



PLUMPJACK
WINES

PlumpJack Wine Club

October 2008

It seems most conversation these days is focused on the state of our country's financial wellbeing, and for good reason. Sometimes it's nice to take a break from politics and news and focus on more important things in life, like the appropriate expression of varietal character in wine. As enological pilgrims, we travel many paths (and open many bottles) in pursuit of finding wines of quality that can display the correct manifestations of terroir and varietal content. Our two wines this month come from different countries but share qualities that make drinking wine so much fun! Their flavors are perceptibly delicious, they have individuality, reflect the terroir where the grapes are grown, and while enjoyable now, will continue to improve with age. In these hard economic times, it is a joy to find exceptional wines that are priced reasonably. Fortunately for us, organoleptic bliss does not have to come at a high price.



Historically, linguistically, and culturally, as well as physically, the island of Sardinia is detached from the mainstream of Italian civilization. Geographically, Sardinia is an island of contrasts, with smooth beaches and steep rocky coasts, luxurious exclusive hotels and simple dwellings. Approximately 85% of Sardinia consists of mountainous plateaus where granite and volcanic rock have been covered by pasture and woods. Although these areas are well-suited to viticulture, they are rarely utilized. Instead, most vineyards are planted in the rolling hills and flatlands at lower levels. Low training of vines is necessary for protection from damaging winds. Irrigation is a recent modernization necessitated by the island's low rainfall (violent and short-lived when it rains at all). Vines have existed here since time immemorial, but play a relatively small part in a total agricultural economy. Launched in 2000 by Francesco Siclari, Feudi della Medusa is located on the southern portion of the island, on an isthmus spreading between the lagoon and the sea, close to the ancient town of Nora. The estate, which is one of Sardinia's preeminent wineries, enjoys a climate that is typically Mediterranean - arid in the summer, rainy in the winter and windy. Their soils are rocky, volcanic and well-draining, perfect for fine wine grapes. In the 1990s, Francesco and his wife Heide visited Santa Margherita di Pula in southern Sardinia. To their dismay, they found the once thriving, bush-trained vineyards had been abandoned, and most of the local winegrowers were struggling to survive on the meager subsidy the European Union doled out for the eradication of vines. In 1996, the Sicliaris, along with their son Sliman, planted 7.5 acres of vineyards at Santa Margherita di Pula. They hired Donato Lanati, Attilio Scienza and Francesco Lizio to consult on the planting, farming and winemaking. Before the vineyards were planted, the viticultural team mapped the terrain and plotted blocks based upon topological and subsurface soil variations. Varieties, clones, rootstocks, spacing and trellising regimes were chosen to match the specific intricacies of the complex terroir. Over the next decade their vineyard holdings expanded to 123.5 acres and Sicliaris built a modern winery modeled after the Amphitheatre in the ancient town of Nora. Feudi della Medusa goes through extraordinary efforts to produce the highest quality wines representing the unique characteristics of their indigenous grapes and land. The harvest is

*2006 Feudi della Medusa
"Albitbia"
Vermentino di Sardegna
Santa Margherita di Pula, Italy*



*2004 Highlands
Howell Mountain Zinfandel
Napa, California*

performed using 10 kg baskets and the grapes are subjected to three distinct selection procedures: on the plant shortly before harvest, during the harvesting where every rotten, withered or green grape is removed, and lastly on a sorting belt in the cellar, where 4 to 6 people perform a final inspection. The grapes are pressed within two hours of harvesting. The cellar is mainly equipped with small vats designed to allow separate vinification of grapes from the various estate plots. This process preserves the characteristics of each harvested block and ensures that each wine is produced with the greatest accuracy with regard to blending and final preparation. The 2006 “Albithia” is made from 100% Vermentino. The vineyards are located in Usini, where the soils are composed of limestone and the vineyards are planted at an altitude ranging from 1,600 to 2,200 feet. The vineyards are a combination of both free-standing bush-trained vines and Guyot trellising. The grapes were hand-picked, and after being lightly pressed, all fermentation and aging took place in stainless-steel. The nose reveals intense, clean, and refined aromas that start with hints of apple, and almonds followed by aromas of pineapple and pear. The mouth has good correspondence to the nose, with a crisp attack, good body, and intense flavors. The finish is persistent with flavors of apple, pears and almonds. As you would expect, the wine pairs beautifully with any seafood as well as traditional Sardinian pasta dishes such as, *Spaghetti con Bottarga*, with dried gray mullet roe shaved on top, *Malloreddus*, a gnocchi flavored with saffron and served with a tomato sauce, and *Culingiones*, a round ravioli stuffed with spinach and cheese.

The 2006 Feudi della Medusa “Albithia” is \$19.99/bottle, \$215.90/case.



Highlands Winery began in 2001, with the vision of using ultra-premium Howell Mountain grapes to produce world-class wines in the Bordeaux tradition. Highland’s owners, Paul Segas and Dave Cofran, are pioneers in the Napa Valley wine business. Dave has worked in the valley as an enologist and winemaker, starting in 1967. In 1984, he joined old classmate Justin Meyer as General Manager of Silver Oak Cellars. Paul has over 33 years of grape-growing history in his portfolio. In 1973, Paul, an executive with IBM in San Francisco, saw an opportunity in the wine business, and with absolutely no experience, acquired vineyard property in both Sonoma and Napa. He took classes at UC Davis, networked with vineyard people in Napa, and read extensively while holding down his travel-intensive job at IBM. In a short time, his grapes became a much sought-after commodity for such brands as Chateau Montelena, Bouchaine, Pine Ridge, Robert Mondavi, Joseph Phelps, Domaine Chandon and Mumm Napa Valley, to name just a few. In 2000, Paul met the owners of Freemark Abbey, who introduced him to winemaker Bruce Scotland, who had been making wines from Howell Mountain fruit. In partnership, they created Highlands Winery in order to establish a high-end brand independent of Freemark Abbey. In 2005, Paul purchased the brand, and brought on Dave Cofran, who had just retired from Silver Oak, as a managing partner. Paul and Dave then hired winemaker Jeff Fontanella. Jeff is a graduate of the University of California at Davis and began his winemaking career working in the cellars of Opus One and ZD, and soon after took a position at Saddleback Cellars. The aim at Highlands Winery since the beginning has been to produce intense and focused wines from hillside and mountain grapes. They use grapes from several vineyards located near the top of Howell Mountain. Overlooking St. Helena from the Vaca Range on the valley’s northeast side, the Howell Mountain appellation encompasses around 14,000 acres, yet possesses only 600 acres of vines. The region is rugged, with vineyards at 1,400-2,200 feet above sea level, avoiding the influences of the fog that often blankets the valley floor below. Even so, Howell Mountain receives cool Pacific breezes. The soils of this area are mostly well-drained tuff and volcanic rock. The Howell Mountain American Viticultural Area (AVA) boundaries are defined by a 1,400 ft. elevation contour line. Upon review of requests and evidence of the boundaries and elevation of the region, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (BATF) ruled that Howell Mountain was, indeed, worthy of one of the few AVAs granted in the early 1980’s. And so, in 1983, the Howell Mountain Appellation was officially designated an AVA—making it the first AVA within the greater Napa Valley AVA. The 2004 Highlands Howell Mountain Zinfandel has a distinguished profile redolent of blackberries and black pepper, a signature of Howell Mountain fruit that is often easy to spot at blind tastings. It is full-bodied yet dignified with blueberry, cherry and black pepper aromas, and a wonderful depth of red fruit underneath. It is a great wine to enjoy with grilled red meats, pizza, sausages, and roasted game birds.

The 2004 Highlands Howell Mountain Zinfandel is \$22.99/bottle, \$248.30/case.