



PLUMPJACK
WINES

PlumpJack Wine Club

May 2007

Academics have long debated the importance of vineyard versus vintner. An old saying goes that the best sign of quality for a farm product, including wine, is the farmer's footprint in the field. If the farmer pays close attention to his crop, then it's bound to be better. Great vineyards, and the wines made from them, do seem to have a life of their own. The people behind our two wines this month have put forth an extraordinary effort to obtain the best fruit from the best vineyards. Their winemaking philosophy of minimal intervention allows the finished wine to express its terroir. Randall Graham, the proprietor of Bonny Doon Vineyard in Santa Cruz, has said, "Feeling terroir is feeling the place through the wine – it's akin to sensing a homesickness, even if you're homesick for a place you've never been." But the importance of the vintner should not be overlooked. For organoleptic pilgrims (like us) to taste a great terroir, it requires a vintner who will invest enough time, money and intelligence to make wines worthy of that land.

*2006 Sineann
Pinot Gris
Newberg, Oregon*



*2004 Fortitude
Frediani Field Blend
Napa Valley, California*



Sineann, located in Yamhill County, Oregon, is easily one of the Northwest's most exciting wineries. Sineann's owner/winemaker, Peter Rosback, has almost single-handedly established Zinfandel as a legitimate Northwest wine grape. But that's just the start. His lineup, which consists of over 20 wines, includes a dozen Pinot Noirs, 10 from single vineyards. "All different," he says, "or I wouldn't make them." There are also three vineyard-designated Gewürztraminers, old-vine Cabernet from one of Washington's founding vineyards, and a seemingly endless selection of Rieslings, Pinot Gris, Sauvignon Blancs, Chardonnays, Merlots, dessert wines and blends. The diversity and excellence of the Sineann portfolio showcases both Rosback's abundant talent and his boundless enthusiasm for great vineyards. Rosback sources his fruit from some of the best vineyards in the region; Pinot Noir and Pinot Gris from the Willamette Valley and the Hood River Valley, Cabernet, Merlot and Zinfandel from the Columbia Valley, Gewurztraminer from the Willamette Valley and the Columbia Gorge. No expense is spared in his pursuit to make great wine. Crop levels are kept very low, one-to three tons per acre. Winemaking is meticulous. All fruit is hand-sorted, delicately destemmed, punched down by hand, gently pressed and gravity racked. It would be difficult to name anyone in either Washington or Oregon who has worked more tirelessly to find and express the local terroir in his wines. Rosback began making wines as an amateur in the mid-1980s. He then began moonlighting as a cellar rat at Elk Cove, where he met his partner David O'Reilly, a marketing specialist, and soon after, Sineann was launched. □□ Their first wine, a 1994 Old Vine Zinfandel from a forgotten vineyard called The Pines, set the standard for everything that followed. □ The 2006 Sineann Oregon Pinot Gris is a blend of 2 vineyards. Most of the fruit (80%) is from the Wyeast Vineyard in the Hood River Valley, the balance from Covey Ridge Vineyard near Banks, OR. The Hood River Valley, already famous for its pears, apples and cherries, now has vineyards planted on select south-facing hillsides at high elevation with fabulous results. The climate, which is a little hotter than the Willamette Valley, benefits from the rain shadow cast by the Cascade Mountains. Wyeast is situated on a high slope

(1600 feet) not very far from Mount Hood. The high elevation offers warm days and cool nights resulting in grapes with intense flavors and ample acidity. Wyeast provides the pear/melon core of the wine. Covey Ridge adds good supporting acidity and an appealing pineapple quality. In the nose, the 2006 Pinot Gris has soft, tropical fruit aromas topped with a little honeysuckle. On the palate, the wine shows a rich, honeyed pear and apple quality and has considerable weight. The accompanying acidity balances the sweetness, and the finish is clean and refreshing. As it ages, the fruit will become more forward and intense. Only 1080 cases were produced. While perfect as an aperitif, dishes such as Balboa Café's seared sea scallops with organic yellow corn, roasted peppers, asparagus and tarragon cream sauce, or roasted chicken with buttermilk-mashed potatoes, wild mushrooms and Blue Lake beans would pair nicely with this wine.

The 2006 Sineann Pinot Gris is \$19.99/bottle, \$194.30/case.



Fortitude wines are produced at Etude's winery in the Napa Valley. Their wines are "a tribute to the small family farmers who pioneered California wine grape growing and who passed their land, and a tradition of excellence, to their children and grandchildren. Against all odds, these families have maintained a fierce independence and an unwavering passion for growing grapes of superior quality." Tony Soter, one of Napa's most successful winemaking consultants, has spent much of his 30-year winegrowing career seeking out superior vineyards, "those viticultural gems that offer superior quality due to honest, careful farming." This search has led him to multi-generational family farmers whose grandparents planted vineyards in California a century or more ago, who grew up surrounded by vineyards, and who have known no other way of life. Tony has always been a champion of dedicated small, family grape farmers and heritage vineyards. His unique Etude Heirloom Pinot Noir is produced from Pinot Noir clones that most vintners had given up on because their yields were very low and the grapes were prone to diseases and other farming challenges. In the 1990s and early 2000s, Tony, winemaker Jon Priest of Etude, and viticulturist Franci Ashton found small blocks of "endangered" varietals, like Semillon, Valdiguié (Napa Gamay), Charbono, and Carignane. In 2004 and 2005, Etude obtained enough grapes to launch a new label, Fortitude Wines. Tony says, "When you meet a grower whose family has been doing it through three generations, and who've stuck it out through Prohibition, the Depression, Phylloxera, and all the economic ups and downs, you can't help but be humbled and inspired. Wine is not a lifestyle to these families, it's a living." Franci adds, "These guys are in tune with the land in a way you don't see very often. If you listen, it's amazing what you can learn from them." The 2004 Fortitude Frediani Field Blend is one of the initial releases from this new project, and only 900 cases were produced. It is a blend of Charbono (66%), Zinfandel (14%), Carignane (15%), and Petite Sirah (5%) from 60+ year-old vines grown in the Frediani family vineyard near Calistoga. Jim Frediani is a third generation Napa grape grower whose mother, Jeanne, at 85, still keeps all of the family books and has lived on the Frediani property in the same house since 1948. The Frediani family has farmed vineyards in the area since the early 1900s, when Jim's grandfather, Abramo, immigrated to the United States from Italy. Jim and Jeanne Frediani today farm a 130-acre vineyard planted to Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Zinfandel, Petite Sirah, Carignane, Valdiguié, and a block of 60+ year-old Charbono vines. The 2004 Frediani Field Blend is a vibrant, deeply colored wine with aromas of currants, huckleberry, fresh blackberry pie and baking spices, leading to mouth-filling juicy red and blue fruit flavors of ripe plums and berry jam. The varietals were co-fermented to ensure a harmonious blend with soft tannins balanced with bright acidity. Mixing grapes in the vineyard can be a headache for growers, but mixing them in the fermentation tank is a technique that holds appeal for many winemakers. Marrying the flavors of the different grapes earlier in the winemaking process produces a more aromatic, seamless wine -- one that is more than just the sum of its parts. This is a great wine to have at your next barbeque. Try it with grilled steak, barbequed ribs or chicken, or enjoy it with full-flavored cheeses.

The 2004 Fortitude Frediani Field Blend is \$23.99/bottle, \$259.10/case.