



Locals Choice Wine Club

March 2010 Tasting Notes

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Hello Locals Choice Members,

Rain, rain and more rain came down steadily in February and although it seemed like it was going to go on forever it was exactly what Sonoma County needed. With dire warnings of drought and very little rain last winter our winemakers were holding their breath and hoping for this exact outcome. Now thoughts turn to springtime, with temps in the 70's and the promise of bud break in the vineyards soon to follow.

March brings thick glorious carpets of bright yellow in some vineyards and green in others. Late January through March is mustard season in Sonoma County. Mustard fields are fairly common in all of California but among the vineyards they are particularly stunning. The vibrant yellow color set against a grey winter sky brings beauty to the dormant vineyards. The mustard plants are used as a cover crop in the vineyards in order to reduce erosion, add nitrogen and improve water penetration in the soil.

For those of you living in, or visiting Sonoma County this time of year it just plain looks beautiful. Depending on how the temperatures vary, bud break can happen pretty much anytime starting in February. Not all growing regions move at the same pace. Warm, late winter temperatures can accelerate the spring bloom around Sonoma County but vineyards can also fall prey to unexpected frost requiring diligent monitoring by grape growers. Frost occurs when the plant and grapes are colder than the surrounding air. On very cold nights when temperatures dip down they bring the temperature of the buds down with them. When the air warms back up the grape can't quite keep up and this causes frost damage on the vines. This type of damage can affect crop yields and has the potential to drastically reduce fall harvest. It takes extremely dedicated and diligent vineyard management to make sure the quality of the grapes is held. Sometimes we see wind machines operating in the vineyards looking just like giant fans, or growers may sprinkle the vines with a fine mist of water during the coldest nights to keep the frost from causing damage. Either method can maintain a high enough temperature to save an entire crop.

The opening of the buds represents the rebirth in the vineyard and varies by grape with Chardonnay typically breaking out first and Cabernet Sauvignon last depending on climate and location. All around us the vineyards begin buzzing with activity and a new vintage is on its way to fruition.

Speaking of new vintages coming to fruition brings us to this quarter's wine selections, both from the Russian River Valley. One of our favorite Old Vine Zinfandels is the 2007 Portalupi Zinfandel, which is bold, jammy and smoky with what some say are aromas of bacon. The 65 plus year old grapes are grown on 5 acres, dry farmed and head pruned, in the center of Sonoma County on a quiet country road on the banks of the Russian River. Our visitors often ask us what constitutes "Old Vine" and while there is no legal definition, the Sonoma County Wine Grape Association states it as follows, "Old Vine Zinfandel is a Sonoma County treasure. The slants and slopes of angled

mountainsides—where artistically twisted, arthritic-looking, gnarly vines were planted by pioneers fifty, eighty, and even more than 100 years ago—are now home to vines that stingily offer up fruit that is transmogrified into wines that are concentrated, intense, and identifiable. These vines are survivors. When most vines are commercially viable for about 25 years, these old vines have lived through two battles with phylloxera, prohibition and several periods of consumer popularity fluctuations. Through it all, these vines and the wine made from them, truly reflect Sonoma County and the different AVAs (American Viticultural Areas) where they still thrive.”

The second selection for this wine club is the Pinot Noir 2008 Saralee Vineyard by Eric Ross, which has been awarded 92 points in an upcoming Wine Enthusiast stating that the 08 Pinot is “...a very pale wine, barely more than a rosé in hue, but very flavorful and enraptures the palate with vanilla-scented raspberry Newton, orange biscotti, cola, buttered cinnamon toast and sandalwood flavors that swirl into a long, spicy finish. Not an ager, but perfect now with grilled salmon or a fine ham.” Pinot requires the shortest growing season to fully mature and is often seen as the most difficult wine to make, but the most alluring when done well. Where many varieties focus on flavor, the Pinot is all about characteristics like succulent, sensual, silky, satiny-like, fleshy, juicy, and enticing. Plus, Pinot Noir is just plain difficult. It ripens unevenly, it wants to race through fermentation, and it goes through what some call the “dumb” stages—in barrel and in bottle—where winemakers wish to pour it down the drain but the smart and experienced ones do not. The Russian River Valley climate, where the Saralee Vineyard is located, is controlled by the regular incursion of the cool fog off of the Pacific Ocean only a few miles to the west. The evening fog rushes through the Petaluma Wind Gap and the valley carved through the coastal range by the Russian River. The fog usually arrives at the end of most days. The resultant drop in temperature of 35 to 40 degrees at night provides natural air-conditioning allowing the grapes an extended growing season often 15 to 20 percent longer than neighboring areas. The effects on the wines from the area are to develop full flavor maturity while retaining the all-important natural acidity frequently missing from hot climate wines.

As always, Diane has compiled some great recipes for you to try, from bold, flavorful and unbelievably easy for the Zinfandel to light and tasty for the Pinot. [Click here for this months recipes](#). We would love to hear what you think of both the wines and the food pairing suggestions. And, if you haven't been to the recipes page of the website, take a gander. There are quite a few gems to pair with your wines. For those of you that are on Facebook be sure to click on www.facebook.com/LocalsTastingRoom and become one of our Fans so you can follow our comings and goings in cyberspace.

To thank you for your continued patronage, we offer you a week of free shipping. Your free shipping code this month is LCMARCH and your order window is between Friday, April 23, 2010 and Friday, April 30, 2010. (**Maximum** order for free shipping is 3 cases with a **maximum of one case to Alaska and Hawaii**). Your 45-day follow-up discount applies to all orders placed before May 7, 2010.

Cheers,

Carolyn, Tim and Diane

Locals Choice Club Selections

**2007 Portalupi Zinfandel
Old Vine, RRV**

\$32 Retail, Club Price \$27.20
45-day follow up price \$25.60

**2008 Eric Ross Pinot Noir
Saralee Vineyard, RRV**

\$40 Retail, Club Price \$34
45-day follow up price \$32

Locals Choice Pinks and Whites Club

2007 Praxis Viognier, Lodi

\$17 Retail, Club Price \$14.45
45-day follow up price \$13.60

**2008 Dark Horse, Andrew Peacock
Chardonnay, Dry Creek Valley**

\$14 Retail, Club Price \$11.90
45-day follow up price \$11.20

Locals is open Everyday from 11 am to 6pm.

We always enjoy hearing from you .

Drop us a line at: Box 124, Geyserville, CA 95441.

Or email us at: yummy@tastelocalwines.com.