



The Wine Steward's

RED

COLLECTOR

WINE CLUB

May 2020

WINE: 2016 Round Pond 'Estate' Cabernet Sauvignon

SOURCE: Rutherford, Napa Valley

GRAPES: 83% Cabernet Sauvignon, 9% Petit Verdot, 7% Malbec, 1% Merlot

ATTITUDE: Like getting a belly rub whilst lounging on a La-Z-Boy

FOOD: Creamy blue cheeses – or ribeye

FACTUAL TIDBITS: A month after providing you with William Harrison's Cabernet we're going to remain in the very same Napa Valley 'hood of Rutherford – and the same vintage of 2016 – for yet another delicious red. Based on production size, Round Pond is the somewhat better-known producer. Proximity to neighbors Caymus, Honig, Frog's Leap, and Beckstoffer is another fame-booster. So is the appearance on the tech sheet of widely-esteemed Thomas Rivers Brown as consulting winemaker. What makes this Cabernet especially well-known to some of YOU is its frequent appearance on the wine lists of local steak houses; appropriate settings for this ribeye and filet-loving bottling.

JIM'S WHIMS: It's my self-appointed mandate to serve you a spectrum. Your club is devoted not to one winery's productions but to the more openminded "Show me!" idea of Delicious Difference. Yes, as a TWS club member you must be a little braver, expecting variations on your wine club theme. While your Red Collector Club is a little more varietal-specific, leaning heavily toward Cabernets and blends thereof, "Difference" is still shown *via* themes like "Mountain *versus* Valley Fruit?" and "Washington or Sonoma or Napa?" and "Cooler vintage / Warmer Vintage?" This month I take a break from geeking out about such things with the convicted opinion that – stylistically – this will NAIL IT for more of you Cabernet lovers than not. Here, I submit, is why most of you signed up for this ride; a stylistic right-down-the middle, satisfying and affable, ripe-yet-poised Napa Cab. Another reason you signed up: Value. Our price for Round Pond is among the best you'll find: Membership matters!

49.99 / 44.99 for all wine club members



WINE: 2017 Mad Hatter

SOURCE: Napa Valley

GRAPES: 67% Cabernet Sauvignon, 12% Merlot,
8% Cabernet Franc, 8% Petite Sirah,
3% Petit Verdot, 2% Malbec

ATTITUDE: Lascivious

PAIR WITH: Aged gouda. Prime rib. Bedstand.

FACTUAL TIDBITS: Mad Hatter is the project of Tuck Beckstoffer, from a family possessing some of the Napa Valley's most famous (and lucrative) vineyards. It is actually the "second wine" of Dancing Hares, a Cabernet costing three times this price. Once upon a time, a particularly sought-for winemaker oversaw the upbringing of these reds. Philippe Melka was that original wine shepherd; especially known for invoking dark fruit scents and flavors, and decadently rich mouthfeels. While the baton has been passed, my sense is that Melka's style yet prevails.

JIM'S WHIMS: With our submission of Mad Hatter we have established a particular two-wine theme for May 2020, a month that will be remembered for its Corona Virus-caused compromises. The theme, as referred-to in the notes for Round Pond, is Drink-Now Generosity. It seems the right thing for us to do at the moment; to give you Carpe-Diem gratification rather than complication. You probably have enough complexity going right now!

That said, this is the more sumptuously dark wine of the two, and keeps from being entirely "floozylicious" with its involvement of gutsy tannins. Will this factor allow the wine to age longer than we'd expect? Perhaps the experiment I've unintentionally conducted over the past four days is an indication: I intended to write these notes last Thursday when I popped a bottle for inspiration. As of Monday, I'm finally back to the task (thank you TWS supporters for distracting me all weekend) and, forgetting that open bottle for one blank-out moment (lots of those of late), I've uncorked another. Comparing the two, I'd say Thursday's edition is still very valid, which indicates age-worthiness to this wine drinker.

Intense, nearly-compote qualities of ultra-ripe black raspberries are the top notes, with espresso and *pain grille* qualities singing an octave or two below. The palate is PACKED with chocolate implications. The finish is long with sweet smoke and vanilla bean. **Yum.** Now all I need is a haircut.

54.99 / 49.49 for All Wine Club Members

The Wine Steward's

World Class

WINE CLUB

May 2020



WINE: 2015 Chateau des Landes 'Grand Héritage'

SOURCE: Lussac-Saint-Émilion, Bordeaux, France

GRAPES: 100% Merlot

ATTITUDE: More evolved (mercifully) than last month's

FOOD: Roast *boeuf*. Cheddar.

FACTUAL TIDBITS: We just gave you a wine from this small producer in the April club. At the time, I was calling 'Cuvée Prestige' their top bottling, forgetting there was yet another step up. I was glad to be reminded of this by Alex, our representative for this wine's importer, but I don't feel stupid for needing the smack upside my muddled head: Grand Héritage is represented by a mere, forgettable 100 cases!

What's nice about this Right Bank Merlot besides the exclusivity factor? Its 2015 vintage. By now you've memorized our decree: "2016 AND 2015 are Bordeaux's best pair of vintages since 2009 and 2010." That said, last month's 2016 from this producer is still rather reticent; unwilling to crack a smile for a while. With this 2015, you get something slightly more filled-out and ready to savor – if you've got some hefty food sitting alongside!

JIM'S WHIMS: Since we've already elaborated on this producer in other write-ups, let's give a shout-out to its "finder" this time around. Of course, location is vital for wine quality, as is the winemaker whose job it is to express it as thoughtfully and deliciously as possible. – But a place and its wine interpreter might never be known to West Coast wine consumers such as ourselves without the contribution of an intrepid importer. Much more than a link in the supply chain, a *great* importer is possessed of a talented palate and just-as-necessary business savvy. One of these rarities is Fran Kysela. Over the many years of our tapping into his selections, Fran has kept us hungry for more with the occasional invitation to join him on one of his overseas jaunts. While those trips are rare, they are irreplaceable with how they get me directly engaged with a wine's source; its place and its people. Another excellent chance for exposure to Fran's finds is his annual Mondovino event at his Winchester, Virginia warehouse. I believe I've attended this industry tasting at least a dozen times. Over 400 bottles are uncorked for the perusal of lucky attendees. I choose about 150 to taste, and from Fran's "finds" I identify OUR finds to bring to you. This great Bordeaux from Chateau des Landes is a Kysela Pere et Fils discovery!

39.99 / 35.99 for Wine Club Members



WINE: 2017 Alléno & Chapoutier 'Croix de Chabot'

SOURCE: Saint-Joseph, Northern Rhone, France

GRAPES: 100% Syrah

ADMONITION: Give it some air and watch it evolve.
Please use a Pinot Noir glass if possible!

FOOD: Lamb is best.

FACTUAL TIDBITS: This is a rare submission from a place deserving more exposure to your club. The impediment is budget. "Rhone" is certainly represented to you with regularity, but NORTHERN Rhone is its own, very distinctive thing, and part of its distinctiveness is that it's rarely inexpensive. The southern Rhone wines you see generally come from easily-farmed vines on flatlands or gently rolling hills. A tractor runs through them. The northern Rhone's topography is totally different; most of it consisting of difficult-to-farm, steep, granite-based riverbank. Stand amid its terraced rows of Syrah and Viognier vines and – without looking down! - just imagine the farming challenge to appreciate the price.

Side note: Michel Chapoutier is certainly a familiar name to Rhone fans. The other, Yannick Alléno, is a mover and shaker in the culinary world. This wine is one from their collaborative collection of Rhone wines.

JIM'S WHIMS: Your wisest reply as a consumer should be, "Yes, but is it WORTH the price?" For seekers of distinctive, unduplicatable wine beauty it is. This is the homeland of Syrah, a cooler-than-Paso place rendering the ethereal, not the confectionary. While expectedly dark in color, Syrahs from here often surprise the first-timer expecting something more alcoholically bold and jammy. The compensation for this lower weight is complexity. Syrahs from here are incredibly – often mystically - scented. Hence, a Pinot Noir glass is your best drinking (and, certainly, sniffing) vessel. This one in particular might offend at first with that feature of reductivity referred to in last month's notes about the Priorat. – But now you know to be patient, right? Wave that wine around for a few minutes. Blue and black fruits, brine-cured olives, and a touch of espresso will arrive. Those Northern Rhone fans awaiting a sense of cured meats might imagine them here as well. We're glad to finally come back to a favorite wine place!

34.99 / 31.49 for Wine Club Members



The Wine Steward's
CALIFORNIA

(West Coast)

WINE CLUB

May 2020

WINE: 2018 Bedrock 'Old Vine' Zinfandel

SOURCE: California

GRAPES: 85% Zinfandel, plus Mataro (Mourvèdre), Grenache, Alicante Bouschet, Carignan, Petite Sirah, + bits of esoteric grapes enduring in California's oldest head-pruned vineyards...

ATTITUDE: Vibrant, not Soupy!

FOOD: Alton Brown's braised baby back ribs

FACTUAL TIDBITS: Morgan Twain-Peterson is the son of Joel Peterson, founder of Ravenswood. In its original, unenlarged and not-yet over-groceried iteration, Ravenswood honored California's oldest stands of Zinfandel, which inevitably included other varieties per the list above. The winery got bought away, became a monster wine brand, and went to hell. Bedrock emblemizes a son's return to those deeply-established, original roots; rediscovering what our state's oldest vineyards have to offer. Beyond the great wines Bedrock yields, its campaign of valuing heirloom plots is serving to maintain their existence. This wine is the product of many of those venerable locales.

JIM'S WHIMS: This is Zinfandel with energy, not ponderousness. For pancake syrup-style cocktail Zin, head elsewhere. For food-enhancing, tongue-awakening, *balanced* Zinfandel, remain here. Some of you may wish Bedrock had more flesh on its bones. Others know to involve OTHER bones – namely ribs – to invoke its real mandate. This beautiful wine with its anxious acidity brings REFRESHMENT to that ponderous, mouth-filling fare; cutting through the proteins. Sometimes food and wine pairing involves getting the flavors and textures of each as close to the same as the other. In other words, match light with light, heavy with heavy, etc. However, with heavy proteins sometimes the better accompaniment is a wine with levity and nerve. Consider another example: Chimichurri sauce on beef. The beef is heavy. The sauce? Vinegar based, and further “zinged” by shallots, garlic, parsley, and peppers. Those ingredients, while dramatic in flavor, demonstrate *vibrance* in feel. Atop asado-style beef, your mouth is in for a lively juxtaposition of effects. Like that Chimichurri sauce, this Zin is characterful while deliberately nervous. Abundant scents of raspberries, smoke, brambles, black pepper, and turmeric - along with juicy fresh berries and spice in the mouth – all happen jazzily. Get cookin'!

27.99 / 25.19 for all wine club members



WINE: 2013 Elyse Petite Sirah

SOURCE: York Creek Vineyard,
Spring Mountain District,
Napa Valley

GRAPES: 100% Petite Sirah

OF PARTICULAR NOTE: Swan Song

FOOD: Grilled Skirt Steak

FACTUAL TIDBITS: What should we expect from Petite Sirah? Dark and chunky. What do we anticipate from red wines grown in one of Napa's mountain sub-regions, high above the valley floor, where eroded soils are less fertile? Dark and chunky. What do we hope for from dark and chunky reds with the addition of a little aging time? A moderated, just-right amount of dark and chunky. That is what's happening here, from a wine meant to cost far more. Why the great deal? Read on.

JIM'S WHIMS: For three decades Elyse's proprietor / winemaker Ray Coursen maintained a house style of balance and restraint. When you tasted Elyse you weren't necessarily bowled-over by alcoholically-inflated fruit flamboyance. When you drank a GLASS of Elyse you came to realize the value of the alternative; less-jammy, elegant wine that's actually more useful to the "wine intellect," engaging you more gradually and more usefully keeping your attention longer. 2014 was among Ray's last vintages before he and his wife called it quits in 2018, selling the place to younger, more energetic players. The new owners are selling off certain lots from the library to the likes of The Wine Steward at attractive wholesale prices ... which is how this Petite Sirah can be crammed into your budget.

The wine is very good, reminding me of how certain vintages of Concannon Petite Sirahs behaved back in the 1980's. Add to that the nostalgically-romantic notion that this will never happen again. The new owners of Elyse have hired a winemaker known for his achievement of several 100-point "trophy wines." Certainly, the Elyse house style is destined for a dramatic change, as is its pricing. This Elyse (sniff-sniff) is among the last of its kind.

23.99 / 21.59 for all Wine Club Members



The Wine Steward's

Wine

Adventurer's

WINE CLUB

May 2020

WINE: 2017 Zuccardi 'Q' Cabernet Franc

SOURCE: Valle de Uco, Mendoza, Argentina

GRAPES: 100% Cabernet Franc

ATTITUDE: Honesty, gorgeously packaged

GOOD TO KNOW: Argentina is emerging as Cab Franc's most successful proponent.

FOOD: Duck, pork, filet mignon, portabellas

FACTUAL TIDBITS: You are not seeing double. We are not replicating. This is ANOTHER red from an Argentine producer we have long admired; last month's Zuccardi 'Q' Tempranillo is now followed up by their Cabernet Franc, with zero apologies. Cabernet Franc is known as a Bordeaux varietal, but in that part of France it nearly always plays a minor role in Merlot-based Right Bank blends. Considering its solo expressions from Chinon and Bourgueil, maybe we should be calling it a "Loire varietal." Cab Franc and Sauvignon Blanc are the "parents" of Cabernet Sauvignon. Unlike its more prevalent son, it is remembered less for power of tannin and more for fragrance and a graceful palate feel. SOMETIMES (not always) this is a good memory.

JIM'S WHIMS: We've had this conversation before. I feel like the guy everyone expects to go on and on per one particular topic, but I don't mind the identification. After all, I don't see anyone else hefting the bullhorn for this announcement: Argentina is killing it with Cab Franc. This wine type with its Loire Valley (France) loyalists and even rarer Napa Valley advocates is emerging as the Land of Malbec's other great wine. In this case, I'm classifying "great" as successful for the price. "Successful" means more than the wine nerds will admire it, as Argentine Cab Franc more often expresses the geeky "Head" AND the gratifying "Heart" of the varietal. This wine is smart with authenticity AND sexy as hell. "For the price"? Cab Franc with the effect of this Zuccardi would easily cost \$10 more from California. As a bonus, this wine has great staying power. The proof? The glass by my keyboard from a bottle opened yesterday morning. It is even BETTER now!

21.99 / 19.79 for all wine club members



WINE: 2018 Alberti Malbec Reserva

SOURCE: Lújan de Cuyo and Uco Valley,
Mendoza, Argentina

GRAPES: 100% Malbec

ATTITUDE: Truthful

FOOD: Asado-style beef / Tri-Tip

FACTUAL TIDBITS: This month we continue our sojourn in Argentina with not one, but TWO submissions from that place. Here is the more predictable one, a Malbec; the varietal by which most of us came to be aware of Argentina as a great wine place. What I'd point out from the wine buyer's perspective: \$20 Malbecs head in all kinds of stylistic directions. THIS one satisfies my desire for varietal authenticity. That is, its oak treatment is enough – and not too much – to allow Malbec the grape to have the final say. The anticipated lift of red peppercorn coupled with blackberries is realized, and my wine intellect is indulged. Alberti goes one step farther, however, with a satisfying sense of density. Dark earth, espresso, and unsweetened chocolate complement the fruit qualities. In my experience, few Malbecs at this price manage to satisfy both “head” and “heart”. Here is such a rarity.

JIM'S WHIMS: Let's talk about pumps. You'll note on the back label a reference to “gravity flow” winemaking being employed here. Before there were pumps to push or pull wine from one tank or barrel to another, you depended on gravity to do the job. Pre-Prohibition-Era wineries were often built into hills to facilitate this, with just-picked grapes entering the facility at a door in the top floor via a service road at the (higher) back of the facility. Here they were crushed, falling into vats one floor down in the meantime. There they were fermented and – a week or two later – pressed. From the winepress the new wine fell once more, to barrels on the ground floor. Here, in the coolest space, the wine would age until bottling time. Two examples of this architecture you might know: The ruins of Oliviña Winery in Livermore's Sycamore Grove Park, and the old Christian Brothers facility (now the west coast campus for the Culinary Institute of America) just north of Napa Valley's Saint Helena. Pumps changed all of this; for better efficiency and use of space ... and, perhaps, to the detriment of wine quality. The jury remains out, but a prevalent feeling among fine wine makers is the less distress the better the wine. Some pumps beat the shit out of a wine; sometimes the best shit. Advocates for less-intrusive winemaking have now come full circle, BACK to gravity flow, and that's what's employed for this Malbec. Does it matter? It's good to wonder!

19.99 / 17.99 for all wine club members



The Wine Steward's
'Here 'n There'

White Wine

WINE CLUB

May 2020

WINE: 2018 Koyle 'Costa' Sauvignon Blanc

SOURCE: San Antonio, Chile

GRAPES: 100% Sauvignon Blanc,
organically-grown

ATTITUDE: Gnarly Nervy-ness

FOOD: Something cold on the patio

FACTUAL TIDBITS: Chile is a very long and skinny country, north to south. Without digging any further, one assumes the major climatic variations happen only longitudinally. More inquiry into this great wine country complicates the subject. Skinny-ness is relative; variations DO occur east-to-west! The San Antonio Valley, west of Chile's capital Santiago, is very affected by the nearby Pacific Ocean. Think California's Carneros or the Edna Valley near San Luis Obispo. Its specialties are Sauvignon Blanc, Chardonnay, and Pinot Noir. Head east to areas more affected by Andean altitude and the vines you'd view would be Cabernet Sauvignon, Carmenere, and other, heftier varieties. San Antonio Valley's maritime situation imposes "nerve" on its reds and whites, evidenced by this Sauvignon Blanc.

JIM'S WHIMS: This wine has a whole lotta "sass," anything but shy with its full-frontal aromatic display of mandarins and gooseberries and – perhaps – tomato leaves and jalapeños. The palate feel is as tangy as any New Zealand example of the varietal, with a compelling continuation of the savories found in the nose. This accumulation of sensories would be called "enervating" by some but "aggravating" by others. The others would do well to get some food involved; a meal with two components. First, protein. This wine wants to cut through something rich like cold chicken, turkey, shrimp, or pork. Cold? Yes, this means protein as part of a salad. You can invoke the "tropicality" of Koyle's features with more of the same IN your salad, involving – say – papayas or mangos (or a salsa thereof, as a topping?). I'd like to hear what you came up with!

12.99 / 11.69 for all wine club members



WINE: 2019 Cochon Pinot Blanc

SOURCE: Dutton Ranch, Russian River Valley

GRAPES: 100% Pinot Blanc,

ATTITUDE: Clarity!

FOOD: Fish, Pork Roast, Soft White Cheeses, River Rafting

FACTUAL TIDBITS: Pinot Blanc is a mutation of the red Pinot Noir grape. It proliferates in Alsace, France where it makes serviceable, if not multi-dimensional wine. Italy's northern reaches also host the variety, where it is known as Pinot Bianco and/or Weisburgunder. I'm not sure we've ever "clubbed" a California version, as there are few to choose from and even fewer that work for us. It did have its little heyday here, perhaps 20 years ago or so, when over-zealous producers applied a bit too much winemaking to this discreetly-voiced varietal. Back then, the common treatment involved barrel – and a lot of it. The idea was to dress it up as one would a Chardonnay, with lots of woody enrobement. Pinot Blanc's slender form was indiscernible beneath all those oaky layers, having its target market reply, "Thanks, I'd rather drink Chardonnay."

JIM'S WHIMS: I was therefore surprised to see Pinot Blanc coming from the sample bag of our friend, winemaker Adam Webb of Cochon. "Where'd you find Pinot Blanc fruit?" I wondered. Another surprise followed: "Dutton Ranch!" This series of vineyards west of Santa Rosa is famous for Chardonnay and Pinot Noir. I had no idea it also grew this endangered variety.

The next impression, however, was no surprise. I KNEW, lifting the proffered pour of this to my nose, that Adam would never make an oaky/buttery Pinot Blanc. Confirmation came in the form of apple blossom, white nectarine, and mandarin scents. Here were fragrances as fresh as mountain air, unencumbered by wood. The mouth experience elaborated on this with mineral clarity and, perhaps, just a bit of citrus peel bitterness. Understanding the "More is More" plan applied to Pinot Blanc would be misconceived, Adam has gone for "Less is More" here. I invite you to purchase a few more bottles of this in order to witness its unwinding over the coming months, for while it is never meant to be "big" wine I do believe this nifty Pinot Blanc will relax just a touch, with a little time.

19.99 / 17.99 for all wine club members



The Wine Steward's

Tuesday

Night

WINE CLUB

May 2020

WINE: 2017 Paris Valley Road
"Founder's Blend"

SOURCE: "California"

GRAPES: 43% Petite Sirah, 29% Zinfandel,
20% Cabernet Sauvignon, 6% Syrah, 2% Merlot

HUNCH: Someone has a savvy palate

ATTITUDE: Impressiveness for Price

FOOD: Marinated strip steak fajitas

FACTUAL TIDBITS: While the label generically declares "California" as the fruit source and the winery address is in Paso Robles, with some sleuthing I uncovered the specific vineyard location. This delicious juice hails from the Chalk Knoll Vineyard in the San Lucas American Viticultural Area ("AVA"). Where's that? Southern Monterey County, and you have passed it without knowing so on trips to Paso and Pismo. Let's say you've just headed through King City, continuing south. The vast swath of vines you're soon traversing is sometimes called the largest vineyard in the world. That's San Lucas, of which Chalk Knoll – where the vines subsist in chalk, limestone, and sandstone – is a part. This is the warmest part of Monterey County, where Chardonnay and Pinot Noir might still happen but are surpassed in acreage by the heat-preferring varieties represented here. – And what a grape list!

JIM'S WHIMS: Based on what we paid for this (and your nice low retail rate) there must be a good amount of this wine. In this value category of the wine market there is a vast array of bottles containing obviously "fixed" wine. We'll not go into detail here, but suffice it to say there are several additions and processes a wine might see to make it more palatable to the "casual consumer." THIS wine tastes more real, meaning *terroir* (soil + climate = location) is having its say. The richness connotes the warm San Lucas place, and the countering framework of acidity speaks to its significant diurnal shift (difference between daytime and nighttime temperatures). What's just as impressive is the human talent behind this innovative blend. How often do you see such a *cepage* (grape ingredient list)? To combine Rhone and Bordeaux varieties PLUS Zinfandel in these particular proportions took a lot of blending trials, and a trained palate (or several). Add to that the obvious VALUE, and this wine impresses me, all around!

12.99/ 11.69 for all wine club members



WINE: 2018 Mont Gravet Carignan 'Vieilles Vignes'

SOURCE: Herault, Languedoc, France

GRAPES: 100% Carignan

ATTITUDE: A Rare Chance to Learn this Grape!

FOOD: Burgers, Pizza, Salumi

FACTUAL TIDBITS: Carignan rarely sings solo in a bottling, more often appearing as a bit player in a blend. Yet it is a very important grape – in Rioja, Sardinia, Priorat, the Rhone Valley, and here in France's Languedoc. A red wine might contain just 5% Carignan but by that addition will gain a "bass note" of dry earth and baking chocolate. Carignan is the low voice to Grenache's soprano, adding an endearing amount of grandfatherly grumpy-ness to a wine that might otherwise be TOO cheerfully silly! Like Grenache and Mourvèdre/Monastrell, it is believed to have originated in Spain but has since been exploited throughout the Mediterranean, and has also found its way to California and Chile and other international destinations. This is a lighthearted version, of course, but if you want a *serious* Carignan remark check out our "Barrua" from Sardinia, Italy. Then you'll REALLY know the grape!

JIM'S WHIMS: What is lovely about this wine is what it is not. Unlike this month's other red it is NOT 14.5% alcohol, but a mere 12.5%; a feature of summertime red wine functionality. It is NOT complicated, and sometimes that's a good thing – especially for Tuesday night consumption. It is NOT oaky (no new barrels used here) nor enriched by residual sugar. How about what it IS? It IS fresh, snappy, palate-enlivening, and honestly good medium-bodied juice you can even refrigerate a little and serve with cold cuts. – And it IS the cause of a nice little lesson on rarely-discussed Carignan!

Finally, some synonyms:

Carignan might be spelled with an 'e' at the end. In Rioja it's "Mazuelo". In Priorat and other parts of eastern Spain it can go by "Cariñena" or "Samso". In Sardinia it's "Carignano".

Finally Finally:

"Vieilles Vignes" means "Old Vines." So there.

11.39 / 10.25 for all wine club members