



PJ's Wine of the Month Club July 2008 Selection

White Selection

2005 Pazo De Monterrey Blanco Monterrei, Spain
Suggested Retail Price: \$13.99 PJ's Price: \$11.99

Location: Monterrei is a relatively new D.O. in southern Galicia on the border with Portugal.

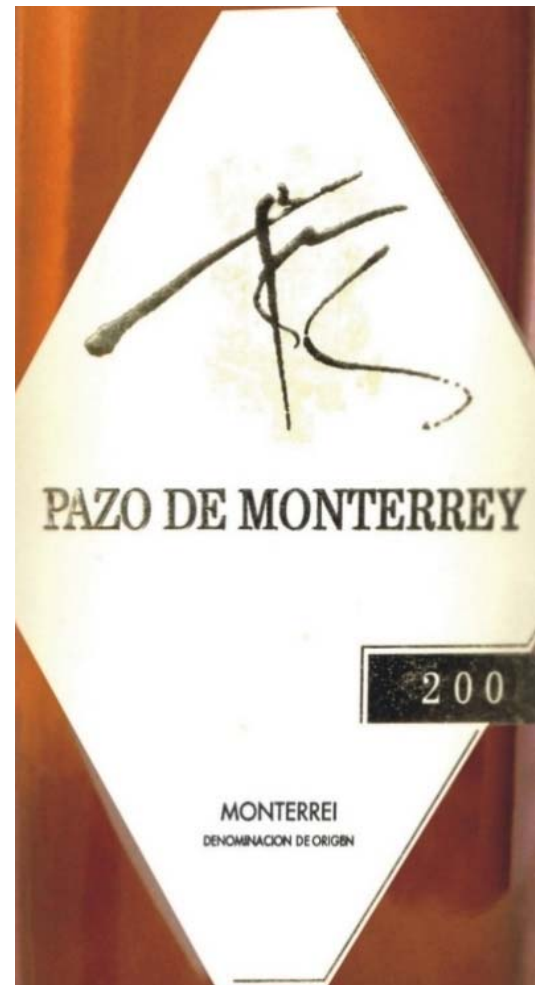
History: As is the story with much of viticulture in Europe, vines are thought to have been first planted in Monterrei by the conquering Romans who brought them from the East. However unlike regions like Rioja or Rias Baixas to the north, the wine here stayed local and did not receive much attention until very recently. Like many of the smaller areas of rural Europe it took advancements in wine technology and global distribution for the wine to gain notoriety. Created in 2003, the bodega is a new project with the previous owners of the vineyard and a winemaker who wanted to use these amazing vines to create an extraordinary wine based around the indigenous varieties in the zone. Only in the last few years have there been great strides in terms of quality in the area and Pazo de Monterrey is one of the leaders in this quality revolution.

Monterrei: The wine producing region of Monterrei lies in Spain's northwest corner in the region of Galicia. Much of Monterrei lies just north of Portugal and to the southeast of Rias Baixas. Centered on four small communes in the Monterrei valley, the region is bordered by the Tamega River which helps to shape this small microclimate. Even though it is quite close to Rias-Baixas, the predominant grape varieties do not include Albarino, but rather Godello and Treixadura. This region is heavily influenced by the Atlantic, with high levels of rainfall and relative humidity. Temperatures are quite moderate and the region is extremely fertile, with miles and miles of green rolling hills. The vineyards are planted on these gently rolling hills on dark, humid soil which sits over granite, and in some places, schist soils. These soils produce white wines with profound mineral aromas and long, crisp finishes. The Monterrei Valley is heavily planted with vines (3,000 hectares in total) but only 600Ha are classified in the D.O. Monterrei. While still quite small, this unknown wine region has great potential not only in terms of volume, but because this valley contains one of the most extraordinary microclimates in Spain, producing terroir-driven wines that explode with minerality.

Vinification: Still a rarity in the zone, hand harvesting is practiced religiously at the bodega, with the harvest being brought in with small 20 kg crates. There is often a summer green-harvest, but this is not carried out every year and is only a function of the vigor of that year's vines. This wine is a blend of 65% Treixadura and 35% Godello. Fermentations start naturally using only indigenous yeasts and can often last up to two weeks. Ageing is done exclusively in tank to retain the fresh aromas of the varieties and the wines are bottled in the year after harvest.

Description: This is a great summer white that is filled with intense notes of lemon-lime citrus, green apple and a chalky minerality that is very interesting. It is medium bodied with great crisp acidity and flavors of lime and green apple with notes of wet stone and white flower tones.

Food Pairing: Suitable for all your favorite light summer fare like grilled shrimp or even fried scallops. It would also pair well with a young goat cheese.





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White Selection

2007 H.u.M. Hofer Grüner Veltliner
Suggested Retail Price: \$12.99
PJ's Price: \$9.99

Location: This wine is from the region of Weinviertel which is in the northern wine mega-region of Niederösterreich. This region is known as "Lower Austria" because of the lower elevation compared to the southern regions of the country.

History: The wine growing in this region of Europe was thought to have been started by the Celts about 500 years before the Christian era. Through the middle ages the vines were tended by Monks that lived in the region. The Austrian wine industry suffered its biggest blow in 1985 when some dishonest producers added diethylene glycol to a small proportion of wine. This is a **non-toxic** but illegal compound that adds body and makes the wine taste sweeter. This episode damaged the reputation of Austrian wine and it is just, within the last few years, that they have been able to get out from under the shadow of the incident.

Weinviertel is the most northerly of the Austrian wine regions and despite this it is one of the warmest. This is due to a number of different factors. The most important factor is the rain shadow effect that is produced by the mountains near by. This is the same effect that keeps Seattle moist while on the other side of the Cascade Mountains is a desert. This effect insures hot summers, mild winters and little rain fall. Because of this Hofer plants most of the Riesling in "fog patches" so they will not get too hot or dry.

Grüner Veltliner: Over the last few years Grüner Veltliner has become the Austrian national grape making up around 36% of the total plantings. Lower Austria is the center of production for Grüner Veltliner while most of the southerly vineyards produce more Riesling and some amazing Sauvignon Blanc (remember the February selection?). It is true that a large amount of the Grüner Veltliner that is produced is light, vaguely acidic and lean however when done correctly Grüner Veltliner can be a beautiful mix of perfume-y aromatics and substance. This grape does need a warmer climate to ripen fully and there are only a few places in Northern Europe that have this climate.

Weingut H.u.M. Hofer is located in the small village of Auersthal which is about 20 miles from the center of Vienna (Wien). Hofer belongs to a group called Bio-Ernte which is an Austrian body that certifies products as organic. They have standards higher than the EU guidelines. The winery produces mostly whites (as is the norm for the region) from Grüner Veltliner and Riesling. They use only stainless steel, in order to retain the intense primary fruit aromas and flavors of this grape.

Description: Let me start by saying that this wine is a treat and yes, it does have a crown cap. This wine has grown such a following in the last few years it is not going to be around long. It is a great value and served in many restaurants. This wine is clean and super crisp, packed with bright citrus fruit notes with a hints of white pepper on the nose. High acidity with medium body and a great finish, this wine is about all you can ask for from a 10 dollar Grüner Veltliner.

Food Pairing: This wine comes in a litter bottle which is perfect for cooking; some can go in the dish and still have plenty for the glass. It would be great in steamed mussels or clams or with cheese and charcuterie.





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July 2008 Selection

Red Package

2005 Ravenswood Zinfandel Lodi County

Suggested Retail Price: \$13.99 PJ's Price: \$10.97

Location: Ravenswood Winery is located in Sonoma County in California. This wine comes from the "County Series" that Ravenswood produces and all the fruit is from Lodi County which is located directly east of San Francisco.

History: Ravenswood winery was started by Joel Peterson in the hope of producing wines that could hold their own against the old world. The very first vintage of Ravenswood, the 1976 Dry Creek Zinfandel, won the San Francisco tasting. Ever since the beginning of his career Joel Peterson has worked hard to lobby respect for the Zinfandel grape. This was no easy task, and it still is and uphill battle. Joel also ran a "tireless campaign against priggish elitism" in order to remain a winery for people, not just wine geeks and the privileged few. He has been successful in keeping the "every-man" nature of the winery while producing some of the best Zinfandels over the last 30 years.

Lodi is the name of a town and an appellation in the Central Valley of California. The central valley is probably best known, outside the wine world, for the endless acres of irrigated farmland that provides most of us with fresh green vegetables in the middle of January. The major farming areas are located in the warmer regions to north and the south of Lodi. Due to the funneling effect of San Francisco bay cool air does make its way into Lodi which keeps the region cooler than other parts of the Central Valley. This wine is part of the "county series" of Zinfandels that Ravenswood produces. They also make a Zin from Sonoma and Napa County in an effort to show how the origin of the fruit is just as important for Zinfandels as it is for Pinot Noir or Cabernet. Each one has different qualities and together they make for an interesting tasting exercise.

Zinfandel: The very origin of the grape was shrouded in mystery until very recently. Most thought it was the same as, or related to the Italian Primitivo grape grown in the southern region of Puglia. However in the last few years it has become clear, through DNA profiling, that Zinfandel is the same grape as a local Croatian grape that nearly went extinct on the Island of Kastela. It moved directly from Croatia to the United States in the early 1800's and was grown on the East coast for wine and table grapes. It then moved out west and was one of the first widely planted grapes in all of California. It was a staple drink of miners during the gold rush, and was very popular for home wine production during prohibition. Zinfandel is not an easy grape to grow, it can ripen unevenly with green berries and ripe black berries on the same bunch, and it is also can go from "ripe to raisin" very quickly if it is not harvested at the peak of ripeness. All of these factors combine to make a varietal that is temperamental and wine that is lackluster if shortcuts are taken.

Description: This is a ripe fruit driven wine, as should be expected from a Lodi Zin. Dark red almost purple in color it is packed with ripe plum and cherry aromas that yield to a backbone of spice and pepper. Smooth as silk on the palate with intense ripe fruit flavors and a nice pungent spice note that complement the jammy flavors. Ripe super-fine tannins and medium acidity make this wine a perfect match for a summer barbeque with ribs, grilled meats or hearty vegetables.





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Red Package

2006 Domaine Les Bruyeres Syrah VdP Collines Rhodanniennes
Suggested Retail Price: \$15.99 PJ's Price: \$12.99

Location: Domaine Les Bruyeres is located in the rolling foothills of the Alps in the southeast region of the appellation Crozes Hermitage. This wine originates from the Collines Rhodanniennes which is located in between the northern and southern Rhone regions.

Domaine les Bruyeres: David Reynaud, a fourth generation wine maker took control of the vineyard in 2000, after earning his degree in viticulture and oenology. David made sweeping changes and converted the farm to organic and has been certified by ECOCERT (the European organic certification agency) since 2005, and recently converted the farm to biodynamic. When asked, why did you convert? David responded, "It was a natural choice and no other choice exists." This attitude is common with many of the small winemakers in Europe. It is the larger estates that have thousands of acres and millions of vines that find it hard to move into producing organically. Having 35 acres of Syrah vines, with 20 to 50 years of age, allows David to be very selective during harvest, hand picking only the finest grape clusters. Yet another example of David returning to the old ways; however this should not suggest that he is old fashioned in all ways. In 2003, David constructed a new cellar on a hill. He did this to utilize gravity, instead of electric pumps, to move the grapes through the wine making process. Many believe that electric pumps extremely agitate the wine, dramatically affecting its texture.



Syrah: One of the undisputed Noble red grape varieties (Cabernet Sauvignon and Pinot Noir are the others) and the one that, in my opinion, can be made in the widest variety of styles. In my experience you get better bang for your buck with Syrah compared to either of the other two noble grapes. I would maintain that in a random sampling of the three noble grapes from around the \$15 or \$20 price point, the Syrah would be the best wine and value. The vine is hardy and produces well in warm climates (and we may only get more of these) and has its roots (sorry about the pun) in the Rhone Valley where it has been grown for hundreds of years. In fact in the 18th and 19th century much of the Bordeaux that was made was actually Syrah from Hermitage and not Cabernet. This grape is full of surprises and is one of the few grapes that is still blended with small amounts (up to 15%) of a white grape (Viognier) in many parts of the world. This adds a refreshing floral note to the deep dark brooding nature of Syrah. A grape well worth exploring.

Description: This wine is an enigma. The color is opaque purple which is usually an indication of a thick full bodied young wine, but I warn you this wine is full of surprises. The nose is laden with intense notes of olive tapenade, bacon fat, and crushed earth. There are also rich notes of mixed berries like blackberries and cherries. On the palate the wine is dry with pronounced flavors of mixed berries like cranberries and deeper notes of mineral, earth and more smoky bacon. This wine is medium bodied and has high acidity which makes it great to pair with food. If one were to take all the cues from the color and the nose of this wine (which indicate a full bodied monster of a wine) the overall mouth feel is surprisingly light structured and elegant. The tannins are fine and ripe and spread across the palate seamlessly. The finish is long and leaves you refreshed with the flavors of ripe berries and earth. This type of wine is a great match with hearty summer grilled meats like lamb tenderloin or mature creamy cheeses.