



California Wine Merchant

Established 1974

Wine Shop / Wine Bar / Wine Club

CWM Wine Club First Quarter 2024

The CWM Wine Club is all about discovery and we love nothing more than sharing our new favorites with you. These wines are truly exceptional, each in their own way, and are bursting with loads of personality. Each wine has its story to tell, which is also part of the fun... knowing the background of the people who make these handcrafted beauties.

The Ra Ra 2023 Melon de Bourgogne from Alexander Valley is a unique opportunity to taste a variety rarely seen here in California. This wine is bursting with fresh fruit aromas of salted pineapple with a hint of vanilla. Only 156 cases produced.

The cool Petaluma Gap area of the Sonoma Coast is the primary source of grapes for the Montagne Russe 2021 Pinot Noir. It is very aromatic with sweet cherry, herbs, earth and cola nut flavor leading into a silky, lengthy finish. Only 450 cases produced.

Dry Creek Valley is ground zero for some of the best Zinfandels in the state and Nalle is one of our long-time favorites. This Nalle 2021 Zinfandel is a crimson clad berry beauty that is simply charming. 578 cases made.

The Anonimo 2021 Blend of 58% Sangiovese and 42% Cabernet Sauvignon from Paso Robles is modeled after Italy's Super Tuscans. The Sangiovese contributes to the aromatics and creamy mid-palate of this wine while the Cabernet portion provides added dark fruit components. Only 250 cases produced.

We are thrilled to offer a perfectly aged 10 year-old Merlot in this quarter's wine club selection. The Petrified Forest 2013 Merlot from Knights Valley has matured wonderfully and has complexity and nuance that only comes with bottle age! Only 250 cases produced!

The Krutz 2020 Cabernet Sauvignon is a very special wine! Fifty percent of the grapes come from one of the most prestigious vineyards in Napa Valley. It delivers fully opened and layered Cabernet complexity while twenty months in French oak (75% new) adds a beautiful vanilla toast character. Only 500 cases produced.

To reorder any of these wines, please contact Greg O'Flynn at 415-567-0646
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Ra Ra Wine Co. 2023 Melon de Bourgogne ‘Robert Young Vineyard’ – Alexander Valley

The owner of and winemaker for Kara Marie Wines, the parent company for Ra Ra Wine Co., is Kara Groom. Her father, Daryl Groom, came to the United States from Australia in 1989 for a two-year contract at Geysers Peak Winery in Sonoma. He worked for the prestigious Penfolds brand at the time, which owned Geysers Peak. Daryl was the senior winemaker for the red wines of Penfolds from 1985-89 and he was responsible for making the world-class wine Grange (which remains the only Australian wine to receive **perfect 100-point scores** from both *Wine Spectator* and Robert Parker’s *Wine Advocate*).

Daryl’s daughter Kara was born in 1992 and grew up in Healdsburg. Her first memories are of visiting Geysers Peak with her father, tasting fresh-pressed grape juice and playing hide and seek in the barrel room. The ‘smell of the cellar’ is a nostalgic element for Kara. That everyday approach to wine at home early on translates to her current winemaking philosophy. After ‘hemisphere-hopping’ for six harvests over four years, working at Peter Lehmann in Australia’s Barossa Valley, working at a winery in England making sparkling wine, and helping her father at Geysers Peak, Kara started working at the Saini tasting room in Dry Creek Valley. Michael Saini, featured in last quarter’s CWM Wine Club for his Zinfandel, gave Kara a ton of Cabernet Sauvignon in 2016 to further her winemaking experience. Kara then launched her own company, Ra Ra Wine Co., in 2018. Starting with a modest 100 cases of a Grenache Rosé, she has since reached a total production of 550 cases. In 2020, Kara expanded her winemaking to include Little Ra Ra Ferments, a more experimental project where she can unleash her creative flair. This limited-production label - every wine produced reaches no more than thirty cases - includes a Pétillant-Naturel, a fantastically fizzy sparkler made of Riesling. With her Little Ra Ra label, Kara strives to offer a range of natural wines driven by experimentation and whimsy, all while maintaining an unwavering commitment to quality. In both brands, Kara’s philosophy remains clear: ‘to make seriously good wine, but not be taken too seriously’.

Kara loves exploring California’s potential for unusual grape varieties. Melon de Bourgogne is a white grape varietal native to France’s Bourgogne region (Burgundy) but it is most commonly found in the Loire Valley, namely near the city of Nantes at the edge of the Atlantic Ocean. This grape is primarily used in the wines of Muscadet, which many consider to be the best wine pairing for seafood, specifically oysters. In the case of Melon de Bourgogne in California, the scarcity of the variety cannot be denied. The grape was brought to the United States in 1939 by Georges de Latour of Beaulieu Vineyard and was for years unfortunately misidentified as Pinot Blanc! A mere 1.9 acres of Melon de Bourgogne is planted at Robert Young Vineyard in Alexander Valley, which is approximately half the acreage in the entirety of California’s North Coast.

Kara’s Melon de Bourgogne undergoes fermentation in exclusively stainless steel to preserve the inherent freshness of the grape and ‘let the fruit do the talking’. She describes the finished wine as ‘oysters and sunshine’ - a tropical fruit mouthfeel is brightened with fresh seashell minerality. Kara visited CWM last year and had Greg try a sample of the wine, which hadn’t even been bottled yet but that she promised was delicious. Greg was immediately smitten, and Kara then bottled 100 cases – almost two thirds the entire production! - for the CWM Wine Club.

Tasting Notes: A light-bodied yet polished white with tropical aromas that lead into a supple mid-palate with subtle seashell salinity. The mouth comes alive with electric acidity of Granny Smith apple and lemon blossom on the crisp, snappy finish.

Only 156 cases produced - 100 cases exclusively for CWM Wine Club!

100% Melon de Bourgogne

Aged in stainless steel

Alcohol 13%



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Montagne Russe 2021 Pinot Noir – Sonoma Coast

The oldest roller coasters were inspired by constructed hills of wood and ice that were a favorite of Empress Catherine the Great, who used them for sledding in the Gardens of Oranienbaum in 18th-century St. Petersburg in Russia. Historians debate whether it was the Russians or the French who first placed wheels on the sleds, but upon seeing these slides, French visitors brought the idea back to France in 1804 and appropriately called them ‘*Montagne Russe*’, or Russian Mountains. Having designed roller coasters as an engineering undergraduate at Cornell, Kevin Bersofsky immediately had the inspiration for a wine label. He had taken a wine course while at Cornell which was the beginning of what became his passion. After getting a call asking if he wanted to work in production for a little Napa Valley winery called Sutter Home, his life changed. While living in St. Helena, he rallied several friends together to purchase a half-ton of Syrah, which was crushed and fermented in his garage. From the humble beginnings of that first full barrel of Syrah in 2008, Montagne Russe emerged. Production gradually increased until Kevin was making 12 barrels of wine a year out of that same garage, which he had converted into a fully air-conditioned ‘cold room’. Unfortunately, a neighborly dispute about his production of homemade wine turned into a Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms raid of Kevin’s property, resulting in a substantial fine along with the disposal of the offending barrels (four of them had to be poured down the drain). Kevin decided to start over and stay small, focusing on his first love, Syrah. The roller coaster as his label namesake seems particularly appropriate for the twists and turns of Kevin’s wine journey, where he says he’s happy to throw up his hands and ‘just enjoy the ride’.

Kevin was featured in the CWM Wine Club in 2019 for his Petaluma Gap Syrah, and in 2021 for his Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir. We here at CWM have fallen in love with his Pinot Noir again this quarter. The 2021 bottling is a beautiful example of cool-climate Pinot Noir. Kevin sources his fruit from well-known Sonoma vineyard sites: Gap’s Crown, Keller Estate, Terra de Promissio, and Van der Kamp. This Pinot Noir showcases high-toned red fruit rather than the darker, more tannic style of Kevin’s Syrah bottlings. Minimal oak treatment in French oak allows the natural bright acidity of the fruit to shine. Kevin has been making wine from the Petaluma Gap area since ‘before he knew there was a Gap’ - the American Viticultural Area was finally federally approved in 2017. He believes that the Petaluma Gap is what would happen if California and France had a child together, resulting in terroir-driven wines with cool maritime influences and an extra kiss of Bay Area sunshine. Kevin feels that the region is like no other, producing nuanced wine with generous fruit and length, which is why he consistently sources from multiple vineyard sites for his label.

Montagne Russe has opened their first tasting room in the Bacchus Landing development in downtown Healdsburg, an exciting new complex of boutique wineries of similarly hand-crafted quality. Montagne Russe was also named **2020 Sonoma Coast Winery of the Year** in the New York International Wine Competition. Additional accolades include several of Kevin’s other 2021 Pinot Noirs - Terra de Promissio, Roberts Road, and Gap’s Crown - **receiving 93 points and above** by *Wine Enthusiast*.

Tasting Notes: This compelling Pinot Noir offers juicy red fruit character of strawberry, wild raspberry, and rhubarb upfront. Red fruit and candied cherry dominates the palate as well, enhanced by notes of crushed stone and woody spices appearing on the finish.

450 cases produced

100% Pinot Noir

Aged 15 months in French oak (10% new)

Alcohol: 13.9%



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Nalle 2021 Zinfandel – Dry Creek Valley, Sonoma

Owner Doug Nalle's first job in the wine industry was in 1973 as a cellar worker for Chateau Souverain in Alexander Valley. Smitten with the wine bug, Doug enrolled at Santa Rosa Junior College while also taking a winemaking class from Dick Arrowood. In 1979, Doug graduated from the esteemed enology program at UC Davis. While enrolled there, he worked harvests for wineries Jordan and Arroyo Sonoma. After graduation, Doug worked for Balverne Winery & Vineyards until 1983, where he and John Kongsgaard (who now produces some of Napa Valley's most acclaimed wines under his own Kongsgaard label), produced numerous estate-bottled wines. In 1984, Doug was hired to build a state-of-the-art Dry Creek Valley winery for San Francisco venture capitalist Bill Hambrecht. After a single harvest, the project was scuttled, which then spawned a Nalle-Hambrecht partnership and the original Nalle label. The partnership ended amicably in 1990, at which point Doug and his wife, Lee, became equal partners and took ownership of their burgeoning Nalle project. Lee's family roots in Dry Creek Valley go back to 1887. Her great-grandfather, John Henderlong, ran sheep in the valley on a ranch (now underwater at Lake Sonoma). During Prohibition in 1927, Lee's grandparents, Fred and Ruby Henderlong, planted prunes, apples, and grapevines on the property. The fruit for Nalle's Zinfandel bottlings comes from that same Henderlong Nalle Estate vineyard, which previously had been under contract to neighboring winery Seghesio. Occupying roughly 1.5 acres of prime benchland, the old Zinfandel vines are dry-farmed and head-trained, yielding intense fruit flavors, balanced natural acidity, and structured tannins.

Doug's winemaking philosophy with regard to Zinfandel is unique: rather than producing an overly alcoholic, jammy fruit bomb, he has chosen to explore the more refined side of the Zinfandel grape. Doug focuses on bringing its naturally high acidity to the forefront, resulting in an elegant, yet fully developed expression of Zinfandel. Doug is also a proponent of dry-farming, which refers to the practice of relying only on natural annual rainfall for growing grapes. Many vintners believe that dry-farming is preferable, both from a conservation standpoint and from the belief that the practice leads to more intensely flavored grapes. It's a fine line, however: vines must be spaced sufficiently to get all the moisture they can. If the vines are planted too close together, there's too much competition for the limited water. Thankfully, Doug has been able to successfully implement this practice and pass along his wealth of knowledge to his son, Andrew.

Andrew now serves as winemaker for the Nalle wines and calls himself 'homeschooled' when it comes to wine - he learned everything he knows from Doug. Andrew also studied Enology and Viticulture at Santa Rosa Junior College and UC Davis Extension, honing his skills as a winemaker while continuing his hands-on education at the winery, following his father's winemaking template to the letter, and tasting as he goes. Today, Andrew is also completing a master's degree in Fermentation Science at Cal State, Fresno. Andrew's wife April, equally education-focused, earned a Masters of Viticulture from the University of Adelaide in Australia and worked for a vineyard management company in South Australia. Upon returning to Sonoma, April dedicated her love of grape-growing helping Andrew farm the historic Nalle estate vineyard. In addition, as a member of the Historic Vineyard Society non-profit organization, the entire Nalle family helps preserve California's oldest vines and historic vineyards like their own.

The 2021 Zinfandel is comprised of fruit coming from two dry-farmed vineyard sources: 65% old-vine estate Nalle fruit (vineyards dating back to 1927 when the Henderlongs owned the property) and 35% from the Bernier-Zibary vineyard that was planted in 1997 to a field blend of grapes including Zinfandel, Carignane, and Petite Sirah.

Tasting Notes: Bright and brambly fruit appears upfront in this classic, elegant Zinfandel. Juicy red raspberry, plum, and wild blueberry contribute vibrant acidity on the palate and mingle with subtle baking spices of cinnamon and nutmeg. The splash of Carignane adds its classic character of cracked white pepper to the polished finish.

578 cases produced

91% Zinfandel, 6% Petite Sirah, 3% Carignane

Aged 11 months in French oak (25% new)

Alcohol: 13.9%



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Anonimo 2021 Sangiovese / Cabernet Sauvignon Blend – Paso Robles

Winemaker Soren Christensen has extensive experience in Paso Robles. Since the year 2000, he has made wine at well-known wineries Austin Hope, Treana, Liberty School, and Alta Colina. Anonimo started as a side project for Soren while he was working at Alta Colina. He had brought an unlabeled sample of the wine to a party where winemaker Guillaume Fabre of L'Aventure and Clos Solène were in attendance. While tasting and talking about the sample, the Frenchman had been trying to say 'anonymous' but the mispronounced name Anonimo stuck. The wine became a passion project for Soren, making wine for the love of making wine.

Jim Saunders, the father of Scotty Saunders of Arbuckle Ridge (featured in last quarter's CWM Wine Club), met Soren years ago early in his winemaking career and had stayed in touch. In 2013, Jim hired Soren away from Alta Colina to become the winemaker at Hearst Ranch Winery. Additionally, Jim brought on the Frenchman Guillaume Fabre as consulting winemaker for a premium project.

With this label as a side project, Soren is focused on making a different style of Paso wine: with the warmer climate, wines of the area can often end up big fruit bombs, but the Anonimo red is a focused blend along the lines of a Super Tuscan. Piero Antinori, of the acclaimed multi-generational Antinori winemaking family in Tuscany, is thought to be the inventor of the 1970s-era 'Super Tuscan' movement with his Tignanello blend. Tignanello was one of the first commercial releases in Tuscany to incorporate traditional Bordeaux varietals such as Cabernet Sauvignon to add richness, texture, and structure alongside the widely planted Sangiovese grape.

The firm structure and dark red fruit character in the Anonimo blend comes from Cabernet Sauvignon, which is sourced from the Saunders Vineyard. Situated on a hillside jetting up from the Salinas River, the defining landmark between East and West Paso Robles, fruit from the Saunders vineyard produces extracted wines that explode with rich flavors and texture. The dominant Sangiovese, coming from the steep hillsides of the Creston Ridge Vineyard, lends length and subtly savory layers of tea leaves and baking spices. Aging the wine in neutral French oak has somewhat of an anti-oxidative effect: as the vessel breathes less, the wine inside stays more youthful and fresh. This technique matches up with Soren's winemaking philosophy of showing 'the expression of the grape'.

Soren's wife Sierra, the general manager at stellar neighboring winery Saxum, is also an artist. She designed the Anonimo label, which abstractly pictures Soren walking through the vineyards - another expression driven by the love of wine.

Tasting Notes: This focused red blend shows black cherry cream and roasted strawberry on the entry. Vibrant acidity is punctuated by warming spice notes of mocha and white pepper, with touches of dried herbs and tea leaves adding a subtle savory quality to the lingering finish. The palate is grippy in texture, with firm tannins persisting through the finish.

250 cases produced

58% Sangiovese, 42% Cabernet Sauvignon

Aged 18 months in neutral French oak

Alcohol: 15.2%



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Petrified Forest 2013 Merlot ‘Totem Ridge Vineyard’ – Knights Valley

Petrified Forest Vineyards may have had its first harvest in 2009, but its roots stretch back to 1986. Arriving in California that year to assume a position in the medical field, Ken Piters was to begin his long love affair with the land, the vineyards, and the special feeling that is Knights Valley. Ken and Susan Piters moved to their seventy-four acre Knights Valley ranch in 1987. The property had once been part of the Booth Ranch, a summer retreat for a wealthy San Francisco family. Its old farmhouse and barn, both built in the late 1870s, remain. But most mysterious and fascinating are the many totem poles carved by Mr. Booth in the early 1900s that adorn the landscape. Fashioned from the natural redwoods that line the property, many have whimsical names such as ‘the Imp’, ‘Pan’, and ‘the Faun’. This most enchanting curiosity gives the property its name of Totem Ridge, while the proximity of the vineyard in Knights Valley to the actual Petrified Forest of majestic giant redwoods gives the winery its name.

The ranch included a three-acre vineyard planted to Sauvignon Blanc, and Ken was soon out in the fields on his tractor. He and Susan took viticulture classes to better understand this new challenge that they had assumed. In 1990, ten acres of hillside Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot vines were planted under the guidance of the late Paul Vander Schalie, whose venerable history as a viticulturist in Knights Valley spanned thirty years and included his influence with Beringer Vineyards. With most of those hillside vines under contract to various Sonoma and Napa wineries, Ken began to handcraft a small amount of ‘house’ wine for the family and realized the incredible potential of these grapes. When accolades for their homemade wine came from friends, family, and perfect strangers, the mission became clear: to create exceptional ultra-premium wines from the Knights Valley appellation by being uncompromising at all stages, from the vine to the bottle. Production would be limited so that the finest enological principles could be applied and intensified.

With the property now known as Totem Ridge Vineyard, the Piters have planted seventeen additional acres of vines on north-facing hillsides in rich, well-drained rocky volcanic soils at elevations from 300 to 800 feet. Blessed with a combination of mineral-packed and nutrient-deficient soils, the terroir is the perfect blend of climate and location and provides an ideal environment for the vines to thrive. The Knights Valley appellation of Sonoma County rises to over 900 feet in elevation on the rocky slopes of the Mayacamas mountain range. It is the easternmost appellation in Sonoma, known for its warm days and cool nights, and is also the warmest viticultural region in the county.

This quarter, the CWM wine club features the wine of Petrified Forest for the third time. The Cabernet Sauvignon was featured in 2018 and 2021 iterations of the club, but Greg has been able to get his hands on a library exclusive of a ten-year-old bottling: the 2013 vintage Merlot. A bit lesser-known for Merlot production than Napa Valley, the time for Knights Valley to shine has come as a richer and more mouth-filling alternative to the showy styles of Merlot commonly made with fruit grown on the valley floor areas of Napa. The dynamic hillside setting of the Totem Ridge Vineyard has earned a reputation for producing high-quality, age-worthy fruit with bold structure and true mountain fruit character. **This wine represents a rare opportunity to experience a 10-year-old Merlot that has been aged to perfection.**

Tasting Notes: A complex nose of fresh-picked blackberry and black cherry leads seamlessly to a layered palate of cigar box, toasty oak, chocolate bark and subtle roasted herbs. The tannins have softened with age allowing the sweet dark fruit and warm blueberry-pie spices to shine throughout the graceful, lengthy finish.

250 cases produced

100% Merlot

Aged 18 months in French oak (50% new)

Alcohol: 13.9%



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Krutz Family Cellars 2020 Cabernet Sauvignon – Napa Valley

Patrick Krutz, a Mississippi native, grew up around wine. His father Fred was an avid collector and encouraged Patrick to travel after graduating from college and before starting law school. Patrick did just that, graduating from the University of Mississippi ('Ole Miss'), traveling the world, and ending up in the seaside sanctuary of Carmel, California. He started working at The Cheese Shop in Carmel, which coincidentally had been a healthy source of his father's wine collection and was soon bitten by the wine bug. Indefinitely deferring his law school plans, Patrick started helping his colleagues with their home winemaking in 2002. During his time at the shop, Patrick met Gary Pisoni and his family. Gary is renowned for his vineyard management and is considered the lone pioneer in developing the Santa Lucia Highlands appellation around the Monterey area. With the Pisonis as his winemaking mentors, Patrick eventually decided to launch his own project. In the summer of 2003, Patrick produced one barrel each of Chardonnay and Pinot Noir in Monterey County and Krutz Family Cellars became a reality. The idea was to purchase a ton of grapes a year to produce a small amount of wine for family and friends. However, demand soon changed that plan and the family-owned company continues to grow in an effort to supply that demand, with brothers Bryan and Cole having joined the team in 2011. Staying true to the family's Mississippi roots, a magnolia graces the label of every bottle of wine produced – the official state flower and tree - which symbolizes Southern hospitality.

The Krutz family project was first featured in the CWM Wine Club back in 2018 with a limited-production Syrah from the storied Stagecoach Vineyard in Napa Valley. The year 2022 brought a second appearance from Krutz with a Pinot Noir from the Pisoni-owned Soberanes Vineyard in the Santa Lucia Highlands. In this first quarter of 2024, the Krutz that we are featuring moves back to the Napa Valley with Cabernet Sauvignon. The family partnership with Stagecoach Vineyards came to an end in 2015 after twelve years, and Patrick was on a mission to find the best Cabernet Sauvignon grapes in Napa Valley. Patrick's research took him to one of the most prestigious vineyards in the Valley, where his connections with multiple well-respected and accomplished area winemakers led them all to vouch for Krutz. These personal referrals, along with the strength of Krutz's own portfolio of wines, got the proverbial foot in the door. After a few 'interviews', the stage was set for the first vintage, 2016. That vintage didn't disappoint, garnering a 96+ point review from Robert Parker's *Wine Advocate*!

The Krutz family now has their own vineyard block within this ultra-premium vineyard (whose identity we can't publicly discuss). It is dedicated to Clone 7 on 110R rootstock. Row directions were replanted to more east-west for favorable ripening in late-summer afternoons. Due to a meticulously curated Vineyard Designate Acreage Contract with the vineyard's owners, Patrick and his brother Cole can control all viticultural practices such as green-thinning, canopy control, clusters per shoot, night-time harvest dates, irrigation, and ultimately yield-control. Once fruit is received, techniques are used such as hand-sorting with whole-berry integrity, fermenting in new French oak, and sending gravity-fed free-run juice directly to the finest Taransaud French oak barrels. All this leads to some of, what they can easily call, 'the best damn Cabernet in the Valley'. Bottlings from this unnamed vineyard can easily command \$175 a bottle, and head north from there! The 2020 vintage of this Krutz Cabernet features 50% 'declassified' fruit from this particular vineyard, along with multiple vineyard sources throughout Napa Valley.

Tasting Notes: Concentrated dark fruit of cassis and wild boysenberry appears upfront and mingles with sweet earthy undertones of baked plum. Full-bodied with a smooth tannin structure thanks to the lengthy oak aging, the wine finishes with cigar box and warm spice notes on the palate.

500 cases produced

100% Cabernet Sauvignon
aged 20 months in French oak (75% new)
Alcohol: 14.7%

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