

The Wine Steward's

The COLLECTOR

WINE CLUB

November 2023



WINE: Madison Vineyards 'Quixotic' Cabernet Sauvignon

SOURCE: Napa Valley

GRAPES: 100% Cabernet Sauvignon

ATTITUDE: Deep, Sultry, Salivation-Inducing

FOOD: A Winter Feast (Braised or Roasted Meats, Fungi, Root Veggies)

What's Important

It's important that we provide you with a quality product, but it's just as important – and a lot more meaningful - if we also like the people behind that product. The folks at Madison Vineyards live and grow nearly all their fruit just two miles east of where I live in Livermore (I ran by their place just yesterday morning, as a nice bike trail abuts their property). Tony, Jen, and winery namesake (daughter) Madison Delumen all contribute to this recently-launched project which seeks to emphasize the Rhone family of grapes (Syrah, Grenache, Mourvèdre, *et al*). This Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon is also rendered at the Delumen's on-site facility a few dozen yards from their actual home. I admire this wine for its depth of very "available" flavors. A lovely combination of fruit (cherries, blueberries, citrus) and savories (earth and tobacco) entice the nose and continue in the mouth with textures that are simultaneously chocolatey and energetic.

More meaningfully, these local visionaries are also generous. Their spirit of giving with no expectation of reward is refreshing – or nostalgic. Maybe I'll elaborate further in the future. Knowing them – even only knowing OF them – should make this small-production Cabernet taste even better.

(Hush-Hush Pricing) 39.99 / 35.99 for all wine club members



WINE: 2020 William Harrison ‘Simpatico’

SOURCE: Rutherford, Napa Valley

ATTITUDE: Tight, and Un-windable

FOOD: Yes – and/or time!

GRAPES: 56% Cabernet Sauvignon, 25% Cabernet Franc, 9% Malbec,
9% Merlot, 1% Petit Verdot

Acknowledgement

We welcome your mathematical scrutiny: This month’s two bottles do not add up to the monthly amount you’re forking over. I could mention that the combined winery asking prices add up to \$110 (and I just did). What’s more important to note, however, is the AVERAGE value we’ve been providing over the months and years. Our own usually-lower pricing for the two monthly Red Collector submissions normally transcends what we ask of your credit card. You wine, on average!

Having put that to bed (I hope), let’s confront another challenge. This is a 2020 vintage wine, and therefore hails from the “smoke year” when many Napa Valley producers didn’t bottle their product – or even go to the trouble to ferment it - recognizing tainted fruit. Believe me, my tasting antennae are fully extended when the occasional 2020 is uncorked for me. I tasted this Simpatico, “clubbed” in several other vintages, with heightened care and caution. It is unaffected, per my palate. So, it turns out, are many other 2020’s. Timing is everything (a reference to WHEN people harvested their fruit).

Finally, I must call to your attention a different “styling” happening in this vintage, at least at the moment. Whereas ‘Simpatico’ means “nice” or “affable,” this bottling is delivering more austerity at the moment. When you open it, you’ll encounter “less than Simpatico” firmness and evasiveness of flavor. Patience, young Padawan: There is more to be revealed by either decanting or waiting a few months to uncork this very good wine. How do I know? An open bottle remained on my desk for three days. On each succeeding day, ‘Simpatico’ was more fragrant and flavorful.

That’s quite enough justifying!!

41.99 / 37.79 for all wine club members

The Wine Steward's

World Class

WINE CLUB

November 2023



WINE: 2019 Muga Reserva

SOURCE: Rioja, Spain

GRAPES: 70% Tempranillo / 20% Garnacha / 10% Mazuelo & Graciano

ATTITUDE: Slam Dunk

FOOD: Grilled Lamb Chops, Ribeye

Sometimes . . .

We appreciate the open-mindedness you World Class members maintain, allowing us to bring you very good things you've never heard of. Here is your reward: A very good thing *you've almost certainly heard of!* Bodegas Muga is one of the most highly regarded producers in Rioja, a wine region four times the size of the Napa Valley. This particular bottling appears on the wine lists of virtually every good restaurant in Spain. All that they make – whether dry rosé, white, sparkling, or red – is topnotch. Muga even goes to the trouble to **MAKE THEIR OWN BARRELS**. I personally saw this happening two Septembers ago in Haro, Rioja: Their crush pad was processing just-harvested Tempranillo and just a few feet away Muga's coopers (barrel builders) were doing *their* thing. Now, THAT'S quality control!

This wine references all the main grapes of Rioja. Tempranillo dominates, of course. Garnacha is – you probably know – the same as Grenache. Mazuelo is Rioja's name for Carignan, and Graciano is an eccentric native of the region. **Robert Parker's Wine Advocate AND James Suckling both conferred 94 points on this vintage.** As one critic said, "This is very Muga, very Rioja, and very good." I concur. Tonight (after a decant) and ten years from now, the uncorking of this wine guarantees satisfaction.

36.99 / 33.29 for Wine Club Members



WINE: Domaine Vendome ‘Les Colaires’
SOURCE: Crozes-Hermitage, Northern Rhone, France
GRAPES: 100% Syrah
ATTITUDE: Modern Classic (or *vice versa*)
FOOD: Lamb!!

Beauty and The Beast

This characterful red takes all of ten seconds after uncorking and pouring to bloom in scent and flavor. It is archetypical Crozes-Hermitage, referencing not one, but both attitudes you might taste from there. Hence, my title “Beauty and The Beast”; here is a rare and very place-true combination of exotic fruit and rustic meaty-ness; an all-encompassing Crozes.

Am I speaking your language or should I back up? “Crozes-Hermitage” is the location, a sub-region of France’s Northern Rhone. This zone is wholeheartedly devoted to the Syrah grape. Neighboring (and pricier) neighborhoods are Côte Rôtie, Saint-Joseph, Hermitage, and Cornas – all of which emphasize Syrah. Does this Syrah behave differently than the California versions you’ve had? It should. The region is cooler and the local winemaking culture tends to prize food-friendly savories over bombastic fruit. Maybe it’s “eccentric” to you, but know this: All of this wine’s craziness of nose and flavor is Syrah’s *original* voice, as the grape was actually born in this part of France. All other Syrahs – whether Shiraz from Barossa, Australia or Syrah from Santa Barbara, *et al* – claim THIS as lineage!

I often ask a wine class, “Who among you likes lamb?” To those hand-raisers I say, “Then you should like Syrah!!” Don’t like lamb? There’s still hope for you!!

34.99 / 37.79 for Wine Club Members

The Wine Steward's

Pacific Coast

WINE CLUB

November 2023



WINE: 2021 High on the Hog by McPrice Myers

SOURCE: Paso Robles

GRAPES: 25% Grenache, 25% Zinfandel, 20% Syrah, 14% Petite Sirah, 12% Merlot, 2% Cabernet Sauvignon, 2% Mourvèdre

ATTITUDE: Vibrantly fruited

FOOD: BBQ

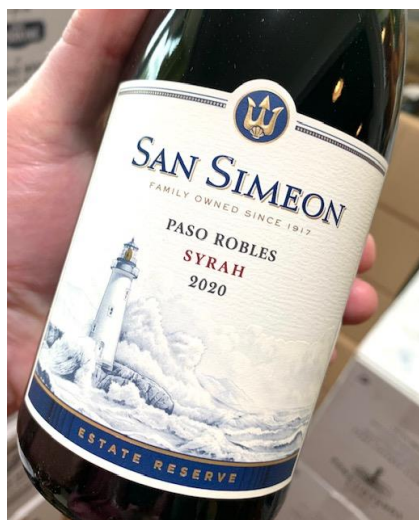
Get that Grill Goin'!

Here is the third (I think) vintage of 'High on the Hog' we've shown your club; a jubilantly-fruited, kinda-Rhone-ish red which – per all that complication – simply KILLS IT with good BBQ. The critics always favor it, and this year around both Vinous and Wine Spectator conferred 91 points.

We acknowledge that any Paso Robles red will veer toward ripeness. In such a hot wine region, the winemaker's challenge is to harness that, to somehow avoid OVER-ripeness. Certainly, grapes like Grenache, Zin, Syrah, and the like will perform exuberantly in such a situation. This wine is not low in fruit drama! What's admirable to me (besides the BBQ usefulness, of course) is how, year in and year out, McPrice Myers renders a very ripe red that simultaneously involves freshness. This wine has "form."

(Did I mention its aptitude for pairing with BBQ?!)

21.99 / 19.79 for all wine club members



WINE: 2020 San Simeon Syrah

SOURCE: Paso Robles

GRAPES: 100% Syrah

ATTITUDE: “The **Best** I Can Find You per Price and Style”

FOOD: Pepper Steak, Shish Kabob, Grilled Lamb Chops

Just Rightness

It is challenging to sell Syrah. I believe the customer’s hesitation is based on bewilderment; an unsureness *per* what STYLE of Syrah happens beneath the label. In my world, our best ways of getting Syrah’s message across is at our WineBar and events where we can personally advocate, and through our wine club where openminded wine lovers apply their more-developed sense of wine wonder. The MOST enabled customer is the member who actually reads these notes. Yeah, I’m talking to YOU!

As suggested in the notes for this month’s other red, also from Paso Robles, this wine region can easily “over-make” a wine - per the way I like to drink them. Upon San Simeon’s vendor pulling this from his bag, I anticipated a “larger-sized” Syrah lacking in character; the heat of the place would have burned that away. What happens instead is a beautiful surprise: Yes, San Simeon is sumptuously rich and/but it retains great character. Along with the blue and black fruits and violets, peppery and “meaty” aspects add nuance. Here is a wine you can think about or simply, more recklessly, DRINK. If someone was brave enough to choose Syrah for a wedding, THIS would be my recommendation.

Congratulations on your open-minded sense of wine wonder. Here is your reward! By the way: Wine.com, who’s now out of this wine, was selling it for 27.99; a little context for ya!

23.99 / 21.59 for all members

The Wine Steward's

Wine Adventurer

WINE CLUB

November 2023



WINE: 2020 Los Cantos de Torremilanos

SOURCE: Ribera del Duero, Spain

GRAPES: 90% Tempranillo, 8% Merlot, 2% Cabernet Sauvignon

ATTITUDE: More “Suave” than Usual

FOOD: Roasted Lamb Shank, Carrots, Potatoes

Transcendent Ribera del Duero

92 points Wine Advocate!

You may notice the photographed bottle has seen “some action.” I have had it near my desk, available for daily check-ins. The vendor who showed it to me left it behind as a thank-you for the club commitment, and the gift has been well used: This remained DELICIOUS for three or four days after opening. I’d also call this ‘Los Cantos’ more deliciously fruit-forward and easy-textured than many former Ribera del Duero experiences.

This is Spain’s “other” great Tempranillo region, stylistic alter-ego to Rioja. The climate here is more “continental,” meaning greater temperature extremes. Reacting to this weather, the local Tempranillo has mutated to a smaller berry with thicker, more protective skins. This in turn yields a darker wine with firmer structure than more svelte and tangy Rioja. We often call Ribera del Duero “The Bordeaux of Spain” due to this bolder, more monolithic message. THIS particular wine certainly reflects the tendency toward impactful dark fruit, and/but the textures are more civilized. It’s smoother and more easily sipped on its own. Los Cantos de Torremilanos is not an exception to the rule, but an enhancement thereof.

21.49 / 19.34 for Wine Club Members



WINE: 2020 Domaine Coteaux des Margots

SOURCE: Macon-Pierreclos, Burgundy, France

GRAPES: 100% Gamay!

ATTITUDE: A Timely Surprise!

FOOD: Thanksgiving Dinner

A TWS First

Known: The **Gamay** grape occurs most famously in the Beaujolais Region of France, south of Burgundy. Its better manifestations are named by sub-regions, or “Cru’s,” such as Moulin à Vent, Morgon, and Fleurie. We talk a lot about these this time of year because super-scented, medium-bodied Gamay is terrific with the turkey dinner and a nice alternative (or addition) to similarly-behaving Pinot Noir.

Known: **Paul Duroussay** is the proprietor of Pierreclos Imports. His book consists of several very good, small French producers and he personally shows the wines of that portfolio to The Wine Steward. We like Paul, and his wines. THIS wine comes to the United States *via* Paul.

Unknown, Until Now: We have never seen a Gamay varietal from the Mâcon region of Burgundy, where Chardonnay runs the show and the reds you occasionally see are Pinots. Upon tasting this, I’d call Coteaux des Margots (“magpies”) very similar to the Gamays of Beaujolais with – perhaps - a little more food-craving structure (you ARE eating, aren’t you?!). So how does Paul know of it? IT’S FROM HIS OWN FAMILY’S WINERY! This no-longer-secret, small-production wine is made in Paul’s hometown, the Mâcon village of Pierreclos, the name of which Paul chose for his company.

Novelty Aside: This wine is delicious. Happy Thanksgiving!

22.49 / 20.24 for Wine Club Members

The Wine Steward's
'Here 'n There'

Uncharted Whites

WINE CLUB

November 2023



WINE: 2022 Pascal Biotteau Blanc

SOURCE: Anjou, Loire Valley, France

GRAPES: 100% The Best Grape in the World

ATTITUDE: Turkey-Lovin'

FOOD: Turkey, White Fish, *Chevre*

Delicious Confusion

After the name of the geographical source of Anjou (bless you!), the next-largest font size on this label is devoted to “Mary Taylor.” Is she the producer? Nope. She’s the importer. The label for this wine (made by Pascal Biotteau) very closely resembles all other Mary Taylor imports. She’s attempting to create a “brand” of her own; if you like one Mary Taylor-imported wine you’re bound to like others, and can easily recognize those based on brand family resemblance.

Next confusion: What’s this lovely white made of? There’s no mention of the grape on the front label. Only in the fine print on the reverse side is Chenin Blanc identified. Of course, I didn’t help with clarity in the heading, but many of you have come to expect the TWS quirk of calling Chenin Blanc “The Best Grape in the World”! We only say that to start a conversation about a wine formerly known by many as mass-produced California plonk represented in a handled jug.

Finally: The back label verbiage isn’t helping this wine’s cause by including the descriptor “sweet”. Many shy away from that term, and in this case it’s erroneously applied. This is a dry – not sweet - wine exhibiting beautiful fruit. So get back here and enjoy a thoughtfully-rendered Loire Valley treat!

19.99 / 17.99 for all wine club members



WINE: 2021 Zestos 'Old Vines' Malvar

SOURCE: Vinos de Madrid, Spain

GRAPES: 100% Malvar

ATTITUDE: Compelling

FOOD: Fish, Turkey . . .

Your Courage is Rewarded

This white, made from a grape most of you don't know, is either complex or easy-to-drink. Its meaning depends on the user. You can geek out about it or just guzzle it, and it will satisfy either way. – But either way, you have to be brave enough to uncork and try a very unfamiliar wine. Let's bolster your courage by noting Wine Enthusiast's enthusiastic rating of 93 points. Getting braver?

The Malvar variety is native to the Iberian Peninsula. While hardly a household name in *your* household, it is actually the most important white grape in the region surrounding Madrid, smack-dab in the middle of Spain. I've stood in one of the vineyards supporting this bottling and could see Spain's capital about thirty miles distant. This area is over two thousand feet above sea level and experiences a distinctly "continental" climate, with very hot summers and freezing winters. The heat would typically render a white wine grape flaccid and spineless - low in acidic energy - but Malvar succeeds.

Here is a no-oak white with good nerve AND moderate body happening simultaneously. This duality encourages allusions to both Sauvignon Blanc and Burgundy-style Chardonnay, but Gruner Veltliner's white pepper quality could also be referenced. Chenin Blanc could be a considered comparison.

I'm glad you're brave enough to share this complex / delicious wine with us!

14.99 / 13.49 for all wine club members

The Wine Steward's

“Curious?” Club

WINE CLUB

November 2023



WINE: 2020 Santa Carolina Carmenère

SOURCE: Valle de Cachapoal, Chile

GRAPES: 100% Carmenère

ATTITUDE: Sultry scents,
Crunchy feel

FOOD: Burgers or Pasta Bolognese

Stowaway Grape

Let's suppose a grape variety was actually cognizant of its impending demise. It might uproot itself, stow away on a ship, and vacate its home country. Landing in some far-off land, it would put down roots but avoid detection by using a different name for over a hundred years. Only after a century of its new culture's growing acceptance would its true identity be revealed.

We're talking about Carmenère. In the mid/late 1800's, Bordeaux and the rest of Europe lost most of their vines to the Phylloxera root louse. When a remedy was finally attained, Bordeaux replanted its Cabernet Sauvignon, Cab Franc, Merlot, and so on ... but Carmenère - a former player - was largely omitted. Farmers are reluctant to replant an unreliable crop. This grape had that reputation. In the meantime, cuttings of Carmenère – along with several other *vitis vinifera* from France – had headed off to Chile to be propagated. Those cuttings were misidentified; for over a century they were thought to be a certain clone of Merlot. Finally, in the 1990's, an ampelographer (who specializes in plant identification based on studying the leaves) made the correction: “Hey Chile, that ain't Merlot; it's CARMENÈRE!”

The grape certainly expresses itself differently as a wine. Carmenère nearly always displays roasted red pepper in the nose and endearing “sweet” (albeit dry) fruit in the mouth. This does that, with nice levity. Want something more dense? Stay tuned. Next month, the Wine Adventurer club will probably see this wine's “big brother.”

13.79 / 12.41 for all wine club members



WINE: 2021 Llama Bonarda / Malbec ‘Old Vine Blend’

SOURCE: Lujan de Cuyo, Mendoza, Argentina

GRAPES: 50% Bonarda & 50% Malbec (we think)

ATTITUDE: Reductive, then – with some air – It’s Party Time!

FOOD: Hamburgers, Grilled Pork Chops, Thanksgiving Dinner

Jubilation

There is no lack of color in your glass. If you smell your wine, you’ll also encounter an abundance of fragrance. “What kind of fragrance?” depends on the particular bottle we handed you, and your awareness of wine’s possibility of “reduction.” A reductive wine is one made in a way that it needs more air at the time of uncorking. Its first scents may seem downright “poopy,” but it’s not time to freak out. That manifestation can actually be a good thing for the wine’s durability. How to react? Decant your wine, or swirl it vigorously. I’m doing it at my desk right now, and witnessing the change from “questionable” to florally beautiful. Violets are emerging, as are qualities of fresh ground coffee and boysenberries.

More technically, what’s represented in your glass are Argentina’s two most-planted grapes. You’ve all heard of Malbec, and Argentina may well be thanked for that awareness. Bonarda is that wine country’s workhorse grape, crazier in aromatics and recklessly “jubilant” in juicy texture. Ironically, the ancient (105-year-old) Bonarda vines contributing here are conferring youthful impressions to your palate. A lively acidity which will mate beautifully with food is a major attribute . . . along with that intriguing, evolving fragrance!!

13.49 / 12.14 for all members