

WINE GARAGE

APRIL 2008 WINE SHIPMENT

Red&White Club

Anglim Rosé Paso Robles '06 \$14.99

Last Spring, I was driving back from yet another trip down to Santa Barbara and I decided to call a wine broker friend while I was just outside of Paso Robles. Karen Bria has turned me on to many small producers in Paso and she was in town and up for lunch. We stopped in to see Steve Anglim and tasted some of his new releases. One we tasted was this Rosé of Grenache, Syrah, Mourvedre, and Viognier. I loved it but told Steve that I wasn't interested in buying it for the store because it was in this really dark bottle – NOBODY bottles a Rosé in anything other than clear glass. I purchased his delicious Syrah for one club shipment last fall and a case of the Rosé for Joy and I to drink in the upcoming long, hot summer in Napa. I got back in the car headed for Santa Cruz where I was hooking up with Joy and Emma at a beach house we rented for the weekend. I couldn't stop thinking about that Rosé – it really made an impression on me. I called Karen up again and said, "I think that was the best Rosé I have ever had", and she agreed. So I told her to ship 5 cases for the store and I'd try to forget about the dark glass it came in and see how it would sell. Well, Joy loved it, too. Then our wine industry friends loved it once they sampled it. Then we couldn't keep it on the shelves it sold so well. Rosé is very trendy these days amongst the "wineratti", and the wineries, who were simply dumping their "sangree" in the vineyard, decided to make a buck and bottle it up. You see, when you are making wine with young vines, sometimes the juice is too light in color. So, to darken it up...you want more skin to pulp ratio...you bleed out some juice to bump up the ratio. The winemaking term for this process is called, in French, "Sangree". People are making Rosé out of every conceivable grape variety, including Cabernet and Petite Sirah! Those don't really work so well...the Rhone grapes do though. Just try a \$35 bottle of Bandol sometime from the Southern Rhone, made from Grenache, and tell me you don't love it. So I was thinking of putting the very first Rosé ever in the Club this spring and called Karen up to see if Steve bottled the '07 in clear glass, so I could turn you folks on to it. I found out to my amazement (and chagrin) that he didn't make a Rosé in '07...He discontinued the Rosé program! What a huge mistake! But there was some of the '06 if I wanted it...just enough to fill the Club order...and I jumped on it. The color of this wine is the closest I have found to a true Bandol Rosé – the only term I can think of that nails it is "salmon", light pink. The nose is of just-picked strawberries...like when YOU do the picking and have the delicious nectar all over your fingers. With a scent of dried flowers and honey. A rich mouthfeel and backbone of bright acidity on the finish. The flavors of strawberry, white peaches, and wet slate. I LOVE this wine! It is absolutely perfect. Serve very cold and try it with that classic Italian dish of fresh strawberries drizzled with aged balsamic vinegar. I have very few cases left.....

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Source Napa Sauvignon Blanc, “Gamble Vineyard” Napa ‘05 21.99

Great vineyards make great wine, as the saying goes, and this delicious SB is proof in the bottle. The Gamble vineyard in Yountville sits in the southern part of the Valley where cool Pacific breezes cool down the fruit in the evening after a blistering hot Napa summer day. Napa makes great wine mostly due to that one fact right there – the cool nights maintain the acidity needed to balance the sugars of the grapes. Napa also has 7 of the 9 total soil types found in the entire world in a 30 mile long valley. The rocky soil, the cool nights, and the Musque clone of Sauvignon Blanc (planted to half of the Gamble vineyard) make this wine special. Unique winemaking techniques were employed as well: 20% of the must was fermented in stainless tanks at a constant temperature for over 50 days – this is a very long fermentation for a white wine – this was done mostly to bring out the tropical flavors. The other 80% went straight into a barrel – French and Hungarian, 18% new - and fermented in the caves. The wood fermentation adds a rich mouth feel and complexity. Another unique winemaking technique was to pick the fruit on different days and brix levels. All picks occurred during very early morning hours and some before sunrise. “Night picks”, as they are called, allow very high acid levels to remain. You should see it in person. Looking at a vineyard off in a distance you would think there was a soccer game going on. The klieg lights make the vineyard look like daytime. This picking technique is actually illegal in France, being that the knives and fingers are working so feverishly and at such a close proximity. I can see the point, err, blade. Anyway, all this adds up to is yummy wine. Aromas of honeysuckle, orange marmalade, and kaffir lime leaf. A rich mouthfeel. Lemon poppy seed cake, grapefruit and honeycomb are intermingled with bright citrus acidity on the finish. Layer after layer of flavors. This wine is a perfect match to a rich seafood dish like seared scallops, doused in browned butter and a squeeze of lemon.

Vine Cliff Merlot, Napa Valley ‘02 24.99

This is a special, special offering to the Club. We secured this wine at this price due to 2 factors: that stupid movie “Sideways” made the merlot market soft, and Ginny Sweeney is best friends with Joy. Ginny is married to Rob Sweeney, who is the GM of the Vine Cliff Winery. OK, Rob is my bud too, but it all started with Ginny and Joy. (Well, actually, it started with Emma, since she was the reason that Joy and Ginny met because Ginny and Rob had a child that same time we did. Practically all our friends in Napa Valley are tied to Emma somehow.)Vine Cliff sits up on a hill off of Silverado Trail in Oakville – seriously major real estate in the Valley. Started (and funded) by Rob’s step dad (he owned Embassy Suites and sold them), at first I thought “here is another rich dude who wants to get in the wine business, and gives it to his son to run”. No no no. Rob went to Napa Valley College and got his degree in freaking viticulture first off. He felt he needed to learn the business from the “vine-up” so to speak. Then he slowly took on more responsibilities until he became the Director of Sales, then GM. This dude works his ass off, either driving a tractor during harvest, or traveling all over the world selling wine for at least 3 or 4

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solid months of the year – being away from his family. A lot of work is involved between a little grape-growing on a hill in Oakville to popping a bottle at the Four Seasons in Tokyo. Their number one wine sells for \$155 and received amazing scores. Rob cut production way back, tightened up the winemaking and vineyard operations, and started blowing away the wine critics. One night we were at a party with Rob and Ginny and this bottle of Merlot came in to the conversation, and here you go. More Cab-like, with firm structure and complexity. Black cherry, currants, pomegranate, smoked hazelnuts and toasty oak. Not at all flabby or soft. A big mouthfull of wine that needs a big-ass steak to stand up to it. All French Oak, 60% new and aged in the caves for 18 months. This wine sold for \$40 and got big numbers in the wine press. Thank Ginny and Rob for the opportunity to have it for almost half off.

James Creek Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa '05 \$24.99

Scott Brown makes his living managing vineyards in Napa. A native of this county, he is lucky that he can actually work, let alone walk, after a freak accident when he was a kid. He was a passenger in a pick-up driving across Zinfandel Lane during a storm when a tree fell across the road just at the precise moment the truck was driving by. The tree actually hit the truck hood as it was falling - destroyed the truck and most of Scott, too. He wasn't ever supposed to walk again – yet he does, with difficulty. I have never - ever - asked to help him unload his truck when he is bringing in another load of his delicious Cab or Zin to the store, out of respect for his determination, or to show any sign of pity for this totally stand up guy. This is one tough dude and a cowboy at heart, as you can see by the wine label. In fact, the Wine Garage sponsors his two kids in their rodeo circuit. I discovered Scott's wine by having lunch in Brannan's and seeing a Zin on the by-the-glass menu that I hadn't recognized. I ordered up a glass, asked for the bottle to see who made it after my first sip, called the number on the back label, and struck up a deal before my burger arrived at the table. We featured the Zin in a previous Club; now I'm sending this delicious Cab to you. So delicious, in fact, that I bought fruit from the same vineyard last year and made wine for ourselves. Only 240 cases made, Scott gets to pick the best blocks for himself from the vineyards he manages. Big and fruity, showing immense concentration and extraction, yet balanced and structured. Extremely dark in the glass, with ripe blackberry, kirsch and smoky leather on the nose. Sweet vanilla and toasty oak surround more gobs of fruit, then saddle leather and incense cedar lead into a superbly integrated, tannic finish. This wine is perfect with the brined and grilled Spring Lamb that is one of the featured recipes in this month's Club Notes. See recipe.

Soda Rock Chardonnay, Sonoma '05 \$14.99

As the second label for Stuhlmuller Vineyards, Soda Rock is blended around a core of lush fruit from Stuhlmuller's estate property in the Alexander Valley. Stuhlmuller Chards have been getting HUGE numbers in the wine press the last few years. In order to maintain its fresh, vibrant charm, the fruit in this wine

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undergoes only partial malolactic fermentation and is predominantly aged in stainless steel with several months of lees stirring to add richness. The 2005 growing season saw the arrival of gorgeous weather in mid-August, which allowed the fruit to ripen to perfection while still maintaining mouth-watering acidity. To create a well-balanced wine with inviting layers, winemaker Leo Hansen paired rich, concentrated grapes from older Chardonnay vines with bright, lively fruit from more youthful vines. The product of a great vintage, the 2005 Soda Rock Chardonnay was made from 100 percent Stuhlmuller Vineyards fruit. This delicious wine starts with delicate aromas of Anjou pear, white flowers and fruit cocktail, before delivering layers of tropical and baked apple flavors, with hints of Meyer lemon blossoms. A perfect wine with fish or lighter entrees like a Chicken Salad for lunch this Sunday, when you can drink a bottle at lunch and then go take that nap you deserve after a hard week at work.

Damiano Zinfandel, Sierra Foothills'05 \$14.99

OK, now, our Club is getting big. I actually had to buy 25% of this dude's entire production to fill the club order. Total production: 215 cases. Made by third generation winemakers from Italian descent – this vineyard is outside the little burg of Grass Valley at about 3000 feet above sea level. The Foothills are a special place for wine grapes for two reasons: the volcanic soil (Lake Tahoe was a huge volcano) and hot days end with extremely cool nights to keep up nice acid levels. The terrior is kind to Rhone fruit but perhaps best seen in Zinfandel. I was turned on to Damiano wine by a broker I deal with from Sacramento. I have some key wine brokers stashed in outlying wine growing regions who keep me abreast of new brands and hot deals. Karen Bria in Paso Robles, Katie Regalia in Mendocino, and Mickey Nixon in Sacramento. You have all had great wine sourced from these Garage satellites. I am now testing out a new connection in Santa Cruz that deals with very small wineries there. Before I purchase large quantities for the Club from a broker I test them out on small orders for the store to see how the distribution and their follow through is. I don't want to see any bottle variation in a new winery that I bring in. Bottle variation is when some bottles in a case taste great and some taste like plonk. Or when some cases are consistent and some taste like they were made by another winemaker. The most important factor for me to buy from a broker consistently is that they know MY customer (you) and what that customer likes so they show me interesting things and that they actually work. Wine salespeople, from what I have seen in my miniscule amount of time in the wine business, can be some of the laziest sales folk I have ever encountered. I have been a salesman for over 20 years. My Dad was a salesman. My Grandfather was a salesman. I KNOW sales. Some wine salespeople are "order takers" – others don't work Fridays, blow off appointments, bring the wrong or bad samples with no backup bottles or don't request all the samples I want to try...so we need to have yet another meeting that they may or not show up for. It blows my mind! One rep, who I had bought 8 different brands from (all selling on the sales floor at the same time), didn't call me for over nine months – I sold all the wine out by the time she finally darkened my

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door. I then requested samples of all 8 wines to taste the new vintages, and she NEVER came back with samples! I had read something in the wine press on one of those brands I bought from her, so I called the winery to see if they sold direct. They told me they had a broker and that they would contact them and have them call me. "Little Miss No Show" had the audacity to complain to me about contacting the winery direct – it got her in trouble for not calling on me. I had no recollection she sold that wine because I hadn't seen her freaking book in over 11 months! She is toast...we are done, kaput. One wine in her book is made by a friend of mine. He calls on me to see if we need more. He tastes me on new vintages. He DELIVERS it to me. "Little Miss No Show" gets the commission.

Sorry. Back to Damiano Zinfandel. Sold to me by Mickey, who drove all the way from Sacramento, tracked me down when I was running a picking crew in a vineyard, and then tasted me out of his trunk. Mickey works hard. Works two jobs so he has enough insurance for his family and he knows my customers' palates. This Zin is amazing and it's hard to imagine it sells for this amazing price. Almost black and pretty much stains the glass. With a rich, blackberry pie aroma. Briary on the palate...think "stems" when I say briar – like breaking twigs in your hand and then smelling your palms. A silky texture on the mouth with extracted, dark fruits up front and then crisp red fruit on the long finish. Black pepper, toasted cedar, baking spices, and clove. Buy more so maybe Mickey doesn't have to work 2 jobs and can see his kids again. It's getting nice enough to BBQ some ribs on the Weber soon....this Zin pairs well with a spicy BBQ sauce.

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