



Wine Club Tasting Notes

August 2007

2005 Cline Marsanne-Roussanne Sonoma County, CA

I'm really excited to bring you this month's wine selections from Cline. Not only does this winery know how to make kick-ass wines, the folks at the winery are some of the nicest people I've ever met. On my last trip to California, some friends and I stopped by this winery. I had just arrived in California that day, and I was ready to TASTE SOME WINE! Unfortunately, it was late in the day and we didn't have much time. After being in the restaurant biz for so long, I do NOT show up at service-oriented businesses 15 minutes before they close, as a general rule. Well, I broke my rule that day and showed up at their tasting room exactly 15 minutes before they closed. You would have thought we were the very first customers of the day from the way they treated us instead of the very last. And, the property is absolutely gorgeous. After the star treatment we received and wondering at the beauty of the estate, if the wines had been less-than-stellar I still would have rated the experience as very good. The wines, however, were excellent. Not a dog in the bunch. In other words, if you're ever in Sonoma, do yourself a favor and visit this winery.

As a clunky segue, let me tell you a little about the wines produced at Cline. While they do plant classic grape varieties like Chardonnay, Pinot Noir and Merlot, Fred Cline is one of the pioneers in the region to plant Rhone varieties such as Syrah, Viognier, Marsanne and Roussanne. (As an aside, there is a saying in the wine biz that if you want to make a small fortune owning a winery, start with a large one. Fred's maternal grandfather is Valeriano Jacuzzi – yep, as in THE Jacuzzi.) Marsanne and Roussanne are the Northern Rhone Valley's two most important white wine grape varieties and are regularly blended together. There are under 250 combined acres of these grapes in California making them a bit of a rarity. Those of you who know me know that I *loooove* white wines made with these grapes as an everyday wine. There is a certain magic that happens when these grapes are blended together that other white wines just can't compete with for the price. Not only that, this blend is quite the food-friendly white. More on that later.

So what's the rub, you may be asking? What does it *taste* like? If you've never tasted a Rhone-style white, it tastes like nothing you've ever tasted before. It's full-bodied while maintaining zippy acidity, it boasts gorgeous stone fruit but also has an herbal tea note to it as well as a bit of spice, AND most intriguingly of all, the wine actually has a bit of tannin. If you normally prefer red wine, this may be the one white wine that you really dig. (One of my girls here at the restaurant who is a die-

hard red wine drinker finally found a white wine she actually likes, this one being it.)
It will marry well with robust seafood such as tuna and salmon, but will also pair nicely with grouper and sea bass in addition to herbed chicken and grilled pork tenderloin. Cheers to something different and off the beaten path!