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The Grapevine

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER FOR VINESSE WINE CLUB MEMBERS



MARTIN'S JOURNAL

Eating a good, balanced diet is an uphill battle for me because, at heart, I'm a meat-and-potatoes guy.



Put a thick, juicy steak in front of me... along

with some fries or a baked potato... and I'm in hog heaven. Add a glass of wine (preferably red), and forget about the steak — you can stick a fork in *me*.

The wonderful thing about wine is that it allows virtually everybody to enjoy similar experiences. The meat may not be beef. Heck, there may be no meat at all. But regardless of the dish, chances are good there's a wine — red, white, rosé or sparkling — that will go nicely with the meal.

If you approach wining and dining with an open mind, there will always be a wine for you.

Martin Stewart Jr.

When Good News Turns Bad: The Curse of the '95 Vintage

By Robert Johnson

The year was 1995. It figures to be remembered as one of the most important annus in the history of French winemaking.

France has had numerous “vintage years” through the decades and centuries — years when the grapes were of such exceptional quality that the resulting wines commanded premium prices.

But wine is not like commodities, the prices of which are determined by any number of market forces. When the price of a particular wine goes up, it very rarely goes down in subsequent vintages. It's a practice that is intended to, as they say in the world of marketing, “protect the brand.”

In 1995, the French harvest was not merely good, or even exceptional. It was magnificent. And it was hailed as such by a number of influential wine critics.

So, when those wines began to hit the global marketplace in 1997

and '98, consumers came down with a cumulative case of sticker shock. Prices were up across the board and, in some cases, had doubled.

We're all feeling pain at the pump these days. Now, imagine what would happen if that \$4 gallon of gas suddenly shot up to \$8 per gallon. Millions of people would begin seeking out alternate fuel sources or transportation modes.

Well, that's exactly what



happened with France's 1995 vintage. While the most expensive bottlings were gobbled up by investors and collectors (for whom money is no object), the overall effect was to send millions of wine lovers scouting for more affordable vinous pleasures.

(continued on page 2)

Check out “Editor’s Journal” every Monday on VinesseTODAY.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.

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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



Let's face it: *Not all of us marry people who are as enthusiastic about wine as we are.*

This can make taking a "wine country" vacation a challenge. Your significant other may be fine with visiting one or two tasting rooms, but he or she may not be thrilled about swirling and sipping all day long (hey, nobody's perfect).

Where to go so both of you can have a good time? I suggest the Sonoma County town of Glen Ellen, where the main drag (Arnold Drive) has wooden sidewalks and even a saloon.

Within just a few doors of one another, one can experience an array of culinary delights of the non-vinous variety (oh, how it pains me just to type those words!) at Raymond & Co. Cheesemongers, Figone's Olive Oil Co., and Wine Country Chocolates.

John Raymond knows his cheese, and he enthusiastically encourages visitors to sample his delicious enemies of the lactose intolerant. With little prompting, he'll even demonstrate the proper way to slice cheese.

Frank Figone is equally knowledgeable about olive oil; in fact, he's a pioneer in California olive oil-making. Sampling opportunities abound here as well, from the light and grassy La Visione (made from olives grown on a tree that his great-grandfather transplanted from Italy in 1927) to the peppery Tuscan blend.

My favorite? The California blend,

which I use as a "dip" for crusty bread, alongside a nice glass of California Chardonnay.

For "dessert," a couple can head over to Wine Country Chocolates and taste samples of *ganache* — the soft, squishy stuff you find inside a truffle. There are lots of flavors to try, but since you're in "wine country," ask for the one infused with Cabernet Sauvignon.

Your significant other duly satiated, you then can get back to tasting the liquid pleasures that are in abundance in and around Glen Ellen.

COVER STORY

(continued from page 1)

That's when the wines of Australia and Chile and Argentina and New Zealand really began to catch on. If the choice were one bottle of magnificent French wine or two cases of very good Australian wine for the same price, millions of wine drinkers said, "*Au revoir*," to France and "G'day, mate," to Australia.

Of course, economic forces can change markets overnight, so it's possible that one day the harvest of 1995 no longer will be considered a curse in France. Meanwhile, Vinesse will continue to do business with French estates that resisted the urge to gouge, while concurrently seeking out exceptional bottlings from all corners of the winemaking world.



Blend. Combining two or more lots of wine in hopes of enhancing flavor, complexity and/or balance. Virtually every wine made is a blend, even if it's a single variety.

Chewy. Another word for mouthfilling — describes a wine that is so viscous it seems as if it could be chewed. Zinfandel and Cabernet Sauvignon are among the varieties for which this description often applies.

Dry. Any wine that does not contain significant grape sugar, typically less than .2 percent residual sugar.

Elegant. A wine of great balance and finesse. In winespeak, it is the opposite of rustic.

Flowery. Description of a wine with an aroma reminiscent of flowers — most commonly, white flowers.

Grassy. Description of a wine with aromas and/or flavors of just-mown grass. A common descriptor for Sauvignon Blanc.

APPELLATION SHOWCASE

TEMECULA VALLEY

Less than 60 miles north of San Diego and 90 miles southeast of Los Angeles lies Temecula Valley wine country, California's largest concentration of wineries south of Santa Barbara.

Rolling hills covered with vineyards, expansive views reaching to 11,000-foot-high mountains, air swept by ocean breezes and world-class wines make Temecula Valley an exciting place to visit for wine lovers.

Twenty-one wineries produce award-winning wines, made possible by a unique microclimate and well-drained granitic soils. The 1,500-foot

elevation makes for cool summer nights, and breezes come through the vineyards every afternoon throughout the summer — delightful for visitors, and beneficial for the grapevines.

Just about every type of wine you could think of is produced by Temecula Valley vintners. Baily Vineyard & Winery specializes in Bordeaux varieties. La Cereza Vineyard & Winery crafts one of California's finest renditions of Viognier. Thornton Winery is known far and wide for its sparkling wines — not to mention its “Champagne Jazz” concert series.

And just like the Napa Valley and other more famous wine regions, there's even a boutique estate that requires an advance reservation to visit: Briar Rose Winery.

Also like other wine regions, Temecula Valley is home to stylish resorts (South Coast Winery Resort and Spa), gourmet restaurants (Café Champagne, Scarcella's Italian Grill), and even hot-air balloon rides.



- Hand-crafted gems produced by little known or small estates
- Limited-production bottlings
- Under-the-radar wines you won't find in supermarkets

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PRICE: Only \$12 Average Per Bottle Plus Shipping



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**IT'S NOT FOR EVERYONE.
IS IT FOR YOU?**

Vinesse created the Elevant Society to meet members' demands for super-premium wines. While virtually all members of the original American Cellars Wine Club were very satisfied with their monthly selections, some wanted more, and they were willing to pay for it.

EACH ELEVANT SOCIETY SHIPMENT INCLUDES:

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Approximately Monthly

PRICE:

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VINESSE STYLE

SPA TERRA

***T*here's a lot to love about The Meritage Resort in the town of Napa.**

The Sienna Restaurant. The Trinitas Tasting Room. The Meritage Bar. Exceptional concierge service.

And then there's the *piece de resistance* — a French term we use for this California resort only because its street address is on Bordeaux Way: Spa Terra.

The spa is situated in the resort's 22,000-square-foot Estate Wine Cave, where natural stone and copper water features combine with Old World Florentine architecture and furnishings to offer guests a welcoming environment unlike any other.

Cascading waterfalls, steaming grottos and serene soaking pools add to the ambience, providing the perfect backdrop for a wide array of unique spa services and treatments.

The "Summer Solstice" package begins with an invigorating

Cabernet/passion fruit scrub, and also includes a 50-minute massage, an espresso facial and a glass of sparkling wine. A luxurious paraffin treatment for the hands and feet can be added for a small fee.

The spa's signature treatment is known as "Solo Vino." It begins with a grape seed scrub, followed by an invigorating jet shower rinse and a decadent body wrap with a wine cave

mud mask. A massage also is included, along with a glass of wine and a plate of cheese. There may be no better way to spend two hours of your life.

Spa services also can be savored "a la carte," from the various treatments to the lunch menu that includes delicious options such as Grilled Rare Ahi Tuna Nicoise, a Smoked Turkey and Avocado

Club sandwich, and a selection of artisan cheeses accompanied by walnuts and wildflower honeycomb.

Many guests begin Saturday morning at Spa Terra with a 45-minute yoga class led by an instructor from Napa's esteemed Ubuntu yoga center. The class is followed by a meditation walk along a vineyard path, with a focus on breathing and solitude.

*T*here may be no better way to spend two hours of your life.

BEING GREEN

The Sustainable Winegrowing Program gives growers and vintners educational tools to increase adoption of sustainable practices and to measure and demonstrate ongoing improvement. Building on major trends and successful regional efforts, the wine community joined together to create the Sustainable Winegrowing Program. A comprehensive workbook and educational workshops provide how-to information on sustainable winegrowing. Participants self-assess their vineyards and wineries, and voluntarily contribute data to measure adoption of sustainable practices. The statewide "Sustainability Report" documents results, identifies strengths and opportunities for improvement, and sets goals to increase use of sustainable practices. New workshops targeting the most challenging areas are underway, and follow-up reports will track ongoing progress. Partners from government, academia, and community and environmental groups contribute resources and expertise.



How to Make Your Picnic Perfect

In some parts of the country, any time of the year is a good time for a picnic.

In most locales, however, not much of the picnic season remains. That means it's time to gather the wicker basket, red-and-white checkerboard tablecloth, cooler, plastic utensils and sun block, and start planning a trip to your favorite park, beach or other outdoor destination.

And if your picnic place allows you to consume alcohol, then it's also time to set aside a few bottles of wine.

Which brings up the question: What kind of wine should you pack?

Let's begin with what you probably shouldn't bring. Those would be wines that we refer to as "big red monsters." Red wines, in general, are not the best for warm-weather occasions, as the lofty air temperature only adds to the perceived "heat" of the wine's relatively high alcohol level.

While it's true that we often recommend Zinfandel for backyard barbecues, the reason that works is because you can keep the wine bottle inside the house, away from the rays



of the sun. (We also recommend chilling down Zin a bit on such occasions.)

For a picnic, during which wine is going to be exposed to warm or hot temps for an extended period, white varieties are your best bet. And the cooler or ice chest is your best friend.

Here are eight wines to consider packing for your next picnic...

1. Sauvignon Blanc.

Light and refreshing, and a great choice if you're bringing along chilled shellfish.

2. **Chenin Blanc.** A very versatile variety that complements almost all picnic fare.

3. **Viognier.** Toss some greens, fold in

some peach slices and nuts, top with a creamy dressing and enjoy.

4. **Riesling.** We love the fruit-forward renditions with blueberry coffee cake, or peaches topped with a dollop of whipped cream.

5. **Gewurztraminer.** Picking up some spicy Chinese or Tex-Mex food for the picnic? Then this is the wine to bring.

6. **Muscat Canelli.** Another good choice with Chinese fare, particularly orange chicken.

7. **Chardonnay.** Great with fried chicken or fried... anything.

8. **Sparkling wine.** You can't go wrong with a Blanc de Blancs — the only wine that pairs well with an egg salad sandwich.

Four Seasons



WINES THAT MATCH THE SEASON.

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2 Perfect Days in Rutherford & St. Helena

Nowhere is the purpose of the American Viticultural Area system more evident than in the Napa Valley.

The landscape changes considerably from the wind-swept Carneros AVA in the south to the sometimes-scorching proposed AVA of Calistoga in the north. In between, there are two main north-south corridors, each lined with numerous wine estates and vast expanses of vineyards.

Trying to navigate the entire Napa Valley in a single trip would be a mind-boggling and ultimately frustrating endeavor. It's much more logical (and enjoyable) to concentrate on one area and experience as much of it as possible.

The Rutherford and St. Helena area — north of Yountville and south of Calistoga — offers an amazing concentration of wineries and restaurants. In Yountville, the Vintage Inn makes a convenient home base. But if money is no object, opt for the village's star accommodation, Auberge du Soleil, where room rates range from \$525 to \$750.

Auberge du Soleil first gained acclaim as a stand-alone restaurant. In 1985, it expanded to include a hotel. Its location on the valley's "quiet side," off the Silverado Trail, adds to its allure.

"Sit on the terrace at Auberge du Soleil and you can look at the grapevines below while enjoying the result," notes Barbara Fairchild, editor in chief of *Bon Appetit* magazine.

The restaurant has long offered an array of rich foods such as foie gras, but you may want to opt for the unique vegetarian tasting menu. Vegetables have always been a



TOURING TIPS

challenge to pair with wine, but chef Robert Curry has found a way to make pink grapefruit, asparagus and fennel salad, as well as stuffed squash blossoms, wine-friendly.



After an amazing food-and-wine experience, it's nice to be able to walk back to your room.

The Rutherford AVA is known for its unique soil — referred to by locals as "Rutherford dust" — which imparts a

rustic quality to the wines, particularly Cabernet Sauvignon. Look for the "Rutherford" designation on labels as you visit the various tasting rooms in order to experience the unique aromas and flavors found in the grapes of the region.

There is no shortage of wineries in the Rutherford and St. Helena area, including famous names such as Mondavi, Coppola, Silver Oak and Opus One. The owners of Opus One — founded in 1979 by Robert Mondavi and Bordeaux's Baron Philippe de Rothschild — definitely believe they make a special wine; they charge \$30 for a single pour.

That said, the days of complimentary tasting anywhere in the Napa Valley are virtually gone. Still, there are much better "deals" to be found up and down the valley, so stop by Opus only if it's an estate you've always wanted to visit. You certainly won't be disappointed by its opulence.

In Santa Barbara County to the south, the Firestone family segued successfully from tire manufacturing to winemaking. Napa Valley is filled with similar stories of "second careers" focused on wine.

Take, for example, Swanson Vineyards in Rutherford. Yes, it's owned by the same Swanson family that made a fortune in frozen dinners. The Swansons began their foray into the wine world in 1987 with Merlot, and now craft a wide array of bottlings, including Sangiovese, Syrah and a noteworthy "Rosato."

Farther north in St. Helena is a must-stop on your journey: Beringer Vineyards. Many associate the Beringer name with White Zinfandel, and that doesn't bother the owners one bit because the winery sells a lot of White Zin.

But it also makes some big,

“serious” wines, and many of these can be sampled in the winery’s “reserve room.” The estate has been undergoing extensive renovation in recent months, so you may need to ask where the “good stuff” is being poured. While there, take a tour; Beringer offers one of the best in all of Napa Valley.

Finish your second day in the Rutherford/St. Helena corridor at the restaurant where many of the local vintners go for dinner: the Rutherford Grill. Rotisserie chicken is the specialty of the house, with the sliced leg of lamb a close second.

The menu also includes the best cheeseburger in the valley, several salad options, grilled ostrich and bangers and mash.

Eclectic? You bet, and so is the wine list. But if you’d like to keep things “local,” the list includes Rutherford-designated Sauvignon Blanc from Long Meadow Ranch and Provenance, Zinfandel from Tres Sabores, and Cabernet Sauvignon from Beaulieu.

And here’s what makes Rutherford Grill a great value: In all the times we’ve dined there, we’ve never been charged a corkage fee for wine brought in — a policy no doubt attributable to the plethora of vintners among the restaurant’s regulars.

For Further Information

Auberge du Soleil
800-348-5406

Opus One
707-944-9442

Swanson Vineyards
707-967-3500

Beringer Vineyards
707-963-8989

Rutherford Grill
707-963-1792



Seghesio Winery Decides to Do More With Less

“Growing smaller” would seem to be an illogical concept, but it has made perfect sense for the Seghesio family of Sonoma County.

The Seghesio winemaking story began in 1886 when Edoardo Seghesio left behind his family’s vineyards in Piedmonte, Italy, seeking a better way of life in America.

Edoardo had heard about the Italian Swiss Colony in northern California, and decided that would be his initial destination. The Colony offered immigrants room and board in exchange for a three-year employment contract. At the end of the contract, workers were paid a lump sum — in effect, a stake in a home or a business of their own.



Edoardo’s talents caught the eye of the Colony managers, and he quickly worked his way up to the ranks of winemaker. He stayed well beyond his three-year commitment, and in 1895, he and his wife Angela purchased a home in Sonoma County’s Alexander Valley.

What actually had caught Edoardo’s eye was not the home, but the 56 acres of land that surrounded it — land that was perfect for grapevines. The couple planted Zinfandel, the variety that has proven to be the Seghesio family’s lifeline through four generations.

Still working for the Colony, Edoardo worked on building his own winery during the evening hours. It made for some long, exhausting days, but by 1902, the Seghesio Winery was completed.

Six months before the enactment of Prohibition, believing that it couldn’t possibly last, Edoardo purchased the 4-million-gallon Italian Swiss Colony for a song. He had to go into debt to do it, however, and when Prohibition lingered, Edoardo was forced to take on partners. He ended up selling his shares in 1933.

The next year, Edoardo died. But Angela endured and gradually built up the Seghesio Winery. She passed away in 1958, but her sons carried on and, into the mid-1970s, were producing 1.7 million gallons of wine annually.

The first wines bottled under the Seghesio label came from the 1983 harvest. Ten years later, 130,000 cases were being made.

But when the next generation was given control of the winery, they decided to focus on quality by dropping production to just 30,000 cases.

They retain that commitment to this day, crafting estate wines almost exclusively — including some from the vineyard Edoardo and Angela planted in the late 1800s.

Quotes Du Jour

■ *Homer, in The Odyssey, offering a word of caution:*

“The wine urges me on, the bewitching wine, which sets even a wise man to singing and to laughing gently and rouses him up to dance and brings forth words which were better unspoken.”

■ *Or, as this American proverb more succinctly puts it:*

“Wine is the discoverer of secrets.”

■ *Henry Leigh, in Carols of Cocayne, with one reason wine is better than beer:*

“If you wish to grow thinner, diminish your dinner and take to light Claret instead of pale ale.”

■ *French vintner Joseph Dargent on wine’s role in politics:*

“No government could survive without Champagne. In the throats of our diplomatic people, it is like oil in the wheels of an engine.”

■ *Veteran wine author Oz Clarke, describing Merlot:*

“Red wine without tears.”

Q AND A



What is the ranking of red wines, from heaviest to lightest?

— **Rex Boller**

Dear Rex:

An excellent question. What makes it so excellent? Well, because it’s nearly impossible to answer. But we’ll give it a shot...

If you want to speak in very broad generalities — and we do mean very broad — the “heaviest” wine among the more common reds would be Cabernet Sauvignon, followed closely by Zinfandel.

Next would come Pinot Noir, followed by Syrah/Shiraz and Cabernet Franc.

Then, one more level down — and leaning toward “light” — would be

Merlot and Chianti.

We throw Chianti in the mix because it’s so well known among wine drinkers. Lesser known are some of the other Italian varietals (Barolo, Barbera, Barbaresco, et al), virtually all of which would be considered “heavier” than Chianti.

And let’s not forget blends of multiple varietals, which can range from light and immediately approachable to big and ageworthy.

Blends, a.k.a. cuvees, provide the best examples of why your question is so challenging to answer. In many, many cases, the style of the wine — heavy, light or somewhere in-between — has as much to do with the vintner’s style and preferences as the grape variety.

In winemaking, more than almost any other endeavor, style *is* substance.

Have a question about wine? Log on to VinesseTODAY.com, click on “Ask a Wine Question,” and ask away!



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THE MYSTERIOUS WORLD OF WINE FORGERY

If you're a fan of "C.S.I.," you'll probably enjoy a new book by Benjamin Wallace, *The Billionaire's Vinegar: The Mystery of the World's Most Expensive Bottle of Wine* (Crown, \$24.95). The book details how certain brands of wine moved beyond agricultural foodstuff to become pricey collectibles coveted by the world's wealthy. It provides a behind-the-scenes look at some of the mind-boggling methods forgers use to "re-create" certain coveted bottlings.

ONE MORE REASON TO VISIT NEW ZEALAND

There's a lot of "wine country" to explore in New Zealand, with its multiple growing regions. Now, there's even more, with the recent opening of the Cable Bay winery on Waiheke Island. The isle is a mere 35-minute ferry ride from Auckland, but it feels a world apart. Luxurious accommodations are available, but the real ethos is perhaps best explained by the verbiage seen on bumper stickers: "Far enough behind to be ahead." At Cable Bay, there's not only an impressive winery and tasting room, but also an excellent restaurant serving rustic-style dishes.

WISCONSIN OFFERS FREE CHEESE GUIDE

Like cheese with your wine? Order a copy of the free guide that spotlights more than 100 cheesemakers and cheese shops in

Wisconsin. The guide also includes a comprehensive list of cheese events — a valuable resource for a wine lover, since we all know that where there is cheese, there's likely to be wine nearby. To order, log on to wisdairy.com.

BEWARE THE WRATH OF WINE GRAPES

While traversing those bucolic wine country roads, who among us has not been tempted to pull over and pluck a few grapes off the vines? Three words: Don't do it. Wine grapes typically have very thick skins and seeds, and don't taste anything at all like the wine that they are used to make. In fact, if you ever hear someone say a wine is "grapey," it's probably not a compliment.



A MOVIE REVIEW AND AN IRONIC TWIST

The movie "Bottle Shock," which tells the tale of the historic 1976 "Judgment of Paris" wine tasting, probably has exited your local theater by now. If you missed it, you'll want to pick up the DVD when it's released. Meanwhile, check out our review of the movie... and an ironic post-script... in the archives area of VinesseTODAY.com.

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THAI-STYLE POACHED HALIBUT

Try this tasty dish with Pinot Grigio, Gewurztraminer or Sauvignon Blanc. (Note: Any firm white fish will work, but we like halibut best.)

Ingredients

- 1-lb. fresh halibut
- 1/2 cup cilantro, chopped
- 2-in. piece of fresh ginger, peeled
- 1 shallot, chopped
- 3 limes, juiced
- 3 tablespoons fish sauce
- 2 tablespoons brown sugar
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 cup chicken broth
- 2 cups fresh corn, cut from the cob
- 1 teaspoon curry
- 5 small dried red chili peppers
- 1/2 cup coconut milk
- 1 cup fresh basil leaves, chopped

Preparation

1. In a small bowl, mix fish sauce, brown sugar and lime juice, and set aside.
2. In a food processor, finely chop the cilantro, ginger and shallot. In a medium-sized sauce pan, add olive oil and sauté the spice mixture for 1-2 minutes.
3. Add chicken broth and bring to a boil. Add the fish sauce mixture and corn, and continue to cook at a low boil until corn is tender.
4. Reduce heat to simmer. Add coconut milk and halibut, and cook until halibut is done (approximately 5 minutes).
5. Spoon over rice, and garnish with chopped basil.

SHRIMP AND GRAPEFRUIT SALAD

This recipe lends itself to warm weather, but it's great any time of the year. Try it with any light white wine or Rosé.

Ingredients

- 1 head butter lettuce, washed, dried and torn
- 1 avocado, peeled and sliced
- 1 pink grapefruit, peeled and sectioned
- 1-lb. shrimp, grilled or poached
- 2 tablespoons fresh lime juice
- Zest from 1 lime
- 1 tablespoon honey
- 1/2 cup medium-bodied olive oil
- 1 teaspoon sea salt
- 1/2 teaspoon fresh ground pepper

Preparation

1. Combine olive oil, lime juice, zest, honey, salt and pepper. Mix well and let stand for at least one hour.
2. Gently toss lettuce, avocado, grapefruit sections and shrimp with desired amount of dressing. Serve immediately.

Light
& Sweet

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PRICE:

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CELLAR SPECIALS

WHITE WINES

Member Price

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2007 Soaring Aces California Sauvignon Blanc	12.99
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