



ALL RED WINE CLUB

Volunteer Cabernet Sauvignon

Napa Valley 2007 \$24.99

Two years ago, Friday October 10th to be exact, I fired up our 1951 Ford F2 pick-up truck and drove her for the first time after many months (and many dollars) of work done right behind the Wine Garage. I was so excited. I thought it would be a fun idea to pick Emma from the after school program in this old truck – she didn't quite share my excitement though riding and rumbling down the road in this noisy and bumpy old beast. I once took her to school in the F2 and when we got close to the drop off area she bent down below the window so her friends wouldn't see her riding in Daddy's old smelly truck. God, I laughed so hard – first grade, and she is already worried about appearances. Anyway, on the way to get Emma that Friday afternoon I stopped to get gas in town and went in to pay and the old gas station dudes were listening to a police and fire scanner and it sounded that all hell was breaking loose. "What's going on", I asked. Dude pointed out the window and said, "That"! Across the Valley a huge plume of smoke was billowing up from the base of Howell Mountain, almost exactly right behind our house. I will never forget that sickening feeling as long I live, ever, I as looked out from that window in the gas station. I hurried to go get Emma and tried really hard not to look alarmed. We drove across the Valley and Emma didn't notice the smoke – yet. I backed up the driveway and left the F2 on a slight downhill slope so I could bump start her if she didn't crank up right away in case we needed to make a quick exit. Emma finally caught on to what was happening when she saw the endless stream of fire engines head up Deer Park Road. Then the air tankers started dive bombing the flames. Nine aircraft and 400 firefighters were battling the out of control wild fire that quickly engulfed 200 acres of extremely dry hillside. We never had to evacuate like the 400 other families living closer to fire had. The fire was contained the next day and miraculously only one house was lost. We were saved, thanks to mostly volunteer firefighters. This wine was made by one of those brave souls who on a moment's notice jump out of bed in the middle of the night to go save someone's ass. Tony Leonardini was in fact asleep one night when his college roommate called him from southern California and told him that his neighborhood was on fire. Tony told him to turn on his sprinklers and get out the hose and start watering down the roof. A few minutes later his phone rang again and it was the Fire Chief. He told him he had 15 minutes to get his stuff together - they were heading to Southern California. This was October 21st, 2007. As he was headed down Highway 5 in the fire truck, he suddenly realized that he had to pick his grapes for this wine in two days. He called the vineyard manager and the winery where he custom crushes and explained the situation and they both told him not to worry, everything would be taken care of and in fact they were going pay extra attention to his fruit - they both had family in So Cal and they "got his back". That October it seemed like the entire southern portion of the state was an inferno. Santa Barbara to San Diego was on fire. Tony fought fires down south for 10 days, 5 days with NO SLEEP.

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He told me they would nap right in the middle of a raging fire sometimes. This wine scored 90 points by Parker, which is 87% Cabernet Sauvignon with the remaining percentages consisting of Cab Franc, Malbec, Petite Verdot, Syrah, and Petite Sirah. Fermented in 20% new French oak, flavors of chocolate covered cherries, black olive tapenade, cassis, plums, and of course, smoke. Nice finish with well integrated tannins. That Sunday after the Howell Mt. fire, I was buying plants at the nursery down on Hwy 29 and, coincidentally that day was the St Helena Volunteer Firemen's open house and parade up Main Street. The whole street was littered with fire trucks, lights and sirens blazing. I ran over to the fence and started clapping for these hero's who just saved 400 of my neighbors butts two days earlier, tears running down my cheeks.

Odd Lot Cabernet Sauvignon

Napa Valley 2004 \$13.99

This wine comes to you compliments of the large 2004 harvest followed by the monster 2005 harvest right behind it. Biggest grape tonnage in history was picked that year. Tank storage was tight right before the harvest in 2005 because there was so much wine from 2004 still being stored. Barrels were scarce too. Almost non-existent in fact. If you can't store your wine then you must sell it and move on to the next crush, so there were some pretty amazing bulk wine deals flying all over the place that year. This wine is the by-product of those variables. An odd lot of bulk wine from several sources was blended by a famous winemaker by a negociant from Lodi who had plenty of storage space. This wine also comes to you with compliments from one of the great wine salesmen in the Napa Valley. His name is Bob. I first met him BEFORE we opened the store. While construction was being completed (by me) on our space I would come home after a grueling day of laying tile, or scraping floors, or painting and I would see these wine catalogues stuck in my fence outside the courtyard – with a card and a note attached...from Bob. He is a sly salesman. He would get a list of the new alcohol licenses that were in queue for approval and would contact these new wine merchants BEFORE their stores were opened so he was first in line to make some pretty big sales as the merchants needed to buy a lot of inventory before opening. Smart, no? We had tasting appointments in my kitchen 2 months before we opened. Wine buyers and sommeliers are notoriously rude folk – especially to wine salesmen. I hadn't known this prior to opening the store since I was never in the wine business before. One time a salesman popped his head in the store, "I'm sorry Brad, did we have an appointment"? I said. "No, I just needed to see a friendly face. I just got beat up pretty bad by that dude down the street". Buyers blow off appointments, make salesmen wait on them for hours, complain that all the wines they tasted were

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horrible and flawed, curtly tell them they have no time to taste so they tell them to just leave the bottles and they will get to them later, maybe. I never understood this attitude. Perhaps because I was in sales my whole life; I always treated all sales people with respect and dignity. It is HARD to sling your ass on the street all day. So, I started seeing some deals no one else was shown – just because I wasn't rude. I mean, if you are a salesman, who are you going to give the best deals; the jerk who just offended you or the guy who offers you a seat and a glass of wine? I take some of my best reps out to lunch on their birthdays. I once took 5 sales-people to a Giants game, everything on me. We took the ferry from Vallejo and drank 4 bottles of wine on the boat BEFORE we reached the stadium. Then they started buying me margaritas. We were pretty hammered, to say the least, before the 3rd inning. We started talking about wine buyers who were A-holes. This one dude's name kept coming up who was the Somm for a local restaurant, and I actually had some contact with him because I was trying to get his opinion on our first release, the 2006 Hillside Cab. I left him a bottle to try and heard nothing back. Called him and left a message....nothing. Month went by and I left him yet another of my \$45, called him to follow up, nothing. I told them my story. "That dude NEVER returns a phone call", everyone said. "Watch this", I said. I took out my cell phone and called him right then and there, of course getting his voicemail. "Hey Scott, Todd Miller from the Wine Garage. Just following up, AGAIN. Yo dude, I'm getting a little pissed. Do you know how much F***ing business I send down to your restaurant in a year? I send so many people to you that I am listed as a concierge in your computer.

I would say maybe \$50 grand a year in covers. Look it up. I left 2 bottles for you to try, not really even trying to sell you it for your list, just trying to get your opinion because I respect your palate. You can't even return MY call? Well if you don't F***ing return THIS F***ing call or the gravy train ends THEN, bro. And if your boss, who is my friend by the way, as you know, asks why all my customers don't come down to his restaurant anymore, I will tell him why. F***ing comprende, A hole"? You should have SEEN the looks on their faces! One dude said, "You REALLY didn't just leave that message, did you"? Yep, I did. I was their hero for life, because none of those dudes had the juice to do what I just did. Bob wasn't there that day. Bob is the sales guy who comes in the store every week, checking on his inventory. Bob is the guy who shows me all the best deals. Bob is the guy who UNDERSTANDS my business and customers and doesn't waste my time with plonk or wines out of my price points. Bob brings me lunch and sends me Christmas cards and helps unload boxes that he didn't even sell me. Bob showed me this wine, and what a wine it is. There wasn't much of it but he brought it to me to offer you. Napa Cabernet Sauvignon for \$13.99? THIS GOOD? Ripe plums, cocoa, vanilla, pipe tobacco, cedar, and leather. Silky smooth on the palate, soft tannin on the finish. Yummy wine.

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The next day after the game, my phone rang and it was Scott. I let it go to voicemail, cringing at my memory of the content of my message to him. "Hi Todd. Maybe you can lighten up on the messages, OK? Bring me 3 cases, I'm putting it on the by-the-glass list tomorrow". Have this wine with a grilled steak, or maybe some crow.....

Marelle Syrah

Napa Valley 2005 \$19.99

This little gem was brought to you via Long Meadow Ranch, the winery, cattle ranch, frantoio (olive oil producer), and organic vegetable farm. Remember the LMR Ranch House Red in the December shipment (along with the olive oil)? Well, Ashley Heisey is the winemaker for LMR, and when the storage facility that had all of their wine was set afire (intentionally), they needed wine to sell at the winery. So Ashley let them taste and sell her Syrah. When we were at LMR to see the olive oil crush the day after our Holiday party – Brandon almost lost it (his cookies) when we had to taste the olive oil in glasses and take a huge sip – I saw this bottle of Marelle Syrah on the counter. I had recently bought some of this Syrah from a broker for my own cellar – I liked it so much – and it was too expensive for the store (\$39). "Why is that Syrah on the tasting bar?" She told me the whole story. Well, it was the last of the Syrah and they had enough new vintage LMR to feed the tasting bar, so we cut a deal and now you have it. I just popped a bottle and Joy, Brandon, and I are all sitting around my kitchen table tasting it (for me, many times). I get a huge meaty nose, more roasted meat on the palate, with lavender on the finish. Joy loves it too, but she doesn't really "verbalize" her findings. Brandon gets stewed black cherries – cherry compote (I helped him verbalize) with roasted meat on the finish. We both get some earth, maybe moss. Brandon also says this baby will go with roasted pork tenderloin stuffed with a sage dressing. I concur. The whole philosophy Ashley expresses with her Syrah, that is all she makes under her own label, is cool climate – "Cote Rotie" style Syrah. She has a vineyard in Coombsville and one in Mendocino that she uses exclusively. Ashley is pretty experienced. She was the head winemaker at Far Niente and Dolce. She also was winemaker at Opus One. She is a real sweetie and VERY modest – for as much cult winemaking that she is responsible for, it is truly refreshing to see some modesty out of ANYONE that worked for Opus.



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Bell Cellars Merlot 06

Yountville Napa Valley 2006 \$21.99

WARNING: This bottle greatly benefits being decanted and allowed to breathe for several hours prior to serving.

Anthony Bell must really like me, because I keep on getting these great deals from him to share with you. He sells this delicious Merlot for \$30 on his website. Anthony, as you will recall was the dude who pretty much discovered the famous Clone 6 Cabernet vines in an abandoned experimental vineyard planted by the Ag department of UC Davis at the turn of the century. He was also the winemaker at BV Winery and helped revive the famous George La Tour reserve bottling there. Anthony is an expert making Bordeaux varieties and this one is super yummy. I really mean what I said about letting this monster Merlot get some air. I tasted the wine after sitting open for 24 hours and WOW, did it ever evolve. Fermented in 40% new French oak, you can really taste the vanilla and experience the creaminess of the wood by letting the wine breathe. Crème de Cassis, plums, blackberries, on the nose then repeated on the palate. Leather, cedar, and pipe tobacco, with spicy black pepper and grippy tannins on the finish. This is a Cab lovers Merlot, no doubt. This wine screams for a Filet Mignon to be served alongside this chewy, yummy wine.

Willowbrook Cellars Pinot Noir

Marin County 2007 \$24.99

Willowbrook Cellars is one of the few wineries that make a Pinot from Marin County. Since there are just 200 acres planted in Marin (compared to a total of more than 105,000 acres of vineyards in Napa and Sonoma), they feel privileged to be among the few to source grapes from this up-and-coming wine region.

The vineyard is located in the northernmost part of Marin, an area noted for late, lingering fog and intense, cool winds coming in from Point Reyes. Yields are always quite low in the region and this particular vineyard has never seen a harvest that produced more than two tons per acre. With these challenging growing conditions it is vital that a vineyard manager knows what to expect from Mother Nature, and how to best grow grapes here. 2007 was an incredibly mild summer with ideal growing conditions for Pinot Noir. Crop set was perfect and the growing season was long and cool, allowing for extended hang time. Harvest was the third week of October. The fruit was gently de-stemmed and covered in dry ice to release a protective layer of CO₂. The grapes - about 70% remained as whole berries -- were placed in an open-top tank and cold-soaked for an additional four days before fermentation. After the active fermentation started, the temperature peaked at 84 degrees. This helped to stabilize color and to give additional mouth-feel. The skins were then gently pressed and the wine put to barrel.

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This Pinot Noir spent a total of eleven months in small French oak barrels and was bottled in August, 2008. This wine has many interesting red fruit flavors. Raspberry, pomegranate, and strawberry on the palate at first sip, then the mid starts kicking in and you say to yourself, "wow, this is big". Then, on the finish you experience the tannins, which are very evident, yet integrated. Very interesting wine that is well balanced and unique. This wine would be perfect with a Pork Roast with black cherry compote.

JRE Zinfandel

Napa Valley 07 \$13.99

I was so shocked to find this wine, delicious as it is, from St Helena grapes that I can share with you for a measly fourteen bucks. Unbelievable. John Robert Eppler is a Texan who started his interest in wine working for Neiman Marcus in Dallas. He moved west to California in 1986 and started a wine label named "Zoom" - which was a Garage staple in our early years - but under new ownership. John sold Zoom in 2001 to this crazy dude, also from Texas, who ran the label into the ground, then sold it to a Doctor from Lake County whom I knew, and I believe they are also done. That first year as Zoom, John picked a ton and a half of Zinfandel grapes from St Helena by himself and made his first release. He was hooked. Many vintages later, I introduce you to the JRE label. This is an elegant, very flavorful, well balanced Zinfandel that goes well with food - not overpowering it. Dried cherry, raspberry, plums, and cocoa on the first sip, followed by espresso bean, tobacco, and saddle leather. Long finish with nice tannin and acidity. At 15.2 alcohol, remarkably not "hot" at all. This is a great BBQ wine. Throw any old thang on the grill - or better yet, serve this with some good old fashioned Texas Briskett.