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Wine Club of Cantiga Wineworks



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Classic California

After I described our wine style to a first-time visitor recently, the gentleman thought for a moment then asked, “So, you do sort of a *nouveau* style?”

I had to chuckle, because this perception shows just how short our wine memory is in California. Surely, those who know our wine would agree that our emphasis is on the pure, unadulterated fruit and natural acidity (thanks to our non-malolactic method). Oak, while an essential step in the aging process, takes a back seat in the flavor profile. Sugar is non-existent, except in the rare instances of our dessert and fortified wines. Stylistically, our wines are aligned much more closely with European (Old World) wines than with the young, soft, oaky, jammy wines—plumped up with residual sugar—that have come to represent the California style. Not that there is anything wrong with wines made in this style—but let’s be clear about what should be considered “nouveau.” Again, our wine memory is short.

Rewind almost a half century to 1976—the famous Paris Wine Tasting, better known as the Judgement of Paris. California wine was put on the map when French judges conducted a blind tasting of top Chardonnays and Bordeaux-style reds from France and Napa. California wines placed at the top of both categories, much to the chagrin of the French. The winner of the white category was the 1973 Chateau Montelena Chardonnay, made by Mike Grgich. The red winner was the 1973 Stag’s Leap Cabernet. The Chardonnay was non-malolactic. Both wines were considered very much “French style,” as the judges were unable to identify them as Californian when tasted blind.

Prior to the 1980s, the aesthetic of California wine was much more European. Malolactic fermentation was relatively rare, as it wasn’t deemed necessary. Our long growing season and reliable California sunshine have always ensured a well-ripened crop with a good balance of sugar and acidity, which isn’t always a given in France.

But then, in the mid-to-late 1980s, a shift occurred. Wine became more market-driven, and wine marketing gurus recognized the potential of targeting a broader range of consumers raised on sweeter foods and drinks—the soda pop culture. It was also recognized that malolactic fermentation could reduce the time to market for a vintage, so that practice made economic sense for many wineries. It wasn’t long before the rest of the New World caught on to this trend, particularly Australia and South America. There are even European wineries today that produce wines in this style for export to the United States. We met some winemakers in Italy several years ago who let us try their domestic and import wines side-by-side. The US-bound wines were soft, heavy and slightly sweet, while their domestic wines were classic Italian style—dry (no sugar) and fruit-forward with excellent acidity—very much like Cantiga wines. The winemakers themselves

found the American affinity for sugar rather amusing and didn't much care for wines designed for the American palate.

As we always say, though, a good wine is one that you like. There are some excellently crafted wines made in the New World style, no doubt about it. However, as a general rule, most of these wines will only age for a few years. If you happen to open a California or other New World wine from 1990-2010, chances are it will be spoiled or at least beyond its prime. However, if you are fortunate enough to taste a California wine pre-mid-1980s, it could very well be spectacular. Likewise, Cantiga's earliest vintages continue to shine, as they adhere to the older style of California winemaking.

So, in answer to the question, no--we're not *nouveau*. Quite the opposite!

In this shipment:

2017 Zinfandel, Herbert Vineyard (New Release)

Harvest Brix: 25.3 pH: 3.49 TA: 7.09 Alc: 15.6% RS: 0% ML: 0%
Cases produced: 244 Barrel age: 3 years in mostly neutral European oak

Finally, our new vintage—thanks for your patience! This Italian-style wine exhibits bright raspberry and pomegranate fruit, anise spice, excellent structure and acidity. This is our 15th vintage from the historic Herbert Vineyard. Like other vintages, this one is outstanding with BBQ (particularly pork), as well as Italian or Indian cuisine. It is our “go-to” for tomato-based pasta dishes and gourmet pizza.

2018 Grenache, Estate (New Release)

Harvest Brix: 26.6 pH: 3.88 TA: 4.52 Alc: 15.2% RS: 0.0% ML: 0%
Cases produced: 278 Barrel age: 2 years in mostly neutral European oak

Our Grenache is a dry, Spanish-varietal red wine with abundant strawberry characteristics. Its medium body and lush, lingering fruit make it a perfect warm weather wine. It goes really nicely with many Spanish, Mexican and even French dishes, and can stand up to some heat. One of our favorite dishes to pair with this wine is Spanish paella. It is also fabulous with carnitas or fajitas!

2014 Petite Sirah, Estate (Library)*

Harvest Brix: 25.3 pH: 3.55 TA: 6.93 Alc: 15.0% RS: 0% ML: 0%
Cases produced: 147 Barrel age: 3 years in mostly neutral European oak

We are pleased to offer several vintages of special “Library” releases of our Estate Petite Sirah. We crafted these wines in our signature, classic European style and have been patiently aging them for you. Ranging between 8 and 12 years old, the wines demonstrate the benefits of careful cellaring—they have settled into a graceful balance while still maintaining the blackberry fruit qualities of their youth. Additionally, layers of complexity are unfolding that knock our socks off! These will be wonderful served with grilled lamb and other BBQ, as well as fresh pasta with Kalamata olives and Feta cheese.

**LIBRARY WINES: We have a spectacular array of “Library” vintages of our Estate Petite Sirah for you! Our Cellar Groupies will receive the 2014 vintage; our Professional Winos will receive two bottles the 2013; and our Ambassadors will receive a four-vintage vertical: 2010 through 2013! Requests for “add-ons” will be considered on a first come, first served basis.*