



October 2018

Dear Wine Club Member:

We are very excited to present you with our latest wine release, the last of the very low yielding 2015 vintage:

### **2015 Montemaggiore Paolo's Vineyard Syrah**

If you are a long-time Club Member, you know that we typically release both our Syrah and Syrafina in the spring, but this past spring you received only Syrafina. We are just now releasing the 2015 Paolo's Vineyard Syrah because it simply wasn't ready earlier—it needed extra time in bottle. The root cause was a 35% reduction in grapes caused by poor pollination in the spring of 2015.

For any vineyard around the world, low-yielding vintages typically lead to more concentration, depth, and intensity in the wines—generally a good thing! When a grapevine focuses its energy on a smaller crop, individual grapes will have more concentrated flavors. But that same concentration of flavors (good) can also mean more tannin, which can make wine more astringent (bad). While winemakers employ various techniques like fining and extended maceration to smooth tannins and reduce astringency (thus making the wine “ready” earlier), like all things in life, it's a balance.

Mountainside grapes like Montemaggiore's already have great varietal intensity and rich complexity, thus the tannins can be formidable in low-yielding years. Lise wanted to retain the full intensity and age-ability of our Syrah, a hallmark of our estate vineyards, so instead of altering her winemaking dramatically, she opted to delay the release of the wine. We typically age both our Syrah and Syrafina for 18 months in barrel and then an additional 12 months in bottle before releasing it in the spring. But in 2015, our 100% Syrah needed additional time. The Montemaggiore Syrafina on the other hand, with its small amount of viognier (4%), has much silkier tannins thus this wine could be released earlier.

Extra time in bottle for the 2015 Syrah really benefited the wine. Just that extra six months (50% more time in bottle) smoothed out the tannins tremendously. We believe you will find this wine to be quite “warm” in tone: full of fruit, mouth-filling, and smooth. It will be delicious when you pair it with a good book, a fireplace, or an intimate gathering of friends!

**The Growing Season.** The 2015 vintage was dry, early, and difficult. This fourth year of drought prompted a very early bud-break, even earlier than the prior year which itself was 2-3 weeks early. In May, the weather during flowering was highly unstable with an impactful cold front followed by a heat spike. The temperature fluctuations led to poor pollination and uneven fruit set—the main culprit of the 35% yield reduction for our vines. Most vineyards in Napa and Sonoma were down 30-50% and some essentially did not produce any fruit, so we were relatively lucky in that we were only down 35%!

Summer temperatures in 2015 were warm, and ripening proceeded on schedule after the cool May. Verasion (when the hard green grapes turn purple and soft) was quick and uniform, which is an early indicator for a compact harvest. The growing season ended in early September with several 100F+ days which affected many vineyards in the area, but didn't have too much effect on Montemaggiore grapes.

**The Vineyards.** The grapes for this wine come from our estate vineyards on a mountainside 750ft above Dry Creek Valley in northern Sonoma County. Long-time supporters know we recently sold these vineyards but we still consider the 2015 wines to be from “our” vineyards since the grapes were grown by us that summer, fermented in our estate winery that fall, and barrel aged in our cellar for a year and a half. (When we sold the property, the barrels were moved to a shared winery then bottled in the spring of 2017 by the same mobile bottling line we've used for over 10 years).

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Our estate vineyards are on a steep grade whose rocky soils produce intensely flavored grapes at naturally low yields. These mountainside grapevines produce small berries, which create wines with firm structure, incredible varietal intensity, and excellent aging potential.

All our estate vineyards are farmed according to biodynamic principles and using organic materials. With its focus on biodiversity and soil fertility, we believe biodynamics brings additional strength, vitality, and a unique sense of place to Montemaggiore wines.

**The Crush.** We harvested our hilltop grapes on September 20, generally on time but perhaps a bit early. As usual, we hand-harvested the clusters starting at 5:30am with LED lights from our tractor, and brought them into the winery while still cold. By noon, all the grapes were destemmed and carefully sorted and put in a stainless steel fermentation tank. The rest of the syrah grapes were harvested on September 29 and put in a separate tank.

The grapes underwent a cold maceration to bring out flavor and color precursors, after which they were inoculated with “Syrah” yeast. For the duration of the 16 days of fermentation, manual punchdowns were performed three times a day (a half hour each) on the tank in order to introduce oxygen in the fermentation and keep the flavorful skins in contact with the juice. Peak fermentation temperature reached 84°F, and the fermentation proceeded evenly to dryness.

**Aging the Wine.** The syrah was pressed off the skins using a stainless steel basket press, whose gentleness limits the wine’s astringency. The wine was then aged on its fine lees in 100% French oak barrels for eighteen months. As you may recall from prior newsletters, **lees** are remnants of fermentation that enhance the structure, mouthfeel, and flavor complexity of the wine as it ages in barrels.

About one third of the Syrah was aged in new French oak barrels, which impart structure, tannins, and oak flavors into the wine. The balance of the wine was aged in neutral barrels (older barrels that have no flavor but definitely impart a good texture). 150 cases were bottled in March of 2017 and then allowed to rest for one year before being released in October of 2018 to our wine club.

**Tasting Notes.** The aroma of the 2015 Syrah opens with blackberries, cassis and pepper, followed by undertones of minerality. A warm, full, fruit-forward palate is framed by structured tannins and a long finish.

The 2015 Syrah is ready to drink now, but its tannin and acid structure also lends the wine significant ageability. If you prefer more mellow, integrated flavors in your wines, you should feel comfortable cellaring this wine for 5-10 years. We recently opened a 2010 Syrah (8 years after vintage) which was very tasty and given the similarity in vintages, indicates that the 2015 wine will be delicious in years to come!

**Food Pairings.** We enjoy pairing Syrah with pasta bolognese, roast duck, wild mushroom soup, anything and everything put on the barbeque, and sheep’s milk cheeses. But it’s a very versatile wine, so you should explore your own pairings. Our favorite ingredients to pair with this wine include bacon, mushrooms, hazelnuts, pepper, and lamb. For recipes and more food pairing strategies, navigate on our website to Wines > Recipes.

Enjoy your 2015 Syrah along with any other wines you’ve chosen for your Fall Wine Club Selection. You can look forward to our next Wine Club Release in the spring which highlights the 2016 Syrah and Syrafina.

We thank you from the bottom of our hearts for your continued support. *Salute*, as we say in Italian!