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“Traditionally-Built” Wines: Big, Bold & Beautiful

Some of you might be familiar with the bestselling novel series by Alexander McCall Smith, entitled *The No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency*. We are big fans of these amusing and heartwarming books. The series centers around a young woman from Botswana who starts up her own detective agency, using her natural intuition and her inheritance from her late father. Her goal is to help people in their lives—to solve things that trouble them. Precious Ramotswe, being a full-figured woman, describes herself as “traditionally built”—a body image of which she is proud.

The wines in this month's shipment can also be considered “traditionally built.” All three are full-bodied and robust. They range from dark to dark-red grape varieties with plenty of tannin to give them structure. However, unlike many modern-style “big reds” that have plenty of mouth-filling tannin but are often lacking in grace and finesse, our traditionally-built reds possess the roundness that comes from age, and the balance and refinement that come from the naturally higher acidity level of classic wines.

To elaborate a little, many big modern reds are released after relatively short aging, and their tannins are coarse and pronounced. These wines are often plumped up and rounded out with residual sugar, which can mask the harshness of young tannins. Some may have their tannins further enhanced with intense aging in new oak, or with the addition of tannins. One could argue that these modern-style big reds are *macho* wines. They swagger and assert themselves. This is not to say that these wines are without appeal, but they are definitely *not* traditionally built and are typically less suited to pairing with food. In contrast, more traditionally structured big reds have generous yet smoother, well-aged tannins, subtle oak treatment, balanced acidity and no residual sugar. Like Precious Ramotswe, these traditionally-built wines are not only buxom and bold, they also possess depth, gentleness and subtlety. They glide rather than swagger, and negotiate rather than assert themselves.

And like our favorite lady detective, our wines can at least contribute to improving lives and making people's troubles feel a little less overwhelming!

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In this shipment:

2015 Syrah, Baby Rattlesnake Vineyard

Harvest Brix: 26.4 pH: 3.82 TA: 5.30 Alc: 15.4% RS: 0% ML: 0%
Cases produced: 225 Barrel age: 3 years in mostly neutral European oak

We offered this wine as a “pre-release” to our club a year ago, and now we are pleased to include it once again so you can enjoy the benefit of its more venerable age. This elegant, “noble” variety is known for its deep color and firm tannins. Grown in our area, Syrah displays lush blackberry and chocolate notes. Most winemakers age Syrah in a high percentage of new oak barrels, imparting smoke and vanilla tones as well as additional tannin. There is also a tendency to leave residual sugar to mask the harsh tannins that the wine exhibits in its youth, and to further soften the mouth feel through malolactic fermentation. In contrast, we prefer to make more of a French-style Syrah by retaining its natural acidity through our non-malolactic technique, fermenting it until fully dry, aging it in mostly neutral barrels to showcase its deep, vibrant fruit characteristics, and letting it rest for several years to soften the abundant tannins.

For our Professional Winos and Ambassadors of Oenos: Your Baby Rattlesnake Syrah offering will be split between our current 2015 vintage and our amazing 2011 Library vintage!

2015 Petite Sirah, Estate

Harvest Brix: 25.0 pH: 3.47 TA: 5.90 Alc: 14.5% RS: 0.0% ML: 0%
Cases produced: 224 Barrel age: 3 years in mostly neutral European oak

Petite Sirah (also known as Durif) has historically been dismissed as a “peasant wine”—overly muscular and lacking in elegance. However, grown in the Sierra Foothills at high elevation and farmed for low yield and high quality, this grape has excellent structure (balanced acidity and tannin) and is not overly tannic as it can be in hotter climates. Our Estate Petite Sirah consistently displays hearty tannins, intense blackberry notes, and excellent acidity. With age, this wine acquires an amazing elegance. We typically release it after five or six years, by which time the tannins have softened to a velvety texture. It has outstanding aging potential—even our earliest vintages keep improving and developing new complexities.

2015 Cabernet Sauvignon, El Dorado

Harvest Brix: 25.5 pH: 3.62 TA: 5.82 Alc: 14.5% RS: 0% ML: 0%
Cases produced: 171 Barrel age: 3 years in mostly neutral European oak

Cabernet Sauvignon is a bit of an enigma in the “big wine” category. Whereas most tannin-rich wines are “dark fruit” varieties, Cabernet is actually a “red fruit” grape. Its predominant fruit characteristic is cherry. Some Cabernets lean toward dark cherry notes, but some can be brighter. Either way, this grape has a lot going on. Lighter on tannin than the other two wines in your shipment, it compensates with intensity of flavor and acidity. Cabernet is high in a compound called *pyrazine*, which can impart an earthiness or a bell-pepper note—another contributor to its fullness of flavor. This is another wine that benefits from ample age. We have released our various vintages of this wine after anywhere from 5 to 10 years of aging. These wines also perform spectacularly in the cellar—on occasion we’ll open a 20-year-old bottle or older, and it is still youthful! **See our special limited time offer of our 2008 Cabernet Sauvignon, available as an add-on to this shipment only.**