



RED & WHITE FALL WINE CLUB



Mary Elke Brut Sparkling Wine

NV Mendocino County \$21.99

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 Mendocino: 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 loosing 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. This wine went perfectly with the cheese and prosciutto. Made from both Pinot and Chardonnay, the wine is made in the "Methode Champenoise", fermentation in the bottle just like the fancy Champagnes of France. And it tastes like it too. This is the best priced sparkling wine I have ever tasted. Yeasty with a hint of mineral, small bubbles, and a crisp and clean finish with a hint of sweetness on the end.

Susan Fields Chardonnay

Santa Barbara 2008 \$17.99

I chose 2 Chardonnay wines for the Club that were made in a very similar style but sourced from distinctly different growing regions to show you how "terroir" effects flavor. This wine is made from Santa Barbara grapes by Jim Porter using 30% new French oak barrel fermentation and partial malolactic. Most wine folks always state that Central Coast Chard has a pronounced "Lemon/Limey" flavor profile and this wine is indicative to that statement. Meyer lemon, lime jello, pear, and green apple all burst forth on the palate after aromas of honeysuckle, buttered toast, and melon. Clean and well balanced – only subtle oak can be detected – with a stony mineral component on the crisp finish. Serve with lemon chicken, triple crème brie, or grilled shrimp.

Horse and Plow Chardonnay

Mendocino County 2010 \$14.99

Horse and Plow is a small husband and wife run winery in Santa Rosa that focuses on making handcrafted wines exclusively from organic and biodynamic grapes. Chris Condos and Suzanne Hagens started Horse & Plow in 2008 making only 600 cases of wine and are currently making 2500 cases. Chris started making wine in 1995 at Pine Ridge Winery in Napa Valley. He is also co-owner of Vinum Cellars, which he started in 1997, as well as the winemaker for Kathryn Kennedy Winery. Suzanne's first harvest was in 1998 at Comte Armand in Pommard, with California experience at David Bruce and Goldeneye. She is also the owner and winemaker for Lutea, founded in 2004, which produces organically grown pinot noir. They utilize organic farming, small lot fermentations and traditional techniques to make balanced, food friendly and site specific wines. Their goal is to make world class wines from organically grown grapes. They feel that in addition to the environmental benefits of organic farming, the resulting wines show more varietal character and sense of place. All wines are made naturally from vineyard to bottle. McFadden Farm is located at the northern end of Potter Valley in Mendocino County. Potter Valley lies on the edge of the Mendocino National Forest and by the headwaters of the Russian River.

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For 37 years, Guinness McFadden has been farming all his vineyards organically. He grows a mix of certified organic grapevines, herbs, rice and cattle. Organic farms sustain diverse ecosystems with higher populations of plants, insects and animals that encourage healthy, well balanced vineyards. To supplement his eco-friendly vision of sustainable agriculture, Guinness built a hydro electric power plant in 1983, capable of powering 100 homes and in 2005 he installed solar panels to make the farm completely energy sufficient. Totally a Mendo attitude. Man, it is “crunchy” up thar in them there hills. But I must admit, like the vineyard, this wine is clean. Aged in French oak barrels, sur-lee (on its yeasts), this wine shows the cool climate style of Mendo Chardonnay with mineral and crisp granny smith apple on the nose, more mineral, apple pie, peach, pears, quince, and melon on the palate. The mouth feel is lush and rich but the finish is crisp and tart. A wonderful combination. This wine is rich enough to serve with pork tenderloin, crab cakes, or even BBQ'd oysters.

Brother Elmo's Red Wine

California 2008 \$14.99

This is a second label from Ty Caton, esteemed winemaker from Sonoma. I really am amazed at how some of these crazy blends can be SO good and so inexpensive. 36% Petite Sirah, 23% Syrah, 16% Merlot, 9% Petite Verdot, 9% Cabernet Sauvignon, 4% Cabernet Franc, and 3% Malbec. Eight different grape varieties. Most of these grapes came from his estate vineyard on Mayacama Mt., some from Monterey, and some from Paso Robles – hence the California appellation. Ty's family bought the Mayacama Mt. property in 1981 and Ty himself developed the site of 107 acres into 40 acres of vineyard. This wine tastes fantastic with dark garnet color, aromas of huckleberry, plums, and toasty oak. The flavors of black currant, blueberry, plums, tobacco, and leather lead into an extracted and complex finish with chocolate and coffee hints right on the end with mild tannin. Serve with Yankee Pot Roast.

Madrigal Vineyards Petite Sirah

Napa Valley 2006 \$24.99

From one of the best wineries in Napa known for their Petite, this bottle of juice ROCKS. Just down the street from the Garage, the winery opened in 2007 but the Madrigal family has been in the grape business since 1933 when Chris Madrigal's grandfather migrated from Mexico to work in the vineyards. Chris's father, Jesus, one of 12 siblings, started a vineyard management business. They farmed some of the best vineyards in the valley and they got hooked up on some sick Petite fruit from some of their customers – obviously knowing what select old vine blocks would have the best fruit for the blend they wanted to put together. Three million bucks later, the Madrigals finally have the winery of their dreams – built all on the dreams of a migrant worker 85 years ago. What a great story. This wine is inky black in the glass with aromas of briar, blueberry, crushed stone, and chocolate. On the palate I get blueberry pie, wet slate, tobacco, espresso bean, and leather. Rich and lush, with a lovely mouth feel minus the bracing, peel-off-your-tooth-enamel tannins normally indicative of monster Petite Sirah, this one is elegant and reserved. Well balanced yet, will still stain your teeth purple. Have with Roasted Leg of Lamb, Beef Stew, or after dinner with a fat cigar.

Susan Fields “Sumptuous” Bordeaux Blend

Paso Robles 2007 \$19.99

These Susan Fields wines actually come from a customer, if you can believe that – with some coincidences – of course. We got a call from Vickie one day stating that she was in town from Maryland – an old customer – and that she actually had a wine label and wanted to know if WE were interested in buying HER wine for the store. That was a new one, for sure. I said hell yes, come on down and we had a tasting appointment set up for the next day. It turns out that these folks have a unique business in MD acting as “sales agents” for small out of state wineries under 11k case production that since 2006, could ship direct to MD. They went one step further, they developed their own label, hiring a winemaker, Jim Porter – who I had known since we sold his wine under a label that was now defunct due to his divorce. He had this unbelievable Pinot we shared in a club some years back – William James, sold to me by his niece who lived in Sacramento. Well the niece kinda had allegiances to the ex-wife and things went south for William James Cellars. But his wine was awesome. So we tasted through the line up and I selected this Bordeaux blend, the Chard, and their Pinot for this club shipment. All at great pricing and all fantastic. It is sold only in MD and to me, period. This is a blend of 53% Cabernet, 19% Merlot, 10% Malbec, and 9% Petite Verdot. If it had any Cab Franc then it would have all five of the “Noble Grapes” of Bordeaux. Extremely well balanced and elegant in structure, medium bodied in flavor and color, the nose is a perfect rendition of Bordeaux. Cassis, plum, leather, cedar, and black pepper. The flavors mirror the nose with blackberry, cigar, and black olive. A hint of mint on the smooth finish with mild tannins. Prime Rib, baby.....