



Reserve Club

Now is the time

The March Gallup Poll Survey of Consumer Spending shows that those who earn more than \$90,000 a year are spending forty-percent less this year, per day, than the same time last year. Being a retailer I have no problem believing this as our own sales have certainly slowed down. What is encouraging is now wineries, importers and distributors are starting to see the sudden drop in business. For most of last year I sensed a slowdown, even when the numbers were strong, but by the end of the year things were definitely slower. Now wineries are starting to support lower prices in order to move product through the distribution system. So what does that mean for us now? Well to start, it is an excellent time to put away stocks of many wines whose prices have fallen as much as 25%. The current vintages, 2005 and 2006 are very good years and many great wines were made. This quarter alone I was able to negotiate substantial discounts on the Reserve selections. In addition, the current vintages from Europe, 2007 Bordeaux and Burgundy excluded, are very good and many producers and importers are offsetting the exchange rate to make the wines more affordable. Look for very good buys from Italy, the Rhone and Spain coming this year.

The selections this quarter

For the selections this quarter I tried to offer a fine balance between popular style and high minded idealism. I am never content to play the role of merchant and merely take your money for the products that I sell. For me it is a calling to promote the wines of people who also feel that making great, distinctive wines is their calling. For that reason I am grateful you allow me this opportunity.

The first selection, Adobe Road Cabernet Sauvignon is a very typical example of modern Napa Cab. It is very ripe, broad and rich, with plenty of oak to hold in the ample fruit. As you will read it is a wine that you can drink now or age for a few years.

The second selection is one of my high minded, artisan wines that I feel is sometimes lost in the stampede for critical points. It is the Scholium Project Garden of Babylon, a Petite Sirah with an amazing story.

Finally, there is our only imported selection, the Mendel Unus, a wine that demonstrates why Argentina is the hottest spot

in the world for red wine right now. This is a wine that drinks gorgeously now, with an hour in the decanter, or will cellar nicely for at least a decade. There are a lot of expensive wines from the region but this is one that is truly the cream of the crop.

Locations:

Orlando 407.895.9463

1223 North Orange Ave.
Orlando FL 32804

Lakeland 863.644.8181

4525 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

2005 Adobe Road Cabernet Sauvignon “Napa”

\$55 per bottle

Winery Owner: Kevin & Debra Buckler

First vintage: 1999

Location: Petaluma, CA (Sonoma)

Winemakers: Michael Scorsone

Winery Production: 6000 cases

Production of Cabernet Sauvignon: 645 cases

Although this winery is new for us they have been around a decade. Founded by Porsche endurance racer Kevin Buckler, his full throttle approach to life is demonstrated in his wines and this Cabernet is a perfect place to become familiar with his wines.

Like many of the current critical darlings, this winery started in the garage, both literally and figuratively. Kevin Buckler made his fortune selling high performance auto parts and racing Porsches but in his spare time made a small amount of wine for friends and family. At the urging of friends he decided to launch into commercial production in 1999 and quickly secured grape contracts to many of the most prestigious vineyards in Sonoma County.

For their first five years of production Buckler focused on vineyards in Sonoma but in 2005 he seized the opportunity to buy a grape contract on a vineyard in the Coombsville area of Napa Valley. This area, at the southern end of the valley east of the city of Napa, is suddenly on everyone's radar as the site to get very ripe Cabernet Sauvignon that is naturally very balanced.

Lying on a plateau under Mt. George, this region sits in one of the coolest sections of Napa Valley but above the cloud line. The fruit from the area, mostly Cabernet Sauvignon, ripens very slowly and achieves high levels of sugar while maintaining high levels of acidity. Many producers like to blend Coombsville fruit with warmer Napa fruit as a way of gaining deep color as well as natural acidity for their red fruited, softer wines. There are also a number of producers who like the raw material unblended as it takes well to oak and provides the deep color and ripe aromas the critics embrace. In recent years winemakers Andy Erickson, of Screaming Eagle and Aaron Pott of Quintessa have launched wines made from Coombsville fruit that are getting a lot of pre-release buzz in the valley.

Fruit for the wines from Adobe Road are hand harvested and sorted before being destemmed. As is the norm they cold soak the fruit for two to three days to extract additional color then allow the fermentors to warm up to start fermentation. Fermentation occurs in small, five ton, open top fermentors and the cap is punched down twice a day until the wine is dry (no sugar left.) When the alcoholic fermentation is complete the wine is basket pressed and barreled down in 100% new, French oak where it undergoes malolactic fermentation.

During the aging process the wine is racked twice, once off the gross lees then a second time to guard against reduction. (Reduction is a binding of sulphur compounds to the color compounds in the absence of oxygen.) After nineteen months in barrel the wine is bottled without filtration or fining.

When you open this wine you want to decant it for half-an-hour to open it up. The color is deep garnet with slightly purple tones and the nose is an enticing combination of sweet raspberry jam, red currants, black cherries, molasses, clove, cedar and toasted brown marshmallows. In the mouth this wine displays impressive thickness and texture, with the ripe fruit flavors framed more by wood tannins than acidity. Although some of the impressive critical press on this wine says it will age for ten years or more, I am not convinced. This rich, almost decadent wine is so good now I don't think it will age more than five to seven years even in proper storage conditions.

You can drink this wine young with roast pork, particularly if served with a dried cherry reduction or try with a braised brisket with lots of onions and shallots.

2006 Scholium Project Garden of Babylon

\$45 per bottle

Winery Owner: Abe Schoener

First vintage of this wine: 2000

Location: Suisun Valley, CA (Tenbrink Winery)

Winemaker: Abe Schoener

Winery Production: 2000 cases

Production of this Cabernet Sauvignon: 600 cases

When making the selections for the Reserve Club I like to have a wine each quarter that reaches to the extremes. I don't think there is a wine, or a winemaker, who pushes the limits more than Abe Schoener and his numerous Scholium Project releases. What is really amazing is not that he pushes boundaries with his winemaking, it is that he is a radical non-interventionist. He is one of the few winemakers who is not afraid to let the wine develop naturally in barrel so that he can bottle one that is already evolved and yet will continue to age for a very long time.

The fruit for this wine, which is mostly Petite Sirah, comes from the Tenbrink Vineyard in Suisun Valley. The Suisun Valley lies due east of Napa, across the Mayacamus Mountains in the vast river delta near Sacramento. Like most farms of the area they grow walnuts, fruit trees, tomatoes and of course, fifty acres of grape vines. The vineyard became semi-famous when Abe Schoener made a single vineyard Petite Sirah from the fruit in 2003, while working for Luna Vineyards. As a thank you the Tenbrinks gave Abe a ton of fruit and he quickly made a wine he named Babylon, recognizing the eden that is the Suisun Valley. Shortly after Abe launched into Scholium Project full time and as of the 2008 harvest moved into the new Tenbrink Winery. In addition to making his wines he also manages the Tenbrink's own wines and Maldonado Vineyards at the winery.

So what draws me to this wine is that it is one part mad science and an equal part of raw natural beauty. The bulk of the wine, 90% give or take, is Petite Sirah so dark it can bend light. Abe readily admits that this fruit was harvested very ripe, between 28 and 29 brix. In order to get it to ferment he had to add water to the must, a very common but rarely discussed technique. The science is that yeast will not begin to do their stuff if the concentration of sugar is too high. This is particularly important because Abe prefers to use

native yeast, not purchased stuff. Once the fermentation is complete the wine goes into French oak barrels, all neutral (at least three years old.)

Now the mad scientist part comes in during the aging, or **elevage**. Conventional wisdom says that once the wine is moved to barrel it is sulfured and then every few weeks the barrels are "topped off" or filled back to the top in order to compensate for evaporation. This step is considered critical to most winemakers because it makes sure the wine is sterile and prevents it from oxidizing and developing acetic acid (turning to vinegar.) Abe believes that by allowing the wine exposure to oxygen, without any sulfur addition, it will develop at a microbial level as the wine "gets used to" oxygen. He does not bottle until the wine evolves a complexity beyond the normal fruit and wood aromas. These are called **tertiary** aromas and are what you could expect if you cellared the wine for several years. Do not believe that the wine is mature because it has already developed these qualities. Because the wine was aged in an oxygen rich environment it will continue to age effortlessly for many years.

Once finished Abe blended in one barrel each (5%) of Cabernet Sauvignon and Syrah. In addition there is half of a barrel of Pinot Grigio that he fermented on the skins. This addition brings aromatics as well as some lift and freshness on the the palate.

So open the wine and allow it to breath for at least an hour but all day is even better. When you pour a glass you will see very deep color that stains the glass as you swirl it around. The nose offers notes of soy sauce, tamarind, Tellicherry peppercorns, dried black figs and black raspberry jam. In the mouth this massive wine displays copious amounts of fruit framed by veiled but very obvious tannins. If you hold it in your mouth for a few seconds before swallowing you will see layers, upon layers of flavors unfold deep into the finish. This wine is good now but will evolve for at least a decade. Serve with any protein rich dish but I liked my bottle with a cassoulet of duck, spicy pork sausage and guanciale.

2006 Mendel Unus

\$55 per bottle

Winery Owner: Anabelle Sielecki

First vintage of this wine: 2004

Location: Lujan du Cuyo, Argentina

Winemaker: Roberto de la Mota

Winery Production: 5400 cases

Production of this Cabernet Sauvignon: 1300 cases

We featured a Malbec in the third quarter of last year and it turned out to be the best selling Reserve selection of 2008. When I tasted this wine in early 2009 I decided it would be worthy follow up, again showing why Argentina is setting the world of wine on fire.

The Mendel Winery is the union of Roberto de la Mota, one of Argentina's most respected and experienced winemakers and Anabelle Sielecki, whose family has been growing grapes for nearly one-hundred years. Mendel was the first name of Anabelle's father, a man who came to Argentina with nothing and ended up a successful businessman in many different industries. He was a man that loved the finest things that life had to offer, particularly wine and so Anabelle pays honor to him with the production of this wine.

Winemaker Roberto de la Mota is the son of Raul de la Mota, one of the legendary winemakers of Argentina. His own career is one of critical success after critical success, with his most noteworthy efforts at Cheval de Andes. That wine is the joint venture between Cheval Blanc and Terrazas de los Andes (owned by Moet and Chandon.)

The Lujan de Cuyo area lies south of the city of Mendoza, with most of valley at around 3200 feet above sea level. At this elevation the vines receive an extraordinary amount of sun but are balanced by cool nights. The soils of the area are mostly sand and light gravel, poor in organic material and consequently very dry. The ungrafted vines struggle to survive and each plant only produces a few kilograms of fruit. For this wine Anabelle and Roberto select only the best blocks from a vineyard that is more than eighty-years-old.

For this wine the vineyard is harvested by hand and each cluster is sorted. The fruit is destemmed then fermented in small, open top tanks and is punched down by hand until the completion of alcoholic fermentation, which takes up to five weeks. At that point the wine is moved to 100% new, French oak barrels where it is allowed to mature for sixteen months and then is bottled unfiltered and unfined. The final blend of the 2006 is 70% Malbec and 30% Cabernet Sauvignon, the final blend being made right before bottling.

Since January 3rd I have tasted over a hundred South American wines looking for the right one for our Reserve club feature, as well as the May wine-of-the-month club selections. There is no shortage of expensive Malbec wines out there but this one stands out for the honest, true-to-the-region and varietal character it displays. The nose offers up the initial Malbec qualities of blueberry, blackberry cobbler and fresh sage. There is also a note of the Cabernet with a deep vein of cassis and red plum that wraps around the darker, Malbec fruit aromas. In the mouth this wine displays impressive texture, with firm, full fruit framed by the sweet presence of new, oak. The blueberry and blackberry notes are complimented nicely by the warm, cinnamon, clove and allspice qualities of the wood and it also provides some frame in the way of long, well integrated tannins. Although good now, with an hour in the decanter, this wine is capable of aging for at least a decade in the proper cellar. Serve with a classic thick steak or bring out the fruit by serving with a braised dish such as osso bucco or lamb shanks.