

The Wine Steward's

# The COLLECTOR

WINE CLUB

October 2023



**WINE:** 2021 Peju 'Legacy Collection' Cabernet Sauvignon

**SOURCE:** Napa Valley

**GRAPES:** 97% Cabernet Sauvignon, 3% Petit Verdot

**ATTITUDE:** No Need to Wait!

**FOOD:** If You're Hungry!

## *The Worm is Turning*

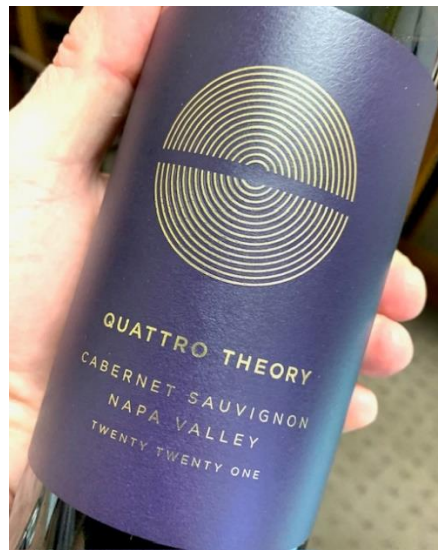
All of THREE years ago we began to anticipate a problematic Cabernet-buying eventuality. What was happening three years ago? Disastrous Northern California fires that changed lives and ruined the winemaking potential of many a grape. "Smoke taint," barely recalled by a few Pinot lovers referencing the 2008 vintage, was now becoming part of the common wine drinker's grammar. We were all hearing what was happening to Cabernet and otherwise in Napa and beyond. 2020 Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir? Forget about it. Etc.!

The Wine Steward – and therefore its customer / club members – was part of the chain of those affected by those fires and resulting smoke-tainted grapes. How? With many wineries making far less (or nothing at all) in 2020, wholesale discounts on quantity buys also "went up in smoke"; the deals evaporated.

The two delicious Cabernets in this month's pack represent a gradual return to normal, where wineries with two (hopefully three, as 2023 fruit is being harvested) "back to business" vintages are comfortable enough with inventories to return to the bargaining table. The Wine Steward is able to show you two "Over \$50" Napa Cabs because of this improvement.

I've left precious little room for elaboration on this particular Cabernet Sauvignon from Peju, so let's sum it up with a few one-words: Dark. Friendly. Deep. Rich. Ready. Guzzle!!

**54.99 / 49.49 for all wine club members**



**WINE:** 2021 Quattro Theory Cabernet Sauvignon

**SOURCE:** Napa Valley

**ATTITUDE:** Smart & Sexy

**FOOD:** Proteins!

**GRAPES:** 84% Cabernet Sauvignon, 7% Merlot, 6% Malbec,  
2% Petit Verdot, 1% Cabernet Franc

### *Smart & Sexy*

Quattro Theory is a new Napa wine name, but its makers aren't anywhere new to the profession. This comes from the Trinchero folks who have chosen to perform a moniker makeover. As an ever-suspicious and pretty darn experienced retailer, "branding" and the adjustment thereof is marketing cleverness in action. More often than not, it's meant to deceive the consumer. – But not always. I don't know why "Quattro Theory" arose from the Trinchero ashes, but I DO know the people behind the wine are the same, the fruit sources are the same, and the quality of the wine – per this wine buyer's tongue – remains stellar. Does this provide any comfort to you, the confused wine buyer?!

I dubbed this Cabernet "Smart & Sexy" because of its dual attributes. First off, there is terrific structure happening here. Compared to the Peju Cabernet I dealt with above, there is more feel of tannins and acids challenging the palate here. That's the "smart" part, in that the chef in you should be beckoned – and the thoughtful builder of a wine collection should also be attracted (in other words, this is built to age). And "sexy"? Come on, isn't that automatic?! Dark and voluptuous fruit happens within that girde of structure, and I want more and more of it. Where's the decanter?!!

**51.99 / 46.79 for all wine club members**

The Wine Steward's

# World Class

## WINE CLUB

October 2023



**WINE:** 2019 Chateau Vieux Chevrol

**SOURCE:** Lalande de Pomerol, Bordeaux, France

**GRAPES:** 80% Merlot / 10% Cabernet Sauvignon / 10% Cabernet Franc

**ATTITUDE:** Elegant

**FOOD:** Cold Weather Fare

### *Lithe*

Consider doing a little shopping around this month if the idea of “Bordeaux” appeals to you. We’re making it easy, with no fewer than THREE Merlot-based Bordeaux’s happening in various TWS wine clubs this month. – And easier, if these notes get out in time to notify you of next week’s ALL-BORDEAUX sit-down tasting event. Certainly, you could do some SERIOUS shopping there!

All this Bordeaux-ishness is happening because of the time of year. Colder nights are upon us, provoking a shift in appetite for most. We’re more likely to be cooking “hunker down by the fire” meals starting now and for the next few months, and this wine type – so forgotten during our warmer summer months – is just the thing for the current fare.

Here is a wine that’s ready to love, from a satellite region of world-famous Pomerol. Chateau Vieux Chevrol doesn’t try to be a dark heavyweight. Its alternative attribute is *litheness*; silky tannins and food-friendly acidity speak more of “class” than bombast. Leather, spice, red and black fruits, and a touch of smoky tobacco are eager to make your food taste even better, not drown it out.

**34.99 / 31.49 for Wine Club Members**



**WINE:** Amistà ‘Nizza Vigna’

**SOURCE:** Nizza, Piemonte, Italy

**GRAPES:** 100% Barbera

**ATTITUDE:** Hauntingly Sexy

**FOOD:** Roasted Meats (I know, I’m saying that a lot this month!)

### *A Gorgeous Wine Lesson*

The wines of Europe are frequently identified by geographical source, not the grape variety employed. “Bordeaux,” “Chablis,” and “Chianti” are examples of such place-named bottlings. Italy frequently elaborates on this (some would say “complicates this”) by combining place and grape name in the titling. “Nebbiolo d’Alba” is Nebbiolo from Alba. “Vermentino di Gallura” is Vermentino from the Gallura portion of Sardegna. And so on.

A well-known reply to Piemonte’s vaunted Barolo and Barbaresco (both made from Nebbiolo but too fancy to say so) is its “Barbera d’Asti”; that is, red wine from Piemonte’s Asti subregion made with the Barbera grape. Nearly a decade ago, some producers of such agreed to drop that traditional appendage. I do wonder if they were inspired by the success of place-named Barolo and Barbaresco to more simply rename their wines “Nizza”. This term, rhyming with “pizza,” alludes to an area. No mention of the grape employed occurs. The newly created “Denominazione Controllata e Garantita” apparently “ups the dignity” of the wine formerly known as “Barbera d’Asti Superiore”.

I didn’t buy this to produce a class on the evolution of European wine naming. This Barbera (let’s call it what it is!) happens because it is hauntingly beautiful in its meaty nose and sexy-licious mouthfeel. And, per its quality, it represents terrific value: Nearly every wine concern representing this on the Internet sells it for far more. The Wine Steward found you a delicious (and informative) wine deal!

**41.99 / 37.79 for Wine Club Members**

The Wine Steward's

# Pacific Coast

## WINE CLUB

October 2023



**WINE:** 2021 Bella Montagna Merlot

**SOURCE:** Santa Clara County

**GRAPES:** 100% Merlot, perhaps

**ATTITUDE:** Velvety, with sultry fruit

**FOOD:** Roasted or Braised Meats

### *Local Connections*

In 2001, The Klee Family purchased and began planning the planting of their estate vineyard in the hills of southeast San Jose. They later learned they were not the first to grow grapes there: Their land had actually been part of Mirassou's original estate way back in the 1800s. The Mirassou name (as far as winemaking goes) now belongs to Gallo – ironically - but most of you have heard of and/or met Steven Mirassou of Steven Kent Winery in Livermore. His forebears farmed what is now Bella Montagna.

Another (sort of) local connection: The Klees send their fruit to Napa to be rendered into wine by Collin Cranor. 'Heard of him? Collin and his father launched Nottingham Cellars which until recently headquartered here in the Livermore Valley. They're now merging north, for certain reasons.

The wine itself is a nice surprise, as Santa Clara-sourced wines are often more backwoods/rustic than I prefer to bring you. In this case, a quality location and savvy winemaking has preserved the fruit and honored the place. Here is Merlot as it should be; silky, mellow, spicy, mildly-fruited and evasively herbal. Like the three Merlot-based Bordeaux we're clubbing this month, Bella Montagna is a great candidate for cold night fare; slow-cooked meats, mushrooms, and root vegetables. You may now salivate!

**21.99 / 19.79 for all wine club members**



**WINE:** 2021 Olema Cabernet Sauvignon

**SOURCE:** Sonoma County

**GRAPES:** 85% Cabernet Sauvignon, 6% Malbec, 5% Petite Sirah, 4% Merlot

**ATTITUDE:** Perfection per the Price

**FOOD:** Filet Mignon and Mushrooms in Brandy Sauce

### ***A Bold Proposal***

I will boldly assert that Olema Cabernet Sauvignon is bound to be our most popular wine club offering in quite a while. Supporting the notion: For many of you, Cabernet is KING. While wine club members are a more open-minded sort – an attitude for which I’m grateful – all the other bottles we provide are often measured by how they compare to a good Cab.

But let’s analyze beyond the popularity of the varietal. LOOK at this wine. It is simultaneously impenetrably opaque AND vivid with a vibrant message of purple-black-maroon. SMELL this wine. Cassis. Charcoal. Grilled bread. Raspberry fur. Cherry facial. RIGHT??

NOW for the MOUTH. Here is the truth of structure; Cabernet should “feel real” with its tannins and acids, and Olema possesses these, amply. Dark fruit lushness is matched by Cabernet’s requisite gutsiness. If the tannins are too much for your cocktail wine treatment, you’d be wise to pivot to your favorite recipe for quickly-cooked (grilled or broiled or “spanked” in a cast iron skillet) **beef**. Olema will thank you for the trouble. I also contend that, while this club’s wines aren’t always built for the long haul, you can and should lay some Olema down for later. There is a lot of “durability” to be appreciated here.

**24.99 / 22.49 for all members**

The Wine Steward's

# *Wine Adventurer*

## WINE CLUB

October 2023



**WINE:** 2019 Moulin d'Issan

**SOURCE:** Bordeaux Superieur, France    **GRAPES:** 90% Merlot / 10% Cabernet Sauvignon

**ATTITUDE:** Pleasing

**FOOD:** Cold Weather Fare

### *A Beautiful Bordeaux Value*

Chateau d'Issan is a much-admired, frequently-collected Bordeaux garnering impressive ratings and costing a pretty penny. As do many wineries in this world-famous region, d'Issan makes a less expensive "second wine," Blason d'Issan. What you have before you is their THIRD "rung" down, the more affordable and immediately-enjoyable Moulin d'Issan.

The 2019 year, called "Perhaps Bordeaux's best vintage ever" by none other than oeno-guru Jancis Robinson, is the savvy wine buyer's cue to buy up. Even a chateau's "third wine" will shine in such a year. Affability and pleasure happen in both nose and mouth, with violet and incense accompanying the dark fruit. A colder year would yield a grimmer red, but here the dark fruit tempers Bordeaux's anticipated earthiness.

Merlot plays a starring role in no fewer than FOUR of this month's wine club wines, and three of those are Merlot-based Bordeaux. That grape, unfairly disdained by some, is Bordeaux's most-planted. When we show Bordeaux to a customer - knowing the aging time it will receive might be no more than the twenty-minute car ride home - we show **Merlot**-based Bordeaux. Simply put, it's delicious sooner!

**21.99 / 19.79 for Wine Club Members**



**WINE:** 2019 Evidência Reserva

**SOURCE:** Dão, Portugal

**GRAPES:** 100% Touriga Nacional

**ATTITUDE:** “Touriga Nacional acquires affability!”

**FOOD:** Smoky Fare

***“The Noble Softens its Demeanor”***

This dark, evocatively-smoky, plush, and oh-so-drinkable red comes from a Portuguese wine region we don’t reference as often. However, the place called “Dão” deserves to enjoy more TWS exposure.

Whereas Touriga Nacional is the base of many Douro Valley reds you tasted - or at least heard of - that “noble grape of Portugal” actually originated in the Dão, south of the Douro. More importantly (for these notes), it is “better behaved” as coming from Dão.

From the Douro you’d only rarely enjoy such an easygoing, fragrantly-friendly, soft red wine made from Touriga Nacional. From the Dão, sometimes referred to as “The Burgundy of Portugal,” we’re encountering gracefulness and juiciness. Apparently, we should expect that from here.

Smokiness is the first aromatic impression, enrobing grapey / blackberry-y fruit. Violets. The palate is round and juicy, refreshing and food-accommodating. This Reserva is up a notch from “brainlessly gulplable” to “thoughtfully gulpable.” Touriga Nacional, you’re so well-behaved!!

**21.49 / 19.34 for Wine Club Members**



The Wine Steward's  
'Here 'n There'

# Uncharted Whites

WINE CLUB

October 2023



**WINE:** 2022 Evidência Vinho Branco

**SOURCE:** Dão, Portugal

**GRAPES:** Encruzado, Malvasia Fina, Bical

**ATTITUDE:** Pert

**FOOD:** Fried Calamari

## *Effect!*

Many of the wines we show your club are aromatic extroverts. “Florality,” “Tropicality,” “Herb-ality” (not a word - yet) – one, the other, or all – immediately engage the nose. Now, smell **this** wine. The actual scents are far more vague (lime leaves?) but the *effect* is instantly recognized; the effect of having your nose hairs (if not recently clipped) straightened. We are smelling the effect of *nerve*.

The theme of low character / high effect continues on the palate. This squeaky-clean white is meant to be exactly that, along with a tongue-spanking of assertive acidity. An apparently simple white **isn't** – because of EFFECT.

The most-planted white grape of this region is Encruzado. It vies with Arinto as Portugal's most important white variety, meaning it accommodates different treatments; oak aging, stainless steel, etc. That's the major player in this white, more innocently portrayed, but do know that one of the greatest current wine writers, Jancis Robinson, has dubbed Encruzado “The Chablis of Portugal.”

Perhaps this grape deserves further inquiry?!

12.49 / 11.24 for all wine club members



**WINE:** 2022 Cochon Pinot Blanc

**SOURCE:** Shop Block, Dutton Ranch,  
Russian River Valley

**GRAPES:** 100% Pinot Blanc

**ATTITUDE:** Autumnal

**FOOD:** Pork Roast, Turkey . . .

### *Whiteness*

The Dutton Family owns a vast amount of the Russian River Appellation. “Dutton Ranch” is not so much a contiguous vineyard but a chain of family-owned and -maintained plots . . . *fairly* contiguous! If you know anything about the area, you’re aware that it’s heavily planted to Pinot Noir and Chardonnay. Those do marvelously here, and beneath a label declaring “Dutton Ranch, Russian River Valley” they expect and deserve an up-a-notch price. Places are planted primarily according to lucrativity.

Enter Adam Webb, who had much (most!) to do with our latest iteration of Domaine des Plus-de-Vie. Ever-inquisitive Adam discovered that, hiding within the plentiful plantings of Pinot and Chardonnay, a very rare stand of older Pinot Blanc vines persisted. This underdog grape variety (there are reasons for that) attracted thoughtful Adam, who has now worked several vintages of Dutton Ranch Pinot Blanc.

Pinot Blanc is most often seen from Alsace, where it performs as an unembellished workhorse wine. Its best expressions may come from Alto Adige, Italy, where the slopes and the soils confer more attitude on this typically-demure varietal. Adam’s example, along with all other “very good” Pinot Blancs, declares the limits and the attributes. Pinot Blanc, once dressed *a la* barrel-fermented Chardonnay, couldn’t fit into that costume. Its flavors, its total demeanor, veer toward whiteness – not yellowness. Here is a beauty as TEXTURE defines “beauty”. White flowers, white peaches, white whatever’s may factor in, but the central message of Adam’s Pinot Blanc from a rare plot in Dutton Ranch is silkiness of TEXTURE. This is a great white meat wine, whether turkey or “the other white meat”!!

**20.99 / 18.89 for all wine club members**

The Wine Steward's

# "Curious?" Club

WINE CLUB

October 2023



**WINE:** 2018 Chateau de Bleyzac

**SOURCE:** Bordeaux Superieur

**GRAPES:** 100% Merlot

**ATTITUDE:** Sturdier than last month's

**FOOD:** Braised and Roasted Meats - again

## *Last Month's Notes are Largely Repeated as they're Still Relevant*

Timing is everything. This chateau (partner to last month's producer) has been acquired by Argentina's richest man, Alejandro Bulgheroni, who recognized a diamond in the rough. Basically, the estate was subject to an internal dispute, resolved by the sale to this avid acquirer and improver of vineyards all over the world. Bulgheroni, who employs rockstar winemaker Michel Rolland for several of his projects, now possesses enviable situations in the Napa Valley as well as Argentina, Australia, Patagonia, and Tuscany. When you buy a winery, you are also buying its current inventory; that which is bottled and that which remains in barrel.

You're the beneficiary of a wine from which the new owner wants to move on. A red I'd normally sell for at least twenty-five dollars has been subjected to a bit of a fire sale. When (or if) you see this label as a newer vintage on our shelf it will sport a well-deserved higher price. In the meantime, pounce on more of this value while you can. - **IF** you admire it, that is.

## **NOW FOR THIS MONTH'S BULGHERONI-ACQUIRED BORDEAUX:**

Compared to last month's wine AND this month's other two (pricier) wine club wines described above, this Bleyzac is darker, more compact, and impressive for its stoic intensity of fruit. Why do this month's other wine club Bordeaux cost more? They have what this does not: Elegance. That said, Chateau de Bleyzac is a remarkable value for its powerful thrust of blackness, no matter how one-dimensional compared with the others. It's delightfully chewy and even a bit ageworthy!

**14.99 / 13.49 for all wine club members**



**WINE:** 2020 Llama Malbec

**SOURCE:** Lujan de Cuyo, Mendoza, Argentina

**GRAPES:** 100% Malbec

**ATTITUDE:** Soulful

**FOOD:** Asado-style Beef

### *Honesty*

It's about 2.5 decades since Argentine Malbec burst on the scene, gradually supplanting Australian Shiraz as the most deliciously, impactful red you could get for the price. Now, as newer trends vie for your attention, good Malbec still happens but fewer of you are insatiably engaged.

That's fine with me. Certain wine types have their periods of fad and hype and can't-live-without-it and, then, mercifully fade back to reality. Now, the Malbec-preferring "herd" has been thinned. Now, thankfully, Argentine producers of good Malbec no longer must overdesign their wines to placate a certain popular palate. Instead, they can bring their wines back, stylistically, to realness and "place-truthfulness".

Llama Malbec is enough. It's not too much or not-enough. It is enough. You know this by drinking an entire glass with a meal. There, as a "volume wine" working with (hopefully) beef off the grill, Llama Malbec is actually more useful than those oak-laced Malbec whoppers of old. Llama, among others of its ilk, can now be REAL wine! Real wine lovers who drink with their meals will understand.

**13.49 / 12.14 for all members**