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The Grapevine

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER FOR VINESSE WINE CLUB MEMBERS



MARTIN'S JOURNAL

After a few false starts, I'm happy to report that a new Vinesse website is up and running.

VinesseTODAY.com made its debut just after the Memorial Day weekend, following several months of planning by our creative team. We had originally targeted a mid-May launch, but some difficulties on the technical side of building the site caused a slight delay.

The reason we've spelled the word "TODAY" in all capital letters is because the site will feature new content *every day* — 365 days per year. Some of that content will come from *The Grapevine* — an online archive, if you will — but most will be fresh, including the occasional "breaking news" story.

We hope the new site will add value to your club membership. Beyond that, we hope it will enhance your enjoyment of wine.

After all, that's what our wine clubs, our newsletter, our members-only benefits and, now, our new website are all about.

Martin Stewart Jr.

Can a Bottle of Wine Create a Sense of Place?

By Robert Johnson

Do you recognize the area where the picture below was taken?

Somewhere in southern Europe? Good guess. A fishing village along the coast of the Mediterranean Sea? Good eye.

But wrong... and wrong. What you're looking at is the "Mediterranean Harbor" area of the DisneySea theme park outside Tokyo. I took that picture on the park's third day of operation in 2002.

As I strolled the pathways of the meticulously themed area, a surreal feeling came over me. I suddenly realized that I was an American immersed in European culture... in the middle of Japan!

DisneySea turns 5 this year, and I'm still struck by the authenticity of "Mediterranean Harbor," with its "Porto Paradiso" area (shown in the picture) and its "Palazzo Canals"

(a section that's a dead ringer for Venice). Nobody does faux culture better than Disney.

In making guests feel like they're there — wherever "there" may happen to be — Disney typically includes wine in the dining experience.

At DisneySea's "Mediterranean Harbor," Café Portofino is a buffet restaurant with indoor and outdoor seating and several wine choices. For more elegant dining, Magellan's



offers gourmet cuisine and a more expansive wine list. And for those in a hurry, numerous fast-food choices are available at Zambini

Brothers' Ristorante, which is said to be housed in "an old winery." At Disney parks, even the history of a restaurant can be fantasy-based.

What Disney has learned is that wine is very helpful in creating a sense of place. But you needn't travel to a Disney park for such an experience. All you need to do is open your wine club shipment from Vinesse.

Robert Johnson can be reached at Robert@vinesse.com.



OUR MISSION:

To uncover and bring you wine gems from around the world, which you're not likely to discover on your own, and which enhance your wine enjoyment.

YOUR GRAPEVINE TEAM:

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Martin Stewart

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(aka "The Buck Stops Here"):

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Editor:

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-  *The Grapevine* Newsletter
-  Premium wine selections at members-only prices
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-  Free subscription to VINESSE's Cyber Circle Community
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-  Random giveaways of wine and accessories
-  Wine Finders Reward — identify a future wine selection and earn a reward
-  Perfectly matched recipes for featured wine selections



I just finished reading seven or eight of my past columns, and it dawned on me that you may be getting the wrong impression of me.

In the columns, I seem to complain a lot. Critiquing stylistic choices in wine-making and pointing out deficiencies

in restaurant wine service is my way of trying to make things better.

However, taking a step back, I can see how my commentaries could be perceived otherwise.

So, in the next edition of *The Grapevine*, I promise to write about something... happy. But first, I have just a few more things to get off my chest about dining out...

• **Reservations.** It was 1 p.m. on a Friday. An associate had arrived in town unexpectedly, and I needed to make a dinner reservation for that evening. I selected a restaurant where neither of us had ever dined, punched in the phone number and got an answering system (Pet Peeve No. 1).

After listening to the menu of prompts — "to make a reservation" was the fourth option (Pet Peeve No.

2) — I pushed the "4" button. After three rings, I got another voice message (Pet Peeve No. 3): "There is nobody here to take your call; please call back during regular hours." Only one problem: The message did not indicate what those "regular hours" are (Pet Peeve No. 4).

• **Specials.** Restaurants that offer appetizers, entrees or desserts not listed on their regular menu need to have extremely competent servers to describe the specials of the day. Most restaurants fall short in this area (Pet Peeve No. 5).

But there can be a problem with specials even when the servers are extremely experienced and competent. The problem: too many specials (Pet Peeve No. 6). By the time the server is through describing them all in intimate detail down to the last dusting of cumin, my head is spinning.

Why not type up and print out a list of the specials with descriptive prose? Wouldn't that save the server time and the diner (me) frustration? The last thing I want to do after a long day at work is memorize a lengthy list of specials and then mentally super-impose them over the regular menu in order to decide



what I'm going to eat.

One more thing about specials: Whether they're presented verbally or in printed form, don't make me ask the price of each item. Tell me. When I have to ask, it makes me look like a cheapskate (Pet Peeve No. 7).

Thanks for listening. As I've always said, writing this column is a lot cheaper than therapy.



WINE A TO Z

Imbottigliato all’Oriigine. An Italian term meaning bottled at the source. It can be used only by estates that use grapes grown on their own property in making their wine.

Jug Wine. An inexpensive wine, generally sold in a large bottle. Typically found in discount stores and liquor stores that don’t specialize in fine wine.

Keller. The German word for cellar.

Late Harvest. A wine made from grapes that are harvested very late in the growing season, when they’ve attained very high sugar levels. As a result, the wine is very sweet, and can be poured alongside complementary desserts or served as dessert itself.

Must. The juice and pulp that results from crushing grapes prior to fermentation.

Nouveau. A very young wine intended for immediate drinking. The most famous is Beaujolais Nouveau from France.

APPELLATION SHOWCASE

AUSTRALIA

Australia is the oldest of Earth’s seven continents.

Its soils are extremely diverse: sandy loam in McLaren Vale, clay and volcanic soil on the Mornington Peninsula, and the famed *terra rosa* of Coonawarra — deep red shallow loam over a bedrock of limestone.

Historically, grapes were planted near the areas where people lived, often within city limits. When more Europeans settled in Australia at the beginning of the 19th century, they scouted out areas that resembled the rolling hills of their homelands.

As Australia’s wine culture grew, more scientific methods were used to determine which combinations of soils and climates would be best suited to grapes. New appellations — or “geographic indications,” as the Australians call

them — are still being developed.

Grapes thrive in the hills and valleys that hug Australia’s coastline from just north of Sydney through Victoria and west to Adelaide. Vineyards then skip several hundred miles and start again along the southwest coast and up to Perth.

Rainfall in the winegrowing areas ranges from a barely sufficient 20

inches in the Barossa Valley of South Australia to the nearly drenching 45 inches in Margaret River, Western Australia. Luckily for the vines, rain falls primarily during the winter season and rarely interrupts or postpones the harvest.

Temperatures in the growing areas vary greatly, too, as mid-summer (January) highs can be as low as 66 degrees. That

may be too cool to toss that shrimp on the Barbie outside, but the grapes love it.

■ *To learn more about Australia and its wines, visit VinesseTODAY.com.*



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VINESSE STYLE

YOUNTVILLE INN

A stay at the Yountville Inn is a great way to experience "wine country" in the heart of the world-famous Napa Valley.

In fact, guests become instant "insiders" because the Inn offers concierge services that open doors to some of the area's finest winery and restaurant experiences.

Upon arrival, guests receive a gift basket packed with special offers from local wineries. While settling in, many visitors use the basket goodies to plan their itinerary for the next few days. Each month, a specific local winery is featured at the Inn, with regularly scheduled wine tastings in the Club Room.

Inn personnel also can help with trip planning, from making dinner

reservations to suggesting winery tours, and from handling transportation needs to scheduling spa treatments. With some advance planning, reservations even can be secured at the French Laundry, still the hottest dining venue in the Napa Valley.

After a long day of wine tasting, spa treatments and gourmet cuisine, the rooms at the Yountville Inn provide a welcome retreat. Rooms

include Fieldstone fireplaces and refrigerators, plush terry velour robes, Starbucks coffee, vaulted ceilings and/or patios, and custom furnishings.

And each morning,

guests can savor fresh pastries from the acclaimed Bouchon Bakery, a local institution that has cured countless sweet teeth.

You can learn more about the Yountville Inn and its special packages by visiting yountvilleinn.com or calling 888-366-8166.



BEING GREEN

"Napa Green Land" is a landmark environmental program, initiated in 2003, that looks at all aspects of a grower's property — vineyards, as well as roads, buildings and non-farmed land — to curtail erosion and reduce or eliminate pesticide use that will ultimately enhance the Napa River watershed and preserve or restore wildlife habitat through sustainable agriculture practices. Napa Green Land Environmental Certification is largely based on Fish Friendly Farming, whereby landowners create a customized farm plan that addresses all aspects of not only the vineyard, but the entire property, by outlining and implementing practices to achieve soil and water conservation, stabilizing drainage, enhancing riparian corridors and fisheries, and other long-term land improvements that result in sustainable environmental protection.



Do Medals Matter?

Medals, just like numeric scores, are indicators of a wine's quality.

That said, the awarding of medals — just like the bestowing of ratings — is a very subjective process.

No two wine competitions are exactly the same, but Vinesse tasting panel members have judged in enough of them for us to be able to paint an accurate picture of what takes place in a “typical” competition.

Judges are assigned to panels of three, four or five (an odd number is preferred to avoid voting ties). A panel tastes through a series of wines by variety type, usually in flights of between 10 and 20 (depending on the number of entries in a given category).

Each judge assesses each wine in his or her own way, and then the panel discusses which wines in a given flight are worthy of medals. Sometimes, in order to elevate the “prestige” of a competition, judges may be asked to be very tough in their assessments and recommenda-

tions; a competition that awards a relatively low number of medals may be perceived as more prestigious than one in which medals are handed out like candy on Halloween.

Once an entire category has been tasted by a panel, the judges compare notes about the gold medal winners in order to select a “Best of Class.” At this point, if there is no obvious winner, the judges may ask to re-taste a handful of contenders side by side.

All of the “Best of Class” wines later are poured for all of the panels to determine a competition’s major award winners. Any number of

categories may be offered, including “Best Red Wine,” “Best White Wine,” “Best Dessert Wine,” etc. Those category winners then are

judged side by side in order to determine an overall “Best of Show.”

Through the years, the Vinesse tasting panel has gained a reputation for identifying medal-worthy (and thus member-worthy) wines *before* they begin winning medals during the competition season. Still, it’s always nice when a prestigious wine competition verifies our tasting panel’s good taste.



Four Seasons



WINES THAT MATCH THE SEASON.

Summer — wines for barbecues, picnics or just for sipping. Fall — wines for hearty, harvest-time dishes. You get the idea. All wines are selected by our Tasting Panel to pair beautifully with the foods you love.

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The Gorgeous Gardens of Wine Country

Sometimes you have to look closely; sometimes they seem to appear out of nowhere.

All over California's North Coast wine country... hugging the rows of grapevines... lining walkways to winery tasting rooms... surrounding a freshly painted wooden porch... you'll see them.

Splashes of color dotting an otherwise brown and green sea of grapevines.

They are the gardens of wine country, and whether large or small, they delight the eyes in much the same way a glass of wine delights the nose and tastebuds.

Virtually every winery has a garden of some sort, but a few take their gardens seemingly as seriously as their vineyards. Among our favorites are the antique rose gardens at Korbel and the classic, formal gardens at Ferrari-Carano, both in Sonoma County.

More than 250 varieties of antique roses are on display in the Antique Rose Gardens on the Korbel estate. The gardens were planted during the 1880s for the Korbel family's summer



TOURING TIPS

home, but they did not come into their own until a century later.

That's when master horticulturist Phillip Robinson transformed the grounds into a magnificent array of colors, textures and aromas that evolve with the seasons.

Complementing Robinson's work are a number of trees, roses and other flowers that were planted by the Korbel brothers and their wives — including a Linden tree, which served as a reminder of their native Bohemia (now western Czechoslovakia).

All told, today's garden areas feature more than a thousand varieties of

plants and flowers, bulbs, perennials and annuals. Unique topography within the gardens creates microclimates that are identical to exotic areas of the world.

At Ferrari-Carano Vineyards and Winery, what began in 1987 as a labor of love for gardening enthusiast Rhonda Carano has grown into a breathtaking series of gardens covering five acres.

It took Carano 16 months to plan and plant the original garden. Since then, she has been joined by gardener Pat Patin in expanding the project and making Ferrari-Carano a must-stop for wine lovers and garden lovers alike.

The gardens surrounding the visitor center, known as Villa Fiore, are Italian/French parterre in style, with classic, geometric shapes. The enclosed garden at the front of the winery offers a more park-like setting with a mixture of trees, shrubs, perennials and annuals.

In the spring, 10,000 tulips and daffodils take center-stage. Tulip fans may call 707-433-5349 during the late winter and early spring weeks for updates on when the tulips will be in full bloom.

Visitors can leisurely stroll the meandering garden path and foot bridges along a rippling stream which has waterfalls at both ends. There are more than 2,000 species of trees and shrubs, all marked with identification tags to lend an educational aspect. Among the trees are a number of Portuguese Cork Bark Oaks — true rarities outside their native land.

Adding to the ambience of the gardens are several bronze sculptures fashioned by such world-renowned artists as Dennis Smith, Douglas Van Howd and Jane DeDecker.

Two other recommended stops for gardeners and garden lovers are the Benziger Family Winery in Glen Ellen, and the Cornerstone Festival of Gardens in Sonoma.

The latter is not a winery; rather, as





its name implies, it's an ever-changing series of walk-through gardens that showcase new and innovative designs from the world's top landscape artists and designers. It was inspired by the International Garden Festival at Chaumont-sur-Loire in France, and it's a great place to visit if you're planning to add or revamp a home garden.

Benziger's gardens are more about function than form, as they make an important contribution to the biodynamic vineyard operations. They're habitat-rich so they attract birds and insects that feast on the vineyard pests.

The fact that the plants also are attractive, adding to the overall ambience of the winery, is just a bonus.

For Further Information

Korbel Estate
707-824-7316

**Ferrari-Carano
Vineyards and Winery**
707-433-6700

Benziger Family Winery
888-490-2739

**Cornerstone
Festival of Gardens**
707-933-3010



At Clos Pegase, Wine Is Art and Art Is Everywhere

Some wineries take great pride in being state-of-the-art. Napa Valley's Clos Pegase might more accurately be called the estate of the art.

Founder Jan Schrem began his professional life in publishing. For 13 years after graduating from college, he lived and worked in Japan, importing English-language reference and technical books to a country that was hungry for anything Western. He also translated and published books in Japan, an endeavor that helped him

grow his company to nearly 2,000 employees in 50 offices.

With success came appreciation for the good things in life, including art and wine, the latter introduced to him by wife Mitsuko, whom he'd met and married during his years in Japan. In fact, wine became an all-consuming passion.

So, after 25 years in publishing, Jan and Mitsuko decided to sell their highly successful company and use the proceeds to become vintners. That's how the Clos Pegase winery and its fabulous art collection came to be.

While the sculptures and other works of art bring people in, it's the wine that brings them back. The stately symmetry of the winery's architecture is reflected in the fine bottlings of Clos Pegase.

"I believe we have achieved balance, harmony and symmetry in the classical Greek sense," Schrem says. "We avoid the Baroque concepts of high oak, high alcohol and high extract to create food-friendly wines of quiet elegance."

One can actually "feel" the Clos Pegase style when walking the grounds of the estate. It's in the cool stillness of the caves. It's on the labels of the bottles in the tasting room, featuring a work by 10th century French artist Odilon Redon. It's around a corner in the vineyard when one comes face to face with a sculpture that's simultaneously beautiful and disarmingly irreverent.

Nowhere else do art and wine commingle so elegantly.



Quotes Du Gour

■ *John Stuart Blackie, proving that being a scholar does not preclude one from being a sexist:*

“Wine is the milk of the gods, milk the drink of the babies, tea the drink of women, and water the drink of beasts.”

■ *Keep this German proverb (and very short poem) in mind the next time you’re planning a trip to Germany:*

“Rhineland is wineland.”

■ *Alexis Bespalof, on cooking with wine:*

“A cook who runs out to buy a bottle of cheap wine may spoil several dollars’ worth of food and perhaps an hour or more of preparation with a dime’s worth of wine.”

■ *This French proverb offers a much better alternative for cheap wine:*

“The best use of bad wine is to drive away poor relations.”

■ *Advice from Benjamin Franklin:*

“Never spare the parson’s wine nor the baker’s pudding.”

Q AND A

It seems like any time we go to a new restaurant and want to bring along a bottle of wine from our club “stash,” we get a different answer about the policy from the restaurant. What are the rules regarding bringing your own wine to a restaurant?

When it comes to taking your own bottle of wine to a restaurant, the rule of thumb is: There are no universal rules. So, it’s not surprising that you get a lot of different answers when you inquire.

Let’s take it step by step. Some restaurant/wine rules are more than rules — they’re *laws*, imposed by a state, a county or a city. If some governmental body feels strongly enough about something to pass a law about it, you can bet that law will be more restrictive than permissive. No restaurant owner in his right mind would break a law, even in the name of customer service.

In restaurants where no laws may

apply, you still may encounter some restrictions, based on the owner’s policy. Some restaurants do not allow wine to be brought in from the outside (because they don’t want to sacrifice the extremely high profit margin they enjoy on wine sales), most will allow wine to be brought in for a fee (known as “corkage”), and some encourage the practice by imposing no fee.

We strongly urge you to support restaurants that do allow wine to be brought in, even if corkage is charged. As a matter of courtesy, you should not bring in a bottle that is available on the restaurant’s wine list. Inquire about this when making your reservation.

In restaurants that allow wine to be brought in without imposing a fee, we suggest upping your usual tip amount by 5 or 10 percent as a way of saying “thanks” for the wine-friendly policy.



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AUSSIE GRAPE HARVEST DECREASES IN 2007

Although final figures were not yet in at press time, it's apparent that the 2007 Australian winegrape harvest will be the smallest since 2000. The harvest estimate from the Australian Wine and Brandy Corporation is based on a survey of wine companies covering approximately 85 percent of the industry's winegrape crush. If the current estimate of 1.34 million tons proves to be accurate, the harvest will be 29 percent or 560,000 tons less than last year, and will give Aussie winemakers around 400 million liters less wine than in 2006.

MORE WINERIES EMBRACE TECHNOLOGY

More than half (54 percent) of the wine growers and vintners responding to the 2007 Vineyard Economics Seminar Survey said that technology represents the most important area of their business that will require additional investment over the next three years. Nearly half of survey respondents also said they will require additional investment in mechanization over the next three years. The message is clear: Once a winery reaches a certain production level, the concept of "hand-crafting" goes by the wayside, and more mechanization is needed to optimize profits. Insiders see the survey results as a natural progression in the ongoing consolidation of the wine industry.

COL SOLARE FINALLY MAKES ITS DEBUT

Col Solare, the ambitious collaboration between Tuscany's Marchesi Antinori and Washington's Ste. Michelle Wine Estates, opened its Red Mountain doors on April

12 and, after a dozen vintages, finally became a reality. "In this case, the reality is better than the dream," enthused Piero Antinori, as he and Ste. Michelle CEO Ted Baseler wielded a pair of giant scissors and cut a big ribbon tied across the winery's entrance. The Col Solare wine is a Cabernet-based blend that has struggled to find a unique identity within Ste. Michelle's portfolio of red blends. But as Antinori told *Wine Enthusiast*, it's now poised to become "perhaps more equal" than its peers.

SINGLE SERVINGS ARE NOW OKAY IN ONTARIO

The Ontario government is helping bring more visitors to the Canadian province's wine regions by permitting the sale of single servings of wine for guests to enjoy as they tour a vineyard. "Ontario is becoming known around the world for making top-quality wine," says Essex MMP's Bruce Crozier.



"Winemakers asked for the government's help to promote their products and improve tourism in the wine regions, and we listened." There are more than 100 wineries in Ontario, sprinkled throughout the Niagara Peninsula, the Lake Erie north shore, Pelee Island and Prince Edward County. In the past six years,

Ontario wines have earned more than 125 international awards for excellence.

QUEEN ELIZABETH DRINKS IN STYLE

Ever wonder what special guests drink when dining at the White House? Well, the 2004 Schramsberg Brut Rosé was served at the state dinner honoring England's Queen Elizabeth II and Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh. This continued the tradition of the White House serving Schramsberg sparkling wines at official events. Schramsberg wines have been served at more than 72 events for every sitting president since Richard Nixon's famous 1972 "Toast to Peace" with China's Chou En-Lai in Beijing.

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ZUCCHINI FLOWER TACO

Looking for an easy-to-make dinner for one? Enjoy this dish with a glass of Chardonnay or a white blend.

Ingredients

- 6 zucchini blossoms, stems removed
- 1/2 teaspoon butter or margarine
- 7-inch flour tortilla
- 3 tablespoons shredded Monterey Jack cheese
- 1/2 teaspoon grated Parmesan cheese
- 3 thin slices avocado

Preparation

1. Rinse blossoms well, then gently pat dry.
2. In a 10- or 12-inch frying pan, melt butter over medium heat. Add blossoms and cook, turning often, until wilted (about 3-4 minutes). Remove from pan.
3. Lay tortilla flat in pan and put blossoms on half of the tortilla. Sprinkle with cheeses. Cook until cheese melts.

4. Lay avocado slices on cheese, then fold tortilla over filling and slide onto a plate.

GARLIC CHICKEN SKEWERS

Here's a low-fat recipe that's loaded with flavor. It serves 4, and matches beautifully with Sangiovese or red blends.

Ingredients

- 3 cloves garlic, crushed
- 2 tablespoons honey
- 1/4 cup ketchup
- 1/4 cup Worcestershire sauce
- 2 teaspoons Dijon mustard
- 2 teaspoons hot pepper sauce
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper
- 3 skinless, boneless chicken breasts, cut into thin strips

Preparation

1. Soak a dozen 10-inch bamboo skewers in water for 25 minutes.
2. Meanwhile, in a large, shallow glass bowl, mix together the garlic, honey, ketchup, Worcestershire

sauce, mustard and hot pepper sauce. Season to taste with salt and pepper.

3. Add the chicken and stir until well combined. Cover and marinate for 30 minutes.
4. Preheat broiler to high. Thread marinated chicken onto skewers, and discard the marinade.
5. Arrange skewers on a foil-lined baking sheet and broil for 6-7 minutes, turning occasionally until well browned and cooked through.

Light & Sweet

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2005 Three Muses White Blend	\$17.99
2005 Barclay Brothers Chenin Blanc	\$17.99
2005 Sweetwater California Chenin Blanc	\$17.99
2005 Nathan's Run California Chardonnay	\$17.99
2005 Fusee California Chardonnay	\$17.99
2005 Avelina Semillion/Sauvignon Blanc	\$19.99
2005 Guy Harvey Sauvignon Blanc	\$22.99
2005 Big Ass Chardonnay	\$22.99
2005 Guy Harvey Chardonnay	\$22.99
NV Duval Leroy Brut Champagne	\$45.99

RED WINES Member Price

NV Stella Rosa Sparkling Rosso	\$16.99
2004 Cantine Spinelli Montepulciano d'Abruzzo	\$17.99
2004 Big Ass Napa Zinfandel	\$17.99
2005 Big Ass Cabernet Sauvignon	\$17.99
2003 Chateau Faure-Beausejour, Fronsac, Bordeaux	\$20.99
2005 Spinyback Pinot Noir	\$21.99
2004 Grove Street Merlot	\$21.99
2004 Guy Harvey Merlot	\$22.99
2003 Guy Harvey Cabernet Sauvignon	\$22.99
2004 Brick Road Shiraz	\$23.99
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2004 Firestone Santa Ynez Valley Merlot Magnum	\$50.99

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What you think about our featured wine
selections matters to us. That's why we
include a "comment card" in every shipment.
Fill it out and return it to us, or go online to:
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Name _____				Daytime Phone Number _____		
Company (if office delivery) _____				Evening Phone Number _____		
Delivery Address _____						
City _____		State _____	Zip _____	E-Mail _____		
Charge my: <input type="checkbox"/> American Express <input type="checkbox"/> Visa <input type="checkbox"/> Mastercard <input type="checkbox"/> Discover <input type="checkbox"/> Card on File						
Card Number _____				Exp. Date _____		
Signature (Required) _____						
<input type="checkbox"/> Check Enclosed, Payable to: Vinesse						

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