

WINE GARAGE

APRIL 2008 WINE SHIPMENT

RedOnly Club

Fife “Redhead Red”, Mendocino Co. \$14.99

Dennis Fife is an old school wine industry icon here in wine country. Inglenook, BV, and even named “Consigliari” at Stags Leap. He started in the wine business in '72 and by '88 he was purchasing vineyards. He launched Fife in '92. Dennis got married to Karen MacNeil and settled down – adopted a baby. Karen is another wine industry icon. She is author of the Wine Bible, a celebrity teacher and Director of the wine program at the Culinary Institute here in St. Helena...a Wineratti Superstar. In addition to her icon status, Karen sports the reddest head of hair I have ever seen. Well, I had no idea about Karen MacNeil's involvement in Fife Vineyards until just this afternoon when I called the sales guy who reps Fife to find out what the actual blend is in this wine. I was told that when Dennis and Karen wanted to launch an inexpensive but tasty red blended wine for under \$15, Karen tasted more than 200 wines in that price range to see what made the tasty ones stand out. They wanted an easy drinking, fruity wine with backbone. So the race began to find the Rosetta Stone of inexpensive wine blends. The winner this year was Carignane, Zinfandel, Syrah, and splash of Sangiovese. The secret ingredient that the Fife's determined made all the difference in many, many blending trials was 2% Sangiovese which gave just the right amount of acidity. After 25 years of being a wine educator, Karen knows wine. My very favorite quote of hers deals with value in wine: “Realize that no price is too little. You don't have to spend a fortune to drink good wine. If you are going to a friend's house for lasagna, a \$60 bottle of wine is not only unnecessary, one could argue it's out of place. ...wine professionals often buy very reasonably priced wines. Wine pros care about what's inside the bottle and the cheaper the price, the better. It's often people who don't know a lot about wine who pay enormous amounts for it, hoping that price will be some sort of assurance. It doesn't really work that way. Unlike cars and stereo systems, there are very good wines at all prices”. One of the best descriptors of this blend would be “juicy”. Grapey, even. Earth, grapes, blueberries, plums, minerals, and tannin. This is the quintessential food wine that you would find in a European café. Close your eyes, take a bite of your lasagna followed by a sip of this wine, and pretend you are in Italy this Tuesday night...

Jus Soli Pinot Noir 05 Mendocino \$21.99

With all the fuss going on about this grape these days, I am proud to have found two excellent and reasonable priced Pinot Noirs for you to try in this Club shipment. This wine from Mendocino – a much cooler growing climate than the other Pinot from Sonoma - is indicative of its terroir. The cooler the growing region the less ripe the fruit will be, enhanced acidity will be present, and the earthiness component of Pinot will come forward. Wine Pros call it “barnyard”, but that is more in tune with Pinot from Burgundy or Oregon – Mendocino Pinot has a “forest floor” aroma which reminds me of hunting for Porcini mushrooms in Sea Ranch at Thanksgiving. Undoubtedly it will be raining like crazy and the wet forest floor actually smells like fresh mushrooms. Three dudes who grew up in wine country make up

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the core of Jus Soli – latin for “law of the soil”. Tom Garret, the winemaker, launched and makes wine for Detert Family Vineyards, and also has his hands in other projects like being General Manager and assistant winemaker for Revanna, working under Heidi Petersen Barrett, the rockstar winemaker of Screaming Eagle and a many other trophy wines. In fact, Tom has quite a resume for such a young guy. He was the west coast wine tasting coordinator at the Wine Spectator (he had the privilege of tasting every single wine made in California), started out his winemaking career at Turley Wine Cellars, then Mondavi, then Joseph Phelps, now Jus Soli. Cool. Joy and I see him eating fish tacos with his kids and wife at Taylor’s Refresher – where we are eating tacos with OUR kid. Anyway, this wine has some very interesting flavor profiles going on....dried flowers and cherry pie on the nose, baking spice, cola, tobacco, pine sap, mushroom compost, and cherries on the palate. Silky mouthfeel, with a finish of soft tannin and cherry cola. This wine was a hit when I served a Chicken Mole one night. The fruit and earthiness were a perfect match to the spicy richness of the non-sweet Mexican chocolate-based sauce.

Ukiah Cellars Cabernet Sauvignon, Mendocino '05 \$16.99

This wine comes to you through our friends from Mendocino Farms, founded by Owsley Brown (Brown-Forman), and now managed by my good friend Josh Metz who we met when he was Sales Director of Ceago Vinegarden. Dedicated to sustainable farming practices, Ukiah Cellars isn’t certified organic yet but moving towards that direction. This wine is delicious. A unique blend of 89% Cab, the aromatics are ratcheted up with some interesting additions of 5 % Zin, 5% Syrah, and 1% Viognier. This is a cool blend. I LOVE when Viognier – a white grape from the Northern Rhone – is co-fermented in with red grapes. It was initially done because some chemical reaction in the skin of the Viognier locks in the dark purple color. A byproduct is increased aromatics, a creamy mouth feel, and richer and more complex wine. Rich and fruity, round and fat, soft and easy drinking, this wine is a steal for \$15. Blueberry, chocolate, blackberry pie, dried cherries, very soft tannin, creamy mouth feel, a hint of earth, and a nice acidity that ties everything together. I tasted this wine with Josh while we were having lunch at Rutherford Grill one afternoon. The Grill is where the wine industry does its business lunches – and the wine industry was out in full force that day. Scott Brown from James Creek Winery (see Red White Club notes) pulled up a stool. Then Ray Coursen from Elyse Winery – and the winemaker for Falcor - came in. Ron Carter from Carter was there, too. Several brokers were in attendance....before the lunch was even served I tallied up all the wine I bought from these folks and Wine Garage was responsible for purchasing almost seven pallets of wine within the last year from the people just sitting around the bar alone. I ordered the famous Prime Rib French Dip for lunch, then bought a pallet of the Ukiah Cab...

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Peltier Station Petite Sirah, Lodi '05 \$18.99

This wine scored very high numbers, "Best of Class", and "Best of Region" at the '06 California State Fair. The winery is named after the 1900 railroad spur originally fed by fruit packing sheds near Peltier Road in Lodi. Mile-long trains loaded down with grapes headed out to anxiously awaiting winemakers throughout the region. The Schatz Family has been farming wine grapes for more than half a century. In 2002 they jumped into the winemaking arena by hiring J.C. Van Staden to control the presses and the awards started coming in. J.C., from South Africa, came to America under a H2 visa working for Michael David Winery and their famous Earthquake brand. Something got screwed up in the paperwork and he was deported back to the Cape, then finally landed at Peltier. This dude is a big and brawny rugby player and makes big and brawny wines. Rodney Schatz farms close to 500 acres of grapes, and J.C. gets to pick the very best lots for his wines. Grown in clay soils and cooled by breezes off the Sacramento River Delta, Lodi produces some mean Petite. Longer hang times allow for extracted and concentrated wines. Intense blackberry flavors predominate coupled with white pepper, creamy vanilla, toasty oak, and burnt earth. Smoky, silky, and finishing with cigar box and leather – I guess you could say a leather cigar travel holder component. Cool wine – big flavors. Have with a hearty steak, or long simmering pot roast.

Mackenzie Pinot Noir Russian River Valley (Sonoma Co.) 06, \$19.99

I do hope you find it a treat that we have two Pinot's in this Club shipment that are so distinctly different. This Pinot is grown in the warmer climes of RRV and shows clearly more red fruit up front. A second label of River Road Winery, originally they were just growers who decided to make wine when the fruit market got soft and had a bunch of grapes that went unsold. So instead of tilling it under the dirt, they hired a winemaker and made wine from it and started the label. Mackenzie is their higher end offering and this Pinot is a steal. Strawberry, cranberry, currants, and raspberries all explode on both the nose and the palate. Hint of mint, cedar, cinnamon, and soft tannins complete the package. Pinot has exploded in popularity and many labels that I once featured in the store have priced themselves out the door. I have seen some wineries tack on over \$100 to the wholesale case price from one vintage to the next – unbelievable! The acidity in this wine, coupled with the fruit forwardness, matches perfectly with the Smoked Salmon Bruschetta appetizer recipe I have included with these tasting notes. The richness of the salmon and avocado combined with the acidity of the tomatoes and peppery extra virgin olive oil spell, "Ooh la la".

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Stonehouse Zinfandel North Coast 04 \$14.99

Negotiant.....many people ask me what the heck a Wine Negotiant is or does. I just did a negotiant deal of my own so here you go: a Negotiant buys finished wine, blends it with other lots of finished wine – maybe even different varietals, bottles it under their own label and, hopefully, sells it. Blending is the talent. My negotiant deal was a little different because I knew the winemakers who made it, and was invited to the winery and allowed to select it barrel by barrel. Most times when you buy bulk wine you order say 20 different Napa Cabernet from the '05 vintage. It arrives by courier the next day in clear glass bottles with screw cap closures. You're never told what winery it came from. You pick the best wine you get, THEN you are told how much it is by the gallon. My negotiant deal was a little different. I showed up at the winery (can't say what winery, I am sworn into secrecy) very early in the morning – making sure to NOT have brushed my teeth – toothpaste is a big no no for your palate, and your palate is at its best early morning. No coffee either. Then we tasted a sample from every barrel that was to be bulked out and picked my favorite barrels for the purchase. We are planning to sell this wine, blended with wine from other wineries and different varietals, dispensed from a gas station style pump nozzle into 1.5 liter pistol grip jugs with screw caps. Blend #1 is 40% Zin, 20% Syrah, 20% Grenache, and 20% Mourvedre. Blend #1A is Syrah, Grenache, and Mourvedre. If the Wine Garage Red Wine labels come in as scheduled we should have this within a month, and it is amazingly good. \$35/1.5 litre (which is about \$14/btl). Stonehouse Zin is a negotiant wine from a broker I deal with. He already has "approved" labels ready to slap on the bottles – I chose the Stonehouse label for you (hee hee). Crazy deal, this wine here. Big monster fruit bomb. Gobs and gobs of black fruit, so dark it practically stains the inside of the glass. Peppery, spicy, lush and rich. Long finish that doesn't want to end. If you want more, Tim Parsley just slaps some more labels on and I ship it out. This wine is screaming for BBQ, sweet and spicy.

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