



Reserve Club

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For the first time in the history of the Reserve Club, I have selected three wines from the same winemaker. This unique phenomenon began with a meeting on January 10th, when Nick Goldschmidt was in my store. That was right after the Winter release and he commented on the display of newly selected Reserve Club wines. He asked how he might get involved, and I told him that while he has made many of my New World Red selections over the years, his Reserve tier wines tend to be out of my price range. We kicked it around while I tasted through his amazing wines, and I presented a “what if” scenario. What if I selected all Goldschmidt wines for the club, could he move prices to fit my parameters? I could see the wheels turning and a few days later he sent me a very generous proposal. Sometimes it pays to ask...

Although not as well known as many cult winemakers, Nick Goldschmidt is, in my mind, one of the top winemakers in the world for Cabernet Sauvignon. His body of work covers most of the great winemaking regions of the Americas and his knowledge of Napa and Sonoma county vineyards is unparalleled. To me, he stands out because unlike most California winemakers, who are only interested in producing \$100+ bottles, he makes brilliant wines for \$20, and hits several price points on his way over the \$100 threshold. As you will see with the selections this quarter, the quality shines regardless of price point.

Like most of us, Nick did not start his adult life thinking about wine. His first degree, which he earned in his native New Zealand, was in horticulture, and he expected to be a farmer of row crops. While studying organic and biodynamic farming techniques he became intrigued by the potential for growing grapes in an Earth-friendly way. Then an evening with good friends and a bottle of Vega Sicilia sparked a passion for wine that would change his course. After earning his diploma (bachelor's degree) in Horticulture from Canterbury, New Zealand 1982, he moved on to another in Viticulture from Charles Sturt (Australia) in 1985 and then a post grad in enology from prestigious Roseworthy (Australia) in 1986. He and his wife, Yolyn, fell in love with California in 1989, while working as an intern at Carneros Creek, and in 1990 he accepted a permanent position under Zelma Long at Simi.

During his tenure at Simi he rose to head winemaker and then rode the wave of big corporate acquisitions. When hired at Simi they were owned by Louis Vuitton Moet Hennessey and later sold to Constellation. During this time he oversaw the winemaking at Ruffino in Italy, Cloudy Bay in New Zealand and Terrazas in Argentina, eventually directing the wines at Franciscan and Ravenswood, just to name a few. From Constellation he moved on to Allied-Domecq, where he oversaw 40 wineries, including Gary Farrell and Mumm Napa, as well as Campo Viejo in Spain and Brancott in New Zealand. Eventually Allied-Domecq was bought by Beam Wine Estates in 2006, where Nick continued in his role. When the portfolio was gobbled up by Constellation in 2008 he jumped ship and began to devote himself full time to Goldschmidt wines.

While working under Zelma Long at Simi, Nick learned the importance of making wines that speak of the place where they are grown. To this end he produces a number of wines under different labels, each showing the unique expression of *terroir*. The first pick, **2014 Hilary Goldschmidt Cabernet Sauvignon “Napa” (\$45)**, comes from the Charming Creek vineyard in the Oakville AVA of Napa Valley. There is little debate that the Oakville area of Napa is one of the world's great places to grow Cabernet Sauvignon. The soils on the west side of the region were formed over millions of years of weathering of the Mayacamas Mountains, creating the bench land, which are alluvial fans of well drained gravel. The rest of the appellation, the area between Highway 29 and the Silverado Trail, is soil that has been formed by the Napa River. For hundreds of thousands of years the river has flooded and shifted course across the valley floor, depositing clay, silt, and fine gravel. The Charming Creek vineyard lies in this area, between Nickel and Nickel and Opus One. (Not bad neighbors for a wine that costs less than \$50).

The 2014 vintage conditions were ideal for ripening the Clone 7 Cabernet Sauvignon that is planted in Charming Creek. Clone 7 is also known as the Concannon clone, as it was originally sourced from the Montpellier Nursery in France by James Concannon (founder of Concannon Vineyard, Livermore, CA). At that time, he was looking to find clean vines to replant after California's first phylloxera blight in 1893. Clone 7 was once a workhorse in Napa Valley, as a strong yielder, with good color. It fell out of favor in the 1990's because at high yields it displays a faintly herbal note in the bouquet, which some critics see as a sign of under ripeness. In the age of ultra-ripe Napa Cab this trait is not

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always desirable, but to me shows varietal correctness. Since the vines in Charming Creek are 37 years old, yields are a moderate 3 tons per acre, so ripeness is not a problem, especially in years like 2014.

Unlike many Napa winemakers, Nick does not rely on tricks to make his wines. The grapes were harvested on September 25th, a little early by the standard of his neighbors, but Nick takes pride that his Cabs are under 15% alcohol. After fermentation the wine was aged in French oak for 20 months, with 25% being new barrels. Like almost all of his wines this one is pure varietal, 100% Cabernet Sauvignon and it was neither filtered or fined before bottling. There were 4,100 cases produced

When you open this wine it will benefit from at least half an hour in the decanter. The color is a rich ruby, with good viscosity and faintly stained tears rolling down the glass. The nose shows classic Oakville qualities of black cherry and blackberry preserves, accented with menthol, cigar box, and cola syrup. On the palate, this wine is nicely rich and balanced, with smooth, polished tannins and nice length. I suggest drinking this wine over the next five to seven years.

The next two selections come from the Alexander Valley, which is the growing region that I most associate with Nick Goldschmidt. The **2013 Forefathers Cabernet Sauvignon “Lone Tree Vineyard” (\$89)** comes from a three acre parcel high in the mountains north of Geyserville. Nick uses his Forefather’s label to pay homage to his roots, producing an international range of wines: a New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc, Australian Shiraz, and this Alexander Valley Cabernet Sauvignon.

The Lone Tree vineyard is the northern-most site that Nick farms and it is very unique. Due to its elevation and east facing exposition, the grapes grown from Lone Tree ripen very slowly. The only reason they ripen at all is the site is above the fog line, which gives the vines more sunlight per day, coaxing them to ripen a small crop of grapes for this wine. To maximize the sun exposure on the leaves, this vineyard is farmed using a cane and spur technique. This is uncommon for Cabernet Sauvignon, but it opens the canopy up so the leaves do not cast shadows on each other, which occurs when using traditional trellising. Due to its remote location, this vineyard is also dry farmed, meaning no irrigation, which also contributes to the lower yield of grapes, a scant two tons per acre. As a result, Nick only produced 756 6-packs of the 2013.

To produce the Forefathers Cabernet Sauvignon, Nick again relies only on Cabernet Sauvignon. This time the grapes are fermented then aged in a high percentage of new oak barrels, 60-70%, of which he incorporates 30% American wood. Of the three selections of this quarter, this is the least evolved and will need the most time. After decanting for at least an hour, the nose displays an extremely deep combination of black currants and black cherries, with overt notes of maduro cigar wrapper, parched earth, grilled bread, and melted brown sugar. In the mouth, this wine displays powerful, obvious tannins, and surprisingly lively acidity, which combine to encapsulate the fruit and hold this wine back for the time being. You will want to hold this wine until 2022 then drink over the next decade.

My final selection for the quarter is one of Nick’s marquee wines, the **2012 Goldschmidt Vineyards Cabernet Sauvignon “Yoeman Vineyard” (\$99)**. The Yoeman vineyard lies south of Geyserville, again on an east facing, terraced slope. Here the soils are moraine, meaning created by the movement of glaciers. For most of northern California, the glaciers covered the area up to the last ice age, ending roughly 10,000 years ago. There are still a few glaciers found in the highest peaks of the Sierra Nevada mountains, well-documented in the writings and study of John Muir. As the glaciers moved and shifted they displaced earth and rock, even occasionally shaving off the sides of mountains. The soils they created in the Alexander Valley are similar in many ways to sedimentary soils, with lots of pulverized rock and sand.

With an eastern exposure, the Yoeman vineyard only receives direct sun in the morning, which slows the ripening process. To further enhance the balance of the finished wines, the site was planted in 1988 to two slow ripening clones of Cabernet Sauvignon, the Jackson (UC Clone 6) and Jenkins clones. One clone expresses red fruit flavors and retains good acidity, the other produces wine with black/dark aromas and softer acids. Nick uses the variation in clonal expression to build additional complexity into the final wine. Being a cooler site, the grapes for this wine were picked almost a month after those in Oakville, and this wine still only weighs in at a moderate 14.3% alcohol.

For the production of this wine, Nick aged it for 32 months in French oak barrels, of which 85% were new. The nose is an extremely rich combination of dried black cherries, pipe tobacco, graphite, roasted coffee beans, dried basil, and molasses. On the palate it is a very large framed wine, with the big sense of fruit framed by firm, obvious tannins that feel like they recede as it stretches to the finish. Although you can drink this wine now, it will also improve with an additional five years in bottle, then drink nicely for at least a decade. There were 1,364 six packs of this wine produced with the 2012 vintage.

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