



RED & WHITE WINE CLUB



Greenwood Ridge Riesling Mendocino County 2007 \$14.99

I believe this is the first Riesling I ever sent in the club. Greenwood Ridge Riesling has been on the shelf in the store for years now. It is one of my very favorite Rieslings of all time. It normally sells for much more than \$15 but I got a screaming deal so I could not resist sending this wine out to you. Greenwood Ridge Winery sits atop a gorgeous mountain in the Anderson Valley region of Mendocino County. It takes forever to get there but well worth the drive if you're ever visiting the area. This is the site of the California wine tasting championships that I attended several years ago with my friend Emile Hawley, the son of Bill Hawley from Random Ridge Winery. Emile has worked as a Sommelier for many years and I thought he would be a good partner to match up with in the professional division of the tasting championships. The night before the competition, we both independently stayed up way too late partying with friends. We met at a breakfast spot to fill our stomachs before the day of wine-tasting and I don't know who looked greener, Emile or I. We headed up to the winery, and boy those curvy mountain roads were not pleasant considering how hung over we were. In the competition you are presented wines, blind, and you're required to choose what the varietal of the wine is. You get extra points for picking what region it came from and even more extra points if you correctly state what the vintage was. We breezed through the first round, actually receiving extra points for several wines that we chose the right vintage and region that it was grown in. We moved into the finals it was a whole different story. We are presented a wine that looked, smelled, tasted like the Petite Sirah. We were both certain that the wine in our mouths was this varietal. We thought we are doing pretty well until the bags came off the wines and we were completely wrong. The wine that we thought was Petite Sirah was actually Pinot Noir. Now, if some wine salesman tasted me on this particular wine telling me that it was Pinot Noir I would have thrown him out of the store on his ear. It was so completely un Pinot Noir-like it was laughable. This is a perfect aperitif wine. There is 1.9% residual sugar but it is balanced with 9 grams of acid so it starts off slightly off-dry on the palate but ends crisp and clean. It straddles the border between dry and off dry. I get spiced apple flavors on the palate, with peach, apricot, and lime. The nose has a very floral honeysuckle aroma with a long crisp finish. Serve this with spicy Thai food or shrimp curry.

Fess Parker "Ashley's Vineyard" **Chardonnay** Santa Rita Hills 2007 \$24.99

Fess Parker Pinot Noir Santa Barbara County 2008 \$17.99

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 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. It had to be off-street and 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 to 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 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. This is from the vineyard named after Ashley in the Santa Rita Hills just outside of Santa Maria. This growing region is very unique because it sits atop of these ridges just above the fog line so the vines get plenty of sun but it's an extremely cool growing region, perfect for Chardonnay and Pinot Noir.

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The Chardonnay Was aged in 40% new French oak on its lees for 10 months. The wine is creamy in the mouth with lemon curd, cinnamon, apple pie, and buttered toast. The nose offers honey, banana cream pie. What a rich wine that is perfectly balanced with bright acidity on the finish but leaving your palate with the essence of vanilla and a slight hint of toasty oak. This is a perfect pairing with cracked crab and sourdough bread both slathered with creamy butter. The Pinot Noir is from Santa Barbara County as the label says, but 59% of the fruit came from Ashley's Vineyard and the remainder from the famous Bien Nacido Vineyard in the Santa Maria Valley. This wine was aged 11 months and 33% new French oak barrels. Strawberries and cherries on the nose, with raspberry, pomegranate, and huckleberry flavors. The finish gives me a tad hint of earthiness combined with a touch of mocha. This is a wine that pairs perfectly with a duck breast with a sauce based on fruit or with lamb chops.

Cali 351 Chardonnay

Napa Valley 2006 \$19.99

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?

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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. 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 was wowed by this Chardonnay when I first tasted it. It comes from the same Vineyard up on Diamond Mtn where I source the fruit for our Hillside Cabernet. It's situated 1200 feet above the valley floor and grown on volcanic soils where the Vineyard faces east and gets sun all day long. This wine was mostly fermented in 23% new French oak barrels. 12% was tank fermented to maintain its vibrant acidity, and 78% of the wine was inoculated to promote malolactic fermentation. This one is perfectly balanced between creamy butter and crisp acidity. I get lemon and lime on the nose with perhaps some pineapple was well. It starts off rich and creamy and finishes tart and lively with just a hint of toasty oak. On the palate I taste other tropical fruits such as guava, banana, and marmalade. This is a first-class Napa Valley Chardonnay made by rock-star winemaker for only 20 bucks. This is a great cheese wine as an appetizer, or with a lemony veal picata.

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Vigilance Cabernet Sauvignon

Lake County 2007 \$18.99

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 which created a very multilayered and complex wine. Full-bodied and rich, this Cabernet exhibits all of the classic characteristics such as earthy tobacco, Cedar, spicy black pepper, and mocha. This is one of those wines that provides different flavors with every sip. The finish is long and satisfying with a hint of black cherry and spicy vanilla oak. And absolutely delicious wine for under \$20. It goes very well with all cuts of spring lamb, but especially the ones that helped fertilize the vineyard.

JRE Zinfandel

Napa Valley 2007 \$13.99

I was so shocked to find this wine, delicious as it is, from St Helena grapes that I can share with you for a measly fourteen bucks. Unbelievable. John Robert Eppler is a Texan who started his interest in wine working for Neiman Marcus in Dallas. He moved west to California in 1986 and started a wine label named "Zoom" – which was a Garage staple in our early years – but under new ownership. John sold Zoom in 2001 to this crazy dude, also from Texas, who ran the label into the ground, then sold it to a Doctor from Lake County whom I knew, and I believe they are also done. That first year as Zoom, John picked a ton and a half of Zinfandel grapes from St Helena by himself and made his first release. He was hooked. Many vintages later, I introduce you to the JRE label. This is an elegant, very flavorful, well balanced Zinfandel that goes well with food – not overpowering it. Dried cherry, raspberry, plums, and cocoa on the first sip, followed by espresso bean, tobacco, and saddle leather. Long finish with nice tannin and acidity. At 15.2 alcohol, remarkably not "hot" at all. This is a great BBQ wine. Throw any old thang on the grill – or better yet, serve this with some good old fashioned Texas Brisket.