



PLUMPJACK

WINES

WINE CLUB

October 2005

For many years I have always made a conscious effort to purchase organic produce for my home. Not only am I concerned about the amount of chemicals I put into my system, but I have noticed that organic fruits and vegetables have a noticeable difference from those that are non-organic, with the organic ones having more intense and delicious flavors. I have never applied the same purchasing criteria to the wines I choose because in the past, the choices were very limited, and I could

not notice any organoleptic superiority to the organic wines versus non-organic. I am not convinced that if you were to blind-taste an organic wine side by side with a non-organic wine you would be able to tell the difference. Around the world more and more producers are switching to environmentally-friendly farming practices and I do believe that their main purpose is to protect their environment. (I'm sure they also believe their fruit tastes better.) There are more organic wines to choose from than ever before and whether organically grown grapes make better wine will continue to be an ongoing tasting study before I can be swayed one way or another. If our two organic wines for this month's selection are any indication of the quality that results from organic farming, I look forward to trying more of them.

2004 Saracina Vineyards

Atrea "The Choir"

Mendocino, California



2004 Bodegas Vinos Piñol

Sacra Natura Crianza

Terra Alta, Spain

John Fetzer, former CEO of Fetzer Vineyards, is the eldest son of Barney Fetzer, founder of the family's winery. The Fetzer family built Fetzer Vineyards into a 2.2-million-case winery before selling it in 1992 for a reported \$82 million. After being freed of no-competition clauses signed 13 years ago at the sale of the family-owned vineyards, John and other family members began focusing on organic farming practices to carve out a new niche in a fiercely competitive wine market. According to John, "Organic wines are the future. We've been saying that for at least 15 years." The number of wine grape growers registered with the state as organic has tripled in the past four years, but none has embraced the concept more eagerly than the Fetzers. John and his wife Patty Rock decided to produce a line of high-end estate wines crafted exclusively from grapes grown in their pesticide-free vineyards north of Hopland. For their new Saracina Vineyard label, they turned to noted winemaker David Ramey, who's earned a national reputation for crafting estate wines for Napa Valley's Rudd Estate and Sonoma County's Simi, Chalk Hill and Matanzas Creek wineries. David, who respected Fetzer's credentials in the industry and admired his vision, joined Saracina Vineyards as winemaking consultant in 2001. Sonoma winemaker, Alex MacGregor, who made wines for Everett Ridge and Collier Falls, both in Dry Creek Valley, was hired to be the full-time winemaker. Saracina's inaugural release was 500 cases of Sauvignon Blanc in 2002, and in 2004, they introduced a second brand, Atrea, which allowed the winemakers a new venue to experiment with unusual varietals. The 2004 Atrea "The Choir" is a blend of 85% Roussanne, 14% Viognier, and 1% Marsanne. The grapes were sourced from the organically certified Lakeview Vineyards in the Sanel Valley appellation of Mendocino County.



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According to the winemaker, the low-yielding, alluvial, gravelly, clay, loam soils and the warm climate of the inland Sanel Valley are ideal for white Rhône varieties. The grapes were hand-harvested and whole-cluster pressed, and then barrel fermented in 50% stainless steel and 50% neutral French oak barrels using native yeasts. The wine remained *sur lie* for eight months with bi-monthly *batonnage* (lees stirring) and was bottled in July 2005. Only 360 cases were produced. Aromas of honeydew melon, orange blossom and jasmine leapt out of the bottle as soon as I pulled the cork. These classic Rhône aromatics follow through on the palate with great intensity accompanied by a slight hint of minerals and vanilla. The bright acidity on the finish leaves the palate clean and fresh and makes it a great wine to have with a variety of dishes. It would be delicious with PlumpJack Café's Prince Edward Isle Mussel and corn chowder with fennel, saffron, and chives, or pan-roasted black sea bass with chickpea, scallion and sweet pepper ragout, toasted almonds, and sautéed spinach.

The 2004 Atrea "The Choir" is \$18.99/bottle, \$205.10/case.



Bodegas Vinos Piñol is located in the town of Batea, 45 miles south of Barcelona, in the high mountains of Tarragona, 1300 feet above the Mediterranean Sea. The winery was founded in 1945 by Joseph Arrufi and consists of 100 acres in the Terra Alta Region. The Terra Alta Region, the highest of the DO wine zones in Spanish Catalonia, is situated next to Priorat and is a wild, remote country buffeted by strong winds, baked by hot sun in the summer, freezing in the winter, and measures one of Spain's lowest rainfalls. Bodegas Vinos Piñol is one of the biggest promoters of organic farming in Spain. They allow plants other than vines to grow in and around their vineyards thereby attracting beneficial insects and predatory mites, as well as providing food (pollen, nectar, etc.) replacing the need for chemical pesticides, fertilizers or insecticides. The soil of the vineyards is poor in organic matter and consists of a surface layer of limestone covering an inner layer of clay. The 2004 Sacra Natura is a blend of 60% Cariñena, 30% Tempranillo and 10% Syrah. Cariñena, the same grape as the French Carignan, is thought to have originated in the region of Cariñena, in the northern province of Aragon. Today it is mostly grown in Catalonia where it almost always is blended with softer varieties. The grapes for the 2004 Sacra Natura were hand-picked during late September and maceration lasted 20 days with daily *remontage* (pumping over). The wine was then fermented for 10 days in 2,700-gallon stainless steel tanks at 85° F. Following the completion of malolactic fermentation, the wine was aged for 12 months in new American and French oak barrels. The wine was not fined or filtered and 2,250 cases were produced, with only 660 cases exported to the U.S. The 2004 Sacra Natura is a rich wine, with well-balanced fruit, very good structure, toasted notes on the nose, and a smooth long finish. Robert Parker in his *Wine Advocate* writes, "A pungent earthy note provides a distinctive terroir aspect to this dark purple-hued 2004. Sweet raspberry and blueberry fruit along with scents of new saddle leather, spice box, toast, and vanilla emerge from this beautiful effort. It is hard to believe such quality is available at this price." I recently had a delicious entrée at a local restaurant, oven-roasted homemade lamb sausage with cannellini beans, and would have loved to be drinking this wine with it!

The 2004 Bodegas Vinos Piñol Sacra Natura is \$18.99/bottle, \$205.10/case