

Wine Club Selections for the Red Brigade

Our first pick of the 2023 vintage is scheduled for Monday, (September 4th)- mixed sparkling lots from the Layne Vineyard. The vineyards look fantastic. As a matter of fact, this is the best-looking crop we have had in years. We dodged frost. Fruit-set was nearly ideal. The season, which started cool, has been evenly warm and dry. Mildew is not an issue. We have a great crew in the vineyard and in the winery. Everything is lining up wonderfully, except for just one little thing.

Smoke.

We had smoke during the ripening season this year. I say “had”, because as of this writing, the smoke has cleared out fabulously. Actually, I’m sitting outside on my patio writing this because I’m enjoying the clear skies and mild temperatures. The weather pattern has shifted to come from the Northwest, typical for the season, pushing smoke away from our valleys. Rain is even in the forecast.

For better or for worse, we have plenty of experience with smoke. At least seven of the last ten vintages have had some amount of smoke impact. We’ve learned a lot in the process. We’ve learned that most of the reactive compounds are very heavy, and they tend to fall out of the air unless the fire is very close. This means that even though the air might be poor, it doesn’t necessarily mean that the wine will be negatively affected. We know that certain winemaking techniques exacerbate smoke compounds, while others minimize them. Ultimately, we’ve got the tools, and we know how to use them.

Furthermore, I did a little research, and as bad as this year is, there are plenty of other recent vintages that were worse. 2017, 2018 and 2021 all had longer periods of smoke exposure for the valleys. In those years, many great wines were made, including the 2017 Syrah 4,2-a, which won best of show at the Oregon Wine Experience, the 2021 Pistoleta, which was named Best in Class at the New World Wine Challenge, and the 2018 Syrah, Mae’s Vineyard, which was named Best in Class at the Oregon Wine Experience last year.

They say that there is no one more optimistic than a farmer. No one else would pay retail, sell wholesale, put himself at the mercy of forces that he can’t control and convince himself that he’s the lucky one. Winegrowers are likewise notoriously optimistic, driven by a combination of faith and hope. Who else would commit themselves to an endeavor that might create something of value in no less than a decade? In the end, wines are the results of hundreds of decisions, the first one being where to plant and the last one being when to open the bottle. The great wines this year will be no different, and we’ve already started making decisions that will shape them.

I look forward to sharing them with you.

Enjoy,

Herb Quady

In July, we hosted a library tasting of Steelhead Run Syrahs. Meloney and I pulled samples from our “wine library.” Every year since 2006, we have held back some amount of wine from sales so that we could understand how our wines aged over time. Steelhead Run is the only vineyard from which we have made a single vineyard Syrah every year since 2006. In 2009, we even selected it for our “Flagship” bottling. It was a fantastic experience, uncorking and examining the wines. I was impressed with how well they held up. None of the wines tasted “tired” or “over the hill,” although the 2007 did show some effect of *Brettanomyces*. What I found especially interesting was how I could follow the evolution of our winemaking style over time, separate from the effects of weather. For example, 2012 and 2006 were both warm, even vintages, but in 2012, I know we replaced our destemmer with a very gentle model, and this shows through in the wine, being softer and more drinkable than the 2006, despite being 6 years younger. Likewise the 2014, which we made in our new facility in Medford, and consciously tried to reduce oxygen exposure throughout the winemaking process, something we could not do as well at the Troon winery. This wine tasted delicious, but took a good hour or so before the aromas began to reveal themselves, obviously an effect of the reductive winemaking that we employed.



2018 Syrah, Steelhead Run Vineyard
Applegate Valley, Southern Oregon
\$35/\$28 (Underground)

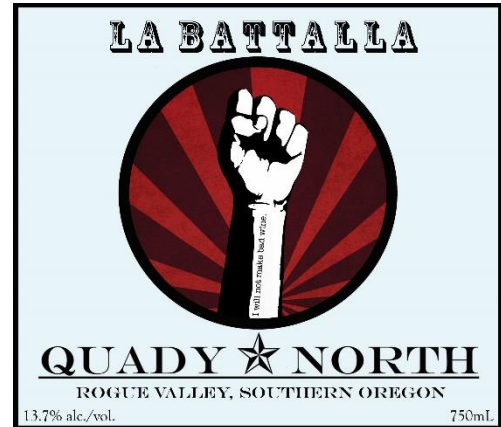
I included the 2018 in this tasting. It was a favorite of both myself and those who attended the tasting. 2018, like 2014, was warm and dry, but in 2018 we had begun to incorporate more oxygen into our Syrah winemaking, especially during pressing. I found that the *garrigue*¹ note, which is present in all the Steelhead Run vintages, gave way quickly to notes of dark plums and black cherries. 2018 seemed to mark a sort of “Goldilocks” vintage where equipment, technique and weather all combined to work with each other to create a real “house style” that allowed the vineyard *terroir* to shine, while still showcasing texture and balance.

We entered the 2018 Steelhead Syrah in this year’s Oregon Wine Competition. Traditionally our Syrahs do well in this competition. This year, the judges were especially fond of Syrah, and many fine examples were entered. This wine took home a gold medal, one of two earned by Quady North.

¹ *Garrigue* is a type of scrubland terrain in Southern France. Rosemary, thyme, fennel and sage all grow wild in this country, and on warm days there is a particular type of savory, pungent aroma. This same aroma is attributed to many Syrah wines from that area.

Stop me if you've heard me tell this story before. "It was 1995. A young Herb leads his then girlfriend Meloney on foot all around Paris, mostly because he is poor at judging distance as well as understanding the map of the Metro. At the end of the day, exhausted, they find an obliging bistro with a *prix fixe* menu that they can afford. Meloney has tomatoes, garlic and pasta with goat cheese, Herb has *steak frites* and they share a glass of red wine from the Loire."

This meal would end up being one of the most impactful ones of their lives. The lesson was, a simple meal, well prepared, with fresh, whole ingredients, is always satisfying. To this day, fresh pasta with fresh whole tomatoes, garlic and goat cheese is one of Meloney's favorite meals. Herb took home another lesson. The red wine of the Loire valley, the everyday version, is the workhorse of the Paris bistro.



2021 "La Battalla"
Rogue Valley, Southern Oregon
\$22/\$17.60

I have always remembered that wine and have always wanted to make my own version of it. Along the way, I learned that the wine was probably from the *Touraine* region. It could have contained any number of different varieties, including Cabernet Sauvignon, Pinot Noir and Gamay Noir, but likely contained Cabernet Franc and Côt, a local clone of Malbec.

With each vintage, I feel like we move closer and closer to the conceptual ideal. The idea behind this wine is that it should be an everyday red with personality. There should be edges. It might be a little rustic. It should not be completely smooth and polished, as many Quady North wines are. Rather it should be lively, it should contend a bit with that steak. It does not simply become a part of the tableau, but rather pulls the conversation to it.

With the "Battalla", process is the product. We pick Cabernet Franc and Malbec on the same day and co-ferment them, leaving the Malbec as whole clusters. Early maceration is done through treading², until enough juice is liberated to allow for the wine to be pumped over. Instead of commercial yeast, we create a *pied de cuvee*³ from Mae's Vineyard Cabernet Franc. In the end, the wine is pressed off, early, and barreled down to neutral French Oak.

The idea is to replicate winemaking processes that would have been done traditionally for millennia in that part of France and in doing so create a wine that might approximate what Mel and I might have enjoyed in that little bistro so many years ago.

² Somehow "treading" evokes slightly sexier imagery than "stomping", although both are accurate.

³ This begins by picking two buckets of grapes, crushing them in the vineyard, and leaving them overnight. This allows a fermentation to begin with the yeast that is on the grapes themselves instead of yeast that is airborne in the winery. We build the fermentation up over time and use it to inoculate Cabernet Franc lots for Quady North.

We jealously guard a few sites in the Applegate Valley that grow delicious Cabernet Franc. Each sits at similar elevation, with similar soils. In the winery, they act like variations on a theme, being both distinctly Applegate in their tannin profile and tendency toward minty and peppery notes, while also being unique. Castellano, on the steep, West facing hillside, is always the most tannic and structured. Layne is more cocoa and mint. Mae's is more supple than the others, and maintains that distinctive red pepper note.

In other years, we would have had fruit from the Serra (formerly Frank's vineyard) or even Wooldridge Creek. However, by 2019, red blotch had claimed those sites, and we no longer saw the ripeness that we enjoyed once upon a time.

By 2020, I knew that we would have to eventually remove our own Eevee's Cabernet Franc. There was too much Red Blotch in the vineyard, and it was spreading faster than we could remove it. In that same year, Monnie Hedges, fellow Applegator, asked if I would help him design and install a new vineyard off of N. Applegate Rd. Realizing that we would soon face a deficit in Cabernet Franc, I encouraged him to plant some additional Franc there. This fruit, as well as Gamay Noir, Chenin Blanc, Sauvignon Blanc and Mourvèdre, were harvested for the first-time last year, and will be fully in bearing this year. It will be fun to have yet another source of Franc in the winery, from a site near the river, and a different soil type. I look forward to being able to increase our Cabernet Franc production, which has been limited in recent years.



2019 Cabernet Franc
Applegate Valley, Southern Oregon
\$35.00/\$28.00