



ALL WHITE SUMMER WINE CLUB



Bray Vineyards “The Hussy” White Blend

Amador County 2010 \$15.99

Bray Vineyards Verdelho

Amador County 2010 \$19.99

TTalk about stepping back in time..... I did just that on a recent buying trip up to the Sierra Foothills in Amador Co. It had been a while since I visited the bucolic wine growing region an hour east of Sacramento. Considering that the Napa Valley has been rather stagnant during the economic downturn I was thinking that the Foothills wineries were probably hurting even more than we were since they sat in the middle of nowhere – hardly an International vacation destination. Boy, was I wrong. New wineries sprang up. New vineyards were planted. Tasting rooms were PACKED on the Saturday that I visited – literally 3 deep at the bar. No tasting fees. Pourers were actually smiling at their guests. Some wineries were serving food out on the deck under umbrella shaded picnic tables pairing nibbles to their wines – for FREE. It reminded me of what Napa Valley was like 20 years ago...Vibrant. I couldn't even FIND a wine on the tasting lists that was priced over \$25. I visited the new spots and found some interesting new wines that are forthcoming in future clubs – but also visited some old friends as well, like Bray, and found that they have evolved to their place in the wine hierarchy and molded the proper varietals to the terroir, with brilliant results. Hardly a Cabernet or Chardonnay in site. Merlot? None. Meritage? Nada. Zinfandel, Tempranillo, Barbera, Verdelho, Mourvedre, Viognier, Syrah, Primitivo and Muscat..... All the varietals that the founding winemaking brotherhood of Portuguese and Italian immigrants planted 150 years ago are here, albeit with interruptions, but the terroir called them back to the proper dirt in which to grow them, and grow them well.

The “hussy” is an interesting blend of Viognier, Verdelho, and Sauvignon Blanc (sounds almost like the new Joy Ride). They call it the “tart with a lot of heart” and that it “goes well with most breakfast cereals”..... OMG, people having FUN with wine? The shame! (As a test I DID have a little snort with a spoonful of Emma's Cinnamon Life Cereal this morning and it was lovely, BTW.) Rich, refreshing, and it has some “zing” to it. Grapefruit, jasmine, and peaches on the nose, and they were all evident on the palate as well with more tropical fruits mixed in like papaya, kiwi, and a hint of lemon verbena. Delightful mouth feel and great acid with a crisp and clean finish. Have with your favorite cereal, but slice some peaches in the bowl as well. The Verdelho is amazing. So complex and lush in the mouth. I know why it won “Best of Show” at the Amador Co. Fair wine competition – beating out ALL of the red wines that made Amador Co. win- famous. An up-coming International Vacation Destination, so-to-speak. This wine is VIBRANT. Fresh, and clean, yet rich and satisfying. No oak or malo to get in the way of the delicious fruit and intoxicating aroma. A combination of stone fruit and citrus with a spicy and lush component that is hard to describe. Lemongrass, peaches, and ginger. Have with Thai food. This wine is unique, fresh, and interesting – kind of what big brother Napa Valley used to be.

Dobra Zemlja Viognier

Amador County 2009 \$17.99

Dobra Zemlja Sauvignon Blanc

Amador County 2009 \$14.99

I always stay at my friend Mike Dougherty's house when visiting Amador Co. He has 25 acres planted to vine on his 80 acre spread, with the house – a “double wide”, situated up on a hill overlooking a gorgeous view of rolling hills covered with neat rows of grapevines, seemingly, all the way down to Sacramento. There is only one hotel in Plymouth anyway, and it sucks. And one restaurant that I heard is good but I opted for foraging in Mike's pantry instead for a jar of his famous Bolognese Sauce that I had with pasta and some stolen sausages from the freezer that was made from who knows what kind of wild game he shot the autumn prior.

He always has plenty of guns about and is half Italian and when I am in the double-wide up on the hill I can't help not to think back of being in Tuscany hearing shotgun blasts echoing in the rolling hills of grapevines. Of course it was 105 degrees that weekend and he forgot to tell me the A/C was on the fritz so I didn't feel too bad about helping myself to his grub. Mike is a co-owner of Dobra and lives in Marin Co.

He stays in the double-wide when he is working the winery, which he wasn't that weekend. The tasting room at Dobra was packed that Saturday, people where coming in to fill jugs of the Blend that Milan Zemlja (winemaker) concocted – everybody seems to be offering “jugs” of wine these days up in Amador, an idea I'm sure Mike got from ME. Jesus, does everybody have to rip off my ideas? This Viognier is unique due to its richness – un-fined and unfiltered, barrel fermented, and allowed to go into partial malolactic. It can be somewhat cloudy, so just deal with it, OK? A perfume of apricots and peaches waft up the glass into your senses. A creamy full bodied mouthfeel coats your mouth. Rich is too soft of a word to describe the flavors. Massive. Masculine. Robust.

This wine paired fairly well to wild game sausages and Bolognese sauce. Butterscotch pudding, peach preserves, grilled nectarine with vanilla ice cream and caramel sauce. Yum..... The Sauv Blanc is just the opposite. Bright, crisp, tart, and thirst quenching. Apple, pears, tangerines, and mineral all linger in the palate after an aroma of grapefruit and gooseberry hit your nostrils. Fast on the finish. Have with crabcakes and corn on the cob drenched in butter – it will cut all the grease, easy. The Viognier? Serve with Bolognese Sauce.

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Maldonado Chardonnay

Sonoma County 2009 \$24.99

Hugo Maldonado walked in the store a few weeks ago with this Chard in his hand to taste and instantly it was a staff favorite. Mostly the family manages vineyards for other wineries in the Valley – they also make a small amount of wine under their own label. This wine is from vines grown on the Parr Vineyard on the border between Napa and Sonoma off of Franz Valley School Road near the store in Calistoga. It is a cool and foggy site that ripens the berries very slowly – perfect for Chardonnay. Jean Hoefliger is the winemaker – formally from Newton, famous in the Valley for their Chard. Native yeasts are allowed to ferment the must in 100% French oak, only 5% new, spending 20 months in barrel. The nose is reminiscent of browned butter and vanilla. The flavors are characterized by figs, apples, and pears with a subtle hint of toasty oak and almonds. Rich on the palate, this full bodied wine pairs well with cheese, pork tenderloin, or grilled chicken.

Jacella Riesling

El Dorado County 2009 \$16.99

Made by Michael Carr, winemaker at Roche in Carneros, Jacella has been gaining all sorts of notice in the wine press – especially when his Chard won the sweepstakes award at the Sonoma Co. Harvest Festival last year. But this wine, I feel, is his best effort. Having spent time in Alsace, ground zero for world class Riesling, Michael has an affinity for the grape making it in the style of the great Rieslings of Europe. From a small vineyard in the Sierra Foothills where the days are hot and nights are cool, this wine was harvested at low sugar levels and displays brilliant acidity. The nose gives off aromas of apricot, dried flowers, and apples, with a hint of ginger. The crisp mouthfeel provides pear, melon, and orange zest. Fermented practically entirely dry and with high PH to attain the tart acidity on the finish. Perfect with Indian food or oysters on the half shell.