



RED & WHITE WINE CLUB

Enotria Arneis

Mendocino County 2009 \$14.99

Arneis (in the Piemontese dialect means a difficult one or little rascal) is a rare, ancient white grape variety all but abandoned because of its low yields and difficulty to cultivate. Primarily grown in Piemonte, this varietal is now being grown in several regions of California. When everything falls into place, Arneis has the flavor and fine, dry palate to succeed where an overblown Chardonnay fails, especially with flavorful seafood such as halibut and prawns. In the Piemonte region of Italy, Arneis is often blended with that region's most famous wine, Barolo; with the idea to tame down some of the tannin. The 2009 vintage marks the 12th vintage of Arneis produced by Enotria, a second label from the Graziano Winery's stable of offerings. Seventy-eight percent of blend comes from the Fox Hill Vineyard owned by Lowell Stone and grown in the southeastern hills above the Ukiah Valley. Gravely loam soils provide good drainage to control vigor and promote ripe high quality grapes with high acidity and low pH. Seventeen percent comes from the Glen McGourty Vineyard located next to the Russian River in the Ukiah Valley. Ten percent is Cortese from the Fox Hill Vineyard. The grapes were hand-harvested at an average 23.5 degrees brix from September 30th to October 4th, 2009. The grapes were crushed, pressed and cold settled before being racked into neutral French Burgundy oak barrels. The wine was then barrel-fermented, "sur-lie" aged for four months, not allowed to undergo malolactic fermentation and bottled on March 17th, 2010. This wine has a rich body and mouthfeel, with balanced acidity. The aroma of spiced apples and toasted almonds opens up to flavors of marzipan, guava, nectarine and a distinctive mineral finish. I love this wine with Thai food, specifically Pad Thai – the noodle dish with prawns, chicken, and toasted peanuts.

Monte Volpe Pinot Grigio

Mendocino County 2009 \$14.99

Here is another delicious white wine made by Greg Graziano, one of the California pioneers of Italian grape varietal plantings. Along with Pinot Grigio, Greg grows and makes wine from Tocai Friulano, Cortese, Arneis, Sangiovese, Montepuliano, Barbera, Peppolino, and Nebbiolo. Pinot Grigio has quickly become one of the most popular white grape varieties in the world. This rust-gray tinted skinned grape, is said to be a mutation of the Pinot Noir grape. However, it seems unsure whether it is a red or white wine grape, hence, grigio, (or gris, in France) meaning gray. Monte Volpe is the oldest producer of Pinot Grigio in California. This Pinot Grigio comes from two very distinct vineyards: the Lolonis Vineyard (planted by Greg Graziano and his step-father in the early 1990s) located on the benchlands of eastern Redwood Valley (89% of this blend). The wine was further enhanced with the addition of 6% Tocai Friulano from our Nube Bianco Vineyard in eastside of Potter Valley and 5% Sauvignon Blanc from the Mc-Memoney Vineyard located near the headwaters of the Russian River in Potter Valley.

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Mendocino is a cool growing region, a perfect climate for growing distinctive white wine grapes. The grapes were hand-harvested the grapes at an average 24 degrees brix on September 10th thru October 9th, 2009. The grapes were crushed, pressed, cold settled and then racked into 2 to 5 year old French Burgundy oak barrels. All of the lots were 100% barrel-fermented and "sur-lie" (on the yeast) aged for six months with partial malolactic fermentation. This produces the lush mouthfeel and rich flavors. Green apple, cassava melon, and wet stone on the nose, with crisp apple, quince, and Asian pear on the palate. This wine is unique in that it is rich and velvety yet still maintains bright acidity on the finish. This wine is my choice to serve with fresh cracked Dungeness crab dunked in melted butter, or crab cakes with aioli on the side.

Sparrow Hawk Chardonnay

Russian River Valley 2009 \$24.99

At a recent staff tasting, this wine created quite a stir. Our new Club Manager, John Mathew Green - a self admitted Chardonnay hater - was blown away and actually said that he "loved" this wine. So do I, and I feel you will too. 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 Heubli 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 Chard was sourced from the Dutton Ranch in Sonoma County. Fermented in 60% new French Oak and permitted to pass through malolactic, this wine provides aromas of tropical fruits such as pineapple, kiwi, guava, and rose petal. On the palate, pineapple upside down cake (I swear), azalea flowers, sandalwood, flint, caramel, and honeycomb. Very unique and yummy Chardonnay. It has brilliant acidity and minerality on the finish. I recently had this wine with seared scallops with a drizzle of beurre blanc sauce, and OMG!



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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 juicy steak marinated with garlic and olive oil.

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.

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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. 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.....

Periano Estate Tempranillo

Lodi 2007 \$15.99

Tempranillo is relatively rare in California. This grape variety is the main component in Spanish Rioja. Coincidentally, the areas in Spain that grow this grape variety well has very similar microclimates and soil consistencies to our lovely County of Lodi, found just 50 miles east of Napa Valley. The 2007 vintage has been getting some amazing press in all the wine magazines these days. With a long cool spring and the very mild summer, the grapes were allowed the maximum amount of time to fully ripen and vineyard managers got to pick the grapes when they wanted to instead of being dictated by Mother Nature, which happens all too many times during harvest. This was the first harvest of these grapes for Peirano Estate Vineyards. The vineyard was planted in 2002 and had been meticulously tended to over those years, benefiting from deficit irrigation, proper crop thinning, and pulling the leaves off of the vines to allow the grapes to ripen evenly. This wine was hand harvested in small lots and the fruit was gently handled. The grapes were whole cluster crushed, inoculated with specific variations of Spanish yeast clones that were developed specifically for this variety.

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The wine was barrel fermented in both French and American oak puncheons, which are very large barrels, so that there was minimal influences of wood. This technique brought out the beautiful black fruit characteristics of this noble grape. This is a very dark and fruity wine with a deep garnet color in the glass. On the nose, the staff and I concur that we detect black pekoe tea, sweet balsamic vinegar, and charcoal. On the palate, plum sauce, smoked meat, soy sauce, and leather stood out. The finish had notes of coffee with very smooth tannin. This is a very ripe, rich, and delicious wine that will go well with a slowly braised chuck roast with roasted potatoes, turnips, and carrots.

