

FERRY PLAZA WINE MERCHANT & WINE BAR

JULY 2019 WINE CLUB



NV Prima Materia Negroamaro, Kelsey Bench, Lake County, CA

One of the real joys of our role as purveyors of fine wines is the hunt for distinctive and compelling selections from producers flying well under the radar. Pietro Buttita and his artisan label Prima Materia are a fine example of where this search can lead. Prima Materia draws on a 12-acre assortment of interesting grape varieties – mostly Italian – planted by Pietro’s father Nick in 2001 on red volcanic soils on the Kelsey Bench, an AVA (American Viticultural Area) 1500 feet above Clear Lake and the small town of Kelseyville in Lake County. The vineyard also supplies grapes for Nick’s label, Rosa d’Oro. This AVA is actually at the far northern end of the Mayacamas Range that separates Napa and Sonoma counties further south. Pietro’s own background includes “two decades spent in vineyards, wineries, and cooking in restaurant kitchens that ranged from Michelin-starred to hamburger consulting.”

There are, according to Pietro, less than 20 acres of Negroamaro in all of California. The variety is most widely planted in southern Italy, particularly in the Salento peninsula of Puglia. It is sometimes blended there with Primitivo (aka Zinfandel).

Prima Materia’s Negroamaro is a blend of the 2016-2017 vintages. Pietro’s approach to winemaking is, in a word, minimalist. The grapes were hand-harvested, fermented gently in small tank and basket pressed. Aging was in older French and Hungarian oak barrels. No sulphur was added until bottling, and the wine was neither fined nor filtered. A mere 192 cases were made. The finished wine is rich and satisfying, with deep berry and dark cherry fruit, slightly dusty tannins and a trace of mocha on the finish. Southern Italian Negroamaro often has a sunbaked earth character that some would describe as overripe. The Buttita’s avoid this by encouraging “California Sprawl” in the vineyard, a technique that encourages a large leaf canopy over the vines thus shading the fruit from the intensity of the sun during the hottest part of the day. Pietro recently opened a tasting room in the Temescal neighborhood of Oakland; it is a great visit if you are in the area and worth a trip if you are not.

Suggested Recipe: Fennel-Rubbed Leg of Lamb with Carrots and Salsa Verde

Mixed and Red Selection

\$21.00

\$17.85

Wine Club Member reorder price



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2018 Apolloni Vineyards Pinot Blanc, Willamette Valley, OR

The Apolloni family traces its winemaking traditions back 150 years near Arrezzo, Tuscany, about 50 miles southeast of Florence. Alfredo Apolloni, the current generation and proprietor of this small Oregon estate, was first exposed to viticulture and winemaking while working summers at the family vineyard and villa in Italy, an experience which often plants itself deep in the psyche, and that can call one to return even many years later. That was precisely what motivated Alfredo to move his wife Laurine and kids from the Midwest to Oregon in 1999, where they purchased a 62 acre property in the northern Willamette Valley. It had 5 acres in vines at the time, now significantly expanded with Pinot Noir, Chardonnay, Pinot Blanc and Pinot Gris. They are even experimenting with Nebbiolo and Sangiovese.

The 2018 Pinot Blanc is vinified in stainless steel, and delivers a pear-scented, refreshing glass of crisp, mouth-watering white wine. It is very much in the style of modern northern Italian Pinot Bianco, and is an ideal and flexible partner with all manner of fresh seafood and summer salads. One of the persistent food and wine pairing myths is that you should not drink wine with salad. In a word, nonsense. Just make sure to use moderate amounts of citrus juice as the source of acidity in your dressing, and watch a wine like this come alive.

Pinot Blanc has been historically confused with Chardonnay, especially prior to the late 1800's, but it is actually a spontaneous genetic mutation of Pinot Noir. It was first identified as such in 1868. It is nowhere near as widely planted as Chardonnay, but does particularly well in Alsace, France, Northern Italy, California and Oregon.

Suggested Recipe: Pickled Nectarine Salad with Burrata

Mixed and White Selection

\$19.00

\$16.15

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2015 Château Fages “La Bête Noire”, Cahors, France

Argentina gets full credit for having popularized Malbec as a wine grape variety in the US, but the ancestral home of Malbec is actually in the Lot département (roughly equivalent to a US county) of south-west France, where it more typically goes by the name Cot. Cahors’ wine cultivation goes back centuries, and in fact the Roman Emperor Domitian ordered the vines ripped up in 92 AD, such was the competitive threat they posed to vineyards closer to Rome.

In Cahors, the best-known appellation in the area, Malbec is usually blended with Tannat and Merlot. Tannat gives those wines even more density and tannic grip, while Merlot does the opposite, typically softening Malbec a bit. La Bête Noire, by contrast, is 100% Malbec. It is also unoaked, which results in a modern style with bright natural acidity and a juicy, red plum and berry lift to the wine that is immediately appealing. The name of this wine is, we suspect, somewhat tongue-in-cheek, and probably refers playfully to the historic reputation of Cahors reds as rustic, rough and tumble wines well-suited to the cassoulets of the region and similar fare, but lacking perhaps in refinement. As Argentinian Malbec took the new world by storm, Cahors as an appellation has had to work pretty hard to regain its rightful place for Malbec on that same stage. La Bête Noire Malbec is produced by Château Haute-Théron, built just after the French Revolution in the hills above the Lot Valley. It is planted entirely to Malbec.

Suggested Recipe: Grilled Rib Eye with Paprika Vinaigrette

Red Selection

\$19.00

\$16.15

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2018 Château La Roque Blanc, Languedoc, France

Located in Fontanès, around 20 kilometers north of Montpellier, Château La Roque wine estate is one of the gems of the famous Pic-Saint-Loup appellation. The picturesque landscape surrounding the historic Château La Roque appears largely unchanged from how it must have been two thousand years ago. Romans were said to have planted the first vines, and Benedictine Monks created the sturdy vaulted-ceiling cellars that still house the bottles today. Winegrowing resumed in the thirteenth century when the de la Roque brothers planted new vines. Château La Roque was converted to biodynamic viticulture and today it is in the capable hands of Sylviane and Bertrand who aim to celebrate the long history of wine at the estate.

This delightful white wine is a blend of 30% Marsanne, 30% Rolle (aka Vermentino), 20% Grenache Blanc, 10% Roussanne and 10% Viognier grown on east facing terraces with clay and limestone scree soils. There is a seductive nose of white flowers, ripe peaches and passion fruit. Ageing for 8 months on fine lees in neutral oak add to the palate creamy apricot and pink grapefruit while a touch of Thai basil and bright acidity add to the complexity of the wine. Drinking a glass of this wine is like drinking history itself and transports you the South of France. Enjoy with any richer seafood dishes.

Suggested Recipe: Spicy Wok Shrimp with Coconut Rice

White Selection

\$21.00

\$17.85

Wine Club Member reorder price



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