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Dear Wine Club Member,

Happy December! It is truly our pleasure to greet you at the beginning of each month with a new selection of wines. For this round, we've chosen bone-warming, complex reds and sophisticated, textural whites. You can enjoy these at holiday parties, or perhaps as a bit of respite from all the holiday shopping and preparation madness!

Speaking of a break from the madness, I've recently found myself reflecting on Adele's latest song, "Easy On Me," and thinking of it as a sort of mantra. Jimmy Fallon made a joke that "as soon as it came out, all you heard around the world was wine bottles uncorking." What a sentiment! Going "easy on me" has been something I've had to ask of myself during this past year, as I have grown and been tested in ways unexpected. But a nice glass of wine is always just the thing for a little TLC, and I hope the bottles we've included will help you carve out some space for you to relax and recharge.

Have a wonderful holiday season. I'm grateful for the opportunity to be part of your wine journey this year. As always, please reach out with questions and feedback!

Tchin-Tchin,

Jin Zhang | Wine Club Director & Head Sommelier



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Best Buy Wine Club

2019 Domaine de Verquière Côtes-du-Rhône \$9.99

Located in Sablet in the Rhône Valley, the Domaine de Verquière is a 45-hectare property handed down for four generations and now run by Thibaut Chamfort. Thibaut converted his vineyard to organic farming and obtained certification in 2014. This blend of 80% Grenache and 20% Syrah is grown on chalky clay soils with loads of large well-draining pebbles. A beautiful deep ruby in the glass, the wine has a youthful aroma with accents of red and black fruits, licorice, and violet. On the palate, it is full, round, and supple with freshness and structure.



2019 Roquefort Blanc, Bordeaux \$9.99

Jean and Christiane Bellanger have been at the helm of Château Roquefort in the Entre Deux Mers region of Bordeaux since 1976. They slowly replanted the vineyard and began making wine from their fruit in 1987, working closely with the Bordeaux Faculty of Oenology to employ the best winemaking methods. Their son Frédéric and his wife Anne took over in 1995. This bottle comes from a hot vintage, which brought out plenty of tropical notes in addition to the usual herbaceous, citrus, and white flower notes. The aromatic bouquet is intense with jasmine, kiwi, pear, lychee, and pineapple. You can expect body and length on the palate. Serve with seared scallops.

Signature Red Collection

2015 ...And... Wine Co. Yamhill-Carlton District Pinot Noir \$19.99

The ...And... Wine Co. wines are made by talented winemaker Jared Etzel. As for the name of the winery: "The idea of universal connectivity was very exciting to us as a metaphor of how we see our wine—a connector of people, places, ideas, senses, nature's rhythms, and family." 2015 was a warm, dry vintage with low yields and warm temperatures, producing wines with deep, concentrated fruit and rich textures. This shows dark cherry, raspberry coulis, baking spices, and fragrant sandalwood. It's fleshy with dusty earth and dry leaves.

The Willamette Valley is in the northwest corner of Oregon, just south of Portland. Yamhill-Carlton is a sub-appellation located in the northern half. The valley is protected by the Coast Range from the cold, harsh, and wet influences of the Pacific Ocean. As a result, the valley receives only half the rain volume as the coast. It still is cooler and wetter, though, than California and Washington State. A cool growing season allows Pinot Noir grapes here to ripen slowly and yield wines with bright acidity, delicacy, and ripe fruit.

2019 Priest Ranch Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon \$29.99



In 1869, a Gold Rush prospector named James Joshua Priest established Priest Ranch high on the eastern hill of the Vaca Mountains above St. Helena, with dramatic elevations ranging from 800 ft. to 1,600 ft. above sea level. The 2019 Cabernet Sauvignon fruit was grown on 24 unique vineyard blocks, and the wine encapsulates the diversity and complexity of this property. The 2019 growing season was defined by copious rainfall and late soil moisture then a warm summer. Foggy mornings provided cool conditions for vibrant and expressive fruit; a long, mild end of season helped to preserve that freshness. The wine is aged in 40% new French oak, then unfined and unfiltered. It shows hints of cherry cola, vanilla, and dark fruit. The long finish is round and opulent.

Premium Club

2016 Bonny Doon "Le Cigare Blanc Reserve - Beeswax Vineyard" Arroyo Seco White Rhône Blend \$14.99

by Ryan Woodhouse, Domestic Buyer

After 37 years, Randall Grahm recently sold his beloved Bonny Doon Vineyards. Randall is a pioneer of Rhône varieties in California, and one of the original "Rhône Rangers." He has been among the most forward-thinking vignerons the state has ever seen, drawing inspiration from all over the planet (and perhaps even beyond). I worked for Randall back in 2008–2010 and am proud to be a part of a large and far-flung diaspora of Bonny Doon alums. When Randall sold the winery, he kept hold of some library inventory, and, because of our past relationship, sold it directly to us (at fantastic prices).



As a white Rhône blend (67% Grenache Blanc/33% Roussanne), the Cigare Blanc "Reserve" is already a fairly rare breed in California. Then Randall took it to a whole new level by giving the wine extended sur lees aging in five-gallon glass carboys or demijohns. This long aging on the lees in totally neutral glass containers, without oxygen, imparted a wonderful, layered complexity and textural nuance to the wine. Though the "science" is somewhat anecdotal, it also appears that aging wine this way (in an anaerobic environment, on the lees) increases the wine's longevity once finally in bottle; thus this 2016 is as fresh as the proverbial daisy. The grapes for this reserve cuvée come from the Beeswax Vineyard in Arroyo Seco. This site, with its very rocky soil and almost constant cool winds funneling down the Salinas Valley from the Monterey Bay, makes the Rhône varieties feel very at home and produces wines with clarity and typicity.

2019 Renwood "Ranch Estate" Amador County Zinfandel \$14.99

During the Gold Rush of the 1800s, small wineries popped up in Sierra Nevada to quench the thirst of fortune seekers. Within a few decades, there were over 100—more than anywhere else in California. Unfortunately, with the decline of gold mining and then Prohibition in 1920, this local wine community went dormant. Today, however, a new generation of pioneers such as Renwood are reviving this historic region. Renwood was established in 1993, and is well respected for winemaker Alberto Antonini's blend of modern techniques with ancient tradition. The Zin is a fresh, vibrant wine redolent of freshly picked blackberries at first sniff, then aromas of cherry pie and crust, fragrant herbs, and a touch of vanilla. The palate has soft, rounded edges with a voluptuous body. It finishes on a long, flowing tip with notes of blueberries, cocoa powder, and vanilla.

Le Club Français

2019 Domaine Chante Cigale Châteauneuf-du-Pape \$29.99

The name "Chante Cigale" means singing cicada. The property has been in the same family since the 19th century and is currently run by Alexandre Favier, who assumed the reins at just 20! Favier was raised in the vineyards and studied viticulture in Orange. His grandfather, Noël Sabon, is from one of the best-known winemaking families in the region. This wine is made with 65% Grenache, 20% Syrah, 10% Mourvèdre, and 5% Cinsault. It was fermented with native yeasts. The wine is succulent and full with red and black fruits notes on the palate, and very fine tannins on the finish. It can age anywhere from 10 to 15 years. Pair this with lamb, smoked meats, or wild mushrooms.



2011 Baron-Fuenté "Grand Millesime" Brut Champagne \$29.99

Per tradition, we are including Champagne in December's Club Français. This year, we have none other than the 2011 from Baron-Fuenté, one of our fan-favorite Direct Import producers. The history of this house starts in 1962 when Gabriel Baron and Dolorès Fuenté received one hectare of vines as a wedding gift. Their children later joined the family business. This cuvée is composed of 45% Chardonnay, 40% Pinot Meunier, and 15% Pinot Noir from estate vineyards in Charly-sur-Marne, one of the last villages of the Valley of the Marne, the westernmost part of Champagne. After 10 years of aging, with eight on the lees, this is just now being released! Long aging has given the wine a lovely pie-crust-like toasty character. It also has ripe pear fruit that comes from the high-quality Meunier in the blend. This was a cool vintage in Champagne, something that is becoming a rarity, and the wine has great lift and freshness on the long finish. Enjoy it throughout a meal or pair with soft cheeses such as Brie, Pont Lévêque, or Époisses.

Il Club Italiano

by Greg St. Clair, Italian Buyer

2018 Fattori "Col de la Bastia" Valpolicella Superiore \$19.99

I remember when I first became interested in wine: Soave and Valpolicella were two of the most widely distributed wines in America, and, if you're old enough, you probably remember Franco Bolla hawking his Soave and Valpolicella on TV commercials (if not: Google them, they were wonderful). Yet the sun stopped shining on the wines of Verona, and they became lost in the popularity of bigger, more powerful wines. Amarone, the region's powerhouse, frequently tasted like it was made from Sun-Maid raisins. Verona has come a long way, and theirs are now some of my favorite wines in Italy: elegant, balanced, yet extraordinarily complex. This wine has 65% Corvina, 15% Corvinone, 10% Rondinella, and 10% other varieties. The aromatics are incredible, the body of the wine supple, and the finish is long lasting. Aged for 18 months in used 500- and 1000-liter barrels, the wine gains subtlety. My favorite restaurant in Oakland, Belotti, has a tortelli di polenta with a rabbit/thyme sauce. This wine is the perfect match!



2019 Innocenti “Lume” Toscana IGT Rosso \$19.99

If I were to mention the town of Torrenieri as a hotbed of Tuscan winemaking, I’m sure I would be sending the lot of you to Google what I was writing about. The acreage available for Brunello di Montalcino is controlled by the Consorzio del Vino Brunello di Montalcino, and, even if you own land and plant Sangiovese within the DOCG boundary, you still can’t call it Brunello unless you have authorization from the Consorzio.

In 1997, after several good harvests and expanding international sales, the Consorzio opened up availability for new Brunello vineyards. This allowed existing wineries to move their vineyards up from a Rosso di Montalcino DOC or an IGT to Brunello. This allowed many estates to start producing Brunello, including Innocenti. The Innocenti winery has been farming 15 acres of vineyards in this northeastern corner of Montalcino where the soils show more clay. The family purchased the estate in 1961 and has been making wine and olive oil ever since. I tasted this wine last summer and was blown away by the purity of fruit and richness. The 2019 Innocenti “Lume” is 100% Sangiovese fermented and aged in stainless steel and shows the incredible fruit of this spectacular new vintage. Try it with a little pasta alla Bolognese, you’ll love it!

Champagne Club

by Gary Westby, Champagne Buyer

Fallet–Dart “Hères” Brut Champagne \$34.99

This a special lot of grande sélection that Paul Fallet isolated for extra-long aging. He is the 17th generation of the family to tend this estate, and, with history going back to 1610, he is not in a hurry! This is composed of 70% Pinot Noir, 15% Chardonnay, and 15% Meunier from Drachy in the Western Marne Valley. While this cuvée normally gets 60 months of aging, this lot is based on 2014, and has had an entire extra year on the lees, as well as reserve wines from the 2013, 2012, and 2011 vintages.

It is still star bright and fresh because of the even 2014 harvest base and has a nose of toasted panettone, bright white fruit, and excellent chalky drive on the long finish. When we tasted this in Paul Fallet’s garden, it was very hard for me not to just drink it, and I can’t wait to have it at home with shrimp cocktail.



Alexandre Le Brun “Passion” Brut Champagne \$34.99

Many of you know Alexandre Le Brun from our annual Champagne Tent events (hopefully to be resumed in 2022). He loves to wear his Giants gear—even in LA! We were lucky enough to get his Alexandre Le Brun “Passion” Brut Champagne (\$34.99) for the club, which usually sells for \$49.99. This wine is from vines that average 45 years old, and is amazingly 100% from 2005, although not labeled as such. After more than a decade on the lees, this Champagne has amazing texture, a silky bead, and lovely brioche aromas and flavors.

It is composed of half Chardonnay from the chalky Sézanne and half Pinot Noir from the cool slopes of Le Brun’s hometown, Monthelon, just south of Épernay. I love this as a winter aperitif on its own, but it really shines when served with pâté, which allows all of that great complexity from long aging to come out.