



INTENSE RED FALL WINE CLUB



Mary Elke Pinot Noir

Mendocino County 2008 \$24.99

This September, Amelia and I headed up to Ukiah in Mendocino County for a buy trip that was partially organized by my buddy Josh Metz, formally from Ceago Winery and more recently, also formally, from Magnanimous Wine Group (Mendocino Farms and Chameleon). Josh is super connected in Mendocino – and it doesn't hurt that his wife Megan is Executive Director of the Mendocino Grape Growing Assoc., as far as getting access to some cool wineries and introductions. I have been carrying Mary Elke's Sparkling in the store for a while and we had set up a luncheon at her winery with Josh and Megan tagging along for the ride. Mary's place is in Anderson Valley just outside the town of Boonville. There are several grape growing regions in Mendo: Anderson Valley, Yorkville Highlands, Redwood Valley, Potter Valley, and Ukiah where the Tallmadge Bench rises up from the headwaters of the Russian River. Anderson is best suited for Pinot Noir and Chardonnay, but before there were grapes growing in the Valley, there were.....apples. It was apples that Mary came to grow in Boonville with her husband and 2 young children in the '70's.

He was a lawyer that got burned out from all the lawyer stuff and Mary needed some good country living to raise her family. They lived in a trailer amongst 25 acres of apple orchard making organic apple juice of all things. A lot different for Mary's lawyer husband that graduated second in his class from Stanford sandwiched between William Rehnquist (1st) and Sandra Day O'Connor (3rd). Mary was one of only 3 organic apple juice producers back then and had herself a thriving business until the California Ag shut her down because they found an "apple maggot moth" in her orchard. They quarantined her orchard.

For 2 years she had to pick her apples and throw them away – bury them, in fact – and thus losing all her wholesale accounts. Later they said they were very sorry, they were mistaken – it really wasn't an apple maggot moth after all since they couldn't live in a climate where it fell below 50 degrees. Mary planted wine grapes where her apple orchards once stood and the rest is history. Things happen for a reason sometimes... You get much better moolah for Champagne than apple juice anyway. She grew Chard and Pinot for Domain Chandon. Mary is quite a story teller and we were all enthralled by her stories hunkered down at a table in her small tasting room munching on fresh figs and prosciutto, cheeses, salume, olives, and delicious bread from a local bakery that was studded with meyer lemon and rosemary. We had to move the table inside when we were attacked by "meat bees", yellow jackets that love lunch meat as much as I do. Amelia had been stung three separate times over the last 3 weeks – once when her daughter stepped on a nest on the ground and trying to protect her daughter, age 3, but she was stung 34 times. The venom builds up in the body and you really run the risk of being in huge trouble if you start swelling up around your face or tongue.

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The Mexican pickers call them "Carneros", meat eaters, and usually during harvest they swarm over the ripe grapes that are just picked. I chose this Pinot for the Intense shipment because it is well, intense. This Pinot utilizes fruit from all 4 of Mary's vineyards in Anderson Valley, a true cuvee. She makes this Pinot in the "New World" style striving for huge fruit extraction, and this huge Pinot accomplished that desire. The aromas are of freshly picked strawberries, licorice, and cocoa. The palate becomes silky when the wine hits the tongue, with blackberries, cherry cordial, cassis, huckleberry, and pomegranate. Huge extended finish with soft tannins. This was a perfect wine to serve with the cheeses we brought for lunch, Morbier, aged Gouda, and a nutty imported Swiss.

Del Bondio Cabernet Sauvignon

Rutherford Napa Valley 2006 Regular \$22.99

Del Bondio Syrah

Oakville Napa Valley 2006 Regular \$19.99

"A Century in the Making" is how brothers Jim Del Bondio and Rich Poncia describe their wine making program. The Del Bondio Family's Napa Valley vineyards are located on land they have owned since the late 1800s. A twenty acre Oakville vineyard with Estate Syrah and Chardonnay has been farmed for more than one hundred years and a thirty-one acre Cabernet Sauvignon vineyard in Rutherford for half that time. The love and care for the land is of utmost importance to the family and with the completion of the Winery in Rutherford, the family has realized their dream of producing organically grown estate wines from the amazing fruit they've been farming for more than a century.

Through four generations of growing practices and with the best organically grown fruit, Del Bondio knows what they are doing, and they do it well. Del Bondio winery's location in the middle of the Rutherford appellation is one of the most desirable in Napa Valley. The famous "Rutherford Bench" was a name given to distinguish the long, snaky alluvial band stretching along the west side of the middle of Napa Valley. This area is where many of the premier Cabernet Sauvignon Vineyards are grown. Rutherford wines are associated with "Rutherford Dust" a quality of earthy, dusty, oaky flavor. Getting a Organic, Rutherford Cabernet with a little age on it for under \$25 bucks? Does the Garage take care of you or what? The nose produces aromas of licorice, black cherry, and cigar box. On the palate, we get flavors of dusty briar, blackberry, black pepper, black olive, saddle leather, and figs. Classic old school Rutherford Cab

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Well balanced, silky mouth feel, firm tannin with a hit of dusty chocolate truffle on the finish. Serve with a great New York Strip steak. The Syrah from Oakville utilizes native yeast strains and has an extended cold soak to lure out all the amazing color that Syrah can produce. Lavender on the nose coupled with spicy black pepper and wet stone pop out after a good swirl. Super dark in the glass and intense on the palate. Blackberry pie, wet forest floor, black pepper, cassis, coffee, mint, and pencil lead push the charge of flavors to a finish of cocoa and black currant. Smooth and silky with soft tannin. I had this wine with Lamb Chops grilled on the Weber with rosemary and lots of garlic, yum.

Stephen Ross Zinfandel

Dante Dusi Vineyard Paso Robles 2006 \$23.99

Taking his first and middle names, Steve Dooley created this wine company in 1996 after leaving the esteemed Edna Valley Vineyards. He got his start in the wine business shoveling pumice from fermentation tanks at Martini Winery in Napa in the '70's, eventually moving up the ladder to assistant winemaker during a ten year stint there. After stops in South Africa and Australia, he went on to become the head winemaker at Edna Valley, at the time, one of California's hottest Chardonnay labels. Steve secured the grapes for this wine from the famous Dusi vineyard in Paso, planted in 1945 in the Templeton Gap area, 30 miles from the Pacific. Hot days and cool nights make this vineyard special, along with teeny yields of only 2 tons per acre, the flavors are intense. A rich and floral wine, deep garnet in color, aromas of dried rose petal, raspberry, cranberry, and clove. Spicy oak and black pepper start off the palate that leads into chocolate caramel ice cream, black cherry, raspberry, cranberry, and baking spice. Moderate tannin with great acidity, this wine is a great food wine, especially served with Santa Maria Style Tri Tip grilled over oak wood.

Atrea Old Soul Red

Mendocino County 2007 \$21.99

Made by the Mendocino icon, John Fetzer at Saracina Vineyards in Hopland, this is now the fourth Fetzer the Garage has done business with. His brothers Danny (Jeriko), and Jim (Ceago), and sister, Patty (Patiana) all wound up making wine in Mendocino after the Fetzer's sold the behemoth namesake winery to Brown Forman in 1992. John was the President and CEO, overseeing the Fetzer production rise from 200k cases to 2.5 million. Winemaker, Alex MacGregor, hosted Amelia and I on our trip up to Mendocino on their patio at the beautiful facility where we tasted all of their yummy wines, tried out the estate olive oil and estate honey. This is a blend of 43% Zinfandel, 20% Petite Sirah, 19% Syrah, and 18% Malbec.

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Alex learned how to make wine under the tutelage of the famous Napa winemaker and consultant Dave Ramey (you may recall how his wife accidentally dumped almost an entire bottle of red wine on me during a Passover meal a few years ago at Jeff Morgan's (Wine Enthusiast) house). Dark ruby in color, the nose offers up aromas of sandalwood, anise, and black pepper. The flavors are extracted and jammy – without being over ripe and prune. Blueberry compote, flint, plum, raspberry, and cedar all dance on the tongue leading to a juicy, extended finish with a gush of creamy oak and mild tannin on the finish. We drank this with grilled skirt steak with a side of fresh roasted porcini mushrooms at Josh's house in Ukiah. Perfect.

Rivino Sangiovese

Mendocino County 2008 \$24.99

I discovered this winery through Josh on our trip to Mendocino. We set up an appointment at the end of our first day up there and Amelia and I were a bit buzzed from the earlier 4 tastings. We sort of poured out of the car.... This is a small family winery run by Jason and Suzanne McConnell. Jason is the winemaker, Suzanne is the money lady – both by tracking it in the winery and by having inherited the property from her father, the Shrader Ranch Vineyard. They sit on 200 acres of vineyard (!) and select the best blocks for their own label, selling the rest of the grapes to other wineries. Amelia and I instantly took a liking to this couple, Jason being a very funny irreverent sort of Canadian bloke, Suzanne starting off shy and reserved but opening up later as we sat on the patio trying wine after wine overlooking the amazing view of vineyards weaving down to the Russian River. I had to twist Jason's arm a bit to let this Sangio go to us at this price. What a wine! I am going to let Jason describe this wine in his own words:

“First you will notice the glistening red currant color as you swirl this viscous treat in your glass. Then as you begin to analyze what aromas trigger your senses ... you instead start to stray and imagine what you may desire for your next meal ... a fresh garden salad with strawberry vinaigrette dressing ... a herb coated pork tenderloin ... or maybe it's time to open that last jar of canned cherries that took so long to pit ... but was so worth the work”. Man has a way with words, no?

The aroma of freshly picked strawberries, leather, and mineral come forth from the glass. Flavors of rich, over ripe plums, wet slate, strawberry a la mode, vanilla, black cherry, and blueberry round out the palate. Nice acid and smooth tannin on the finish.