

# WINE GARAGE

FEBRUARY 2008 WINE SHIPMENT

## IntenseRed Club

### **Voss Syrah “Ocala” Napa 02 \$22**

In the first year of the Club we included the Voss Syrah and it won much acclaim from our members. Perhaps, due to that initial purchase 2 years ago, I was offered a special deal on their reserve wine, the “Ocala”. Normally \$38, we bring this delicious nectar to you for under \$23. Named after the obsidian arrowheads that litter the vineyard in Rutherford where this wine was born, many people don’t realize how extensive the Native American presence actually was in Napa Valley – for thousands of years. I know first hand about the obsidian deposits on our property by digging the garden beds six years ago and finding arrow heads and removing obsidian boulders out of the rocky soil. We live next to “Glass Mountain” and at the base of the mountain near Deer Park Road and Silverado Trail where there once was an arrowhead factory next to the Napa River. I know a vineyard worker that has a collection of over 500 arrowheads and even spearheads. The Wappo Indian was eventually replaced by the Spanish/Mexican settlements and most of the Valley was included in the Rancho Carne Humana – yes, “human meat” in Spanish. ....sick. It was named after a drunken American surgeon, who was married to General Vallejo’s sister, who I assume wasn’t very deft with his scalpel – especially when imbibed. Anyway, the wine is as black in the glass as an obsidian arrowhead. Hand selected from the best blocks of Voss’s vineyards, the average of only 3 tons of fruit per acre, makes this a concentrated and extracted wine. Anise, earth and blueberry pie on the nose. White pepper, leather and tobacco leads to blackberry and plums on the finish. Completed by well structured tannins. Many layers of flavors make up this reserve Syrah. This bottle is a perfect match with roasted pork tenderloin with a huckleberry glaze, alongside smashed olive oil potatoes.

### **Mt. St. Helena Charbono Napa \$24.99**

The two partners involved with this wine, Bill Davies (Schramsburg) and Tom Gamble (Gamble Ranches) have been friends since kindergarten. They started this winery to produce wine from their childhood stomping grounds and the Charbono grown in the vineyards of Calistoga was a “must” for their portfolio. Brought over from the old country by Italian immigrants in the late nineteenth century, only 100 acres remain of the varietal, mostly in Calistoga. It needs the heat of the upper valley appellations to ripen – Calistoga can be 15 degrees hotter than Napa city, which is closer to the cooler San Francisco Bay fog banks. Originally from the mountains of France, where it was called “Charboneaux”, this varietal, for the uninitiated, has a flavor profile (for me at least) of the combined pepperyness of Petite Sirah, the meaty structure of Syrah and the black fruits of Zinfandel. Plush and rich with bracing acidity. Only 275 cases were made of this wine which was barrel fermented in 100% French oak, 25% new. 2004 was a hot year and this wine reached an unbelievable 25 on the brix scale – one of the drawbacks of the Charbono grape is its late ripening qualities. Last year, when I was picking Petite Sirah on November 13th (at 24 brix), Charbono was still on the vine with a major rain storm imminent (one of my tricks for finding deals

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on fruit is approaching desperate growers right before a storm). This wine pairs well to smoked meats, like sausages on the grill.

### **Martin Family Syrah “Estate” Dry Creek Valley 04 \$17.99**

One of my favorite producers in Dry Creek, Martin Family, is changing hands. Sad. When we 1st opened the store, I was dealing with Bill's wife – when they were newly divorced and she had complete control over the winery until the estate was split up. Then she was paid off and out of the picture and I was dealing with Bill and a new GM. Now he is throwing in the towel and a group of investors are taking over and I got a smokin' deal on this normally \$30 Syrah as a close out. All I can say is, if you can find a better Syrah for under \$18 I'm a monkey's uncle. There is VERY LIMITED amounts of this wine left at these prices. This wine was the only the 2nd Syrah he made; I can see by reading the tech sheet on the wine that he was blowing out all stops. 80% French oak, 60% of which was new. Five (5!) punch downs per day – which was exactly what I did on my first foray into winemaking, thinking that 5 punch downs per day was better than the 3 that Massimo told me was all that was required because you wouldn't gain anything more from 2 additional punch downs. What happens, when the grapes are fermenting after yeast is added, is the carbon dioxide bubbles up through all the “must”, which is made up of the grape skins and seeds. All that matter creates this hard crust called the “cap”. To gain more skin to juice contact – which gives wine its color and tannins, and eventually more flavor-- you punch through this crust (cap) and make the carbon dioxide push up all the must all over again. And you wouldn't believe the heat it (fermentation) produces. The tool looks like a huge potato masher. In fact, that is what exactly I was buying at the hardware store to use to punch down the two bins we had in the back of the store this year – when, luckily, a friend was in line behind me that Saturday morn who happens to be the vineyard manager of Duckhorn, and asked what was I doing with that industrial potato masher. I told him “to punch down my wine”. He looked at me with an incredulous stare and pointed to the wooded handle (with dried glue oozing out from the connection of the handle and the business end), and told me to use only 100% stainless steel or I was going to deposit all those chemicals right into my wine and perhaps TCA as well and who knew what else you big dummy! Whew, that was a close one! (thank god I rely on Massimo for all this important winemaking stuff, but I AM learning). ....This incredibly dark and rich wine (5 punch downs!), has all the right stuff (no glue). Creamy and rich, with toasty vanilla. The aroma reminds me of a mocha grande with vanilla sprinkled on top (French oak). Black cherry, blackberry compote and spicy black pepper (Dry Creek) predominate the palate. A multi-layered, complex finish with nicely softened tannins completes the picture. I had this wine in San Francisco's Indian (eastern, and the neighborhood is called the Tenderloin) food district with lamb curry – and ewe was it good.

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### **Il Gioiello Petite Sirah Amador Co. \$24.99**

Two years ago Joy and I took all of our employees (Katie and Amy, both no longer with us) and Emma, on a wine buying trip up to the Sierra Foothills for our 1st company sleep over. We stayed at Mike Doherty's (Dobra Zemja Winery) cabin. The 1st thing I do on a wine buying trip is go on the internet to research wineries to visit. Any winery that I HAVEN'T heard of gets called 1st. We talk about the different wines they produce and, if they seem like they know what they are doing and have a predilection to wheel and deal, I set up an appointment. Well 2 years ago I called this winery, Il Gioiello. (Pronounced "eel-joy-ello", meaning "the jewel" in Italian). The winery was named after the estate that Leonardo DaVinci was banished to by the Pope for heresy; it was there he lived out his final years. Rob Morse was initially only going to do Italian varietals so the name made sense, but now he mostly makes wine from grapes that grow well in the Foothills: Zin, Barbera, the Rhones, and Pets. Since the name is so damn hard to pronounce (and spell, for that matter), and he isn't exclusively sticking to Italian varieties, I think we have convinced him to change his winery name. Ron has an incredible piece of property nestled (and hidden... it took us an hour to find the freaking place) amongst the hills and coves of the Gold Country. We met and started tasting barrel samples in the barn and all his wines were thin and acidic – not MY customers' flavor profile at all. Then he told me that he only was making 100 cases of this and 50 cases of that and I very gingerly told him that when he makes some substantial amounts of wine, that I could actually buy for the store, to call me sometime down the road. Way down the road is what I was thinking, yuk! See, guys who have the money to start a winery initially make wine that THEY want to drink – not what the actual person who is going to plop down hard earned cash wants to drink. They learn. At least the smart ones do, and Ron sure is smart (he is Director of Ops for Cypress Semi-conductor). One day this past fall some dude and his beautiful lady friend stop by the store and says, "Remember me?"... Oh no, not the Italian dude from Amador (how am going to get out of this). Well, he says he has made some more wine and would I like to taste it? OK.....and WOW, he changed his schtick! Gorgeously huge Zins, brawny Barbera and delicious Petite Sirah was what he poured me. I could have fallen on the floor. I BEGGED him to give me enough cases of one of these wines to include in a club. Then he invited me golfing at Black Hawk CC and we cut the deal there (while his beautiful lady friend proceeded to kick my arse on the golf links...I know she is reading this and laughing hysterically - I'll get you one day, darling). Sweet kirsch on the nose (currant liqueur). Dark purple in the glass. Herbal components like thyme and anise and fresh oregano fill the palate like no other Pets I have had. Blackberry jam, plum pudding and wet slate fill it all out until a long lingering finish leaves you wanting another sip. Herb encrusted rack of lamb, baby – have that with this wine. More of these wines to come – hopefully with a pronounceable name attached to the label.

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### **Madrigal Merlot Napa Valley 04 \$24.99**

Chris Madrigal's family has been farming in the valley for generations and his dad has a very well respected vineyard management business here in Calistoga. They have been making wine for their own label now for years and finally we were able to purchase a significant quantity to get the price down enough to offer it to you folks in the club. They just built a winery down the road from the store on Hwy 29, spent a lot of dinero and welcomed my offer on a pallet of Merlot. This fruit comes from the Larkmead area – a sub appellation between Calistoga and St. Helena. Dense, rich and fruity. This Merlot tastes like a big Cab minus all the astringent tannin. Cola, Chocolate, vanilla, toasted wood, baking spices, blackberry and saddle leather. This wine will pair really well with Lamb or Beef. I had it with carne asada tacos and mole sauce. (Yes, I drink wine with Mexican food).

### **Il Ponte Sangiovese 01 \$24.99**

Jim Moore is an old timer 'round these parts in the wine country. Having made wine for almost every winery you have ever heard of, he started concentrating on his own brand almost exclusively...which, by the way, exclusively only makes Italian varieties. We have grown to be close compatriots in the struggle of selling incredible tasting wines for an affordable price tag. He started selling, personally, his own wine after a bad experience with a lazy wine broker here in Napa Valley who thought answering the phone when it rang was a sales call. That was right along the time we opened the shop. Since then, I see Jim every other week – in person – for a touch base on what we need, and even if it is NOTHING (i.e. a sale), he still restocks the shelves of whatever wine he has left that is stacked on our floor. Old school. He sells a lot of wine to us, too, because sometimes if you are not in my face (due to all my projects...mostly finding you guys even better wine for even better prices), I just can't keep up. Well this offering to you folks is a gift – to both of us – from my friend, Jim. Sold for much higher prices to mostly fancy-ass restaurants here in the Napa Valley, this Sangiovese is a masterpiece. To me, tasting like the best Brunello I have ever consumed, this bottle has wave after wave of flavors. Brunello, by the way, IS Sangiovese, but only from a certain area north of Sienna in the Tuscan hills, from a supposed clone/hybrid of either the Grosso or Piccolo Sangiovese clone. Whatever it is or tastes like, it is reminiscent of THIS: that freaking bottle of Brunello my new bride and I drank in that little trattoria in the town of Montepulciano over a lunch of wild boar ragu, during a rainstorm on our honeymoon (oh, what a time in space). Wild cherry, crabapple, rosemary, dried rose petals, cranberry sauce with a bite of dark turkey meat...the flavors (and memories) go on and on. I had this wine with my bride of seven years on New Years Eve, this one past, and I wish we had a ragu of wild boar over homemade pasta to pair it with, but caviar had to do.

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