



Reserve Club

Normally in this column I write about the current state of the wine market but I am taking a break from that this quarter because there is little new news to report. Sales of wines in the \$75+ range are down, wines in the \$15 to \$25 range are up. Our own experience with the fourth quarter is that volume increased and the average transaction value decreased. Contrary to what many in our business believe, this is not all bad.

For those willing to spend more for a bottle, the prices are starting to fall and this quarter's offering is a good example. Originally I only intended to offer two wines but at the end of the year I was able to buy three for the price of two as distributors slashed prices to move inventory.

The unexpected theme that developed in this offering is that all the wines are from hillside vineyards. While I resist the temptation to say that mountain fruit is better than that of vineyards grown on flatter elevations, the results are more dramatic. For this offering we will look at two Napa bottlings, on hillside and one from bench land vineyards and a rare Spanish wine made by a modern winemaker from South Africa.

"Thar's gold in them thar' hills..."

California has always held a certain allure for settlers but at no time was that more apparent than the gold rush of 1848-1855. Over 300,000 people moved to California (then a territory) and a few found vast wealth in the hills around San Francisco. For those who arrived with little and found less, they were forced to return to the only livelihood they knew, which for most was agriculture.

At those times everything was planted on the valley floor because most farms produced food crops and a few vines to make homemade wine. As time passed the wine business took off and many farmers replanted crops with vines. For over a hundred years most of the vines planted in California were at low elevations because the land was easier to work. Then in the 1960s American winemakers started visiting European wine regions and discovered that the best wines were typically grown on the steepest vineyards. Since that time there has been a movement to plant hillside

vineyards and now the prestige bottles of many wineries in Napa are based on fruit from these sites. This quarter we will look at the results of what it means to grow fruit in such extreme conditions.

Locations:

Orlando 407.895.9463

1223 North Orange Ave.
Orlando FL 32804

Lakeland 863.644.8181

425 South Florida Ave.
Lakeland FL 33814

Windermere 407.876.9463

428 Main Street
Windermere FL 34786

St. Augustine 904.461.0060

128 Seagrove Main St.
St. Augustine Beach, FL 32080

The Terraces at Rock Quarry

Cabernet Sauvignon 2005

\$55 per bottle

Winery Owner: Tim Crull
First vintage: 1985
Location: Rutherford hills, California
Winemakers: Tim Crull
Winery Production: 2035 cases
Production of Cabernet Sauvignon: 395

Like many Napa wineries the story of Terraces Vineyards at Rock Quarry has a beginning, an end, and another beginning. The original property was bought in 1881 by Charles Scheggia, who intended to grow Zinfandel grapes on the eastern edge of what is now the Rutherford appellation. The winery was built in 1885 but was destroyed by a fire before the first harvest was made. Mr. Scheggia was also replanting the vineyard due to a phylloxera outbreak and the fire ruined him and the estate was abandoned.

In 1920 the Werle family bought the property for the whopping sum of \$10 and set out to replant the vineyards. During their ownership they also opened a rock quarry and sold blocks of tufa to builders who used the stone to construct many of the famous buildings in St. Helena. In the 1970s the Werle family sold 21 acres to Wayne Hogue who established The Terraces. It was Wayne's friend Charlie Wagner, of Caymus Vineyards, who recognized the quality of the Zinfandel and Cabernet grapes growing on the site and contracted to buy the fruit and take cuttings to propagate his vineyards as well as the Grace Family Vineyard.

In 1993 the Werle family sold the property to the Crull family, who renamed the estate Quarry Vineyards. The next year they entered into a long term agreement with Beringer Vineyards to replant the property and provide them with fruit. Then in 2001 the Crull's bought the adjacent Hogue property, reuniting the vineyard and renaming the estate The Terraces at Rock Quarry. The contract with Beringer Blass continues and now Nickel & Nickle has started to buy fruit for a Quarry Vineyard bottling of Cabernet Sauvignon.

What makes the wines from Terraces so brilliant is their intensity without being heavy. When I visited the property in 2007 I was struck by how steep the vineyards are and vines, which are

planted in nutrient weak tufa (decomposed granite) struggle to survive. There were a total of eight lots selected for this wine and the average yield was less than two tons per acre. For his own wines Timm Crull selects fruit from the oldest blocks of Zinfandel and Cabernet Sauvignon in the vineyard. For the Cab the vineyard was planted in 1981, using the old clonal material from the property and St. George rootstock to prevent another phylloxera outbreak.

After harvest the fruit is allowed to cold soak for two to four days to extract extra color without too much tannin. Fermentation takes place in small, open-top fermentors and the cap is punched down by hand. Once the wine is dry it is moved to oak barrels, of which 35% are new. What I also find fascinating is that Timm uses hybrid barrels; where the staves of the barrel are American oak and the heads are French oak. The cost of these barrels is about half of that of a comparable, pure French oak barrel. The wine is allowed to rest in barrel for thirty months before bottling.

For the final blend Timm uses a smattering of other grapes to round out the wine; the 2005 being blended with 5% Zinfandel, 2% Cabernet Franc and 3% Petite Verdot. The result is a wine with medium garnet color that slightly stains the tears as they roll down the glass. The nose is subtle combination of kirsch, raspberry jam, cedar, sage and dried thyme, with some notes of mocha and toasted macarons. In the mouth this wine shows a great balance of bright fruit and alcohol, with moderate tannins framing the sides. Good now, this wine will age gracefully for ten years and can be served with any beef dish but also works great with grilled tuna or even smoked salmon.

David Ramey

Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon

\$55 per bottle

Winery Owner: David Ramey

First vintage of this wine: 2005

Location: Multiple sites, Napa Valley AVA

Winemaker: David Ramey

Winery Production: 50,000 cases

Production of this Cabernet Sauvignon: 5,000 cases

This wine breaks one of my rules about a Reserve selection, we can buy more than 10 cases, but I wanted a great example to compare and contrast with the two hillside bottlings in this offering. This wine does not come from exclusively from hillside vineyards but rather a combination of sloped and bench land sites. The result is a wine that is a bit less structured but in no way less serious.

So it is no secret that I am a David Ramey fan and I do consider him the best all-around winemaker in California. Many of the greatest wines I have ever tasted from California, including a transcendental 1987 Matanzas Creek Merlot and 1994 Dominus were made by Dave. After stints at those wineries, as well as Chalk Hill and Rudd, he launched his own winery with the goal of producing brilliant wines from great vineyard sites. Critics hail his accomplishments but more important, customers come back to buy the wines because they good.

This is the first time Ramey has produced a straight Napa Valley Cabernet, intending it to be on the same qualitative tier as his appellation Chardonnays. It is a wine that is built to demonstrate the "Ramey" style and display classic Napa Valley character. For this wine Dave has chosen several vineyards, including Snowden (33% of the blend) just outside the Rutherford AVA; Somerston Vineyard (28% of the blend) from the eastern hills near Chiles Valley; Jerico Canyon (19%), Larkmead (15%) near Calistoga and 5% from a vineyard right behind Brix restaurant. Dave uses these varied sources like a chef uses different ingredients to build layers of flavor. Unlike many of the superstar winemakers in Napa Valley, Dave does not believe in harvesting fruit that has reached the desiccated, raisin state and adding water back in the fermentor. His approach is to find the right

balance between acidity and sugar and pick them. He selects vineyards where he can achieve this level of ripeness and have total control over the management and harvest of the fruit.

Winemaking at Ramey is focused on producing as much flavor as possible but with a gentle extraction of color and tannin. The fruit is chilled before fermentation and is allowed to cold soak for three days before the must is warmed to allow fermentation to begin. Dave believes in racking the wine off the skins into barrel before the wine is completely dry, allowing the finish of alcoholic fermentation and malolactic fermentation to occur in wood. For this wine all the barrels used for the aging process are French, with forty-percent new. The wine is barreled down for twenty months then bottled without filtration or fining.

When it comes time to drink this wine I recommend two hours of decanting time and make sure it is around sixty-five degrees. The color is almost jet black/purple with an exotic nose of, cherries confit, dried plums, vanilla, clove, mocha and some dusty, earthy qualities. In the mouth this is a big wine, with the texture filling every nook and cranny of your taste buds with a combination of ripe fruits and barrel/wood flavors. The size is held in check by some dusty tannins that rise up mid-palate and hold the fruit in check into the long, oak dominated finish. This is a young wine and needs some time to fully evolve but is so rich and luscious that you may have a hard time keeping your hands off it. Serve this wine with a filet mignon topped with Gorgonzola dolce and mushroom demi-glace or with a Tuscan seasoned porterhouse. With proper decanting you can drink this wine now but it will also age in the cellar for seven years to ten years.

2005 Sadie Family Farms Torroja del Priorat

\$69 per bottle

Winery Owner: Eben Sadie & Dominik Huber

Founded: 2001

Location: Priorat, Spain

Total Acreage Owned or Leased: 20 acres (multiple sites)

Winemaker: Eben Sadie

Production of this wine: 233 cases

In a first for our Reserve Club I have selected a wine from Spain made by my friend Eben Sadie, who I consider the most passionate winemaker I have ever met. During a private luncheon with him last year I came to understand what it means to be driven by a single purpose, in his case to make wines that display the perfect sense of original terroir. He is most famous for his wines from his native South Africa but he also produces a miniscule amount of wine from the Priorat region of Spain, which he considers one of the two great terroirs of the world.

For those not familiar with the Priorat it is one of the greatest regions in the world and the source of very unique wines. In this wine Eben has managed to capture the true essence of the region and do so in a truly modern wine.

The Priorat region has produced wine for centuries but it was not until the 1980s that the region started to gain a world class reputation. Then Rene Barbier founded Clos Mogador and started to catch the attention of wine critics. The region swelled with wineries but despite the growth still only harvests about 2400 tons of fruit per year. By comparison Rioja produces almost 400,000 tons of fruit per year. The producers claim the difference in the wines comes from the soil of the zone, a grey/brown slate called licorella. This soil, which is low in organic material, causes great stress on the vine and the result is very small, concentrated berries. This effect is amplified by the dry, hot climate of the area which causes even greater stress on the vines. Often the wines from this area have a cooked, or prune-y quality but Eben and CO-owner Dominik Huber have learned that selecting vineyards with very old vines helps to temper the effects of soil and climate.

For Eben Family Farms the owners have selected over a dozen vineyard sites planted to

Carignane and Grenache, where sixty-five to one-hundred-year-old vines are planted in steep, sheltered expositions. They produce three wines with each signifying a different growing condition. Their top wine, Dits del Terra, is produced primarily from vineyards that face south with one parcel that faces north. Arbossar is produced from exclusively north facing vineyards and Torroja del Priorat is from a combination of vineyards that lie around the village where the winery is located.

For all the wines the fruit is handled exactly the same. In an attempt to preserve the natural acidity in the grapes, harvest is conducted from daybreak to early morning, with the fruit picked into small lug baskets then transported by refrigerated truck to the winery. At the time the grapes are refrigerated until the next morning. Every cluster is then sorted by hand with only the ripest, cleanest berries placed into the fermentor, where the alcoholic fermentation is allowed to start naturally. The alcoholic fermentation lasts for three weeks then the grape skins are allowed to continue macerating for two to three weeks more. The wine is then moved to a basket press where only the free run juice is racked to French oak barrels, of which 40% are new. The wine is then aged for 24 months before it is bottled without fining or filtration.

When you pour this wine I recommend decanting for an hour and chilling to 60 degrees. The color is deep purple with some staining of the tears. The nose is a heady combination of baked blackberry cobbler, sage leaves, dried thyme, soy sauce, tamarind and smokey, charred bread. In the mouth this wine is very dense and textured, with the mineral quality of the licorella rising in the mid-palate. There are some tannins but they are soft and integrated so you could drink this wine now or age it for three to seven years. Serve this wine with a grilled leg of lamb or sausage with lentils.