



RED & WHITE SUMMER WINE CLUB



Bray Vineyards “The Hussy” White Blend

Amador County 2009 \$15.99

Bray Vineyards “Vinho Tinto” Red Blend

Amador County 2007 \$21.99

Talk 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.

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The Tinto is a blend of Touriga Nacional, Tinta Cao, Souza, Tinta Roriz, and Alvarelhao. These Portuguese varietals typically are found in traditional Port, and Bray does make one. John Hoddy, the winemaker, saw that these grapes would make a great red table wine as well and here you go. Only 13.8% alcohol, this is a great summer red wine to pair with a hamburger by the pool or with BBQ'd Tri Tip. It is so nice to see interesting wines being made so well. Medium bodied, garnet in color, the aroma is of mineral and strawberry. Black pepper, blackberry, pencil lead, and a hint of earth mingle on the palate. The finish is gentle with very little tannin but great acidity.

Vino Noceto Sangiovese

Amador County 2008 \$22.99

Frivolo (Noceto) Moscato Bianco

Amador County 2010 \$18.99

This winery pretty much does Sangiovese, and they does them right. A few other Italian varietals mixed in with a Zinfandel and the fun and yummy Moscato, these guys are having fun and making great wine. In 1984, Jim & Suzy Gullett began the pursuit of their dream with a vague, but well-researched, idea of growing grapes. They purchased 21 acres in Amador County's Shenandoah Valley, in the Sierra foothills' gold country. They added another 18.5 adjacent acres with an 1887 ranch house several years later. “Our objective became to grow a noble grape variety and make it into a distinctive, accessible table wine,” asserted Jim. He understood that Shenandoah Valley required warm weather grapes. Candidates were the Rhone varieties, central Italian varieties, and Zinfandel. Jim noted, “We have a predisposition toward being different. That, the seeming glut of Zinfandel, and market confusion about Syrah led us to Sangiovese or Aglianico.”

After much discussion with the folks at UC Davis, acquiring quality Aglianico budwood seemed beyond their capabilities. They had located Sangiovese Grosso at Montevina and three Sangiovese clones of uncertain parentage at UC Davis and planted vineyard. Sangiovese is the primary grape of the Chianti Classico of Tuscany and they make their Sangio in that style – medium bodied, perfect food wines. Famed wine writer, Dan Berger states that this Sangiovese is the best made in California. It has hints of chocolate mixed in with cherry, cranberry, and leather. I also pick up the classic Amador “bramble” flavors found in most Zins grown there – a sort of stemmy/woody character. Great acid on the finish tends to conger up a big plate of pasta and red sauce to pair with this wine. The Moscato is a super fun summer white that is off dry and a bit “spritzzy”. Lower in alcohol than most white wines at a mere 7% - you can drink an entire bottle yourself in 95 degree weather and not feel blotto. I know – I've done it. Perfect hot tub wine. Stone fruit, jasmine, meyer lemons....yum. Perfect wine to serve as an aperitif with a cheese plate or gazpacho.

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Relativity Merlot

Napa Valley \$24.99

From the Jaeger Family Vineyards, where William Jaeger owns 1130 acres planted to grapes – including the 5th largest parcel in Napa County at 582 acres. Started in the mid 1960's and later turned into Freemark Abbey (which has sold numerous times since), finally morphing into Rutherford Hill Winery up near Auberge du Soliel – one of the most outrageous views in Napa Valley. This Merlot comes from a pretty nice pedigree, as you will agree when you pop the cork on this sucker and throw back a glass. Rich and chocolaty – you will see how dark the wine is in the glass. This is the way Napa Merlot should taste. A nose of blackberry, coffee, and pepper, with flavors of plums, leather, espresso bean, black pepper, and more rich cocoa. The finish is extended with subtle vanilla and soft tannin.

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.