



# ALL RED WINE CLUB

## **The Guardian Cabernet Sauvignon**

Sonoma County 2008 \$19.99

This wine is also made by Kenny Likitprakong under his Hobo Wine Company umbrella of labels. You folks enjoyed the Guardian Chardonnay last Spring, this is the first Guardian red wine made that made the club. Amazing quality at an even more amazing price. The Cab fruit was sourced from Alexander Valley and made up 93% of the blend – the remaining 7% is Merlot from the Russian River Valley AVA. This wine was made to be approachable at a young age, but still very full bodied, concentrated, and with firm tannins. The nose is of freshly picked blackberries, plums, leather, and a hint of smoke. This dark wine tastes very full bodied with tobacco, blackberry, cedar, and black pepper. The tannins are evident on the long rich finish that reminds me of chocolate covered espresso bean. This wine need a hearty pork roast or grilled rib eye steak.

## **JS Hofherr Pinot Noir**

Napa Valley 2005 \$14.99

This is one of the greatest deals EVER secured for a wine club wine. Being a wine merchant in Calistoga has advantages – I see deals that sometimes don't even leave the town, let alone the Valley, let alone California. Jim Hofherr is a second generation winemaker and worked with August Briggs making Pinot. A few years ago he started up a mobile bottling line business in Napa Valley that took off in a big way. I say this from experience.... It is expensive for us small vintners, and when mistakes are made when you are paying big bucks bottling your juice, you learn to appreciate the dudes who don't (or rarely) make mistakes. Jim doesn't make mistakes. After a while Jim was making more money running his line then making wine and he gave up on the label. Look at this bottle: gold leaf, etched glass. Napa Valley (Carneros) Pinot Noir, 5 years old – about to peak – that tastes delicious for FIFTEEN BUCKS? Unbelievable deal. This wine is delicious with a very unique nose of hickory smoked bacon, molasses, and strawberry rhubarb pie. More smokiness on the palate with saddle leather, cigar box, strawberries, currants, and pomegranate. The finish is of sweet oak and berry pie. This is another great wine to serve at Thanksgiving, perfect with a glazed ham or roasted turkey.

## **Morse Mourvedre**

Amador County 2006 \$14.99

I first met Robert Morse while on a buying trip in Amador County the first year we were in business. This is the second label of Robert's Il Gioello winery. Robert is an executive in the semiconductor industry in Silicon Valley and bought 80 acres of land in Amador County, 20 acres of which are planted to vineyard. The land sits at 2300 feet elevation, and it produces some of the best Rhone varietals in the Sierra foothills. David French is the winemaker and vineyard manager.

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Mourvedre is the backbone of most Rhône style blends and provides great acidity, tannin, and minerality. This wine is from a hillside vineyard from the estate and was blended with 10% Syrah grapes. It spent 18 months in French oak barrels, 30% which were new. Only 150 cases were produced. The winemaker crafted the grapes to produce a very elegant and smooth wine. Aromas of black currants and cherries lead to a velvety and rich mouthfeel on the palate. Plums, cherries, and strawberry coat your tongue on the first sip, then leading to more red fruits like cranberries and pomegranate. Baking spice and orange peel are detected along with sweet oak on the finish. The French oak really tamed the normally tannic Mourvedre, with just a hint of spiciness and black pepper during the long soft finish. This wine will pay her very well with an elegant meal of pork tenderloin or a savory lamb stew.

## **Stromberg Cabernet Sauvignon**

Dry Creek Valley, Sonoma County 2006 \$24.99

Ross Stromberg has been growing grapes since 1972 in Dry Creek Valley. His estate Vineyard was established in 1999 and consists of 120 acres just outside of Healdsburg. Bill Knuttel handles the wine-making duties for Ross, but his main job is the executive winemaker for Dry Creek Vineyards. He also worked for Chalk Hill Estate Winery and Acacia Winery. The grapes that made this wine came from a steep vineyard in the southern range of the mountains that define Dry Creek Valley. Vigorous pump-overs were conducted three times a day until fermentation was complete, then two times a day until the must was pressed.

The juice sat on the skins for 20 days after fermentation was complete. This is the reason why this wine is so dark in the glass. The finished wine was then placed in French oak barrels, 50% which were new wood for a total of 21 months. This wine was not filtered or fined prior to bottling.

This wine has aromas of ripe black plums, tobacco, and saddle leather. This is a very full bodied and masculine wine. On the palate I get cracked black peppercorns, mushroom, plum pudding, cherries, and sweet toasty oak. The mouth feel is rich and velvety. The finish is extended with concentrated tannin with my gush of blackberry right on the end. This wine requires a very hearty meal of prime rib or herb encrusted leg of lamb.

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## **Ancient Block Red Blend**

Mendocino County 2006 \$12.99

This is one of those exotic and crazy blends that tastes delicious and is an extreme bargain. The wine is composed of 38% Merlot, 38% Zinfandel, 23% Syrah, and 1% of Petite Sirah. All the grapes were sourced from hillside vineyards in Mendocino County which produce intense and concentrated flavors. This one is made by Nancy Walker, a pillar in the Mendocino County wine scene since 1984 when she worked as an assistant winemaker at Clos Du Bois. Nancy was appointed as the founding winemaker of Brutocao Cellars in 1991. In 1998 she joined winemaking staff at Fetzer Vineyards until 2005 then started the winemaking duties at Winery Exchange, a huge beverage company that made wines from California, Oregon, and Washington states. Her own brand, Stephen and Walker, is based in Healdsburg where she makes some pretty amazing (and pricey) offerings from Zinfandel to Pinot Noir. Nancy spends most of her time consulting with smaller brands such as Ancient Block. This wine is very fruit driven and has a jammy and juicy character. The wine is garnet in color and has aromas of blackberry, cinnamon, and earth. On the palate, I get black cherry pie, blueberry, spicy oak, crushed peppercorn, juniper, and thyme. Lush and rich mouth feel and a smooth and lingering finish. This is the perfect Tuesday night spaghetti dinner wine, inexpensive, delicious, and pairs well with hearty meatballs and Bolognese sauce.

## **A Cote Pinot Noir**

Santa Barbara County 2008 \$24.99

This summer, while I was avoiding the thousands of phone calls from all the starving wine sales folk trying to get placements in the Garage Wine Club, I did have to take a phone call from Lara, the rep from a winery that I had to unfortunately cancel an order at the last minute for a past club. I felt badly to have to do that to her and told her so, but she had already moved on to another distributor and would I like to meet the winemaker from an amazing producer from Santa Barbara. "How much are his wines?" (they were all well over \$25/btl) "Then, no. I'm busy". I really don't waste time tasting wines that I can't buy for the store these days. "No, you should meet with us, I think he will deal". So Joshua Klapper and Lara waltzed on in the store with 8 wines in tow and we popped some corks. Josh got his wine knowledge, first from waiting tables in 4 star restaurants like Daniel Boulud in New York, then from developing wine lists for Sona restaurant in L.A. which soon landed the Wine Spectator Grand Award for his work as the Wine Director. He was hooked by vino. He slaved away working harvest in Santa Maria for 3 years at Qupe and Au Bon Climat, then later worked in the cellar and was mentored by Jim Clendenen and Bob Linqvist, two amazing winemakers. So it was inevitable that he started his own label, and thus, I present this wine to you. This is the first Pinot that I have tasted – and believe me, I have tasted many a Pinot – that the nose has a completely different aroma than the flavor of the wine.

On first whiff, I get an incredible fruity/strawberry/cherry/raspberry perfume rising from the glass. But on first sip, the fruit is muted by the bold, masculine, meat and earth flavors of Burgundy. Very freaky indeed. I experimented by tasting the wine at different stages of the open bottle and found that the fruit comes back on the palate after the wine has been allowed to breathe for an extended period. This is a complete contradiction from any other wine I have had because the more air, generally, that the wine gets to share with the oxygen in the bottle, the more the fruit flavors should be muted. So, you get two different wines for the price of one. Very, very cool indeed. Before the wine has been allowed to breathe, it has a very tight structure and bold earthiness reminiscent of mushrooms, leather, wet stones, forest floor, roasted meat, and herbs. Later, the strawberry, currant, cherry, and black pepper come forth. Extremely complex and interesting bottle of wine. Have a glass with some delicious cream of mushroom soup as an appetizer, then save some for later and try it with some cheeses and fruit, such as figs or strawberries.