

INTENSE RED WINE CLUB



CS Cellars Zinfandel "Old Vine"

Napa Valley 2006 \$24.99

This wine is from my friend Chris Sweetanos. You know him from past wines that were featured in the club under the label "Panacea". He got sued by some dude who also had rights to the name "Panacea", but very wisely decided not to fight him in court with the lawyers, so he decided to just change the name of the winery. This is the very first vintage of Chris's wine under the CS Cellars label. The grapes came from a vineyard just south of St. Helena that was owned by Carl Doumani, the former owner of Stag's Leap Cellars, but the vineyard was ripped out and is now used as a soccer field. See, the vineyard was over 100 years old and produced very, very low yields due to its age, and economically for Carl, didn't make sense to continue to grow grapes on the site. He wanted to use the land which was rite off Highway 29 to develop a small Business Park but the city of St. Helena didn't really like this idea very much. St. Helena is a very tough place to conduct business, as I have unfortunately experienced myself. This was the last vintage for that very old Zinfandel Vineyard. Chris then found a Zinfandel Vineyard in Lodi that he liked very much and told me the following story when he harvested grapes just last fall. He was unfamiliar with the vineyard and decided to camp out there in his motor home checking the sugar levels very closely since Zinfandel is a very tricky grape to make wine from. When you pick the fruit is perhaps the most important factor when making wine. The pick date was on a Monday and a storm was brewing on the horizon. He instructed the vineyard manager to pick early in the morning and he was going to have the grapes shipped to his crush facility in Napa. They beat the storm in the morning and the pick bins were loaded onto the flatbed but were not covered. Wouldn't you know it, during transportation it started raining and then the truck broke down on Highway 5 and all the fruit was getting rained on. Chris was following in his motor home and at about the same time the truck broke down the awning from the motor home broke loose going 65 mph and cart wheeled onto the roof and punctured a hole right above the driver's area so when Chris was driving back - after they ripped off the awning along the side of the highway - he was getting rained on, just like all of the Zinfandel fruit. When he got to Napa and pulled off the highway onto Sage Canyon Road, it is a rather sharp turn and when he completed the turn, apparently there had been a lot of water leaking into the roof area of the motor home and it all sloshed down on Chris's head like a fire hose. Chris wasn't having a very good day. I remember when he was telling me this story and tasting me on this delicious Napa Zinfandel at Dos Compadres in Napa I practically fell off my barstool laughing. Oh well, the life of the winemaker... it's not all fancy tasting menus, release parties, and wine auctions. This wine is very interesting in its complexity. It shows dusty cocoa and black cherry on the nose with perhaps a chocolate covered cherry dusted with cocoa powder on the palate.

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Boysenberry, blackberry, and raspberry are represented here with a hint of cayenne and black pepper on the finish. I also get some herbal quality, such as sage, and an earthy, saddle leather component while sipping my second class. This is a great barbecue wine, from hamburgers to filet mignon. Chris had dried off his grapes, dried out his motor home, and dried off his shaggy blond hair when he got back to the winery, then did what great winemakers do - made some more Zinfandel.

Kaena "Hale" Rhone Blend

Santa Barbara County 2007 \$17.99

This delicious blend of Sarah and Grenache is made by Mikael Siguin, they had winemaker for Beckman Estates in the Santa Ynez Valley in Santa Barbara County. This is his own label that he makes at Beckman. A lot of times part of the compensation package for winemaker is allowing them to make their own label using the facilities of the winery where they work. Of course, it all occurs after they have clocked out for the day and I'm sure he has spent many long days in the cellar. I had initially met Michael on a buying trip to Santa Barbara five years ago and tasted through his wines and love them all. At that time he was the assistant winemaker at Beckman and since Steve Beckman was the winemaker he felt that he couldn't move up the ladder and left to become one of the winemakers at the Fess Parker Winery. Well, Steve couldn't really live without Mikael and hired him back when he offered him the head winemaking position. Mikael was very cool and introduced me to a bunch of other assistant winemakers who were making wine for their own label at the now famous "ghetto" in Buellton. It essentially was a warehouse behind a dry cleaning store that had winemaking equipment in it. I have purchased Mikael's wines throughout the years and he has been quite successful with his label and has secured very high scores in the wine spectator. Several years ago, Joy, Emma, and I decided to combine a wine buying trip with a vacation and we rented a motor home for the journey. Big mistake. While driving down Highway 101, I hit a bump in the road and the television that Emma was watching a video on came flying out of his cabinet, missing Joy's head by inches and smashed on the floor. That cost \$350 bucks. We spent one night at the El Capitan State Park which is right on the Pacific Ocean, and after Emma and Joy went to sleep, I was enjoying a glass or two of wine around the campfire when I got a call on my cell phone from Mikael explaining there was an earthquake off the coast in Northern California and there was a tsunami warning for the entire coastline. He told me that I had better head to higher ground. I went to the camp host and pounded on the door of his motor home and said, "there was an earthquake and a tsunami warning has been issued for the whole coast, have you heard anything?" I'll never forget the look on his face standing there in the doorway of his motor home in his boxers... "tsunami???"

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While there was no tidal wave that night it sure made things interesting. The next night we drove the motor home to Mikael's house and parked it on his front yard and camped right there. We had dinner at his house with his wife and newborn child. I awoke early and Joy and Emma were still sleeping in the back of the motor home so I left them there and drove back up to Napa Valley. When we got home it was raining so I decided to back up the motor home up my steep driveway so the door would be closer to the garage so I wouldn't get so soaked unloading. Unfortunately the angle of the driveway was too steep and the bumper ripped right off while simultaneously puncturing a hole on the chassis. Then when I returned the motor home I was responsible for washing the exterior, which was really fun (not). All told, we could have spent two weeks in Maui, including airfare, for what it cost me to rent and pay for the damages of that stupid motor home. This is what I call a juicy wine. Very fruity and full-bodied. Roasted meat and blackberry pie on the nose with a very dark garnet color. Super concentrated and extracted, I get blueberries, plums, mineral, and bacon fat on the palate. Monster wine that I can't seem to stop drinking when it's in my glass. The finish lasts a full 60 seconds. What an incredibly delicious fruit bomb for only \$18. This wine is best served with a very ripe cheese or a pulled pork sandwich with a spicy sauce.

Sapphire Hill Vineyards Pinot Noir

Russian River Valley 2003 \$24.99

I am so happy to be able to bring you a Russian River Valley Pinot Noir in our price range that has so little age to it. This wine is seven years old and still shows such great fruit. Even I was shocked when I first tasted it. This wine is amazing. I thought my eyes were deceiving me when I saw that the label had the vintage year 2003 on it. First of all, I don't get tasted on seven-year-old Pinot Noir very often, or actually, never before this wine. Sapphire Hill Vineyards traces its roots back to one of General Vallejo's original land grant rancheros in the early 1800s. Gen. Vallejo was the last Mexican governor of California before the famous bear flag revolt of 1846 when he was overthrown and California was for a very short period its own Republic. In 1834, Gen. Vallejo granted the Rancho to his brother-in-law, Capt. John Cooper who then sold 120 acres to his distant relative Lucy Sullivan and her husband Levi Grove in 1869. Sapphire Hill Winery is located on the original homestead of Lucy and Levi Grove. My contact at this winery is Ann Giere, one of four partners of the estate. She found a pallet of this wine in the back of her case goods storage facility and she didn't want to have several vintages of Pinot Noir out in the market at the same time. Lucky you. I chose this wine for the Intense Red Club due to, well, it's intensity. Concentrated, fruit forward, and complex, this wine is very special. Super rich and velvety on the palate, I get blueberries, raspberries, leather, tobacco, and a hint of truffle in the mouth. Very dark in color, with violets and cranberries on the nose. Normally older wines lose a lot of their fruit characteristics but not this wine. This would pair beautifully with lamb chops encrusted with fresh herbs.

Epiphany "Gypsy" Rhone Blend

Santa Barbara County 2006 \$24.99

Epiphany Syrah "F Block" Rhone Blend

Santa Barbara County 2006 \$24.99

This is a second label from the Fess Parker Winery in the Santa Ynez Valley. Fess Parker passed away just two weeks after I visited the winery last month on a buying trip. You may recall that we were trying to start another wine garage a few years back in Santa Barbara. Half of my college career was spent in Santa Barbara and I absolutely fell in love with that town. Everyone who goes to college in Santa Barbara wants to stay there after they graduate but there just aren't enough jobs. So I figured why not create your own job. How cool would it be to live half the year in Santa Barbara and half the year in Napa Valley? I had this fantasy that I would take flying lessons, buy a plane and commute there, then move well it sure was nice fantasy the family there for the entire summer then come back to Napa Valley during the school year. Well it sure was nice fantasy, because the city of Santa Barbara is harder to conduct business in than Napa Valley and San Francisco combined. Unbelievable roadblocks were erected at every turn, which I seem to jump over until we were just about to get our use permit when the planning department bozos came out to look at the parking lot that they required me to have for the store, even though there was plenty of street parking right in front of the store. It had to be off-street within 350 feet of the store. They were going to make me spend \$50,000 building a nice wall around the parking lot with planting boxes on top. When the inspectors came they told me that there wasn't a sidewalk on that street and someone was in a wheelchair it would be dangerous for them to wheel themselves to the storefront so they wanted me to build curb, gutter, and sidewalk all the way to the parking lot and then they said that since it would look stupid to have a sidewalk to up only half of the block they wanted me just finish off the street and connect the gutter to the sewer system three times. Well that was a million-dollar roadblock that I just couldn't jump over. And looking back, had we opened the store down there just before the economic crisis we may have just gone completely bankrupt. I sure wish I had the \$150,000 I spent fighting the city of Santa Barbara in the bank right now, however. Anyway you should've seen the hoops that the city of Santa Barbara made Fess Parker jump through to open up his Doubletree resort town they're situated right on the beach. That was 20 years ago and opened up just as I was leaving Santa Barbara to finish school in San Francisco. Fess Parker, you may recall was the actor who played Daniel Boone in the TV series back when I was a kid. I recently found a photo of myself when I was five or six all duded out with the coonskin cap and deerskin shirt. God I loved the TV show. When I went to the winery to taste these wines I met with Tim Snyder, the general manager of the winery and the husband of Ashley Parker, Fess Parker's daughter. Santa Barbara County makes some of the best Rhône varieties in California. The Epiphany Syrah is a special wine that was reserved exclusively for their wine club and when I tasted it I just had to secure it to share with you folks. This is a huge wine. Very masculine, extracted, and super concentrated.

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Nearly black in the glass, it is reminiscent of roasted herbs, smoky bacon, crushed stones, and dried lavender. This wine is both fruity and earthy, with fig, porcini mushroom, and plum pudding all coming together on the palate at the same time. This wine has a very long finish that comes together with beautiful acid and minerality. The Epiphany Gypsy is a blend of Syrah, Mourvedre, Carignane, and Petite Sirah. This wine is softer than the F Block due to the Grenache component providing sweet strawberry jam, blueberries, and dried rose petals on the nose. But this is still a big wine, but more feminine than the Syrah. Very rich and velvety on the palate with a slight hint of rosemary and thyme combined with the soft sweet fruit. This is a very elegant and sophisticated wine that is perfectly balanced. I would serve both of these wines with the big fat rib eye steak with a dollop of herb butter.

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.

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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. 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 varieties together to produce this very unique and delicious wine.