



# ALL RED DECEMBER WINE CLUB

## **Pope Valley Winery Zinfandel**

Napa Valley 2007 \$19.99

(NOTE: this wine needs to breathe at least one hour before enjoying)

This winery, nestled in the bucolic Pope Valley just east of St. Helena, has a special meaning for me. It was the site of my very first wine buying trip – actually BEFORE I was a wine buyer. The year was 1981 (I was still too young to drink legally) while I was in college in Santa Barbara. I was working at this funky coffee house in Isla Vista called Borsodi's. It was collectively owned by this socialist acting troop who all worked at the restaurant and they had a rule that everyone took a shift washing dishes – including the owners – and there was no dishwashing machine. It was all done by hand.

Totally sucked, I must say...I waited tables, cooked, hosted, and yes, washed dishes. My job was to make 15 gallons of tomato sauce, which I did at my kitchen in the house I rented, bringing the supplies on this cart I rigged to my bike – until I got followed by the Health Department who got tipped off by a disgruntled employee and they busted me. Anyway, the manager was adding wine to the restaurant beverage list. My roommate had just returned from Napa Valley and brought back some Pope Valley wine that I shared with him and he was impressed. So I told him I could probably get a good deal from these dudes running the tasting room and he gave me a budget to spend and my buddy Nick and these 2 chicks and I packed into his 1972 VW Fastback and we went “on a roady”.

One of the girls was this French exchange student who didn't speak a word of English, but I figured she knew wine. We stayed at a friend's house in Santa Rosa the first night and then headed over the hill to Napa – and got completely lost, somehow ending up in Lake County. It was like 110 degrees that day, no AC in the Fastback. The car started REEKING of body odor. Nick, who was driving looked at me and nonchalantly smelled his armpit, giving me the high sign to see if the smell originated from me – it didn't, or from the girl with me in the back either.... It was the FRENCH CHICK. It was so bad my eyes were stinging.

It was common knowledge that the French didn't use B.O. juice in those days. We rounded a bend and low and behold was the fantastic site of Lake Berryessa (Amelia calls it: Lake White Trash). I called out: “lets all go SWIMMING!”, and whispered to my chick to give the French chick some freaking B.O. juice afterwards. So, freshly bathed (and slathered in deodorant) we pulled up to Pope Valley Winery. Founded in 1897 and built as a gravity flow (state of the art back then) winery, it is very much like it was over a hundred years ago. Except the 2 young dudes who ran the place back then (there is new owners who bought the place in 1997).

These guys were already bombed by 2pm. We all started tasting and cut our deal. Somehow we packed 15 cases of wine in that little car by stacking the bottles in every nook and cranny. With the frame practically rubbing the tires, we found our way over the hill (this time without getting lost), had a burger in St. Helena at Taylors Refresher and headed back down the state to SoCal. My first buy trip. Little did I know I would make my living 30 years later by finding deals in Napa Valley, and at Pope Valley Winery to boot. This Zinfandel thrives in the hot days of Pope Valley, then develops flavors during the cool nights when the fog wafts up into the Valley from the Bay, 90 miles south. Fruity with structure and bright acids, this Zin rocks. Dark and brooding before it opens up, then gentle blackberry, cherry, and raspberry flavors come out. Dusty bramble, zinc, cherry pie, and olive flavors hit the palate. The finish is fruity at first then ends with nice acid – perfect food wine. Serve with Pork Roast and Root Vegetables.

## **Dead Man's Hand Cabernet Sauvignon**

Napa Valley 2009 \$24.99

The famous “Aces and Eights” hand of black suits that was pried from the cold fingers of Wild Bill Hickok in Deadwood South Dakota in the late 1800's after he was shot dead are featured on this very cool label. The wine is pretty cool too. A cuvee from many of Napa's finest vineyards, this ripe and fruity Cab has a beautiful nose of currant, blackberry jam, and anise. Nicely dark in the glass, the fruit pops out on the initial waft with intense black fruits of plums, blueberry, and currant. Tobacco, black olive, black cherry, and black pepper come forth on the front palate with licorice and coffee bean coming later then leading into the long rich and fruity finish. Medium tannins. Great served with grilled Buffalo.

## **Twisted Rivers “Raven” Red Blend**

Napa Valley 2009 \$24.99

This is a wine from Duke Heringer out of Clarkesburg, just south of Sacramento. Duke – named after Duke Snider, the baseball great who played with Duke's father on the Chicago Cubs in the 40's. Duke comes from a long line of farmers and studied at the famed CalPoly in San Louis Obispo. Duke makes this wine blending Petite Sirah with classic Bordeaux varietals: Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, and Petite Verdot. The result is a monster wine with an elegant twist. Super black in the glass – due to the Petite Verdot and Petite Sirah (always wondered why both varietals are called “petite” since they are practically totally black). But the elegant Merlot and Cabernet come out in the aromatics and layers of flavors. Fruit, tannin, earth, tobacco, chocolate, leather.... this wine has it all. Serve with something grilled, such as Ribs, Pork Tenderloin, or a Burger.

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## **Due Vigne Dolcetto**

El Dorado County 2007 \$16.99

Dolcetto is one of the three grape varieties grown in the Piemonte District of Northern Italy known for their amazing Barolo and Barbaresco. Meaning “little sweet one” in Italian, this wine is far from sweet. In fact, this wine is a bruiser. Grown in the Sierra Foothills by the Musso Family, this is their tenth vintage of this obscure varietal. Aged in 40% new Hungarian Hogsheads for almost 2 years, this wine is very masculine with both fruit and tannin. Dried cranberries, raspberries, and plums at first, then the palate discovers earthy leather, smoky oak, and coffee. Long rich finish with tight tannins. This is a great wine to serve with Eggplant Parmesan with tons of grated Pecorino Romano.

## **Gustafson Zinfandel**

Dry Creek Valley Sonoma 2008 \$16.99

This Zin is produced from grapes that are grown at the highest elevation estate vineyard in all of Sonoma County above Dry Creek Valley. At 1800 feet, this vineyard has some unique challenges for the winemaker since it is so steeply terraced and they choose to farm sustainably. Special equipment is needed, roll cages on all the tractors, organic composts, earth friendly pest preventions, cover crops, they place nets over all the vines in August so the birds that they utilize to eat the bad bugs year round - don't eat all the grapes before they are picked in October. Netting is expensive and a major hassle. So is fighting back all the other wildlife that likes grapes too like deer, wild boar, turkeys, and bears. A few years ago in Pope Valley this vintner shot and killed 3 black bears that dug holes under his vineyard fences to get at the sweet grapes – what an A-HOLE – and the community became enraged at this dude, so much nasty press that I doubt anyone else would stoop to such a despicable act as killing a bear for a few hundred dollars of wine grapes. Wild pigs that were introduced to the area and are breeding like crazy are one thing, especially when they taste so good – but native bear, our state icon that has a dwindling population due to urban encroachments already, no. Anyway, to find this delicious wine that has so many expensive costs associated with just getting the grapes to the crusher, at this price, is truly amazing. With 9% Petite Sirah and 8% Syrah added to this cuvee of mountain fruit to round it out, this wine displays interesting fruit characteristics of raspberry, cherry, currants, and strawberries against spice components like clove, allspice, and black pepper. Spicy oak comes into play as well with some vanilla on the finish. This is a yummy Zin that will pair well with Ribs or pulled Pork Sandwiches.

## **29 Hadley Pinot Noir**

Russian River Sonoma 2008 \$16.99

This wine comes from Robert Watkins and is named after some family property west of Sebastopol where they went to unwind and relax for many years. A cuvee of fruit selected from 4 vineyards, including the famous Rochioli vineyard – this fruit forward Pinot really over-delivers for the price. Aged over 18 months in French oak, 35% was new wood. Medium bodied and brick red in the glass, cherries and strawberry, with a hint of earth on the nose. Blackberry, black cherry, and mocha on the mid-palate with plum and vanilla on the finish. Try this wine with grilled wild Salmon.