

March 2011 Special Guest Winery: Omega Cellars

Family-owned and operated by the Natsis family, Omega Cellars winery is located off State Route 88 in Lodi.

The heart and development of Omega Cellars centers around its founder, Frank Natsis, and began with an idea that dates back to a time when Frank was still a child.

As the story goes, Frank's work ethic, dedication and attention to detail were instilled in him as a young boy in Artemision, Greece, where he observed and helped his father tend to the family farm. It was hard work, but hard work is nothing new to the Natsis family. Frank often told his children as they were growing up, "There are no short-cuts in life; do things the right way and you can later sit back and see how the fruits of your labor have rewarded you."

After immigrating to Canada in 1960, that work ethic and attention to detail served Frank and his family well. He became a successful chef and restaurant owner, a career that spanned forty years. Even with the success achieved in the restaurant business, the yearning to "work" the land was still alive and burning within him.

Frank believed that owning land and tilling the soil was a solid foundation for creating a legacy and instilled that idea in his children. Thus, in late 1990, the legacy began – the family purchased the original vineyard on Locust Tree Road and plant-

ed their first vines (Chardonnay).

However, it became clear that the family wished for more. "Why not make wine for ourselves?" was a repeated theme, and, as a result, the transition from the restaurant business to the wine industry took place. Omega Cellars was established in 2002 by Frank and his two sons, Jim and George.

Omega's stated philosophy is simple: In order to craft a distinctive and well balanced wine, you must first start with quality in the vineyard.

Their estate vineyards, consisting of Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Chardonnay, Malbec, Merlot, Mourvedre, Petit Verdot, Petite Sirah, and Syrah produce small quantities of grape clusters. The resulting wines embody intense color, concentration and depth.

Aaron Mosley was since brought in as a consulting winemaker, and was instrumental in laying down the foundation for their winemaking program.

Omega's 2006 *Mystico Bordeaux Blend* won "BEST Red Wine of Lodi" at the 2009 California State Fair.

In 2008, Tim Chapralis came on board to bolster the "Omega" brand. Tim has been instrumental in helping build the "new" Omega Cellars, from the look of the bottle to the style going into each of their blends..

Visit them at <http://www.omegavineyardsandwinery.com/>



Grab your (21+) fun, wine-loving friends and family and join us at this month's Wine Club meeting!

**OUR NEXT MEETING:
MONDAY, MARCH 28, 6:30 – 9:00 PM**



Bring a bottle of a **French Varietal** and wine glasses!



This Month's Theme: *Bon Appetit!*

For many, when they think of *wine*, they think of *France*. France has a long and fascinating heritage as the mother of all wine-producing countries. But how did France become the established wine trend setter, the gold standard for so many producing countries? History, experience and exceptional *terroir* have all played a key role in building the French reputation for classic wines.

First a bit of history, the Greeks and Romans are credited for planting and growing the early vineyards. Then around the 5th century the church became the dominant keeper of the vine and the primary producer of the wines, used predominantly for the Holy Sacrament.

Through the centuries the vineyards of France continued to develop as did the foreign trade. However, in the 1800s many of the French vineyards fell victim to disease (primarily phylloxera – a small insect that destroys the roots of vines) which crippled the country's dominating wine production.

In the 1900s after France suffered economically under two world wars, contributing in part to a significant decrease in the quality and availability of prestigious French wines, the A.O.C. (or Appellation d'Origine Controlee – meaning "regulated origin name") was

devised. The A.O.C. outlined the standards for today's modern wine regulations and laws that serve both to define grape growing regions as well as protect the quality of wines. The A.O.C. served to redeem the country's wine reputation and determine structured protocol for quality and consistency within the French wine market.

As for experience, the French winemakers have been honing their business for centuries. It is estimated that France has around 150,000 grape growers, producing about 1.5 billion gallons of wine per year. There are many recognized wine growing regions in France, spanning north to south and east to west. Alsace, Beaujolais, Bordeaux, Burgundy, Champagne, the Loire Valley and the Rhone Valley are the big hitters with a myriad of vineyards sprinkled throughout the country.

Virtually all classic grape varietals available today were sourced from France. French wines continue to serve as the archetype against which modern wines worldwide are evaluated. For example, a California Cab will be held to the tasting standards of a Cabernet Sauvignon from Bordeaux. In France, wines are typically named for the vineyard or growing region in which they were produced, rather than for the grape varietal that was used.

FRENCH VARIETALS

Major White Grape Varieties

Grape Variety	Region(s) Where Important
Chardonnay	Burgundy; Champagne; Languedoc
Chenin Blanc	Loire Valley
Sauvignon Blanc	Bordeaux; Loire Valley; Southwest France; Languedoc
Gewürztraminer	Alsace
Pinot Gris	Alsace
Pinot Blanc	Alsace
Marsanne	Rhône Valley
Muscadet	Loire Valley
Riesling	Alsace
Roussanne	Rhône Valley
Sémillon	Bordeaux; Southwest France
Viognier	Rhône Valley; Languedoc

Major Red Grape Varieties

Grape Variety	Region(s) Where Important
Cabernet Sauvignon	Bordeaux; Southwest France; Languedoc
Cabernet Franc	Loire Valley; Bordeaux; Southwest France
Carignan	Rhône Valley; Southern France
Cinsault	Rhône Valley; Southern France
Gamay	Beaujolais
Grenache	Rhône Valley; Southern France
Merlot	Bordeaux; Southwest France; Languedoc
Malbec	Southwest France; Bordeaux
Mourvèdre	Rhône Valley; Southern France
Pinot Noir	Burgundy; Champagne
Syrah	Rhône Valley; Southern France

Understanding how French wines are named

By Ed McCarthy and Mary Ewing-Mulligan

The first step toward understanding French wine names is to realize that, in France, the government controls how wines are named, and every wine name is a reflection of French wine law. In theory, you could learn all sorts of information about any French wine just by looking up its name in the French laws. That information would include the general vineyard territory for that wine, which grape varieties could possibly be in that wine, and so forth.

If you were to research several wine names, such as Bordeaux and Burgundy, you'd discover that most of them are the names of places — the vineyard area where the grapes for the wines grow. Vineyard location is the organizational principle behind French wine law and the basis for naming French wines.

Terroir is the French word for the set of natural conditions that any one vineyard (or wine region) has — the unique combination of climate, soil, altitude, slope, and so forth, in any one location. Different vineyards produce different wines. The locale where the grapes grow affects the quality and style of the wine. Naturally, then, terroir became the basis of French wine law, and the system for naming French wines.

Not all terroirs are equal in the eyes of the French wine law. Some vineyards are very privileged locations, and other vineyards lie in more ordinary territory. The status of the locale determines, to a large extent, the price and the prestige of the wine grown there.

Two basic categories of wine zones exist in France: classic wine areas and newer grape growing and winemaking areas

Every vineyard in France lies within one type of wine zone or the other — or sometimes, both. Where classic zones and newer areas overlap, a winemaker can use either area's name for the wine, provided that he follows the rules governing the production of the wine whose name he uses.

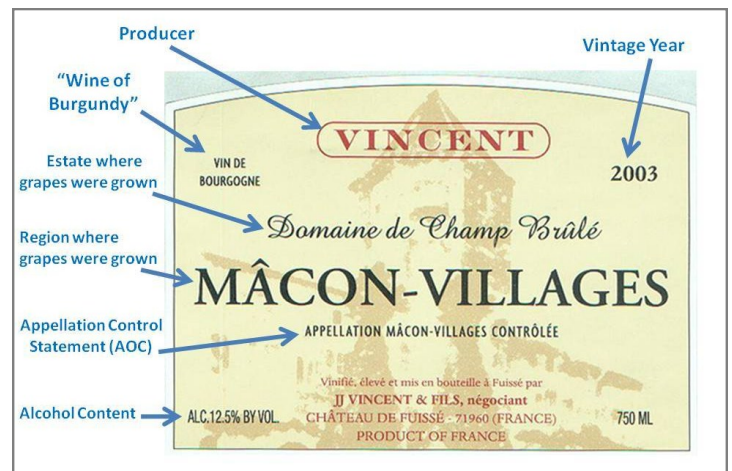
These rules are stricter for vineyards in the classic areas, and more flexible in the newer areas. For example, winemakers in a classic zone have less choice of what grape variety to plant. But wines from the classic areas are generally more prestigious.

Where territories overlap, a winemaker generally chooses the name that represents the smallest, most specific terroir for which the vineyard is eligible for several reasons. The smaller area is more exclusive; fewer people can have vineyards there and use that name for their wine. Also, wines from smaller terroirs typically command a higher price than wines named after larger areas because they are generally perceived to be of higher quality.

An exception to this rule can occur when the name of the larger area is better known and more marketable than the name of the smaller area.

SOURCE: Wine for Dummies

HOW TO READ A FRENCH WINE LABEL



1. One of the easiest things to spot on a French wine label is the vintage or year the wine was produced. Sometimes you'll see a second date on the label, followed by the word "depuis" or the phrase "Fondée en" which means "since" and "founded in". This refers to how long the producer has been in business.
2. Wines are named by the grape they're made from (Merlot) the region they come from (Bordeaux) or the estate where they are produced (Christian Moueix). Although not printed on the label above, we would know the wine is a Chardonnay because it is was produced in Bourgogne (Burgundy) and because the green-colored bottle tells us it is a white wine.
3. Perhaps the most important thing to look for is the phrase "Appellation Controlee" which on the label above appears below the region name (Macon-Villages). This means the government has sanctioned that type of wine to be grown in that region or at that chateau. Since grapes grown in different soils and different regions differ in taste, this allows for consistency.



WHAT'S THE MOTIF?

As always, the Wine Club provides an array of appetizers at our meetings, along with those contributed by our members.

For 2011, we've upgraded our monthly themes to provide balance and harmony to your tasting palate. This year, the wine theme will be complemented by food along the same lines.

In March, "Bon Appetit!" is our theme, so look for French-inspired h'or doerves on the food tables.



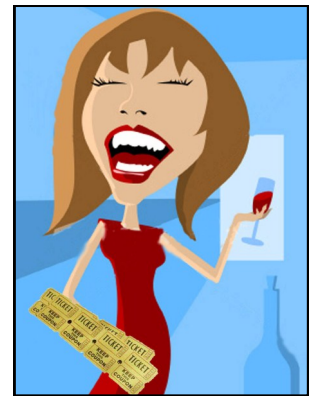
We anticipate another large turn-out at this month's event, so member-provided appetizers would be appreciated!

Contact us for suggestions on which tasty food you can bring - or just bring it! Please make sure you let us know what you brought (we'll have a sign-in sheet) so we may properly thank you.

Our sincerest thanks to those Wine Club members who continue to share their yummy dishes!

Support your Wine Club and Win Fabulous Door Prizes!

Since admission to our meetings is **FREE**, the club relies on the generosity of its membership in purchasing **Door Prize Donation** tickets to gain adequate, well-managed proceeds to cover expenses for the appetizers, food service supplies and the usual cool assortment of door prizes from the Wine Club, personally selected by committee member and buyer extraordinaire Mary DeChance and complemented by fabulous prize donations from your fellow members.



MARK YOUR CALENDAR FOR THESE UPCOMING EVENTS

APRIL 25

Happy Anniversary Wine Club!
(Champagne)

HOLLY'S HILL

Nestled in the beautiful Sierra Foothills in El Dorado County and Pleasant Valley, Holly's Hill Winery specializes in producing Rhone-varietal wines, including Viognier, Roussanne, Grenache, Mourvedre, Syrah and Counoise.

www.hollyshill.com/

MAY 23

Summertime and the Livin' is Easy
(California Wines)

ANNUAL SUMMER SOCIAL

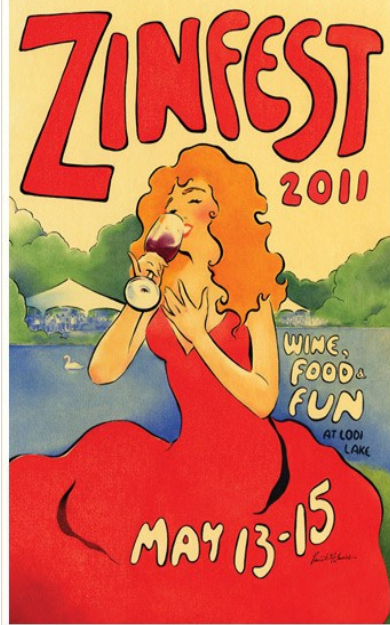
Join your fellow Wine Club members for our annual social meeting. We're working up some fun, so stay tuned for details! Check out our website to view pictures from past meetings.

<http://www.heritageparkwineclub.org/>



Saturday, April 30
Sunday, May 1

The Winegrowers of Dry Creek Valley will be celebrating their 22nd annual Passport to Dry Creek Valley. More than 45 Dry Creek Valley wineries will be rolling out the red carpet for an exclusive weekend of new wine releases paired with a bounty of food from top Sonoma County chefs. Meet the winemakers and owners, often the same people, and learn more about winemaking in bucolic Dry Creek Valley. Many wineries offer either live music or entertainment. Come and see what they have to offer this year! <http://wdcv.com/passport>



VINTNER'S GRILLE AT LODI LAKE

Friday, May 13, 2011

Lodi Lake Park

ZINFEST WINE FESTIVAL

Saturday, May 14, 2011

Lodi Lake Park

WINERY OPEN HOUSES

Sunday, May 15, 2011

Participating Lodi Wineries

<http://www.zinfest.com/>



TASTE OF ALEXANDER VALLEY

Geyserville, CA

May 21-22, 2011 (Sat & Sun) 11:00am - 4:00pm

This weekend-long wine and food extravaganza begins on Friday, May 20 with the Opening Gala, where guests can experience renowned wines and delectable gourmet fare in an intimate setting while mingling with Alexander Valley winery principals, wine-makers and vineyard owners. On Saturday and Sunday over 30 wineries host their own special parties offering wine and food pairings, live entertainment and weekend special wine discounts. Come and experience the best of the casually elegant wine country lifestyle that makes the Alexander Valley one of the world's premier destinations for wine and food good times! <http://tastealexandervalley.org/>



For more information and to
view over 2,000 pictures from past Wine Club events, visit us online at:

<http://www.heritageparkwineclub.org/>

CHEERS!

The HP Wine Club Committee