



**PLUMPJACK**  
WINES

PlumpJack Wine Club

April 2009

Appellations, terroir, and specific vineyards become important to us as we make wine-buying decisions. As we grow in our knowledge and sophistication in wine appreciation, these nuances can make the difference between an enjoyable, but non-memorable, wine experience and an organoleptic revelation. Winemakers know they can make great wine with great grapes, and conversely, can't make superior wine with inferior grapes. Quality grapes consistently come from exceptional vineyards in great growing regions.

That's why appellations and terroir are important. Our two producers this month take extreme care in choosing the vineyards their fruit comes from. They seek out specific appellations and vineyards that have proven themselves as the pinnacle for quality for their respective varietals. There is much debate as to the importance of terroir. Ultimately, does terroir matter? For the wine drinker or collector, the answer is yes.



Clarksburg is one of California's least-known appellations. The Clarksburg AVA is an American Viticultural Area that spans three counties in California's Sacramento Valley. Located in portions of Sacramento County, Solano County, and Yolo County, the Clarksburg AVA includes 64,640 acres near the town of Clarksburg, and has approximately 10,000 acres of vineyards. The growing region has dense clay and loam soils, and fog and cool breezes from San Francisco Bay keep the Clarksburg area cooler than nearby Sacramento. This treats the area to warm but not hot days and cool nights during the long, dry growing season. Many vineyards have irrigation in place but keep the water application low because Clarksburg has a high water table that feeds the vines whose roots have traveled deep into the soil. These prime conditions allow for the growing of over 25 varieties of wine grapes. 90% of the grapes grown in the Clarksburg AVA are crushed in winery facilities located elsewhere in California, and relatively few wines are released with the Clarksburg AVA on their labels. The AVA has long been known for producing vegetables and grains, and the first vineyard plantings were in 1968 by Warren Bogle, who wasn't making much growing potatoes. Clarksburg is beginning to build a reputation for premium wines based on its great success with the generally overlooked Chenin Blanc. In the shadow of more in-vogue varieties, like Chardonnay and Sauvignon Blanc, Chenin Blanc is rarely privileged with the best growing sites. North American Chenin Blanc would benefit from more moderate climactic conditions, lower yields, and being planted in the chalky type of soils, like in France's Loire Valley, where it performs so well. In California's hotter bulk winegrowing regions, yields are often twice as much as the maximum allowable from Loire vineyards, and Chenin's response to such treatment is to make wines of little varietal character and complexity, lacking much of its typically refreshing, life-giving acidity. It isn't surprising that such bland wines have doomed the variety to the role of jug-wine workhorse. However, a notable exception to this is Chenin grown in the Clarksburg AVA. Here, many producers have recognized the grape's potential for high quality wine. One producer who has long been a staunch advocate of Clarkburg's Chenin Blanc is Vinum Cellars. Vinum Cellars is a collaboration of winemakers Richard Bruno and Chris Condos, who first became friends while they were students at UC Davis. After graduation, Chris went to work for Pine Ridge as enologist, and Richard went to Bonny Doon as their distiller. Shortly after, their friendship was solidified over

*2007 Vinum Cellars  
"White Elephant"  
Oakville, California*



*2006 Roessler Cellars  
Griffin's Lair Pinot Noir  
Sonoma Coast  
Santa Rosa, California*

Chenin Blanc with the creation of their first wine "Pointe Blanc". Today, Vinum Cellars has long-term contracts with grape growers all over California. They search the best areas for the specific varieties, and the fruit is grown to their specifications. Our featured wine this month is Vinum Cellars' "White Elephant." It is a unique wine made from a blend of 58% Chenin Blanc, 30% Roussanne and 12% Viognier, which are barrel fermented and aged sur lies for 9 months. The barrels are 25% 1-year old, 25% 2-year old and 50% 3-year old French Oak. The Chenin Blanc comes from Wilson Vineyards. According to the guys at Vinum, "Undoubtedly, Ken Wilson grows the best Chenin Blanc in California at his vineyard in Clarksburg. The grapes come from low-yielding old vines which provide the intensity that makes our Chenin Blanc unique." The Roussanne comes from Ledgewood Creek Vineyards in Suisun Valley, and the Viognier is from the Vista Verde Vineyard in San Benito County. Vinum's tasting notes on the 2007 White Elephant are as follows: "Light straw color, tangerine and kefir lime aromas open, but then melon, lemon and almond paste prevail. On the palate, the bright acidity is multi-dimensional from tart apple to sour cherry to fresh lemon curd. The acidity from Chenin Blanc is balanced on a complex canvas of ripe Bartlett pear and floral palate from the Roussanne, while the honeyed and nectary capacity of the Viognier provides the final harmonious ingredients to make this wine finish as the unique hybrid it was intended to be." Vinum's "White Elephant" is a clean, food-friendly wine with a great degree of complexity. I recently enjoyed a bottle at lunch with Richard Bruno. We shared a Dungeness crab on toasted brioche sandwich and a salmon, bacon, and tomato sandwich. The wine paired beautifully with both.

**The 2007 Vinum Cellars "White Elephant" is \$17.99/bottle, \$194.30/case.**



Roessler Cellars is dedicated to producing single-vineyard designated wines from grapes farmed to their specifications by growers who maintain their passion for quality. Roessler is primarily interested in single-vineyard Pinot Noir, but have also added a few small lots of Chardonnay which they feel are in keeping with their Burgundian roots. By searching out grapes from premium grape growers, in areas they feel are most well-suited to Pinot Noir and Chardonnay, they are able to show unique and distinctive characters arising from these specific sites. Working with the growers to maintain quality is paramount to giving them the highest quality fruit. With 35 years in the restaurant business, Roger Roessler's passion for food and wine quite naturally evolved into winemaking. Roger's friends, the Sangiacomos, agreed to provide a small quantity of Pinot Noir. The challenge of finding a winemaker was quickly satisfied, when through a series of phone calls, Roger was directed to Wells Guthrie, who had just started a label of his own called Copain. As the next two years unfolded, his relationship with Guthrie allowed them to add new vineyards and grow from 225 cases of that original Sangiacomo fruit, to 7300 cases in 2007. Guthrie has since been replaced by his brother-in-law Scott Shapely, who is now the full-time winemaker. Our featured wine this month is a Pinot Noir from a vineyard within the Sonoma Coast appellation. Griffin's Lair Vineyards is located a few miles north of San Pablo Bay in the Lakeville area. The hillside overlooks the Petaluma River, Mt. Burdell, Mt. Tamalpais, the Bay, and, to the east, Mt. Diablo. Soils at Griffin's Lair Vineyards are sandy loam and clay loam with varying amounts of gravel/rocks. Climate is typical coastal--warmer in winter, with fog and wind cooling the vineyards in summer. Fog channels in through the Petaluma Gap, as well as from the Bay. Twenty-plus acres of vineyard were planted in Pinot Noir and Syrah in early spring 2000. The Pinot Noir plantings face east, southeast, and the syrah faces west. The vineyard is owned by Joan and Jim Griffin, who live on the property. Truly a team effort, their winemakers are involved in every phase of the growing process. Each winemaker has designated rows in the vineyard, and the techniques within those blocks vary according to the philosophy of each person. Roessler's tasting notes on their Pinot Noir are: "Great savory aromas and a dusty, earthy character show first on the nose of our 2006 Griffin's Lair Pinot Noir, along with mushroom and fruit scents of plum, cherry, and even boysenberry. These open quickly to include nuances of smoked meat and Indian spice, along with a deepening and expansion of the fruit character. Good acidity and structured tannins mingle with the savory aspects from the nose as they continue on the palate, and these elements all compliment the back and forth drift between red fruit and dark fruit flavors. All of these components come together to great effect, creating a complex wine with a lot of nuanced layers that reveal themselves in varying combinations as it opens up through the long finish." Only 283 cases were produced. Try this wine with coq au vin, pasta al pesto, or grilled salmon.

**The 2006 Roessler Griffin's Lair Pinot Noir is (originally \$44.99) \$24.99/bottle, \$269.90/case.**