

INTENSE RED DECEMBER WINE CLUB



Pope Valley Winery Sangiovese

Napa Valley 2007 \$18.99

(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 Trasha). 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).

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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 Sangiovese is a way better wine than the 2 young dudes made 30 years ago. Ripe, smooth, fruity, has a smoky nose and flavors of tobacco, wild cherry, strawberry pie, raspberry, hint of charcoal on the finish. Nice wine. Perfect with a Spaghetti and Meatball Tuesday night dinner.

Neyers Syrah

Old Lakeville Road Sonoma

2009 Regular \$24.99

This was a major score for the Wine Club. I was introduced to Neyers wines because my buddy Ehren Jordan, winemaker for Turley Cellars, was a part owner with Bruce and Barbara Neyers. Ehren made all the wines until he sold his share so he could build his own facility and then launched the Failla Winery (his wife's maiden name – he tried to name it Jordan, but Jordan in Sonoma sued him).

This wine is the bomb, perfect for the Intense Club. It is made in a rather interesting way as well. Pigeage is the French word for crushing grapes by foot, a traditional practice in the northern Rhône Valley, and at Neyers Vineyards. Whole clusters of grapes are dumped directly into a fermentation tank, and a worker wearing flexible waders walks in circles on top of these whole berries for 30 minutes or so. The process is normally repeated twice daily, and after a week or so enough juice has been released by the process that the cap can be manually ‘punched down’, to stay in contact with the fermenting juice. With Syrah in particular, traditional pigeage results in a wine with better color, less tannin and a more complex aroma.

Over the past five vintages, every bottling of this wine has received a score of 92, 93 or 94 points from The Wine Advocate, The Wine Spectator or The International Wine Cellar. Black in the glass, aromas of raspberry, black cherry, roasted herbs, and smoky bacon. The palate provides flavors of lavender, mineral, bacon fat, roasted thyme, black pepper, and cassis. Super extracted and concentrated. This wine is tight now and will age at least 8-10 years. This is a big wine and needs big food. Roasted Leg of Lamb with lots of garlic and an herb rub.

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Anaba “Turbine” Red Rhone Blend

Sonoma Valley 2009 \$24.99

Named for “Anabatic Winds” that blow upward towards the hills of Carneros during the daytime as the air gets hotter, John Sweazey, owner of Anaba, also uses the wind to power his winery, tasting room, and visitor center by gigantic turbines sitting out in the vineyards. This wine is a blend of 52% Grenache, 28% Mourvedre, and 20% Syrah grown in the Sonoma Valley just up Arnold Drive from his winery. Jammy and seductive, this wine is concentrated and extracted with flavors of currant, blueberry, blackberry, baking spice, and cherry pie. Velvety on the palate with soft chewy tannins on the finish, the flavors linger on the tongue for quite a while. This is a perfect wine with lamb stew, as an aperitif served with stinky cheeses, or on its own.

Cache Creek Petite Sirah

Lake County 2005 \$13.99

Amelia and I were headed back up to Trinity Co last week for some more Steelhead fishing and we decided to take a shortcut to Hwy 5 by heading north through Lake Co and cutting over via Hwy 20. We passed by the Cache Creek vineyards and were blown away by the beauty of this rugged country. Started by the Van Pelt family when the patriarch purchased 590 acres along Cache Creek in 1997 – Bill passed in 2004.

He would explore his new acreage and had found a herd of tule elk one day – hence the elk drawing on the label. They farm sustainably, respecting the wildlife that live amongst the vines, shunning herbicides and placing owl boxes in the vineyards to utilize a natural gopher control program. We headed up to Redding to meet our guide, Mat Dover, for some fishing. This dude is amazing, going above and beyond the call of duty to get us into fish. Last month we stayed on the river until dark, rowing in complete blackness towards the pull-out for 45 minutes, he instinctually knowing the way – guiding on this river for 20 years.

He works out of The Fly Shop in Redding if you ever want to catch Steelhead or big ass Rainbow Trout. The Trinity was running too low and clear for any chance at nabbing a monster steelie so we changed gears and floated the Sacramento out of Anderson, targeting both Steelhead and Rainbow Trout.

It hadn't rained for close to a month – bad news for the Trinity. Floating along the river we spotted so much wildlife: geese, ducks, kingfishers, herds of deer, bald eagles, and an enormous bobcat stalking a pod of ducks just off the banks – thinking twice before charging into the icy river. What a site, bald eagles fishing the river, bobcats stalking prey, fat Rainbows smacking your fly, ripping of yards of line, jumping, trying to throw the hook. Makes me appreciate vintners trying their best to protect California wildlife. Cache Creek is on its way to getting an organic certification for

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their vineyards – and trips like these make it hit home as to if its worth all the pain to farm sustainably. This Pets is peaking right now. From the famous 05 monster harvest, the wine has had time to smooth out and release some of the monster tannins that Petite can possess.

Makes me appreciate vintners trying their best to protect California wildlife. Cache Creek is on its way to getting an organic certification for their vineyards – and trips like these make it hit home as to if its worth all the pain to farm sustainably. This Pets is peaking right now. From the famous 05 monster harvest, the wine has had time to smooth out and release some of the monster tannins that Petite can possess. A nose of lavender, smoked meat, roasted herb, and mineral. The inky wine has blueberry pie on the palate along with earthy moss, pipe tobacco, thyme, bacon fat, and sugar plums. Tannins on the long finish, but subdued tannin. Have with wild game sausages, pot roast, or beef stew.

Robledo Family Winery Cabernet Sauvignon

Red Hills Lake County 2006 \$24.99

I love these American Dream stories. Reynaldo Robledo comes to California from Mexico as a migrant vineyard worker earning \$1.10 an hour. Works his way up the ladder and eventually starts his own Vineyard Management Company, purchasing over 300 acres of vineyard along the way. He sells off most of the grapes but decides to make his own and starts this winery. He and his seven son's run all the family businesses. Some of the vineyard he developed sits in the Red Hills AVA of Lake County, site of one of the most brisk land grabs in winemaking history. During the wine boom, the Beckstoffer family started buying up land in Lake Co for vineyard development – the land was perfect for grape growing and CHEAP, compared to Napa. A lot of folks followed suit. Red Hills got its AVA in 2004, sits between 1600 and 3700 ft above sea level, has the perfect sun exposure, gets 10% more UVA light than sea-level vineyard due to the pure air and elevation which creates thicker skins on the grapes, bigger tannin, and more intensely flavored wines.

This wine is one of them. Named “El Rey” for the patriarch Reynaldo, this is a powerful wine, just like the man. Normally this wine sells for \$38. Bold, and masculine, dark in the glass. The perfume of cedar, blackberry, and plums jump out at you with flavors of tobacco, sweet, toasty oak, blackberry crumble, plum jam, saddle leather, and chocolate. The mouthfeel is smooth and rich, the finish is long with softening tannins (this wine is a 06 and is moving into its prime). Serve with Prime Rib or Carne Asada, tastes great with either.



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Sparrow Hawk Cabernet Sauvignon

Rutherford Napa Valley 2009 \$24.99

NOTE: This wine needs to breathe for one hour prior to enjoying

This wine comes from my friends Harry and Tim Parsely, father and son team that sources grapes and juice all over the wine country. This wine is made at Swanson Vineyards – situated between Opus One and Silver Oak. I cannot tell you where they source the grapes or who the winemaker is. Did I say this wine is made at Swanson? Anyway, the winemaker at Swanson is Chris Phelps, just for your general knowledge, so you know who makes the wine at Swanson, if you ever wanted to know. Chris studied at UC Davis then moved to Bordeaux and studied more there and actually worked at a Chateau during the famous 1982 Bordeaux vintage that will go down in the books as one of the best EVER. He also got to work and live at Chateau Petrus for a spell and Christian Moueix became his mentor. Christian came over to Napa and started Dominus Estate in Oakville and soon brought Chris on too, eventually naming him winemaker. This is all just for your general wine knowledge because Chris had NOTHING to do with this wine, nothing what-so-ever. Chris moved on to work at Caymus, making the amazing Caymus Special Selection, then eventually to Swanson – where this wine was made, but not by Chris, I swear!!!