

WINE GARAGE

APRIL 2008 WINE SHIPMENT

IntenseRed Club

Earthquake Petite Sirah, Lodi '04, \$23.99

The Garage has been opened for 4 _ years now. I remember my first (ever) wine buying trip to get the initial inventory of wines before we opened. I went to Lodi and my second stop that day was at the Michael David Winery on Hwy 12 (the first stop was at St. Amant). Now, most people wouldn't think that this was an actual winery since the tasting room is in a farm stand along the highway; I am not kidding. The family behind this mega winery – mega NOW, that is, not 4 years ago – are a bunch of Lodi farmers who have been working the land for decades. The Phillips' had been growing wine grapes but selling to the co-op like all their other neighbors did. Well, Dave Phillips decided to start making wine with those old vine grapes and selling it out of the farm stand. It was pretty good stuff, too. Then he decided to do a higher end wine brand, named it Earthquake, sourced extremely old vines and hired a very good winemaker out of Australia (since Aussie Shiraz was hot and the big, fruit-forward style matched the extracted, concentrated fruit that he sourced). Zin, Syrah, and Petite was the line-up, and he got his brother to write a poem on the back label which brought everything together...also came up with the label design. Smart dude. And nice, too. He gave me very good pricing on the EQ stuff and we were the very first wine shop in Napa County to carry the newly formed brand. "It is gonna rock your world" was my battle cry and we sold a ton. Meanwhile, the brand took off and Dave made more and more EQ. Soon it was selling in every big box store in the Valley – which I don't like – and then they changed to a distributor system that I didn't like...especially the distributor they chose, who I couldn't stand and did not do business with. I liked the days when I would drive up to the farm stand, shake Dave's hand and negotiate another deal. So the days of Earthquake and Wine Garage ended...right exactly when they made it to the big time and scored "Best of Class", "Sweepstakes" and "Best Wine of Show" at the San Francisco Chronicle International Wine Tasting Competition...for THIS WINE! When all that news hit the wine press, there was a clampdown on EQ Pets like I have never seen before. Allocation, allocation, allocation. Price increase. Then another price increase! This wine scored better than over 4000 other wines tasted. Phillips Farms and Wine Garage were really toast now. Well, there is a long story how I got my hands on this little baby...but in a nutshell, it involves someone getting fired, a lawsuit and some lucky connections! The happy ending is that there was some remaining EQ Pets warehoused and I got a call from my old rep to see if I wanted the leftovers....and I got the LAST 100 CASES on the planet of this vintage for a steal of a deal (remember they upped the price twice and now they make a \$50 Cab and Zin, too). The wine is actually better now than when it was reviewed; Pets needs some bottle time. A searing intensity of fruit. Almost viscous in texture. If you were to spill this wine on your clothes, you would NEVER get the stain out, it's so dark and brooding. Chocolate truffles, roasted espresso bean, smoked wild game, blackberry jam, cigar box...and that all finishes with this delightful acidity on the palate to complete the picture. Major score! Only one case maximum per member on re-orders.

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Atrea "Old Soul Red" Mendocino Co. '04, \$24.99

John Fetzer, oldest brother to my good friend Jim and new friend Danny, is the backbone of this new label, a second label of Saracina Winery, Atrea is about blends. This one is Zinfandel, Syrah, Malbec, and Petite Sirah. This is the first crazy blend, as I call them, that has Malbec in the mix and WOW what a blend this is. Consulting winemaker, Dave Ramey, one of the hottest rockstar winemakers right now, did his thang... "touches" it, as they say in the industry...and the result is one of the most interesting wines I've tasted in the last 12 months. I met Dave Ramey and his wife during a Passover Seder a few years ago here in St. Helena at Jeff Mogan's house. (Jeff, formerly a critic for the Wine Spectator, is now a winemaker and wine educator at the CIA Greystone). Anyway, I made my "famous matzo ball soup" for the Seder – I have been told I am the best Jewish cook in Napa (the joke is that I am not Jewish, and there are about 5 Jews in Napa Valley); I make homemade Gefilte Fish for ----- sakes! Well, I was sitting next to Dave's wife and she accidentally spilled an entire glass of Jeff's barrel sample (his, then new, kosher wine "Covenant Cabernet"...the most expensive kosher wine ever made; \$85/btl) all over me! From shoulder to cuff, I was COVERED with Covenant! Oy Vey! I looked like I was schvitzing red wine from my pores (pours?). So I looked like a dork all night for a Seder that lasted like FOREVER. Man, he read every freaking story in the Haggadah. Anyway, my wife, Simka Friedel (that's Joy's Jewish name, and she IS Jewish) bid our adieu as I sloshed my way out to the car. Back to the wine...it is delicious and you can pour a gallon all over me if you wish since it's only twenty something bucks. Liquid velvet. Rich blackberries and briar (Zinfandel), blueberry pie (Malbec), forest floor covered in pine needles (Syrah), and a black peppery spiciness (Petite Sirah), and creamy vanilla oak (30% new French Oak). OMG this is good, and we got enough to ship because I already had Danny's and Jim Fetzer's wines in the Club, and I think there was a little sibling rivalry at play there. Serve with Matzo Ball Soup! Filet of Old Soul. Or better yet, Osso Bucco, Lamb Shanks braised in a tomato based sauce with lots of mushrooms

Anglim Grenache, Paso Robles '04 \$24.99

Paso is the preeminent spot in California to grow Rhone grape varieties. Steve Anglim is one of the better winemakers in Paso and Grenache is one of my favorite grape varieties. All this adds up to a kick ass wine for the club that goes great with food. Grenache is originally from Spain where it is called "Garnacha". It loves limestone soils and hot weather. This wine is more "red fruit" driven than "black fruit" so I get a lot of aromatic strawberry on the nose, pomegranate, cranberry and currants on the palate, and a extracted, concentrated finish. This wine is perfect to serve as a hearty aperitif wine and would pair well with the Smoked Salmon and Tomato bruschetta provided in the recipe section of these notes. Enjoy!

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Borra Vineyards Zinfandel Lodi '04, \$22.99

This wine is all about family, going back a hundred years to when the Manassero and Borra families immigrated from Italy to Lodi. One son of the Borra's married the beautiful Lucille Manasserro and then they had Stephen Borra Jr., the current owner and winemaker of Borra Vineyards. Located along the Mokelumne River, the block of Zin that goes into this wine, at over 40 years old, is special. The river provides cool breezes to maintain the proper acid levels in the grapes. This sub-appellation of Lodi is called Clements Hills and is highly desirable. So, with four generations of winegrowers, special terroir, and impeccable winemaking skills, I introduce to you this kick ass bottle of grape juice. I have been selling Borra since day one at the Wine Garage. I tasted this wine at ZAP one year and HAD to have it but it sells out quickly. The Zin has been difficult to obtain, but I finally scored it. I mostly sold the blend called "Fusion" and the newest version is coming in the May Club for you Intense folk. Deep purple in color, dusty blackberries on the nose. Plum pudding, molasses, caramel, mocha, roasted espresso, wave after wave of more fruit, then a clean, yet seemingly endless finish. Yum! Man, Lodi wines have completely taken a huge about face. There was a day when Lodi grape growers could hardly give the fruit away for free let alone get big scores in the wine press and sell bottles for over \$50 retail (Earthquake). Selling out an entire vintage? Allocating the wines to retailers? Unbelievable. Club member, do you realize that 50% of the wines shipped to you in the April Club are from LODI? I know you are going to just love them. How did this happen? What made Lodi grapes become so damn good in the first place? They were always good. The winemaking and vineyard management techniques got better, but one of the most important factors responsible...the driving force behind the renaissance of Lodi winemaking and grape growing...is the Spencer Family and St. Amant Winery (which happens to be the third wine from Lodi in the Intense Red Club selection this month.)

St. Amant Zinfandel "Mohr-Fry Vineyard", Lodi '06 \$19.99

Lodi Rules! Not a phrase, or slang, but actual winegrowing practices that have been developed by the Lodi Grape Growing Commission to promote sustainable viticulture that is certified by a third party. How is that in your eye Napa Valley? Unbelievable quality of wine coming out of Lodi these days. Four and a half years ago when we opened the Garage, I knew I was on to something when we went out to do wine buying trips in Lodi. Affordable, high quality, nice people, and now, sustainable. I love it. At one point, the Wine Garage sold more Lodi labeled wine than any other store in Northern California. Did you know that over 40% of all California Zinfandel comes out of Lodi? Well, a bunch of that goes into "White Zin", but more and more old vine Zin vineyards in Lodi are being included in the grape programs for wineries outside of Lodi, including the Wine Garage. I am determined to make a Lodi designated Zin in 2008. I just need some help from Stuart Spencer to find me the right vineyard. I WISH I could get some Mohr-Fry, or Marians fruit, but it is all spoken for. This Zin comes from a ranch that has been growing wine-

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grapes since the 1850's. I am now seeing Napa wineries using Mohr-Fry fruit and actually stating that on the label as a vineyard designate. Full circle, boy. Lodi has always been seen as the "red-headed stepchild" to Napa wineries although these same wineries have been buying winegrapes from Lodi for many, many years, pretending that the great wines they made from Lodi fruit came from Napa. I am teaching a class at Napa Valley College this semester on the sensory analysis of wine to wine industry folk. Last night our class did Zinfandel from around California and everybody's favorite was St. Amant Marians, which is a smaller block inside the Mohr-Fry vineyard. I couldn't get enough Marian's for the club since there was only 225 cases made total (I have it in the store if you want to order it). The Mohr-Fry vineyard is farmed under the Lodi Rules Program. This is Stuart Spencer's first vintage since his dad, Tim, passed. Tim was a special person and really made an imprint on me. I was praying Stuart would continue on with the winemaking at St. Amant, and encouraged him profusely to do so. He did. I bought it. You are going to drink it, and I think love doing so. Seems like Stuart didn't fall too far from the tree – he has become an excellent winemaker. He had a lot to do with the Lodi Rules program, since he is the Program Manager for the Lodi Winegrape Commission "a big ripe chewy Zin with rich raspberry and spicy blackberry flavors finishing with a delicious mouthcoating texture." I would add to that; baking spice, licorice, plum jam, and cigar box with a long finish. as well as running St. Amant. This is what Stuart says about this wine:

Six Sigma Red Wine Cuvee, \$24.99

Over Thanksgiving week, one of my oldest and dearest friends, Pete Hill and his wife Tammy, came out for a visit from Florida. I wanted to take them out wine tasting for a day, but it had to be with my daughter, Emma, since Joy had to work in the Garage. Wine tasting with a 6 year old is tricky business; I know first hand. There has to be 2 things for Emma at a winery...space to run around... and a dog. So I was scouring my brain on what winery owed me a big favor and I thought, "Six Sigma Ranch has invited me up several times to the estate – they have a lot of room; they MUST have a dog, too!" So I called up the friend who brokered the deal of the Sigma Sauvignon Blanc (featured in the October Club) and asked, "Kara (Pecota), do you know if Kaj has a dog up at Six Sigma?" She said, "Yes they do, a beautiful Border Collie". "Great. Can you ask him if I can cash in my invite and head up there the day after Thanksgiving for a picnic with 2 friends and Emma?" Done! So off we go, picnic hamper filled to the brim with goodies – Proscuitto for Daddy and brownies for Emma.

"Sigma Six" is the name of a quality assurance technique that was developed by GE and employed by other corporations worldwide – Pete is an engineer and knew all about it. Well Kaj is the DUDE WHO INVENTED it –The ranch is over 4500 acres (!), but only 29 acres planted to vine so far. That is why we were driving 5 miles inside his gate before we got to the tasting room. Sweet folks, Kaj and his wife, Else.

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Emma fell in love with the dog. We invited those guys to share our picnic with us and Kaj cracked this bottle of cuvee to go with my charcuterie. OMG! As they say in text-ese...what a wine. I have NEVER tasted such sweet toasty French oak. This bottle is the definition of French oak. A little too much new oak, perhaps, but the effect on this wine is magic. Deep, dark purple in color. Cab, Merlot, Petite Verdot, and Cab Franc make up the components. And these are the exact varietals that shine while being coopered in French Oak. Blueberries, plum jam, strawberries, licorice, chocolate and toasty sweet vanilla oak. Long, rich finish that doesn't want to end. Hidden tannins hint at potential age-ability. This is a good wine with the Grilled Lamb recipe included with these notes, or with a picnic of proscuitto and brownies. BTW, I caught Emma feeding my Parma ham to the dog (\$25/lb.) just like I suspected she would do...

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