



INTENSE RED WINE CLUB



The Rule Cabernet Sauvignon

Napa Valley 2008 \$22.99

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 well before the Howell Mountain fire when his old 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. 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. He told me they would nap right in the middle of a raging fire sometimes.

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The 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. Tony makes a small amount of wine every year under various labels. I have sent "Bandwagon" and "Volunteer" labels in the club that have been made by Tony, now you get to taste the "Rule". The fruit was sourced from vineyards in Calistoga, Calistoga, and Coombsville in southern Napa Valley. The blend is composed of 95% Cabernet, 3% Merlot, and 2% Cabernet Franc. All the grapes were hand harvested and separately fermented in Stainless Steel before being transferred to French Oak barrels where it remained for aging for 18 months. This is a classic Cabernet with a deep garnet color and black fruit aromas. Blackberry, cassis, cedar, and leather on the nose. Currant, blackberry, plum, earth, cocoa, and leather on the palate. Long rich finish with soft tannin. This wine will benefit by an ample amount of breathing prior to consumption. Serve this wine with a hearty winter meal of beef stew or pot roast.

Salva Tierra Cabernet Sauvignon

Napa Valley 2006 \$24.99

Salvador Renteria arrived at Sterling Vineyards in 1962 from Mexico working first as a field laborer, then a vineyard supervisor. After several years, Salvador left to oversee the formative vineyards of Beaulieu Vineyards, Clos Pegase, Cuvaison and Silverado. While working these vineyards, Salvador initiated novel vineyard experiments which earned the respect of famed vintners such as Andre Tchelistcheff, Rick Forman and John Thacher. Urged by these winemakers to implement trials on trellising, canopy management and other innovative grape management techniques, Salvador was among the first in the Napa Valley to do so. Salvador had the rare ability to focus the divergent ideas of different winemakers and as a result guided their vineyards into lower yields and higher quality grapes. Because of his skill and Hispanic heritage, Salvador was also able to bridge the difficult cultural and communication gaps that often exist between wineries and vineyard workers. In 1987 Salvador started his own vineyard management company, Renteria Vineyard Management. At the time, it was one of the first Mexican owned vineyard management companies in Napa Valley and is now among the top three. Tending many of the most prestigious Napa Valley vineyards, Salvador quickly garnered a reputation for his exceedingly high standards- a reputation his son Oscar would embrace and upon which he would build.

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INTENSE RED WINE CLUB



Madrigal Petite Sirah

Napa Valley 2005 \$24.99

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In 1993, Oscar Renteria, who had worked alongside his father for many years, assumed proprietorship of Renteria Vineyard Management. Oscar continued to care for the handful of distinguished vineyards his father cultivated and progressively increased his clientele. Working with select vineyards in Napa Valley and Sonoma's Russian River, Renteria grows world renowned grapes for clients that include William Selyem, Robert Mondavi Winery, Caymus, Rombauer and Duckhorn. In 2006 the Renteria Winery was launched and famous winemaker Karen Culler at the helm touching the juice. This wine is the secondary label for Renteria and named for Oscar's mother, Virginia Salvatierra. This wine is extremely Bordeaux in character and has a pronounced silky smoothness. The wine is deep with complexity but not overdone. The aromas are very fruit forward but more earthy on the palate. Blackberry, plum, and anise on the nose, with black licorice, pepper, loamy, black olive, mushroom, plum, Chambord liqueur, and blackberry tart. The finish has nice minerality and a lush gush of fruit. Very complex and well balanced wine. Serve with an elegant meal of rack of lamb or prime rib.

Eno Grenache

Mendocino (Eaglepoint Ranch Vineyard) 2007 \$24.99

This wine is made by Sasha Verhage, a tech dude who works for Google in Silicon Valley. Sasha has been making small batches of wine since 1999. In 2001 he became assistant winemaker for Tom Leaf at Grapeleaf Cellars in Berkeley – an Urban Winery in the East Bay near San Francisco. That same year Tom offered Sasha some extra fruit and Eno Wines was born. Tom left Grapeleaf for Crushpad, an urban winery in San Francisco, and Sasha hunkered down and expanded his portfolio. He is the Design Lead at Google by day and winemaker maverick by night (or in his not-so spare time).

The grapes from this wine are sourced at the Eaglepoint Ranch in Mendocino County – a rather famous vineyard run by Mark Hartlip. This is the same vineyard that sell grapes to the likes of Copain, Rosenblum, Sean Thackery, and Edmunds St. John Wineries. Pretty good company, no?

This wine is un-fined and unfiltered and 100% Grenache. Sometimes you will see sediment, but it is completely natural. The aroma of strawberry and oregano waft up from the glass when first poured. Strawberry, white pepper, rhubarb, graphite, and blueberry pie hit your palate. The finish is quite tannic for a Grenache and would benefit with ample time to breathe. Have this wine with lighter meat dishes like pork roast or chops, or perhaps a hearty Tuscan Bean soup with faro.

Here is a story about getting wine for the club, having the principal of the winery freaking out at the price that I negotiated with the salesman, and eventually pulling the plug on the deal at the last minute: Such is the case regarding this wine. I had tasted this gorgeous wine a while back with Chris Madrigal, the son of the owner of the winery. I loved the wine, got a good price and decided to buy close to one hundred cases for the up-coming February Club and placing the wine in two clubs, the Intense and the All Red. The more I buy the better the price. Well, the story continues.... the original wine slated for this club was (I better not name the winery) a beautiful Bordeaux blend that we had stocked in the store that originally had retailed for close to \$60 per bottle from the winery at their tasting room.

I had inquired about a larger purchase for the club – thinking that really, I was truly dreaming that I would actually get so much at such a good price. Well the salesman consulted with the son (his college buddy) who was in charge of "sales" and gave me the green light. I was very excited. The day before the wine was to be delivered to our ILS hub in Petaluma, the Dad (who was the REAL person in charge of sales but doesn't really SELL anything) got wind of the deal and pulled the plug stating that he – at that price, would actually LOOSE money on the deal – if you call getting a check for twelve thousand dollars actually losing (in this economy, getting ANY check for a wine worth \$60/btl. is called hitting the freaking Lotto, by the way). So here I was, one day after getting back from Thanksgiving at Rancho Santa Fe getting a call stating that the deal was toast.

I had to scramble to fill the spot – I had 12 hours to find a replacement so that YOU, dear Club member, would get their wine in time for Santy Claus. Well, I worked the phone HARD and had nothing special to send off to you. What to do? I know, let's get the Madrigal and use half of my initial order for the Dec Club and the other half for February. Chris Madrigal was in agreement and we were set. I instructed him to get the wine to the warehouse by December 1st and away we go. So last Tuesday, December 7th, I get a frantic call from ILS that the Madrigal Petite wasn't in LA. Devon, our new Club coordinator called Chris 4 times on his cell (it is now 7pm) with no response. I call him, text him, call the winery, call his DAD – and nada – no response to anything.... I NOW have to find a wine for the club by tomorrow morning. Right. Later that night Chris FINALLY called me – he had been attending a funeral and had thought that his delivery service had sent the wine last Friday (they are since fired, BTW).

I am to leave for NYC Thursday Am for my sister's Bat Mitzvah, - our company Christmas party is Wednesday night – I have NO time, really, to deal with this..... Soooo, Lulu at ILS, the "fixer", as I call her, fixes everything. She gets the wine picked up by her own truck, gets it to LA, packs up the Club and ships it out Friday December 10th, working her staff overtime in the process.

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Whew. Since the wine club finalized so late, here I am sitting in my sister's kitchen in Brooklyn, New York on Sunday night December 12th, writing about this scenario because our freaking flight got canceled due to all the weather issues in the Mid West. Oh well, Emma had to miss another day of school but we got to eat an amazing array of Jewish Deli food for a mid day meal that consisted of the best Nova Lox I have EVER tasted from Russ & Daughter on Houston Street in Manhattan in the Lower east Side (we also splurged on Whitefish Salad, and Herring in cream sauce from there) – Pastrami, Chopped Liver, and new pickles from Katz's (just up the street), and then the Bagels from Terrace Bagel in Brooklyn on the Slope. For dinner – we had what else.... NY Pizza. I truly wish I had a bottle of this Madrigal Petite to drink with my Pastrami sandwich this afternoon. Super dark in the glass, an aroma of pencil lead and blueberry on the nose. Dried flowers, graphite, blueberry pie, black pepper, and espresso on the palate. A long rich and seemingly endless finish. This wine will stand up to peppered brisket and spicy mustard any day of the year.

RustRidge Zinfandel

Napa Valley 2006 \$24.99

Racehorse Red Blend

Napa Valley 2005 \$24.99

WARNING: Both these wines need to be decanted and allowed to breathe for 2 hours prior to consumption – or even overnight.

RustRidge Ranch is part of a 10,000 acre Spanish land grant named Rancho Catacoula that was granted to Colonel Joseph B. Chiles in 1844. This narrow valley with rolling hills and panoramic vistas is predominately a viticultural region and is commonly known as Chiles Valley. Chiles Valley lies approximately 1,000 feet above the Napa Valley floor. Chiles Valley's special microclimate is integral to the character of RustRidge wines. The daytime climate here is similar to that of the Oakville and Rutherford areas; however, the temperature is several degrees cooler at night. The cooler nights and the higher elevation delay bud-break which occurs two to three weeks later than the rest of Napa Valley. As a result, the grapes are harvested later than most other grapes from Napa Valley which, in part, lends distinctive flavor and quality to the wines. RustRidge Ranch comprises 442 acres. About 55 acres are vineyards. The secluded property, once a large thoroughbred horse ranch, was purchased by Susan Meyer's family in 1972. Now it reflects Jim & Susan's two passions: wine and horses. The grapevines were planted in the mid 70's to Chardonnay, Riesling, Sauvignon Blanc, Cabernet Sauvignon and Zinfandel. Most of the vines are on the original rootstock because the Ranch was not hit by the phylloxera epidemic of the 1990's. The winery was founded by Susan's brothers in 1985. It is housed in a renovated cattle barn. Winemaker Susan Meyer and her husband, Jim Fresquez, took over the reins of the operation in 1990. Kent Rosenblum is the consulting winemaker to RustRidge. The dry farmed, organically grown grapes are made in a rustic style that has become rather rare in the "finesse", and "balanced" frou- frou Napa Valley namby - pamby girly wines era. These wines are HUGE. These wines are CHUNKY. These wines are MASCULINE. These wines are like a chugging, sweat frothing, bug eyed racehorse hauling ass down to the finish line. The Connection with horses at RustRidge is immense. Before he was a grape grower and winemaker, Jim Fresquez of RustRidge Ranch & Winery trained race horses at Santa Anita & Hollywood Park. Fresquez began as an exercise rider and eventually worked for Petaluma native, M.E. "Buster" Millerick. Millerick, the Hall of Fame trainer who trained Native Diver, the first California racehorse to win a million dollars and the winner of three consecutive Hollywood Gold Cups, was part of the team that trained Seabiscuit, the 1930's racing legend. In 1935, Millerick, an up and coming trainer, was hired by Charles S. Howard to train his racehorses. "Silent" Tom Smith, an insider in the Eastern-racing establishment, was hired by Howard to build a world-class stable. Shortly thereafter, Howard purchased Seabiscuit and Smith took the reins as his trainer with Millerick as his assistant.

In the early 1980's, Fresquez exercised horses for the reclusive, secretive and absolutely regimental Millerick. Fresquez feels Millerick's character was shaped by his experiences with Seabiscuit's celebrity. Millerick continued to train for C. S. Howard and his family after Seabiscuit retired. After Howard's death, Millerick inherited Seabiscuit's trunk containing his saddle, helmet, twitch and whip. On Millerick's death, his widow Martha gave Fresquez the trunk and all of Millerick's tack, medicines, training charts and other items. Fresquez continued to use many of these items over the years for his own stable. In 1990, when Fresquez and his wife Susan took over RustRidge Ranch and Winery, they decided to display these items in the Bed and Breakfast. The RustRidge Zin is perhaps the most tannic and massive Zin I have EVER tasted. Take heed to my warning: let it breathe, baby. Black coffee, dark chocolate, tobacco, black pepper, briar, black raspberry, and black tea. Long, extended, extracted, tannic finish. This wine can last a week on your counter with half the juice left in the bottle and still taste great. The Racehorse Red is a blend of 60% Cabernet Sauvignon and 40% Zinfandel and every big as the Zin, but a bit more tamed by the Cab. Cedar, currant, blackberry jam, black olive tapenade, wet stone, and molasses. Both of these wines require big, bold flavors to stand up to them. The Zinfandel would be great served with a stinky cheese. The Blend is great with ribs smothered by a spicy bbq sauce.