



# ALL RED WINE CLUB

## **Cali 351 “Old Faithful” Red Blend**

Napa Valley 2007 \$21.99

This is one of the most unique red wines I tasted recently. Mostly old Vine Zinfandel blended with Syrah and Pinot Noir. Named after Calistoga's elevation of 351 feet above sea level, the story about this wine is a bittersweet one. Several years ago we were all excited about a new resort that was to be built at the Silver Rose Winery and Inn property. The winery and Inn was sold to a group of investors and they had plans to completely raze the property and build this luxury resort, winery, and a restaurant right across the street from our other new luxury resort that just opened in Calistoga called Solage. Everybody was excited in town, especially us merchants because Calistoga has always had some difficulty getting tourists to actually drive those long 8 miles past St. Helena and spend some of their dollars in our town. So now we were going to have three new luxury resorts in the northern tip of the Valley if you also count the recently opened Calistoga Ranch. Calistoga was going upscale and becoming an important destination in the wine country. The Silver Rose property was especially desirable because way back when the site was getting permitted they had included a restaurant. In Napa Valley there are only two wineries that are allowed to serve food. Domain Chandon and V. Sattui are the only wineries that were grandfathered in with their restaurant and deli, respectfully, when Napa County enacted the Ag Preserve Ordinance. See, all the locals were getting a bit nervous 30 years ago when wine started getting popular and Napa Valley became a tourist destination that was rivaled only by Disneyland in California. The supervisors back in those days figured that all these new wineries that were getting built in the 1970s, if they had restaurants and started doing weddings, well this whole valley was going to be one huge parking lot. I mean, you have to see their point. While the Silver Rose site actually was permitted before that ordinance came down, but for some reason the owner never opened the restaurant that he was allowed to operate. The permit was still valid. What a gold mine, no? Though this group of investors bought the Silver Rose - before everything was completed and all the financing was secured they figured they'd better get started on their wine label. So they hired Nile Zacherley as the winemaker and he was getting huge scores in the wine press for his work at the Barnett Vineyards Winery. No expense was spared because this was going to be the wine label for this new luxury resort. They bought all the best barrels, secured contracts on some great vineyards, and started making some pretty amazing wine. This was right before the mortgage crisis and at the last minute all hell broke loose and Merrill Lynch who was the underwriter on all the financing pulled the plug and the whole deal was toast. Silver Rose winery is still there because the original owners got the property back but this new Phantom resort had made all this wine and now didn't have any place to sell it. The winemaker landed on his feet at the David Arthur winery, but what to do with all of this great juice? Well that's where I come in, as usual. The Wine Garage comes to the rescue once again.

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Looking back I have to chuckle to when we first started the business and all of Napa Valley's hoity-toity wineries had a knot in their panties because this dude opened a store selling wine for \$25 and less and he was not concentrating on selling exclusively Napa Valley wines. I remember I was asked to speak at the Calistoga Rotary club luncheon before we opened the store and some old dude in the back stood up when I was fielding questions from the audience and he very defiantly stated "do you actually think that this is a good idea selling non-Napa Valley wine for \$25 and less? People come to Napa Valley to buy and drink Napa Valley wine." I very calmly explained to this old geezer that when I lived in San Francisco all I had to do was walk around the corner to the local wine store to buy Napa Valley wine and that people come to Napa Valley to be IN Napa Valley and drink wine, and it doesn't necessarily have to be wine from Napa Valley that they are drinking. Everyone thought we were to make enemies here in the Valley. And look what happened, we became the outlet for a lot of hoity-toity wineries who couldn't sell their precious Napa Valley wines in Napa Valley. Okay, I'll get off my soapbox. I do love the label of this red blend named after the Old Faithful Geyser here in town. I was very impressed when I first tasted this wine, and I must say I don't think I've ever had Zinfandel and Pinot Noir blended together before. What a yummy wine this is, with delicious fruit components of blackberry, cranberry, currant, and spice. Hints of leather, bramble, cocoa powder, coffee, tobacco, smoke, and black pepper. What an intensely complex wine with very soft tannins that is immensely satisfying and very easy to drink. This wine pairs well with many foods from fried chicken all the way to roast prime rib of beef. My hats off to the winemaker to boldly combine these varietals together to produce this very unique and delicious wine.

## **Vigilance “Cimarron”**

Lake County 2008 \$14.99

This wine is a second label from Shannon Ridge Vineyards and my good friend Clay Shannon. It's named "Vigilance" because Clay is very vigilant about his farming techniques. He grows all his grapes sustainably using cover crops in the winter to invigorate the soils with nutrients, then has a flock of sheep that comes in to feed on all of those same cover crops in the spring as well as to control the weeds instead of using chemicals. These techniques have been proven to be very good for wine grapes. In fact, he sustains his vendors (me) as well. Just last week Margarita Shannon stopped by the store and delivered the proceeds of one of those weed-eating lawnmowers to me and I now have a nice big fat juicy leg of lamb and several racks in my freezer. The fruit from this wine came from several Hillside Vineyards in Lake County's Red Hills AVA. The Red Hills area of Lake County sits at the southern end of Clearlake,

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which is the largest natural lake west of the Mississippi. It was formed by a huge volcano millions of years ago, and the soils in the Red Hills area are, duh, red - obviously due to volcanic soil. When the cost of vineyard land in Napa Valley started to go through the roof in price, vintners started looking north to Lake County for areas that would produce good wine grapes. The Red Hills area was very unique because of the soils and also the elevation. It gets extremely hot in the summertime in Lake County but the evenings cool down to the winds coming off the lake which maintains good acidity in the wine grapes. This is a very unique blend of Zinfandel, Barbera, Syrah, Petite Sirah, Mourvedre, and Tempranillo. The entire staff, when we tasted this recently, loved this wine. It has juicy ripe fruit on the front palate, with a very unique finish up baking spice combined with nice acidity, which I feel is due to the Tempranillo. Tempranillo is the ubiquitous grape of Spain and goes into the classic Spanish Rioja. There's a fruity explosion when first sipping this wine. I get black cherry, blackberries, huckleberries, currant, and plums. In the mid-palate, espresso bean, dark chocolate, and smoky bacon show up. On the finish, spices overwhelmed the palate such as black pepper, cumin, allspice, and cinnamon. What a delicious wine for a measly 15 bucks, \$10 cheaper than what price shows up on Clay Shannon's website for this wine. I featured his Cabernet Sauvignon from his Vigilance label in the Red and White Club which, if you love this wine, you equally enjoy the Cabernet Sauvignon which is also priced affordably for \$19. This wine goes very well with all cuts of spring lamb, but especially the ones that helped fertilize the vineyard.

## **Wine Garage "GSM" Rhone Blend** North Coast 2007 \$24.99

This is a special bottling that Massimo and I blended together exclusively for the club. This is a blend of Syrah, Grenache, and Mourvedre - 33% of each varietal. The Syrah came from the Russian River vineyard that was one half Shiraz clone, and the other half Durrell clone on a hillside vineyard that is steeply terraced right off of Dry Creek Road. The Syrah and Mourvedre came from Clay Shannon's estate Vineyard in the High Valley section of Lake County, which is also steeply terraced and faces south west. We used 50% of new French oak in the wine was in barrel to half years. I love this wine, as you know the Rhone varietals are my favorite grapes. We picked the grapes very ripe at an average of around 27 brix, and in what a fruit bomb it turned out to be. I pick up lavender and smoky oak on the nose with a bit of earthiness reminiscent of walking in a forest just after a rain. The Grenache provides some sweet strawberry rhubarb pie, and the Mourvedre adds structure, tannin, and black pepper spiciness. We only bottled up around 60 cases of this blend because we're using the rest of these wines in the future blend coming out this fall.

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This is a very full-bodied wine that would be best served with a very hearty meal. I recently served this with a tri-tip roast barbecued on my Weber. I first marinated the meat with garlic, olive oil, and a dry rub of spices that included a tremendous amount of black pepper. The wine was perfectly matched to the roast.

## **Cru Pinot Noir** Central Coast 2007 \$19.99

The Cru label is one component of a larger wine group consisting of three brands. Winemaker Michael Levin, uses this brand to showcase Pinot Noir and Chardonnay grown from primarily Monterey County but sometimes he gets access to fruit sources from Santa Maria Valley and Santa Barbara County. Monterey County fruit consists mostly of these two varietals due to the very cool growing conditions which is necessary to produce outstanding Pinot Noir and Chardonnay. Michael is very knowledgeable regarding the Vineyards of the area, which blocks of those Vineyards produce the most optimal for, and has relationships with farmers that manage them. The knowledge of individual vineyards is crucial to producing great wine from this region and Michael often selects grapes from the middle rows - out of the brisk winds that are typified in the region - and then sometimes even selecting different blocks from those middle rows to achieve flavor profiles he seeks out his grapes.

This wine is cuvée from many different Vineyards from Monterey, Arroyo Grande, and Santa Barbara County. Much like the wine that goes into our jug program at the store where I source finished wine from big-name wineries but I cannot reveal because they don't want their name associated with the wine costs much much less than their juice normally sells for, Michael had been granted access to two very famous vineyards in the Santa Barbara region that he's forbidden to disclose. I guess it was a vineyard in the St. Rita Hills, and perhaps the Bien Nacito Vineyard. By using fruit from different Vineyards, different regions, different blocks, and different Pinot Noir clones, Michael has crafted a marriage of many components, in this case, an unbelievable result. When we recently tasted this wine at the store, the staff went crazy. This is a fantastic representation of a Pinot Noir cuvee that is fruit driven, perfectly in balance, and complex. The nose reminds me of floral black tea and berry pie. Dark in the glass, the mouth consists of a velvety texture. On the palate, I get cranberry, strawberries, black cherry, and red licorice. Smooth and silky, the mid-palate produces a hint of earthiness and bramble, in the long finish reminds me of cherry cordials. This wine was recently served at a dinner party paired with chicken liver pâté and baked brie. The Cru Pinot Noir was a perfect choice.



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## **Monticello Vineyards Cabernet Franc** Napa Valley 2007 \$24.99

This winery is run and owned by the Corley family and the Oak Knoll district of southern Napa Valley. In 1969 Jay Corley purchased the site which was to become their Home Ranch Vineyard which is planted to Cabernet Franc, Chardonnay, Pinot Noir, Merlot, and Syrah. Later they purchased vineyard land in St. Helena, Rutherford, and Yountville all planted to Cabernet Sauvignon. The three Corley sons all have a hand in Monticello Vineyards. Kevin is the vineyard dude, Chris is the winemaker, and Stephen is the sales guy. We've had many selections in the club from this winery and this bottle is a special purchase. Found on their website selling for \$38, we got a screaming deal.

This Cabernet Franc displays all of the proper characteristics of this grape. Normally used in a Bordeaux style blend, this varietal typically adds richness and a dark chocolate component to a cuvée. The texture of this wine is rich with a slight grip of tannin on the finish. Monticello grows for different clones of Cabernet Franc on their estate Vineyard. They typically vinify each one of these clones separately so they can evaluate each one against the other. The 2007 version was a slight departure of the last few vintages because they normally always blend components of the four different clones together, usually always coming up with a wine that is hundred percent Cabernet Franc. This vintage corporations to small amount of their estate grown Merlot and Syrah.

The winemaker was struck by the positive impact of these other grape varieties had on the finished wine while still allowing the Cabernet Franc to maintain its full varietal expression. This one is very dark and the glass and has a nose of bittersweet chocolate, cherry blossom, ripe plums. Very rich and silky with very smooth tannin, this one is extremely easy to drink it pairs well with many different foods. Blueberries, mocha, black cherry, with a slight hint a pipe tobacco combine for a yummy mouthful of juice. The finish is long and smooth with some nice acidity to tie all of the components together. I would turn this wine with elegant meal of Filet Mignon or that Tuesday night dinner of spaghetti and meatballs.

## **Vino con Brio Winery "Matzin"** **Old Vine Zinfandel** Lodi 2007 \$15.99

From our old friends at the Vino con Brio Winery in Lodi, this delicious old Vine Zinfandel was sourced from the Locust Tree Vineyard that was planted in 1943 during the Second World War. Rumor has it that a group of Italian women planted the crooked rows while their husbands were off at war. These are head pruned, dry farmed classic Lodi Zin grapes that produces very low yields, which in turn produces very flavorful wine. Everything was hand harvested from the 67-year-old Vineyard, carefully selecting the ripest grape bunches. This winery is a member of the "Lodi Rules of Sustainable Winegrowing" Association. This is a very unique, and precedent setting, set of guidelines that has never been done to an entire grape growing region before. This is California's first sustainable winegrowing standard that have been peer reviewed by scientists, academics, and environmentalists which is being implemented on a region-wide basis. The "Lodi Winegrowers Workbook", is a set of rules that are designed to lead to measurable improvements in environmental health of the surrounding ecosystem, inhabitants, and overall wine quality. Participating growers can get their Vineyards certified as producing sustainably grown wine grapes. The program is third-party certified which means the standards have been reviewed and endorsed by an organization not connected to the Lodi Woodbridge Winegrape Commission. These wineries are certified by Protected Harvest, an environmental nonprofit organization that endorses farmers' use of stringent environmental farming standards. The majority of the standards set in the guideline concerns natural buffer areas surrounding the Vineyards, and the use of pesticides. Don't confuse "sustainable" with "organic" because they are completely different. I love the idea of this entire region wide program because here Napa Valley, you could have a completely organic vineyard surrounded by other vineyards that flood their ground with "Roundup", the ubiquitous weed-killer used in most farming practices in California. It leeches onto the sustainable organic vineyard anyway and into the soil which eventually finds its way into the water table. A few years ago they did a test of the water which flows in the Napa River and stated that it was perhaps the most polluted water in Northern California due to all of the chemicals being used in the Vineyards. When Emma was a newborn I asked the vineyard down below our house to notify me when they were spraying sulfur on the vines so we could close her windows in her room. Growing wine grapes can have a nasty effect on the environment. The Zinfandel has the classic Lodi characteristics from an older vineyard. Lots of spice. The nose is reminiscent of the cloves, allspice, fennel, and blackberry bramble. I swear, a friend and I thought we detected some spicy Italian sausage wafting up to our nose. I guess the thought of those Italian women in 1943 planting those crooked rows of Zinfandel grapes somehow made me think of the big bowl of pasta with big chunks of sausage swimming in a delicious tomato sauce. Once you get past that, I get cherries covered in dusty cocoa powder, black pepper and charred oak. Soft tannin and a long finish round out this delicious, sustainably farmed, Old Vine Zin.