITH STRUCTURE. Those evening temps are vital for retaining acidity.

More visually impressive are the vineyards here. From infertile sandy soils rise stubby little claw-like vines pruned in the *gobelet* style. They're old. Really old. Roots search for water at least thirty feet down, and must often wander twice as deep. The age and perseverance of these vines along with the severe local climate are why this wine is so characterful. The fact that Spain has SO MANY such old vine plots in no-name locations causes the low price.

Who would be anything less than confident about serving such a sumptuous yet affordable wine at his or her next party? I don't see any hands!

NOW 9.99 / 8.99 for all wine club members