



ALL RED WINE CLUB

Highflyer “Aviator Red Blend”

California 2006 \$16.99

This wine comes from the Somerston Estate and the Historic Priest Ranch east of Rutherford in the hills and canyons west of Lake Berryessa on Sage Canyon Road. Bollinger Chiles purchased land from General Vallejo from the Rancho Catacula to establish Chiles Valley. Joshua Priest purchased a parcel from Bollinger to establish the Priest Ranch around 1870. It stays planted and under the Priest family name for 100 years.

After Allan and Cathleen Chapman purchased the Priest Ranch in 2004 they soon purchased the two neighboring valleys Elder and Lynch to complete the 1700 acre estate now know as Somerston. Highflyer is a second label of Somerston. The Estate wines are much more expensive than \$17. The elevation starts at the estate at 600ft above sea level and tops out at 2400ft with some of the highest Zinfandel and Petite Sirah and Grenache vineyards in Napa. With all of the different angles and aspects the 300 acres of estate vineyards are broken into 88 different blocks of flavor and nuance. They source only 15% of the estate vineyards for their wines and sell the rest off to other wineries.

Organic practices and minimal crop loads are the program for quality, longevity, and sensitivity. In fact, “green construction” and compressed nitrogen technology for heating and cooling the winery as well as a progressive grey water treatment system make for as minimal an impact on the site as possible. The solar fields will go into full production by 2012 and they will be closer to total self-sustainability. The winemaker is Craig Becker. Craig started as an intern in the labs of Mondavi and progressed into the winemaker for the Spring Mountain winery during the 1990's establishing himself as one of the rising talents in the wine game. He soon became sought after as a consulting wine maker for small production, vineyard-driven wines of distinction. I met Craig because he made wine for Borra Winery in Lodi, a brand you may have tried in the club previously. He began Somerston Wine Co. with the Chapman's in 2004 and has continued to consult with small hand crafted artisan wine projects in addition to his commitment to the Somerston project.

Craig Becker's other great passion in life is aviation. As a private pilot Craig can fly to any distant region, walk the site, meet with the vineyard management team to ensure strict farming protocols are being followed and still be home in time for dinner, hence the name Highflyer and the airplane motif. This wine is composed of 55% Syrah from three vineyard sources of exceptional appellation driven quality – Somerston in Napa – Vivio in Bennett Valley (Sonoma Co.) – Star Lane in Santa Ynez. 30% Zinfandel, 10% Grenache, and 5% Tempranillo come from the Somerston Estate to make up the remaining components.

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This wine is what you would call a fruit bomb. Dark in the glass with aromas of steel and blueberry pie. Black fruit on the palate – blackberry, plum, and elderberry lead to flinty shavings and pencil lead, which lead to black pepper and cigar. Cedar, mushroom, and baking spice make up the mid-palate. The finish has more fruit and mineral. I LOVE this wine, especially the price. Big bang for your buck. I recently had this with a Tri-tip sandwich, and couldn't keep my glass full.....

Sparrow Hawk Pinot Noir

Russian River Valley 2009 \$24.99

This label was created by Harry Parsley and his son Tim. You may recall how Harry assisted us in securing counsel in an un-founded ABC investigation a while back that we had to deal with in a story last year written in these notes. Harry's main label is Silver Stag, an ultra premium Cabernet that we sent in the club last December. Harry has been immersed in the wine industry for over forty years. His career commenced as a retail buyer, buying for Lucky and American Stores for territories including California, Nevada, Arizona and Texas. He also launched and led the Beverage Division of Crown Incorporated, representing industry leaders including Bacardi, Brown-Forman Wines and Spirits, Coors Brewing Co and Heublien Wines and Spirits, to name a few. Harry was President of Buena Vista Winery and Racke USA in Sonoma for eight years.

Harry was involved in the Carneros Quality alliance and a tireless ambassador for Sonoma Wines as he travelled the country meeting with press, bottle shops, and restaurateurs. He also was an active participant with the Wine Institute advocating for the wine industry while he was Director at large. He was a Steering Committee member for Sonoma State University for their Wine Program where he would speak and share his experience with the students. The dude breathes, sweats, and bleeds wine. His stature in the industry allows him to secure excellent fruit from great vineyards.

This Pinot was sourced from the Dutton Ranch in Sonoma County. Fermented in 60% new French Oak, this wine can be described as “juicy”. Very grapey and fruity, it has a lush, velvety mouth feel. Very smooth and rich. I get the classic strawberry/cherry on the nose, with a hint of spiciness. Medium garnet hue in the glass, the palate gushes cherry, strawberry, and raspberry with an underlying earthiness. Rosewater, start anise, smoke, truffle and leather come out in the mid-palate, then a smooth, long, rich finish with light tannin and ample acidity. Very “pretty” wine, as they say in the biz. Serve with smoked salmon canapés.



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Revenge Red Blend

Napa Valley 2008 \$20.99

This is a second label from Allora Vineyards in St Helena, producers of expensive, premium wines. As with many high end labels these days, the Allora dudes decided to create a wine with a softer price tag, but still using their same grapes that go into \$50 and \$60 offerings. Made by Rudy Zuidema, who formally was the winemaker at Robert Craig for 8 years and currently is the winemaker for Ehlers Estate and Allora. This is a fun blend of 67% Merlot, 25% Petite Sirah, and 8% Cabernet Sauvignon. Allora Vineyards was established by Terry and Nancy Klein in 1999.

They purchased 15 acres of pasture land north of St. Helena and planted 10 acres to Cab, Merlot, Petite Sirah, and Cab Franc. The soil is gravelly loam and clay. They consulted some big hitters in the vineyard biz and planted all the vines super close together to produce only small amounts of fruit that are extremely concentrated in flavor. This wine will prove that. Very extracted and ripe, you will never believe that the majority of the wine is Merlot. Dark and brooding in the glass, aromas of blackberry, black pepper, slate, and leather jump from the glass. On the palate I get blueberry, loam, leather, black pepper, currant, and black olive. Well balanced and structured, the finish is long and lingering with well integrated tannins. This wine cries out for a for a juicy steak marinated with garlic and olive oil.

Regio “Dark Wine”

NV Lodi \$10.99

This is a fun and unique red blend from a winery group I have been recently doing business with. This is a “negociant” label – a business group that has winemakers on staff scouring the countryside locating deals on bulk wine, purchased by the tanker truck, then creating interesting blends. This is a blend of 38% Petite Verdot, 26% Cabernet Franc, and 36% Petite Sirah. Petite Verdot, one of the 5 noble grapes of Bordeaux (and the most expensive grape on the market now) is unique in that the meat of the grape is actually black instead of white like most all other grapes that have red skins.

This varietal is primarily used for the color it imparts to the wine and often blended in small percentages. Occasionally you will see wine that is 100% Verdot – most are lacking in the mid palate flavors, and I rarely see its merits for a purchase. The Petite Sirah, also an extremely dark grape that has tons of flavors usually consisting of blueberry, mineral, and healthy tannin, really cranks up this blend. And finally, the Cabernet Franc adds lush richness – classically the flavor profiles of this grape almost always consist of chocolate, cherry, and blackberry.

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The term “Dark Wine” has a story with roots in the Cahors region of France. For centuries that wine growing region produced blends that they referred to as “Black Wines”, composed from Malbec and Tannat, the latter varietal known as THE darkest grape ever known and perhaps the most tannic. Interestingly, Tannat is the primary grape grown in Uruguay. Chile has its Carmeniere, Argentina has its Malbec, Uruguay the Tannat.

This wine resembles those blends in color only, much more fruit driven and soft and gentle on the palate. Obviously black in the glass, the nose resembles just squashed blueberries, pencil lead, and spice. Round and rich, this full bodied wine definitely will stain your teeth purple. On the palate I get blueberry compote, plum jam, and chocolate covered cherry in the mid-palate. The finish is pronounced and extended, yet smooth with hints of tannin. All that for ten bucks? Yep. Serve with ripe cheese after dinner or a hearty beef or lamb stew.

Dry Creek “Heritage Clone” Zinfandel

Dry Creek Valley 2008 \$16.99

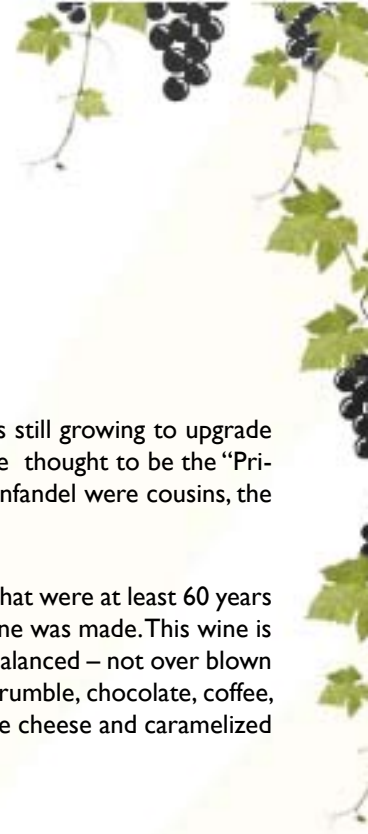
This is the second vintage of the Heritage Clone, named so by the viticulture technique of t-budding graphs of bud wood from old-vine Zinfandel plants onto younger root-stock. The result is acquiring the flavor profile of the 100 year old clones with the juicy, fruitier younger gape bunches. You will agree the finished product is fabulous.

This winery was founded by David Stare in 1972 and he is considered the God Father of Dry Creek Valley. Why? Well, he opened the first new winery in the Valley since Prohibition, revitalizing the entire wine industry there. He was the first to ever grow Sauvignon Blanc in DCV. Released the first ever SB from Sonoma County. He organized and initiated the Dry Creek Valley as an American Viticulture Area (AVA).

David was the first ever to release a wine as DCV as an appellation. He also was the first to coin the term “Old Vine Zinfandel”. He also was the first to initiate the clonal trials for the Heritage Zinfandel Vineyard, a project to promote better clonal selections for Zinfandel for all Winegrape growers in California. Growers were complaining that since California was the essential ground-zero for Zin production in the world, they didn’t have France to turn to for better clonal selections to upgrade vineyards that would produce better berries or yields.

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The tracing of the origins of the vine back to Croatia proved fruitless since there were hardly any vineyards still growing to upgrade vine qualities. The mother of Zinfandel is a grape called “Kastelanic” – originally the origins of Zinfandel were thought to be the “Primitivo” grape of southern Italy. With the discovery of Kastelanic, it was determined that Primitivo AND Zinfandel were cousins, the Mother was found in Croatia.

Currently there are more than 90 different clones growing in the Heritage Vineyard from Old Vine vineyards that were at least 60 years old from every grape growing region in California to improve grape quality. It is from those vines that this wine was made. This wine is super yummy and shows distinctive Sonoma County characteristics of spice, cocoa dust, and blueberry. Well balanced – not over blown with jam – this wine has aromas of raspberries, cherries, and spicy cigar box. The palate provides blueberry crumble, chocolate, coffee, and oak. Soft tannin and easy drinking - guzzle a glass or two with BBQ Tri-Tip, or a Steak Sandwich with blue cheese and caramelized shallots.

Guerrero-Fernandez Merlot

Dry Creek Valley 2004 \$24.99

This is a wine made by Martin Guerrero and Olga Fernandez, with help from their two sons, Luis and Josue (my favorite Spanish name, pronounced “Hos Way”). Martin had worked for years in the vineyards of Korbel Winery on the banks of the Russian River. He moved to the cellar, learning how to make wine and eventually started this label as head winemaker. The freaking American Dream still lives on, no? This wine was made for Cab lovers – i.e., HUGE. Big and brawny, dark in the glass, this is a full throttle Merlot. Leather, cedar, and currants on the nose – tobacco, espresso, vanilla, blackberry, and plum on the palate. This wine craves MEAT, like a grilled rib eye with plenty of black pepper and a dollop of herbed butter to mingle with all the juice dripping onto your plate.