VOL. 9 | NOVEMBER 2019

VINERATION

It's November and Fall is in full swing. It may not have cooled off much in Florida, but college football, Halloween, and the abundance of activities are telling us it's Autumn. I'm especially glad to slow things down for a moment and live in "California Time" with this month's wine release.

Bart Hansen is a Sonoma County native and journeyman who is integral to the community's wine scene. You may have heard of him as the host of the popular "The Wine Makers Podcast." His Dane Cellars wines are hyperlocal - the ones that local bottle shops and cafes stock, but rarely cross the county line.

I don't just choose winemakers by the quality of their wine, but also by their personal stories and character. Bart is a wonderfully generous and humble guy, which you'll learn more about on the next page.

This month, invite some friends over, uncork these wines, and drink like a Sonoma local.

Cheers!

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THIS MONTH

Receive 10% off all Dane Cellars wine using the code "Vineration". Don't delay, this month's Chenin Blanc was named to Oprah's 2019 Thanksgiving wine recommendations.

NEXT MONTH

We're traveling north again to Willamette Valley, Oregon and meeting one of the best small pinot noir producers I've discovered.

Bart Hansen has his fingerprints all over Sonoma Valley, but exudes humility with a touch of self deprecation. A native of Petaluma, Bart doesn't boast about how integral he has been to many wineries' successes. He got his first wine job harvesting and hauling grapes at Kenwood Vineyards during junior college in 1986. At the time, Bart was managing a record store, and he remains a big music fan - still traveling to Austin's SXSW festival every year. The Kenwood temp job quickly morphed into a full-time gig, and Bart stayed on for 12 years, rising to the position of Cellarmaster and working extensively with zinfandel.

DANE

Sonoma, California
www.danecellars.com

After Kenwood's corporate acquisition, Bart went to work for the Benziger winery and their sister brand, Imagery. The Benziger family are pioneers in biodynamic grape growing, which they had just started around the time of Bart's arrival in 1998. Biodynamic farming is an extreme version of organics that uses all natural fertilization and pest control methods, as well as relying on the moon's phases to dictate their farming schedule. Bart credits this as one of his key experiences that broadened his understanding of winegrowing and spurred his love of Rhône varieties like syrah, grenache, and mourvedre.

In 2007, things changed for Bart's career in an uncommon but incredibly rewarding way. He and his wife, Teri, married in their 40's and their only child, Dane, was born that year. Bart decided to leave Benziger for a part-time role at Sonoma's Lasseter Family Winery to support Teri's corporate career and be Dane's primary caregiver. It's a rare move in our society, but a truly commendable one which Bart modestly downplays when you meet him. He also started his own brand that year in honor of his son and Dane Cellars was born.

Bart now focuses on raising Dane and making Dane Cellars wine. For wine geeks, though, Bart may be best known as one of the hosts of "The Wine Makers Podcast," one of the industry's best resources. He travels around California bringing exposure to the state's most authentic winemakers, including some previous Vineration partners like Peter Mathis, Steve Law, and Blair Guthrie. Get to know Bart even better by tuning in to the podcast every Friday.

2016
CHENIN BLANC

BUDDHA'S DHARMA VINEYARD

BASICS

- Origin: Mendocino County AVA
- Varietals: 100% Chenin Blanc
- Production: 2,100 bottles

SENSATIONS

- Color: Pale Gold
- Acid: Medium
- Texture: Viscous
- Body: Medium / Full

AROMAS

- Orange Blossom
- Honey
- Concrete
- Apricot

The Golden Nectar

Dane Cellars' chenin blanc is a local legend in Sonoma - one of the favorite white wines of sommeliers. Because it's only grown in small quantities, it's hard to find, which is why I'm even more excited to bring it to you. Sourced from a 75-year-old vineyard, the age of the vines produces more complex, concentrated characters in the wine.

This wine is all about texture. Your first impression is a refractory bling of pale gold. A good swirl gives it the look of undulating gold, like Scrooge McDuck's pool of golden coins. The aromatic key to this chenin blanc is the floral, fruit, and honey interaction. If you're familiar with French Vouvray, this is a textbook Chenin with an herbaceous note. Starting out full of orange blossoms and honey, the aromas have a lift of lemon at the end of a long breath. You'll also find apricot, wet concrete, tomato leaf, and white peach wrapped up in the bouquet.

The look and smell of this wine are preludes to the big texture, which drives home the "nectar" factor. Slick and viscous, the flavors are delightfully mouth coating. I always look for good acidity in wine, and it's here but partly disguised by the rich texture. You can still notice it through the palate-cleansing effect. As you drink your glass, the honey continues to dominate, with lightly bitter mineral component behind it, and the tartness of apricots.

Bart intentionally crafted the complex texture of this wine. He split up the pressed juice into three different types of vessels: stainless steel tanks, used French oak barrels, and concrete eggs, which each contribute a different mouthfeel. Depth was added through aging the wine for five months on the lees - the remnants of yeast cells that are responsible for the characteristic "bready" quality in Champagne.

MSRP: $28
ABV: 13.1%

Buddha's Dharma Vineyard

This is one of the most peculiar vineyards to be found in Northern California.

Best known for its dramatic coast, cool climate, and being part of the "Emerald Triangle" of clandestine marijuana farming, Mendocino County actually has warm, dry areas in its eastern part. Planted in 1944, this vineyard east of the town of Ukiah is located on the current property of the City of 10,000 Buddhas. It's one of the largest Buddhist monasteries in the USA.

Previously, this complex was the Mendocino State Asylum for the Insane (later rebranded the more compassionate Mendocino State Hospital). In the midst of a major drought in the 1970s, the hospital ran out of water and couldn't find a well, so they shut it down.

After purchasing the property, Venerable Master Hsuan Hua tapped the ground with his staff, said "drill here," and miraculously, water was discovered (or so the legend goes). Today, the Buddhist colony has a major focus on organic farming and tends this vineyard, selling off the grapes to notable wineries like Dane Cellars, Jolie Laide, Dirty & Rowdy, and Pax Mahle Wines.

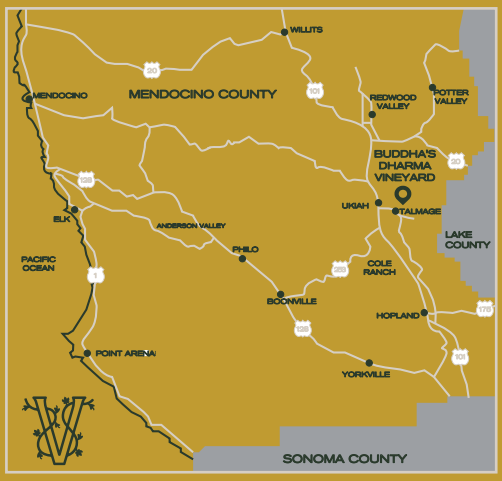
About Chenin Blanc

Chenin blanc is native to Anjou (aka Angers) in the Loire region of western France. This ancient variety has a recorded history of over 1,200 years and is a sibling to sauvignon blanc. Chenin isn't a popular varietal among the American public, but it used to be one of the most widely-grown white grapes in California and used in blended jug wine.

However, in the last 20 years, it's acreage has been cut by over 75%, mostly in favor of planting the more profitable chardonnay. On store shelves, you're more likely to find chenin blanc from South Africa, where it's the most widely grown grape.

Buddha's Dharma Vineyard

APPELLATION



PAIRINGS

Chenin blanc is a super adaptable "food wine." Pair it with lemon-butter seafood like grouper, lobster, or scallops. The texture will complement richness while the acid will help refresh.

It's also great with Thai, Chinese, or Indian food, where the acid clears the spice.

Because of the vegetale notes, this particular bottle can handle green dishes like salad, asparagus, and artichokes surprisingly well.

COMPARE

Vouvray - This Loire region is the most famous chenin blanc appellation. Usually produced in a sweet style, the Dane Cellars version is similar to a dry Vouvray. You can easily find Vouvray at big box wine retailers and most small shops for $15-30.

Savennières - Further west of Vouvray, the town of Savennières is home to the most lauded and expensive chenin blanc. These wines are bigger, more acidic, and have a salty character that usually demands aging before you drink it. Challenging to find, you may encounter some at specialty wine shops for $30-100.

Steen - If you see a bottle of white wine from South Africa, chances are it's chenin blanc, which they also call "Steen." Light and crisp in style, you should find some at most big box retailers for $10-20.

2016
VALERIA GSM

KIMBERLY VINEYARD

BASICS

- Origin: Sonoma Valley AVA
- Varietals: 55% Grenache, 38% Syrah, 7% Mourvedre
- Production: 1,800 bottles

SENSATIONS

- Color: Crimson
- Acid: High
- Body: Full
- Texture: Syrupy

AROMAS

- Raspberry
- Blueberry
- Cinnamon
- Cloves

The Jam Session

Wine critics tend to denounce "jammy" wine, where sweet, bold fruit dominates. Sometimes I've sided with them, but this is one wine not to dismiss. It is a jammy wine, but in a beautiful way. Lovers of "mainstream" California style wines will absolutely dig the Valeria. It's named in memory of Teri's godmother, Valerie, who was a home winemaker. She grew syrah in Carmel Valley and served as Bart's inspiration for this style.

Be hypnotized by the beautiful dense crimson color with a hue of magenta. Entrancingly strong fruit and spice aromas wander out of the glass. They capture you like passing a beautiful person on the street - you're so mesmerized, you lose all sense of your surroundings until you awkwardly walk into a telephone pole.

This bottle doesn't need decanting to unleash the stampede of aromas. Up front, note raspberry and blueberry jam with the sugary scent of sweetened condensed milk, then cinnamon and clove after, with a slight hint of olive and fresh asphalt at the end.

On the palate, enjoy the freshness of the high acid content. The same warm red fruits and spices carry through each sip. Moderate and precise tannins will occupy your tongue after a glass, so drink this with food. There's a syrupy texture to its finish from the higher alcohol content. Yes, this wine is a bit "hot", which means the alcohol is more noticeable. It lends a warm afterglow that fumes through your palate - the result of restrained winemaking techniques. Bart could've watered back this wine to lower the ABV (like many winemakers do), but he naturally crafted this wine that channels the warm California site where it was grown.

Don't forget, in Chateauneuf du Pape, where GSM wine originates, alcohol is regularly north of 15%.

MSRP: $40
ABV: 15.5%

Kimberly Vineyard

Grown on a ridgetop overlooking blocks of Cabernet and Zinfandel, this is a warm climate area exposed to the sun. Sitting directly west of famed Pagani Ranch, one of the oldest Zinfandel vineyards in Sonoma Valley, the block this wine comes from is 2.5 acres of syrah mixed with grenache and mourvedre.

Bart picks the different varietals at the same time and crushes the grapes together. This process, called cofermentation, can produce more unexpected and complex flavors than the alternative, where grapes are fermented separately and blended together at the time of bottling. Bart also included 20% "whole cluster" grapes, meaning 20% of the bunches were left with the stems on. Grape stems include tannins and add a unique backbone to the wine.

About GSM

Grenache, syrah, and mourvedre grapes are so frequently combined that they're called "GSM" wines around the world. These grapes are native to France and Spain, where they have been mixed for centuries to create well-balanced wines. Each of these varieties brings something unique to the finished wine - Grenache is lighter bodied with bright red fruit flavors; Syrah lends herbal notes and acidity; Mourvedre contributes dark fruits and density.

Winemakers in places like Chateauneuf du Pape naturally discovered these attributes complement each other, and modern winemakers in Australia and America have imitated this style.

Kimberly Vineyard

In fact, many of the wildly popular "California red blend" wines you'll find in wine shops are based on the GSM model, with at least two or three of those grapes plus zinfandel.

APPELLATION

PAIRINGS

The Valeria is a perfect bold pairing wine because it adds an undercurrent of dark red fruit to whatever flavors are going on with the food. Drink with a red meat dish like steak, lamb, or BBQ.

Cheese board: Stronger flavored cheeses like white cheddar, bleu, or manchego pair well with GSM wines.

COMPARE

Chateauneuf du Pape - Dane Cellars' Valeria is incredibly similar in character to France's famed Chateauneuf du Pape wines, so I encourage you to pick up a bottle to compare. Most wine retailers will have a good selection from producers like Guigal, Vieux Telegraphe, Chateau La Nerthe, and Chateau de Beaucastel for $30-75.

For a neat tasting exercise, buy a bottle each of grenache and syrah (single varietal mourvedre is hard to find). Taste each wine individually, then gradually blend them together in different proportions to see how the attributes combine. Compare this to a cofermented GSM like Valeria.

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