



Trust Carolyn Wine Club

May 2006 Tasting Notes

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Welcome to my inaugural wine presentation of the *Trust Carolyn Case Club*.

Just a few weeks ago I was feeling so impatient for spring to come, like everyone here in Sonoma County, I was obsessively counting a record number of days of rain, which it seemed would never stop. I was on a mission, and knew I still had to go the extra slippery mile to accomplish my goal of uncovering the most amazing wines that I could possibly find for you.

Most of you know me, so you can probably picture me zooming through the relentless mist of a still rainy wine country landscape. Traversing mile after mile through obscure dormant vineyards looking to unearth the juiciest unknown wine gems I could find. No wonder you left the driving to me!

Then **bam**, one day the rain stopped and spring had arrived! After interminable showers, the May flowers are now finally blooming profusely. All it took was a little faith that Mother Nature would deliver us from the clouds, and move us forward into the beautiful bud break that happens here like clockwork every spring.

I want to take this opportunity to thank you for putting your *trust in me* to deliver. It has been a rewarding experience! As promised, the wines in this collection reflect the profound and meticulous talents of obscure, small-production wine artisans who brighten the flavor of my neighborhood. Chosen from the best that *Locals Tasting Room in Geyserville* has to offer **and** from slightly further away—one even from Mendocino county just to the north—you can always *Trust Carolyn* and *Locals Tasting Room* to uncover distinctive quality and solid value with every bottle.

This collection includes 12 bottles of 9 different wines, all especially selected for your club from the tasting room as well as my travels. In some cases I have included two bottles of a particular wine because the wine is either in short supply...or I am positive one bottle will immediately leave you wanting another, as these wines are apropos for sharing at any and every upcoming occasion. Whether it be at a gourmet dinner or during that kickback surprise break on the patio on a mild summer evening, I know that you will love these wines at least as much as I have...and will want to order them again to take advantage of your 25% follow up discounts.

Now...on to the wines themselves...



Toulouse 2003 Estate Pinot Noir
Anderson Valley, Mendocino County
Alcohol 14.1%, 1600 Cases
Winemaker Vern Boltz
\$34 Retail, \$27.20 Your Club Price

I discovered this juicy Pinot on a jaunt up to the Anderson Valley, located to the northwest of Geyserville, inside Mendocino County. I was lunching at *Libby's*, where locals hang out in the quaint town of Philo, enjoying the best Mexican food around. Talking up their favorite wines, they waxed poetically about *this* Pinot from Toulouse Vineyards. They were telling me how it was made with the same breathtaking fruit with which renowned Winemaker James McPhail recently scored 97 points from wine guru Robert Parker, when my wine karma kicked in, and in walked Vern.

A hastily arranged but friendly private tasting yielded this selection, a superb, medium-bodied Burgundian-style Pinot Noir. In the cool climate of the Anderson Valley, the temperature rarely exceeds 80 degrees—and if so briefly—so the body and fruit of this wine is more restrained than other *Russian River* Pinots you might have tried at Locals. Its subtle nose of red cherry and strawberry, with hints of licorice and cedar, will entice you. Its bright fruit lingers mellifluously from start to finish, accompanied by light tannins, and every savory sip finishes smooth and full. What a great wine to enjoy now!

Ramazzotti 2003 Raffinto
Dry Creek and Alexander Valley
Alcohol 14.5%, 650 cases
Winemakers Joe Ramazzotti & Bob Keeble
\$25 Retail, \$20 Your Club Price

Joe Ramazzotti and his wines have been a big hit since we brought his wines to Locals, as one of three recent additions to my tasting room. Outgoing, exuberant, the quintessential Geyservillian, he also knows how to do Italian right. The *Raffinto*, meaning “refined” in Italian, is a blend of 60% Sangiovese grapes, and the remaining 40% is comprised of Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Merlot and Syrah. This type of blending, termed “Super Tuscan” in California to describe a style of blending Sangiovese in Chianti-style wines, results in a fuller-

bodied and more complex wine than the lighter, 100% varietal Sangiovese wines so often found in California.

This wine really stands out from that crowd. Deep rich garnet color fills your glass, while succulent cherry and slightly sweet strawberry fruit agreeably pass across the palate, to finish with an artful touch of spice and oak. The Sangiovese fruit, by virtue of both its quality and blending, is unusually rich and spacious. Match this wine to a bolder marinara sauce shaded with boldly-spiced sausage for a perfect taste treat.

Martin Family 2003 Zinfandel (Old-Vine)
Red Rooster Vineyard, Dry Creek Valley
Winemaker Mike Martin
Alcohol 15.4%, 275 cases
\$29 Retail, \$23.20 Your Club Price

Vibrant, dramatic fruit from 82 year-old vines drives the fresh fruit character of ripe blackberries, juicy cherries and big-time plum in this fruit-forward Zin. These fruit flavors are matched with bright aromatics of toasty coconut and bananas, along with other sweet flavors drawn from contact with an abundance of fresh, savory first year oak barrels.

For the 2003 vintage, this wine is back in its signature jammier form; a wonderful wealth of rich flavors bursts in your mouth as the dense liquid moves across your palate. Supple, round tannins and undertone aromas of tobacco and chocolate make this Zinfandel a unique treat. Serve with Plum Pork perhaps? Also a great sip on its own. No matter how you drink it, enjoy!

Eric Ross 2001 Zinfandel (Old-Vine)
Feeney Ranch, Russian River Valley
Alcohol 14.5%, 300 cases
Winemakers John Ross Storey and Eric Luse
\$25 Retail, \$20 Your Club Price

This is our favorite vintage yet for this longtime Locals darling. 65-year-old vines, located in northern Santa Rosa on River Road, ably defend themselves against the encroachment of suburbia by producing stellar wine grapes. Soft and deftly balanced, this medium-bodied, dry Italian-style Zinfandel offers delightfully lush, intense forward cherry fruit up front. Next, flavors of cedar and fresh tobacco ride smoothly across the pal-

ate, building slowly and finishing with a subtle spiciness and this wine's characteristic slight smokiness.

A delectable *Umami*, a Japanese word I am using to describe the mouth-watering, savory quality of this wine, is apparent from the start, expanding broadly as the wine fills the palate. Its lighter mouthfeel is deceiving, as the flavors are very full-bodied, with moderate alcohol also making it very food friendly. Goat or Stilton cheese, or perhaps leg of lamb served with roasted summer squash and baked potato, would be excellent companions to this bottle.

Peterson 2002 Petite Sirah
Dry Creek Valley
Alcohol 13.7%, 225 cases
Winemaker Fred Peterson
\$26, \$20.80 Your Club Price

This dynamic wine, which captures the ripe, dark flavors of this unusual grape rarely seen outside of California, is a terrific match to the enjoyment of food in the warm season ahead. A cross of the old French variety Pelourcin and Syrah, Petite Sirah fruit possesses saturated color and very dense fruit clusters. Petite was not formally made as a varietal wine until 1964 in Livermore, and has traditionally been used in my area to add color and character to Zinfandel wines. This Petite turns that approach upside down, blending other common Zinfandel companions Mourvedre and Carignane along with the Zin and a touch of Syrah, to create a unique wine with a special ability to please.

A new release, and a more spacious vintage compared to the 2001, Fred Peterson's approach softens this often overwrought, brash varietal. Smooth and luscious, mocha coffee and cocoa flavors blend in an ultra-smooth foundation of oak, tannins and lively acid to make the wine a perfect match to say, lasagna, or ribs off the grill. Careful control of alcohol levels—picking the fruit at the ideal moment not too ripe but not green—results in a wine with a remarkable ability to match any food presentation.

Hawley 2003 Cabernet Sauvignon
Dry Creek Valley
Winemaker John Hawley
Alcohol 13.9%, 475 cases
\$28 Retail, \$22.40 Your Club Price

Every vintage of Hawley Cabernet Sauvignon offers a new adventure. Throughout his illustrious winemaking career, grower-winemaker John Hawley has been known for his thoughtful approach. For instance, along with using his Estate Cabernet Sauvignon fruit, which gets morning sun, takes longer to ripen and develops deeper acidity and thus more varied flavors, he purchases Cabernet from a neighbor across the valley whose fruit ripens a little faster but has fuller body. Every year John also blends different varietals to his Cabernet Sauvignon—for 2003 10% Estate Merlot—in response to what the vintage brings. The result is a wine which is always a unique representation of its year.

Hawley is also releasing their 2003 vintage ahead of 2002, again reflecting an ongoing commitment to releasing the best possible wines. The warm weather and record early harvest of 2003 resulted in a slightly lighter wine, which matured faster in the barrels and bottles as well. The relatively high percentage of Merlot juice also contributes to its ready drinkability. Medium-bodied, offering rich strong fruit in the mouthfeel along with subtle tannins, this is a Cab you can go ahead and enjoy now...like I do!

Hart's Desire 2001 Cabernet Sauvignon
Ambiance Vineyard, Napa Valley
Winemaker John Hart
Alcohol 13.7%, 123 cases
\$32 Retail, \$25.60 Your Club Price

I have had Hart's Desire Winery on my wish-list for Locals Tasting Room for years, and am so very pleased to have finally brought these wonderful people and their illustrious wines aboard. An unusual sourcing of fruit for this vintage, from the great Napa Valley, provides an interesting comparison to the other Cabernet Sauvignon wines offered here in the room. The vines on this hillside vineyard yield less than one ton of fruit per acre, improving fruit quality and intensity dramatically.

The taste of this wine is fresh, and it is somewhat less vegetal on the nose than the Hawley, in part reflecting greater time in the bottle. Black currant and blueberry aromatics lead to layered black fruit, and a pleasing mocha flavor with hints of tobacco and licorice. Its medium body and deep ruby-purple color delivers quintessential Cabernet Sauvignon flavors on a bed of liquid perfection. Soft, smooth, and great for any occasion.

**Topel 2003 Meritage, Le Mariage
(Cabernet Sauvignon Blend)
Mendocino County
Winemaker Mark Topel
Alcohol 14.2%, 730 cases
\$25 Retail, \$20 Your Club Price**

Topel is my third new member of Locals Tasting Room; I am very proud to have found their excellent wines and share them with you! Topel wines also give us the chance to further explore the unique *terroir* of south-western Mendocino County, where the weather is typically more moderate than in Sonoma County but still warmer than the Anderson Valley to the west of Hopland. Here long hang times ideally provide superior flavor development and a distinct complexity of flavors in the wines.

This Meritage wine then, meaning a California blend of *Bordeaux varietals*, is absolutely magical. Hidden Vineyard Estate Cabernet Sauvignon (60%) is artfully blended with Estate Merlot and Petit Verdot, along with Cabernet Franc grown on a neighboring property in the hills above Hopland. A striking use of 12% Petit Verdot informs the wine with the dark, inky influence of its

color and soft texture. Rich, slightly sweet fruit dominates a full mouthfeel, and the wine's tannins are still firm, indicating that this wine is ready to enjoy, but will still improve. Serving this wine with a rich meat dish will further soften the tannins at finish, enhancing your enjoyment of its fruit.

**Peterson 1999 Agraria
(Cabernet Franc Blend)
Bradford Mountain, Dry Creek Valley
Winemaker Fred Peterson
Alcohol 13.4%, 250 cases
\$52 Retail, \$41.60 Your Club Price**

Finally, from the Peterson wine library comes a classy wine from a classic vintage. Cabernet Franc (77%) and careful blending with other *Bordeaux varietals* Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Petit Verdot results in a wine with seductive depth and enticing fruit flavors. With mild weather leading to harvest, and thus long ripening time sufficient to fully develop flavors in the grapes, 1999 was the vintage of the decade in the Dry Creek for these varietals.

Again a classic food wine (a typical result of Peterson's lean, low-alcohol style), this wine is approaching perfection, thanks to extensive bottle ageing. What an improvement to a few years back when I first sampled this wine—the tannins (still present) have softened, and the fruit has come elegantly to the forefront. All French oak barrels, mostly new, inform the complexity and layers of fruit with a lovely hint of cedar. Robust, yet medium-bodied and smooth, this intriguing wine offers a broad array of taste experiences. A classic by any measure!

**Locals Tasting Room is Open
Every day except Tuesday, 11am-6pm.**

Remember as you find the wines you love, we offer an extra 5% discount (total 25%) on follow-up orders from this collection of wines, for 45 days...while supplies last only as a few of these selections are extremely limited in supply.

I always enjoy hearing what you think.

Drop me a line at Box 124, Geyserville, CA 95441.
Or email us at yummy@tastelocalwines.com.



Original Painting by Carolyn Lewis