

Rebel Grape Society
JANUARY 2022

Palmina Wines

Steve Clifton doesn't need much introduction in the California wine landscape. An icon for Santa Barbara County wines best known for capturing the industry's attention with his fabulous Pinots and Chardonnays through the Brewer-Clifton label that really helped prove the potential of the region. The project that we at Bergamot have always known Steve from has been Palmina, which was established all the way back in 1995. Not only was it the very first domestic Nebbiolo we tried but also one of the few California Nebbiolo that tastes like real Nebbiolo!

Steve has long held the philosophy that "Palmina is not trying to emulate the Italian versions of those wines, but rather translate the history of those grapes to the growing conditions and vineyard sites of the very unique characteristics of Santa Barbara County." This is such an important piece to the Rebel Grape movement: to explore what these grapes can taste like here in our soils as opposed to striving to capture the exact tastes of the old world. The greater making wines with these grapes to fit the mold of what the rest of California tastes like.

In the end, it's all about honoring the grape and Steve Clifton has long been a fantastic steward for these varietals from his humble little winery tucked in the wine ghetto down in Lompoc.

- Kevin Wardell, January, 2022

WINE NO. 1
Palmina Dolcetto
Santa Barbara, California 2019

GRAPE: DOLCETTO [dohl-CHEHT-oh]

Don't let the name of this dark-skinned grape fool you. While its name "little sweet one" implies its low acidity, sweet Dolcetto wines aren't easy to find. Because of its adaptability and early and easy ripening, it reads as a poor cousin to Nebbiolo and Barbera, and is generally grown in regions where these others don't produce as well, in higher altitudes, in the Monferrato hills of northwestern Italy. Ironically, the cooler locale actually helps the grape retain acidity and avoid premature ripening. Dolcetto has a mixed past here in California and can mostly just be found outside the house of an older established Italian-American grower for nostalgic purposes.

GLASS:

Like sweet petit fours made from fresh blackberry juice that jumps out of the glass and goes down so easy. There is also just the right amount of the peppery bite in the mid palate. One particular aspect to Dolcetto wine is that there is a bitter note that can put an abrupt halt to the pleasant sensation that said ripeness. Not here. The fruit and the grip hold hands and slide headlong into a mouthwatering and lip smacking tart finish that leaves you wanting for more.

WINE NO. 2
Palmina Sangiovese
Sogno del Fiore, Santa Ynez Valley, California 2020

GRAPE: SANGIOVESE [san-GEE-OH-vay-say]

Sangiovese in California, inexplicably, has yet to achieve a hayday. It has been planted in varying sites here and there is ample evidence of its ability to grow very well - not to mention the potential for beautiful results, in the right hands. And as our temperatures here begin to rise, so has the momentum towards varieties that are more accustomed to a warmer Mediterranean climate, as opposed to the more Northern French grapes that have long held the spotlight here. Given the enormous success and notoriety Sangiovese wines from Tuscany enjoy on the world's stage, it would seem only a matter of time. It has been featured here and there in the Northern California appellations, but clearly has gobs of untapped potential in the Santa Barbara region as well.

GLASS:

The 'pure' flavor of Sangiovese is a very tough thing to nail down... but this wine has some familiar denseness to it that points to what the marriage of this iconic grape and our home soils can equal up to. Big and bursting with red cherries, this wine showcases the warm and sundrenched California ripeness that should be expected as well as the right touch of wood. There are secondary tones of toasted hazelnut as well which is a classic indicator from Sangiovese's most important heartland, Chianti. Young and wound up with yet unraveled layers, this wine has a lot to say either in the immediate or in a few years... Just be sure to have it on hand next time you cook a Bistecca alla Fiorentina.

WINE NO. 3

Palmina Nebbiolo

Santa Barbara, California 2016

GRAPE: NEBBIOLO [neh-bee-OH-low]

Nebbiolo is as famous a grape name as one can find in Italy, let alone the world. It is most notable from Barolo and Barbaresco in Piemonte, where it expresses its brawn and brooding depth, but it can be truly remarkable from many other growing regions. From the greater Langhe to the rolling hills of Roero, to the Alto Piedmont appellations: Ghemme, Gattinara, Boca, Lessona and Carema, and up into the steep and remote Valle d'Aosta, all Nebbiolos are very much worth exploring.

Santa Barbara County features a unique transverse mountain range where the cool air from the Pacific meets warm and dry desert air and creates a microclimate that can be very similar to Piedmont. There, the dichotomy is between the Alps and the Mediterranean but the two growing conditions have distinct similarities.

GLASS:

Where Nebbiolo can be brooding and sometimes intimidating, this wine does a fabulous job of displaying its brighter disposition with tart cranberry and a pomegranate pop. It is still, after all, Nebbiolo. Allowing this wine to breathe before you dive in will benefit all parties involved. As it opens up, that is when the expected tertiary notes of dusty cinnamon, nepitella, fennel flower, fresh mushrooms and dried rose petals all line up beautifully in a neat little row. There are equal parts cherry leather and bitter citrus rind that provide the backbone and the finish is a teetering balancing act of tannin and warm southern California sun kissed fruit.