



# Merry Monks

Wine Club of Cantiga Wineworks

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## Nobles and Peasants

Your fall wine club shipment features two nobles and a peasant. You might wonder how these categories apply to wine. There is a historical basis, but are these titles still relevant today?

A handful of grape varieties have been referred to over the years as *noble grapes*. According to Wikipedia, “Noble grapes are any grapes traditionally associated with the highest quality wines. Noble grapes are said to retain their character no matter where they are planted.” The grapes that are traditionally considered noble are Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc, Riesling, Cabernet Sauvignon, Pinot Noir, Merlot and Syrah. These are also known as *international varieties*, in that they have been successfully and widely colonized in winegrowing regions throughout the world.

### *A little background...*

The wine grapes crowned as nobility are, as you may have noticed, all French varieties with the exception of Riesling. This is no coincidence. France (particularly Bordeaux) rose to prominence as the premiere European wine region during the Colonial period, when Europe was expanding its sphere of influence and establishing broad networks of trade relations. Hugh Johnson’s *The Story of Wine* (Octopus Publishing House, 1989) is a fascinating read if you are interested in the history of wine. He outlines how, after centuries of exporting bulk wine to England, the French began in the 17<sup>th</sup> century to market wines under the names of the estates from which they were produced. Around this time, the wine bottle and cork closure were developed—a more controlled and high-end alternative to the jug. The Dutch were the chief merchants and traders of Europe at that time, and they partnered with the French to engage in export and grow the demand and prices for French wine.

According to Vinepair (Vinepair.com), during colonial times “...the French strategically exported their best commodity: luxury. While many other colonial powers also had extravagant courts, none were as famed as those of the French. Louis XIV became known for his lavish parties and decadent lifestyle and as word of this opulence spread, many others wanted a part of it. With that reputation for extravagance came a desire for all it came with: the clothes, the jewels and of course, the wine.”

It is therefore understandable that the most popular wines of the day dictated which grape varieties would be most widely planted. These French “nobles” were able to thrive and retain their distinct characteristics in the wine regions of the New World. Although our times are marked by great diversity in grape varieties and an interest in novelties, many wine drinkers regularly return to the classics—those time-tested wines that are highly respected and unlikely to disappoint.

### *Are titles justified?*

As we mentioned earlier, your shipment contains two noble varieties and one that is not. The nobles are our 2014 Cabernet Sauvignon, *El Dorado* and 2014 Syrah, *El Dorado*. Somewhat lower in pedigree is the third wine, our 2011 Library Petite Sirah, *Estate*. Why did this variety not make the noble cut?

Discovered by Francois Durif in his greenhouse in the 1860s, Petite Sirah is thought to be the result of cross-pollination of Syrah with Peloursin. The result is a bold, inky grape high in tannin and acidity. Petite Sirah is widely grown and very popular in California; in fact, California and Israel are the leading producers of high quality Petite Sirah. Wine snobs often look at this grape as a second-class citizen, for some reason, which has

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led to the formation of the *P.S. I Love You* organization. This advocacy group is dedicated to elevating Petite Sirah to the status of a noble grape of California.

From our perspective, Petite Sirah is much more deserving of such a crown than Merlot, which does not have the acidity and balance of Petite Sirah. Merlot has trouble standing on its own without blending, which is not the case for Petite Sirah. In fact, when made in a traditional European style such as we do at Cantiga, Petite Sirah has remarkable elegance, quality and longevity!

May the wines in this shipment bring a touch of nobility to your holiday celebrations and feasts! *À votre santé!*

*Included in your summer shipment:*

**2014 Syrah, El Dorado (Pre-release)**

Harvest Brix: 25.4      pH: 3.68      TA: 5.18      Alc: 15.0%      RS: 0.0%      ML: 0%  
Cases produced: 159      Aging: 3 years in mostly neutral European oak

We are pleased to pre-release our new vintage of El Dorado Syrah. Grown in Sierra Oaks Vineyard, Fair Play, this wine is rich and bold yet elegant, with blackberry fruit and hints of cocoa. Enjoy with roast beef, rosemary lamb or wild game, wild rice pilaf, lentils, and root vegetables.

**2014 Cabernet Sauvignon, El Dorado (Pre-release)**

Harvest Brix: 25.6      pH: 3.52      TA: 5.56      Alc: 14.9%      RS: 0.0%      ML: 0%  
Cases produced: 189      Aging: 3 years in mostly neutral European oak

A release of Cantiga Cabernet is always much anticipated, and this new vintage comes just in time for the holidays! The grapes come from two Fair Play vineyards: Sierra Oaks and Goedeck. The wine is dry, full-bodied and elegantly structured, with classic acidity and cherry fruit. It is excellent with beef, mushroom dishes, roasted garlic potatoes, blue cheese and walnuts.

**2011 Library Petite Sirah, Estate (Reserved for wine club)**

Harvest Brix: 25.5      pH: 3.58      TA: 7.00      Alc: 14.9%      RS: 0.0%      ML: 0%  
Cases produced: 261      Aging: 3 years in mostly neutral European oak

As a special treat, we are offering a small reserve of an older vintage of our beloved Estate Petite Sirah that we saved just for our club. It is dry, rich and full-bodied with blackberry, currant and spice. Enjoy with Italian food, BBQ, hearty stews, and with rich red meats, particularly wild game.

*Our very best wishes for a safe and enjoyable holiday season! Thank you for your continued support!*