



April 2019

Dear Wine Club Member:

We are excited to present you with our latest releases from the last vintage of Montemaggiore's estate wines:

2016 Paolo's Vineyard Syrah
2016 Syrafina

When we started harvesting the grapes for these wines in late September of 2016, we didn't realize it would be our last vintage at Montemaggiore. Of course we had contemplated selling our property over the years, especially after continuous 18-hour days during harvest, when we saw wildfires from our deck (even before the great 2017 fires), after equipment broke down for the umpteenth time, as friends took relaxing vacations while we toiled away—but we were living the dream, right?

Yes, having your own vineyard and winery in Sonoma County is the stuff that dreams are made of! We lived that dream and loved pretty much every moment. But as we grew older, it was time for us to slow down in life. Farming life has definitely taken a toll on our bodies. But let's not get too nostalgic yet—we still have an exciting new vintage to release this year!

After a difficult 2015 vintage, we were especially happy that 2016 was a "typical" vintage. 2015 was the fourth year of drought and spring temperatures fluctuating so much that our vines didn't pollinate fully or evenly—then we had a heat spell as harvest approached and our yields were 35% down. Yes, 2015 was difficult, thus in comparison 2016 was a easy. All of northern California had plenty of rain during that winter; then spring and summer temperatures were moderate; and harvest was cool and spread out—just the way we prefer!

The Syrah and Syrafina reflect the "typical growing season" that was 2016—deeply intense flavors, balanced acidity, solid tannins. We think you will be pleased with these two classic wines!

The Vineyards. Both the syrah and viognier grapes for these wines come from our estate vineyards on a mountainside 750ft above Dry Creek Valley in northern Sonoma County. On a steep grade, the rocky soils of the Montemaggiore vineyards produce intensely flavored grapes at naturally low yields. These mountainside grapevines produce small individual 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 Growing Season. The 2016 vintage was typical and uneventful, producing wines with great energy and freshness! The growing season started auspiciously with the first normal rainfall after four years of drought. Due to prior drought stress, the grapevines bore smaller berries and a slightly lighter crop than usual but nothing too extreme. The moderately warm spring weather led to even pollination and nice fruit set.

The summer ripening season enjoyed slightly cooler than average daytime highs—perfect for deeply colored, complex wines. Due to the wintertime rains, there was a nice healthy canopy of leaves sheltering the grapes and we did a bit of leaf pulling to get the right sun exposure on the grapes.

Mid-September brought some unseasonably cool temperatures which slowed down ripening and spread out the harvest, a bonus for every winemaker. Our first harvest day of the season was September 24th which is about typical. The harvest started with our top-most block of Syrah which went into our Reserve (to be released this October), then generally proceeded down the mountain, with our last harvest on October 7th. All the wines have great depth of flavor and there were no major disasters during harvest—especially compared to the stresses of 2015!

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The Crush. We harvested four different areas of our vineyards over two weeks days, resulting in three different lots of syrah and one of syrah + viognier (a co-fermentation, where the two varietals are fermented together). 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. About 20% whole clusters were put into the bottom of an open-top stainless steel tank, stems and all. By noon, the remaining 80% had been destemmed and carefully sorted, the resulting whole berries are layered on top.

The grapes underwent a cold maceration to bring out flavor and color precursors, after which they were inoculated with yeast. For the duration of the 14-19 days of fermentation, manual punchdowns were performed three times a day (a half hour each) on every tank in order to introduce oxygen in the fermentation and keep the flavorful skins in contact with the juice. Peak fermentation temperatures ranged from 82°-86°F, and all fermentations proceeded evenly to dryness.

Aging the Wine. Each lot of syrah (and syrah + viognier) was individually pressed off the skins using a stainless steel basket press, whose gentleness limits the wine's astringency. The wines were then aged on their fine lees in 100% French oak barrels for eighteen months. For those not steeped in wine-lingo, **lees** are the dead yeast cells and grape skin particles remaining in a wine after fermentation. As the yeast cells break down, they release polysaccharides and mannoproteins (amongst other compounds), thus enhancing the structure, mouthfeel, and flavor complexity of the wine.

Less than half of each wine was aged in new French oak barrels, which imparts 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). In September of 2017, the four different syrah lots were blended into two according to taste. 100 cases each of Syrah and Syrafina were bottled in March of 2018, and then allowed to rest before being released in April of 2019 to our wine club.

Tasting Notes. With the 2016 Paolo's Vineyard Syrah, aromas of deep, dark blackberries and cassis mingle with baking spices such as nutmeg and cinnamon. With the 2016 Syrafina, those aromas are similar but higher toned, and complemented by notes of orange blossom and black pepper. Flavors on the palate of both wines reflect their aroma, being framed by smooth tannins and balanced acidity.

The 2016 Syrah and Syrafina are ready to drink now, but their tannin and acid structure also lend them significant ageability. Both could be cellared for up to 5-10 years if you prefer more mellow, integrated flavors in your wines.

Food Pairings. Our favorite ingredients to pair with both these wines include bacon, mushrooms, hazelnuts, pepper, and lamb. Thus the wines pair well with wild mushroom soup, braised short ribs, pork tenderloin, bacon rösti, marinated tri-tip, lamb shanks, pasta bolognese, sheep's milk cheeses, lamb burgers—and the list goes on! For recipes and more food pairing strategies, go to our website and navigate to Wines > Recipes.

Enjoy your 2016 Paolo's Vineyard Syrah and 2016 Syrafina along with any other wines you've chosen for your Spring Wine Club Selection. In October comes our final Wine Club Release, consisting of the 2016 Nobile and 2016 Reserve.

We thank you from the bottom of our hearts for your support over the years!

