

# INTENSE RED WINE CLUB



## **WG Red Wine “Field Blend”**

Contra Costa County 2009 Regular \$29.99 - Club \$22.99

When we first decided to make wine back in 2006, I had asked Ehren Jordan if he had any Zin that he could spare during harvest. He did, from an old vine vineyard in Pope Valley, we crushed 5 tons that year and made a pretty yummy wine. I wanted a yummiest wine the next year. Once again I went to Ehren, the winemaker for Turley Estate, perhaps the cultist of the cult Zinfandel producers in all the land. This time it was grapes peeled off his Pato Vineyard contract in Contra Costa Co. Ehren was a partner in Neyers Winery, acting as the winemaker. Neyers also took Pato fruit and was struggling to sell it so they let me have 10 tons. Awesome wine was made. We did the same deal in 08. THEN in 09, Bruce Neyers, without telling me – the person who was helping out on his grape contract by buying almost 20 tons of grapes off him – canceled his contract with Mr. Pato. Dave Phinney, the whiz kid rock star from The Prisoner fame, snatched it all up from underneath me. I was out, no fruit.

The growers in Contra Costa County are a group of old-school farmers from Portuguese and Italian descent, many are still family members of the original growers who planted the vines 120 years ago. They are close knit and suspicious of strangers. Many have been burned by fancy pants vintners from Napa Valley in the past and it is hard to break into their circle. So what did this not-so-fancy pants vintner from Napa Valley do? He called the King, Matt Cline. From Cline Cellars, formally that is (he had a falling out with his brother), Matt pretty much was a god in Contra Costa County (C.C. Co.). When Cline was starting up, they specialized in old vine varieties from C. C. Co. and he saved the asses of many of those farmers when it was more chic to make wine from Napa and Sonoma than C. C. Co.

So one day Matt took me under his wing and we headed up to the town of Oakley to look at vineyard and scope things out. We had lunch in this Italian Diner where all the old farmers have their lunch and he introduced me around and that is where I met Dan Gonsalves, all five feet two of him. We made a date to go look at vineyard a few weeks later where Massimo and I met him in the parking lot of a Target store. Right next to the parking lot, between a 7-11 store, was a teeny Old Vine Vineyard of Zinfandel, with some Carignane and Mataro mixed in haphazardly. Dan had little blocks all around town tucked between apartment houses, chain stores, and restaurants. Back in the day everything was vineyard. During the housing boom in the 90's, most of the beautiful 100 years old vines were ripped from the earth to plant houses and stores and schools. I had asked Matt what his favorite vineyard was in Oakley and he replied with, “WAS right over there where that empty school sits...and my second favorite was where that apartment house is – half empty”.

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When the housing boom ended, there weren't enough people to fill all the houses and schools that were built and then the mortgage crisis hit and a lot of those houses sit empty, foreclosed on. So Dan, Massimo, and I drove around and picked blocks that we liked and the result is this delicious wine. Mostly fermented in neutral barrels so the fruit really stood out, and it does. What a fruit bomb. Super black in color, I get blackberry jam, strawberry pie, plums, and orange rind on the nose. Blueberry, blackberry, raspberry, black cherry, cigar, granite, chocolate all dance in the mouth. The finish is forever.

## **WG Zinfandel “Dwarf Vine Vineyard”**

Contra Costa County 2007 Regular \$29.99 - Club \$19.99

I got a small amount of fruit from this vineyard when a winery backed out of the contract. Zinfandel is a tricky grape to harvest because some berries are ripe, others not, sometimes in the same grape cluster. We constantly have to monitor the sugar levels during harvest season to get it right. I once asked Ehren Jordan what is the one varietal that he typically picks first, “Zin, and the last is Zin too”. To check sugar levels or what the industry calls “brix”, you take a thing called a “refractometer” into the vineyard, pick grapes from various bunches all over the block that you are going to pick so you get an average reading, mush up the grapes in a bucket and take some grape juice and drop in on the device – it kind of looks like a scope from a rifle – hold it up to the sun and you get the reading. Brix levels above 25 are ripe enough to pick for red wine. Whites can go as low as 22-23. Sparkling is around 21. Above 32 you have “late harvest, Port, or dessert wine. I like ripe fruit so we try to pick at 26 or above. Brix levels are a direct relation to alcohol levels. The higher the sugar, the higher the alcohol.

Sometimes there are great battles fought between the winemaker and the grower regarding sugar counts. Typically the winemakers want higher brix and riper fruit, but the grapes tend to shrink in size the riper they get (remember raisins are VERY ripe grapes, then dried), thus lighter in weight and less money for the farmer who sells grapes by the ton. Sometimes when you have picked REALLY ripe wine grapes at say, 28 -30 brix, the alcohol levels are going to be way too high. The alcohol level for table wine ends at 18, over that level you have Port. The winery pays a tax to the government based on the alcohol level. If the sugars are too high, to get the future alcohol levels to be in a better range, a winemaker will sometimes add “Jesus Units” to the fermenting must. I laughed so hard first time I heard that phrase....A Jesus Unit is water. And free water at that.

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A winemaker saves a lot of money if he adds water to the must that turns to wine that will sell for \$25 per bottle – especially if 20% water added – for free. We picked the Zin at 26 brix (14.5% alcohol). The fruit came from a vineyard 120 years old. It's called "DwarfVine" because the vines are growing in pure sand for 30 feet then hit a layer of clay/loam. Stressed to the max, the vines struggle to get down to the clay layer since the sand offers up nothing nutrient-wise. This causes very small grape yields and small berries, yet extremely flavorful. Red brick in the glass, the nose offers up aromas of pomegranate, raspberry, and spice. On the palate, distinctive flavors of mace, clove, and allspice come out prior to the gush of fruit. Black raspberry, cherry, and red currants lead into dusty cocoa powder. The finish is elegant with mild tannin. Nice to pair with Grilled Leg of Lamb.

## **WG Carignane**

Solano County 2008 Regular \$19.99 - Club \$14.99

This is from the Siebe Vineyard in Eastern Solano County planted 80 years ago. Head pruned meticulously by the vineyard manager; I had not seen a prettier Carignane vineyard in my life. The fruit was a screaming deal too because this grape is mostly used as a blender – just as I initially was planning to do. But man, this wine turned out fantastic – Massimo, the winemaker thought that this was perhaps the most exciting wine made this vintage. I decided to offer this up as a single varietal due to the amazing quality. I scored this fruit through my buddy, Jeff Popick, formally from Chameleon Cellars, who won a Gold Medal and Best of Class awards at the California State Fair with grapes from this exact vineyard. Dark in the glass with a gorgeous nose of dried flowers, blackberry, and mineral. You will be surprised by the combination of fruit, acidity, and minerals. Blackberries, blueberries, graphite, and spicy black pepper lead into a long finish that ends with a hint of chocolate. Pair this with Duck Breast, or Cassoulet.

## **WG Petite Sirah**

Napa Valley 2007 Regular \$29.99 - Club \$22.99

The fruit is from some of the oldest vineyards in Napa, collectively over 100 years. Petite Sirah has practically disappeared in the Valley – vineyards ripped out in favor of the king: Cabernet Sauvignon. Petite, or as some of the old timers call it "Petisara", was planted along with Zin, Alicante Bouschet, and Carignane as field blends by the Italian immigrants in the 1880's and only a few of the original vines remain. This wine is super dark in the glass and has a perfume of blueberry, lavender petals, and pencil lead. Dark rich fruit of blackberry, blueberry compote, plum is paired with leather, tobacco, and black pepper. A long smooth finish with mid to soft tannin is completely different than some old vine Pets – some of which seem to strip your teeth of enamel. This wine needs something hearty to stand up to the fruit and spice such as a marinated and grilled Tri-Tip over charcoal.

## **WG Red Wine "Red Wine"**

North Coast 2008 Regular \$29.99 - Club \$19.99

This is a blend of Grenache and Mourvedre from Shannon Ranches in Lake County, and old vine Carignane from Solano County. Clay Shannon farms these vines himself and the vineyards are on a hillside that is extremely steep. During harvest, it had rained a bit and the Grenache was ready to pick but they couldn't get in the vineyard with the tractors. There are precautions that you take when you are driving a tractor on a steep vineyard: you wear a harness to keep you from falling out and you install a roll bar so you aren't crushed from a tip-over.

I heard a story from a friend winemaker entailing a worker who had the roll bar on but didn't lock himself in so when he flipped the thing he was thrown from the cab and the tractor rolled over him. He lived but was crippled for life. We were to pick the Grenache first since the Mourvedre wasn't quite ready. Well when the tractors finally were let in the Grenache was a tad over-ripe, so we picked the Mourvedre and co-fermented them both together. A gamble that paid off with a classic Rhone style blend, this wine is really loaded with flavor and structure. Dark and brooding - the aromas explode from the glass. Strawberry, mineral, blackberry, and currant all intermingle with the senses. Sweet cassis, strawberry flowers, coffee, chocolate, leather, black pepper, clove, earth. The Carignane provides beautiful mineral and acid to bring in all the components to this tightly structured wine.

## **Trinity Ridge Pinot Noir**

Sonoma County 2008 \$24.99

This is a second label of Sparrow Hawk Wines. The fruit from this winery is sourced from some of the finest vineyards in Sonoma and Napa Valleys. The principals behind Sparrow Hawk, Harry and Tim Parsley, have cultivated terrific relationships with both growers and vintners'. The wealth of experience combined with the access of some of the best fruit and talent has enabled Sparrow Hawk the opportunity to provide wine that is an excellent example of the growing region at a price that significantly over delivers for what is in the bottle.

This boutique producer is guided by the wealth of experience that Harry Parsley brings to the table from retailer, producer, and wholesaler. 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 Heublien Wines and Spirits, to name a few. Harry was President of Buena Vista Winery and Racke USA in Sonoma for eight years; his current incarnation is as proprietor and owner of Silver Stag Winery, a premium Napa Valley wine producer.

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He and his son also jointly own Sparrow Hawk Winery. 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.

I chose this Pinot for the Intense club for 2 reasons: its big, and you guys rarely get Pinot to try from me. Coming from fruit grown in both Carneros (60%) and Russian River (40%), this wine is highly structured and well balanced. Dark in the glass, the aroma has earth, rose petal, and black cherry pie. On the palate I detect leather, black pepper, cherry, currant, mushroom. Exactly what a Pinot should taste like. You wouldn't believe how many Pinots in this price point taste NOTHING like Pinot Noir. Serve with lighter meat dishes like Pork Roast or Indian Spiced Chicken.