



INTENSE RED WINE CLUB



Sapphire Hill Syrah

Sonoma County 2007 \$24.99

Sapphire Hill Vineyards traces its roots back to one of General Vallejo's original land grant rancheros in the early 1800s. Gen. Vallejo was the last Mexican governor of California before the famous bear flag revolt of 1846 when he was overthrown and California was for a very short period, its own Republic. In 1834, Gen. Vallejo granted the Rancho to his brother-in-law, Capt. John Cooper who then sold 120 acres to his distant relative Lucy Sullivan and her husband Levi Grove in 1869. Sapphire Hill Winery is located on the original homestead of Lucy and Levi Grove.

My contact at this winery is Ann Giere, one of four partners of the estate. Last May we had Ann's delicious 03 Pinot for you to try and I wanted to place this wine in the club too, but had to wait until now. This is a cool climate Syrah that has attributes of warm climate Syrah as well. In hotter grape growing areas we see big, bold, fruit forward and jammy wines – in cooler climates, Syrah in California is a little tighter, higher in acidity, more mineral than fruit, aromas of dried flowers.

This wine has the best of both worlds. Delicate perfume of dried rose petals and crushed stone (cool climate). Brooding, dark color in the glass (warm climate). Rich, full bodied, monster black fruit smacking your tongue on first sip (warm climate), then nice acid and mineral on the finish (cool climate). I get lavender, roasted pork belly with Chinese five spice rub, boysenberry, blueberry jam, earth, chocolate, coffee, and tobacco. I love this wine. Rich and extracted finish. I recently had this wine with some Chinese BBQ'ed pork ribs, and man was I in heaven.

Phoenix Ranch Syrah

Napa Valley 2004 \$21.99

I met Richard Phoenix at Ehren Jordan's 40th birthday party a few years back. Richard and Ehren go way back to when they first arrived in the Valley, Ehren working at the Joseph Phelps tasting room and Richard selling wine for a distributor. Ehren (winemaker for Turley and his own label Failla) started buying Syrah and Viognier from the Phoenix family in 2001 and has taken all the fruit ever since except a very little that goes into this Phoenix Ranch label.

I recently had lunch with Richard to taste his line-up and he brought a surprise – this 2004 Syrah. He had mysteriously found a pallet tucked way back in his case goods storage warehouse. This is the same fruit that Ehren used for his 04 Failla Syrah that received huge scores in the wine press and sold for more than \$60.

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If you could actually find the wine, the price would be off the charts. You get almost the same wine for \$21. Surprisingly, the fruitiness of this 6 year old wine is shocking. Sweet nose of lavender and ripe plums. Very dark in the glass. Complex, with layer after layer of flavors hitting your palate. Blackberry, blueberry, espresso bean, charcoal, and cassis are all evident. Minerals, cedar, forest moss, and roasted meat on the mid palate, then a long, rich finish with bright acidity and lush fruit. What a treat. Great with grilled meat or stinky cheese.

Bridge 1904 Petite Sirah

Napa Valley 2007 \$24.99

As I have stated countless times recently, the wine biz is on life support. Wineries that sell wine over \$25 are REALLY hurting for cash flow. If you sell a wine for \$48 in a normal economy and want to discount it in a slow one – you can screw up your brand because no one will ever pay \$48 again once they pay \$25 for the same wine. Wineries are using second labels as an outlet to move juice for cash without risking torching the brand forever.

You folks have had wine after wine sent to you from us that was originally priced way higher, but was dressed in different clothing for a much more palatable price tag. Same deal here my friends, with this Petite Sirah that was made by the king of Petite in Napa... Vincent Arroyo. He makes Pets that are priced from \$30 to \$50 that (supposedly) sell out, and are on a waiting-list-only-basis (although a recent look at the website, everything except reserve stuff is "available").

Vincent describes on his website that 90% of his wines are sold out before they are even bottled – and only sold through his winery, never from a retailer. Nice business, making wine and selling it for full boat retail direct to the consumer and never having to discount it or sell it for wholesale pricing..... at 8 thousand cases per year, even at say the LOWEST priced wine he makes (\$30) the revenue is close to 3 million bones per year. Well sorry, those days are over – as you folks know. It not because his wines suck, he makes fantastic wine.

I also currently have a Cabernet in the store with the same label on it that is very yummy indeed. This wine is a monster. So dark you can't see the other side of the glass while holding it up to a flashlight. Major fruit bomb with tannins, spice, and depth. Very concentrated and extracted. Dark, inky, with a plush mouth feel. Black pepper and blueberry pie. Classic old vine Calistoga Pets. Mineral, blackberry, herbal and with an extended finish. Go look at your teeth in the mirror after drinking this wine. Pair with BBQ'ed anything with a spicy, peppery sauce.

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Ancient Block Zinfandel

North Coast 2006 \$19.99

All the grapes were sourced from old vine vineyards in Mendocino County which tend to produce intense and concentrated flavors. This wine 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 is a delightful Zinfandel with great balance, fruit, and structure. Not too jammy. Bright acidity, with classic Zin red fruit essence coming out in the glass. Raspberry and bramble on the nose. Dusty chocolate covered cherry, cranberry, baking spice, tobacco, and cedar on the palate. Nice acid with more dusty cocoa on the finish. Pretty wine. Try this with a glazed ham dinner with scalloped potatoes.

Fisticuffs Cabernet Sauvignon

Napa Valley 2008 \$24.99

This is Rob Lawson's label. Rob is a super nice dude, married to one of Joy's best friends, Pavi Lawson. They have a daughter near Emma's age. Rob has "touched" more cult wine made in Napa Valley probably than any other winemaker on the planet. He used to be the head winemaker at Napa Valley Wine Company, a huge facility where more than 150 different labels are produced. Ghostblock, Mirror, Kapskandy, Pahlmeyer.... The list could fill a page in itself. Now he is concentrating on just a handful of wines, including this delightful little number. His vision for this label is to produce the highest quality wine while keeping the price tag very reasonable. He wants to "over deliver", and he does. The grapes come from some of the best vineyards in the valley – getting deals on fruit is easier due to his many years making wine for so many different growers and vintners. This wine is ripe and full bodied, with aromas of nutmeg, cherries, and cedar. Roasted coffee, blackberry, plums, and toasty oak come alive on the palate. Black olive, rosemary, and raspberry shine on the finish with well integrated tannin. Perfect with a New York Strip and a dollop of herbed butter.

Dobra Zemja Red Blend "Milan Rouge"

NV Amador County \$16.99

I have been enjoying wines from this small Amador Winery since well before we opened the store seven years ago. This fun blend of Zinfandel, Syrah, and Petite Sirah has been one of my favorite wines they produce. It is also the least expensive.... The Amador Co. growing region produces some of the best Zinfandel and Rhone grape varieties in all of California. This bottle will prove it to you if you dare not believe me. Started by a Croatian dude in 1991, Dobra Zemja means: "Good Earth". The Croatian dude has retired and my buddy Mike Dougherty has taken over – once inviting our whole staff up for a visit and sleep over at his cabin. He made the best freaking chicken stew served over polenta I ever had. Went with his big wines perfectly. DZ makes huge fruit bombs. This wine is dark, big, and fat in the mouth. The Zin provides red fruit like cherry and raspberry, the Syrah chimes in with earth and roasted herbs, and the Pets gives the broodingly dark color, structure, and significant tannins. Have with chicken stew over polenta....