

# WINE MERCHANT

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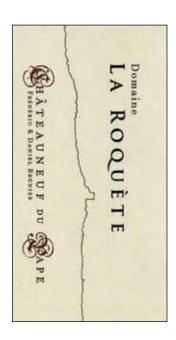
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#### PUNTA CRENA DAY

O MANY PARTIES, so much good food, some decent wines, too—I know, it must get tiresome. Here's my excuse for this one:

Early June 2000 Coil Direct Live Company Control of the Control of

Early June, 2009. Gail, Dixon, and I were driving from Tuscany back to France along the Ligurian coast. Earlier, Dixon had attended Vinitaly and been impressed by the wines of a domaine called Punta Crena, so we pulled off the autostrada, the one with all the tunnels, and drove down to Varigotti (near Finale Ligure on the ancient *via Aurelia*), a beachtown so small it is not on my Michelin map of Italy. White sand beach on the blue Mediterranean, a couple of hotels, a handful of restaurants . . . no, it ain't San Remo or Portofino.

About two blocks from the beach, we found Punta Crena, and I began to get a certain vibe, as we used to say in the sixties, because at the gate there was an older woman (who turned out to be the winemaker's mother) standing behind a wooden table selling her garden tomatoes, zucchini, onions, eggplants, cherries, olive oil, etc., to her neighbors. Hmm, good sign. Clearly, Punta Crena is not owned by an insurance company or a supranational corporation that has so much of our money, they don't know what to do with it except buy a château or winery and hire some kid fresh out of enology school to run it.

We tasted through the wines, some sparkling, some lightly *frizzante*, some dry still whites like Pigato and Vermentino. We were delighted by their unseriousness, their gaiety, their quaffability, their . . . fun!

Then Paolo, one of the two brothers who run the winery, took us to the beach for a platter of fried little sea critters and a bottle of Lumassina, which sparkles before it speaks. Paolo brought a neighbor to translate. She told us in English—Paolo couldn't understand—that he already has seven kids. I say "already" because he looks like such a peach-fuzz youngster. "The men here tell their wives, don't even look at Paolo, you might get pregnant."

Later, as we said our goodbyes, the brothers started loading up our trunk with their olive oil (from massive, thousand-year-old trees), delicious thick-skinned lemons that you can almost eat like an orange, and, of course, plenty of wine.

We left elated.

Later in the summer, Paolo called and asked if he and a friend of his, a good cook, could drop by. "Get some people together," he said, "my friend will cook."

Alain Pascal at Gros 'Noré agreed to host the meal at his big outdoor table under the plane trees near Bandol. We invited Ravier from Tempier, Fadat from Aupilhac, Rozier from La Roque, and Ravaille from Ermitage du Pic Saint Loup.

Paolo and his pal pulled up in a rickety old van and started unloading groceries from Italy and wines from Punta Crena. Our chef proceeded to prepare about twenty different courses.

It occurred to me that the visit to Punta Crena and the lunch at Gros 'Noré

taught me a lot about the pleasures to be found in Paolo's wines. They are so different from any California wines, for example—if you are not prepared, they might puzzle you. Where's the oak, where's the mighty wallop, the thundering finish, and so on.

Well, I thought, there is a good cook who knows what Italian cuisine is all about—Berkeley's own Christopher Lee. Why not throw a parking lot event, invite Paolo and Chris to get together some typical Ligurian fare, and you lucky readers will see the light and spend the rest of your days drinking Punta Crena?

And thus did it come to pass:

#### SATURDAY, OCTOBER 9

#### II A.M. to 4 P.M.

Chris and Paolo will collaborate on the foodstuffs, my staff will sell Punta Crena by the glass or the bottle, and all will seem right in this mean ol' world again (at the usual bargain price, by the way).

C'mon, gang. Let's show Paolo what we're made of. He'll be here, and you can ask him questions, like: "What do you have against complexity? Where're the lip-searing alcohol levels? Where's the jam? Doesn't oak improve all wines? Why does your sea-breezed Vermentino grown on the sun-bleached cliffs above your winery taste better with a *frittura* than Le Montrachet? Why don't your wines score 100 points?" Etc.

And my staff insists, for Saturday during the event, ONLY, all Punta Crena will be discounted 15% for all orders of at least 12 bottles.



Paolo in his vines

Photo by Dixon Brooke

#### ITALIAN SAMPLER

by Clark Z. Terry

As I'm sure you've noticed, Dixon and Kermit have been working to uncover new treasures from Italy. It seems that every few months they find an enthusiastic winemaker who eschews the calls of modern winemaking and follows the traditions he learned from his father, who learned from his father, and so on into Italian wine eternity.

Italy leads the world in wine production by volume (producing more than twice as much wine as the U.S.), and nearly every corner of the country is covered in vines. I'm a "glass is half full" kind of guy, so that leads me to believe that there's a lot of great juice to discover over there. The diversity of styles in Italian wines is at least as astounding as in France, and this carefully selected sampler reflects that. We have some classics: Pinot Grigio from Friuli, Barbera from the Piemonte, and Sangiovese from Chianti and Montalcino. We are also proud to offer the obscure: Mataòssu, an indigenous variety from Liguria, and Bianco di Custoza, a crisp quaffer that shares the Garganega and Trebbiano grape varieties with the better-known Soave region.

In true Italian fashion, these wines make great pairings with food. *Pesto al pasta*, *bistecca fiorentina*, *fritto misto*, or a simple pizza *margherita* would all find ideal partners in this selection of wines. And I'll bet a hot dog wouldn't mind accompanying Cantine Valpane's superb Barbera, a staff favorite.

Normally \$116.00

# SPECIAL SAMPLER PRICE **\$93.00** (a 20% discount)

**ANNOUNCEMENT:** Author Robert Camuto—whose newest book, *Palmetto*, about Sicilian wine and food so inspired Kermit that he talked Camuto into taking him and Aubert de Villaine to Mount Etna—will be in town soon, October 25 at A–16 in SF and October 27 in Berkeley at Locanda da Eva. Kermit's advice: Be there!

#### ——PRE-ARRIVAL OFFER—

#### DOMAINE ARNAUD ENTE

by Dixon Brooke

RNAUD ENTE IS quietly and patiently crafting some of Burgundy's greatest white wines. He has never sought the spotlight and doesn't travel much, preferring to focus his attention on the state of his vines. This philosophy suits us just fine. He invited me to tour his vineyard parcels last week, and you will not find more impeccably kept vines anywhere in Burgundy. When this type of commitment meets passion and skill in the cellar, great wines are inevitable. These 2008s will certainly prove to be the greatest wines ever produced by Arnaud thus far in his career. I find them stunning.

PER CASE
2008 Bourgogne <i>Blanc</i>
2008 MEURSAULT
2008 Meursault "Clos des Ambres"
2008 MEURSAULT "LES PETITS CHARRONS" 1365.00
2008 MEURSAULT 1ER CRU "LA GOUTTE D'OR"1416.00
2008 Puligny-Montrachet 1er Cru
"Les Referts"
2008 Volnay 1ER CRU "Les Santenots du Milieu"

Pre-arrival terms: Half-payment due with order; balance due upon arrival.



#### WHITE BURGUNDY

by Dixon Brooke

Burgundy. Maybe that's because we have a good collection. Remember one of our many mottos: life is too short not to drink great white Burgundy. Look at a map of Burgundy and you'll quickly see how much more red wine is produced than white. We work hard to bring you Burgundy's very best vin blanc. Burgundy, which inspired thousands of Chardonnay makers around the world, yet the real thing remains inimitable.

#### 2008 BOURGOGNE BLANC • BRUNO COLIN

I had to include a simpler, more affordable white Burgundy, in this case from vines grown around Bruno's home base in Chassagne-Montrachet. It is aged in barrels alongside his top growths and delivers a blast of clean, pure, chalky Chardonnay fruit with plenty of complexity.

**\$26.00** PER BOTTLE

**\$280.80** PER CASE

#### 2008 MÂCON-FUISSÉ "LES TÂCHES" ROBERT-DENOGENT

This lovely white Burgundy combines all the qualities of great Mâcon and top Pouilly-Fuissé. It is lighthearted and easy to swallow like a proper Mâcon but also shows a deeper, more serious aspect like a Pouilly-Fuissé. What a combo. Enjoy now or over five or six years.

**\$28.00** PER BOTTLE

**\$302.40** PER CASE

#### 2008 SAINT-VÉRAN "LES POMMARDS" ROBERT-DENOGENT

The Roberts are excited about this relatively new acquisition from one of the top sites in Saint-Véran, and after a taste, I predict that you, too, will catch the fever. I'd choose it as their finest value, and it stands proudly among their other old-vine bottlings that have been part of the estate for many years. Perhaps the most approachable of the bunch, this is a great introduction to the domaine's superb collection of vines and wines.

**\$32.00** PER BOTTLE

**\$345.60** PER CASE

## 2008 SAINT-ROMAIN BLANC "SOUS LE CHÂTEAU" • CHRISTOPHE BUISSON

This white Burgundy is always one of the shining lights in the domaine's line-up. You could call it their flagship bottling. It hails from one of the best *terroirs* of Saint-Romain, the beautiful, ancient village carved into the rock outcroppings as you drive west from Auxey-Duresses and Meursault. It is a slightly cool, particularly stony *terroir*, well placed for today's climatic tendencies. Our bottling from Christophe exudes class and refinement, as well as pure drinking pleasure. It might be at its best two to three years after bottling, which is to say around 2012–2013, but he has proven that it is just fine younger or older.

**\$36.00** PER BOTTLE **\$388.80** PER CASE

## 2008 BEAUNE BLANC "CLOS SAINT DÉSIRÉ" • CHRISTOPHE BUISSON

Kermit once told me that Richard Olney introduced him to the great Beaune blancs from the "Clos des Mouches." Value and aging potential—two qualities we always look for in Burgundy. Well, Christophe's parcel of Clos Saint Désiré is right above the Clos des Mouches and shares the same exposure. The hallmark of wines from this part of the Côte is a Corton Charlemagne—like richness and opulence, at a fraction of the price, and of course the ability to age well. With our hearty approval, Christophe seems to be bringing out more and more of the parcel's intense stoniness with each passing year.

**\$40.00** PER BOTTLE **\$432.00** PER CASE

#### 2007 PULIGNY-MONTRACHET "LA GARENNE" COMTESSE BERNARD DE CHERISEY

De Cherisey's youngest vines are no longer youngsters at approximately 35 years of age. Raphaël Coche once told me that he thought vines in Burgundy began to produce really interesting wine starting at around 30 years of age (assuming the soils are worked properly, of course, which encourages the development of deep root systems). That means you'd better hope as a young vigneron that the generation(s) preceding you were thinking ahead. La Garenne is a superb highaltitude *terroir* above the Hameau de Blagny giving very spirited, racy wines that dance gracefully on the palate. If you haven't caught the de Cherisey passion yet, get it while you can!

**\$76.00** PER BOTTLE **\$820.80** PER CASE

#### THE SOUTH OF FRANCE I

#### 2008 PODIO ALTO • DOMAINE DU POUJOL

A lovely blend of Syrah, Mourvèdre, Grenache, and Cinsault, it is made just northwest of Montpellier. Nice weight and balance—nothing is exaggerated and it drinks well already. I like the way the healthy tannins sink in at the finish.

**\$18.95** PER BOTTLE

**\$204.66** PER CASE

#### 2007 BANDOL ROUGE DOMAINE DU GROS 'NORÉ

Vintage 2007—certainly fabulous for Bandol reds—and this is my favorite Gros 'Noré so far. It is not packed with jam, but it is jam-packed with goodies. Suffice it to say: classic Bandol flavors, unfiltered. Those who like such flavors—you know if you fit the bill—will be in heaven. The part that sends me the most is the round fleshiness on the palate. It is simply remarkable and makes for a great tasting experience. In terms of aging potential, it will probably be good for as long as you are.

**\$39.00** PER BOTTLE

**\$421.20** PER CASE

## 2008 CÔTES-DE-PROVENCE BLANC "CLOS DE LA PROCURE" • DUPÉRÉ-BARRERA

The annual ratings from the *Revue du Vin de France* only awarded stars to fourteen Provençal domaines. Pretty stingy. Domaine Tempier, by the way, is the only three-star domaine. Our gifted organic winemakers, Emmanuelle Dupéré and Laurent Barrera, just became one of the select fourteen within only a few years of their domaine's creation.

Their white is full-bodied, deep, and luscious. Believe me, such depth and richness are unheard of in a Côtes-de-Provence *blanc*. And it tastes good!

According to the French review, this dry white "est à tomber de bonheur"—not sure how to translate that. To die for? To fall over from pleasure?

**\$30.00** PER BOTTLE

**\$324.00** PER CASE













Alain of Gros 'Noré in his vegetable garden

© Gail Skoff

#### THE SOUTH OF FRANCE II

#### 2008 LES LAURENTIDES DOMAINE GRAMENON

This glorious Grenache blows my mind. It has gobs of ripe cornucopian fruit. While not from the grandest appellation, it is as good as Grenache gets. Prepare to revel in the Grenache of the southern Rhône! You'll want to bathe in it, be enveloped by it.

We are so lucky to have Gramenon and Dupéré-Barrera, two cult wines in France that produce miniscule quantities. I don't know exactly what bugged winemaker Michèle Aubéry-Laurent at Gramenon, but for years she would not export to the U.S.

Here it is, in Berkeley. Live it up!

**\$30.00** PER BOTTLE

\$324.00 PER CASE

#### 2008 CÔTES-DE-PROVENCE ROUGE "CLOS DE LA PROCURE" • DUPÉRÉ-BARRERA

Just as with their white, this majestic Provençal red does not act like any Côtes-de-Provence I have ever tasted, and I have lived in Provence a good part of each year since 1986.

Oh, but does it ever taste like Provence. Its complex fruit, spice, and herb aroma—I mean, this is one to dive into. Another remarkable quality—its tannin. It is 30% Mourvèdre, by the way, which accounts for the heart of darkness aspect.

**\$26.00** PER BOTTLE

\$280.80 PER CASE

#### 2009 COTEAUX DU LANGUEDOC ROUGE CHÂTEAU FONTANÈS

This is from the lovely region near the Pic Saint Loup, where I buy Château Lascaux and Château La Roque.

The wine has so much wine in it, I could add half water and enjoy it with lunch. I mean, talk about intense! Talk about full-bodied! However, trust me, kind folks—it will not damage your finely tuned palates, not even a smidgen.

I know you are tired of me always reminding you of the great bargains we import, so I won't mention it here.

**\$12.95** PER BOTTLE

\$139.86 PER CASE

## —BACK IN STOCK AND BETTER THAN EVER—

#### CHÂTEAU GOMBAUDE GUILLOT

by Dixon Brooke

TE USED TO IMPORT these wines back in the early eighties. Territorial problems put our relationship on pause for all these years, but now we are excited to have Gombaude back, better than ever. *Viticultrice* Claire Laval works her land organically and crafts statuesque Pomerols with depth and class. Kermit says her 1981 in magnum in his home cellar is at its peak. In his words, it still shows the tannin from the stems she leaves in during the vinification, but none of today's fashionable jamminess and new oak.

Gombaude is an example of the style he looks for in Bordeaux. While enjoying a 1988 Sociando-Mallet over dinner at his house in Provence last year, I remarked on its austerity (it followed a 1989 Côte Rôtie from Robert Jasmin). "Good Bordeaux should be somewhat austere," was his response. Kermit discovered and grew to love old-school claret, mainly from Richard Olney's cellar. A certain homogenization of styles in that region has evolved over the past several decades, led by enologists and formulaic winemaking rather than respect for the individual terroirs and the search for a unique identity. We always look for producers who have given that trend the cold shoulder, and who are willing to work with us directly.



Claire Laval is proudly and definitively one of those people, and her wine has as much strength of personality as she does. Thankfully she had a small stock remaining of her impeccable, textbook 2005 Pomerol, enabling us to reintroduce this domaine with a top-notch vintage. It is running on all cylinders and will make great drinking as long as you let it. What a gorgeous tannin! Some of Kermit's notes from *Inspiring Thirst* on the archetypal Pomerol are apt here: "brilliant blackish purple, the nose deep and young, black currant and black truffle. Lots of stuffing; long, intense finish." Don't miss it at our attractive direct import price.

#### 2005 POMEROL CHÂTEAU GOMBAUDE GUILLOT

**\$68.00** PER BOTTLE

**\$734.40** PER CASE

## DOMAINE LA ROQUÈTE

#### CHÂTEAUNEUF-DU-PAPE FRÉDÉRIC & DANIEL BRUNIER

HE BRUNIER BROTHERS ride again!

They are, of course, my partners at Les Pallières, and they own—what's that other domaine?—Vieux Télégraphe.

Just an aside: at lunch with Daniel Ravier of Domaine Tempier, I poured us a glass of Vieux Télégraphe. As he swirled and sniffed, he said, "You know, I read in journals about such-and-such a Châteauneuf-du-Pape and how it is the best, and then a week later I read the same thing about a different domaine in some wine guide, and how it is the best—I'll tell you, no one tops the Bruniers. Year after year. It's not even close."

The Brunier brothers bought La Roquète in 1986. Back then, La Roquète already had an importer who wanted to continue importing it, but given our long collaboration, they offered me the chance to take it on. I suppose I declined because the quality previous to their purchase was not convincing. Since then, as you may know, they changed the cellar, the *foudres*, the vinification, almost everything except the *terroir*, which is different from Vieux Télégraphe's. They recently decided to change importers, as I understand it, and asked if I would be interested. I went, I tasted, I fell in love. No, not with one of the Bruniers—with La Roquète.

Our first shipment just arrived:

#### 2009 CHÂTEAUNEUF-DU-PAPE BLANC

I smell anis and *fleurs blanches*, and a suspicion of oak in the bouquet. While it is rich and round—actually quite a ripe, luscious dry white—I would still call it a subtle, pretty wine.

**\$44.00** PER BOTTLE

\$475.20 PER CASE

#### 2007 CHÂTEAUNEUF-DU-PAPE ROUGE

A suave Châteauneuf, La Roquète is to Châteauneuf-du-Pape what Les Amoureuses is to Chambolle Musigny, what Charmes is to Meursault. For stoniness and power, go to Vieux Télégraphe. At La Roquète, you are moved by its unusual elegance. I imagine a handsome chevalier on a prancing stallion.

In a progression, La Roquète would precede Vieux Télégraphe. And how nice to introduce it in its 2007 incarnation—one of the standout Rhône vintages.

**\$38.00** PER BOTTLE

**\$410.40** PER CASE

## —VALUES OF THE MONTH— CANTINE ELVIO TINTERO

by Lori Varsames

LVIO TINTERO'S WINES are the essence of the legendary Italian table or tavola—meant to be gulped and not sipped, shared with family or friends, enjoyed in abundance, treasured for their simple elegance, and loved for their price. His steep vineyards in the Langhe dominate the epicenter of the Piemonte region, a rolling heartland dotted with hilltop towns. Upon one of these hilltops, you can find their tiny but tough-spirited hometown of Mango, both a former Resistance garrison and a thirteenth-century stronghold of shifting military alliances between Alba and Asti. Today, one can still visit the secret passages from which the villagers escaped the sieges. Perhaps earlier generations of the Tintero family were there providing the fearful with libations.

#### 2009 LANGHE ARNEIS

Rarely planted in this part of the Piemonte, the Arneis grape is easier to understand if you speak the local dialect, in which *arneis* means "rascal" in some translations, "stubborn and difficult" in others. That's because these grapes do not grow easily in most areas outside of Roero. Soft, juicy, ripe pears and limestone minerals draw you in from the first sniff. With great aromatics, a seductive midpalate, and a lively finish that lingers on, and on, and on, and . . . it can't be only \$11.25 per bottle by the case, but it is.

**\$12.50** PER BOTTLE

\$135.00 PER CASE

#### TINTERO ROSSO

This is the kind of wine that would taste great from a thermos snuck into a place where alcoholic beverages are prohibited, not that I would ever do that or recommend that you do. I'm just trying to communicate what it is like so you can imagine how it tastes. Also, it would be best if the thermos were kept cool in this imaginary universe. Elvio's kitchen-sink blend of Barbera, Nebbiolo, Merlot, and Dolcetto is quintessential Langhe: spicy cigar box and cedar aromatics, subtle cherry and red berry juiciness, a light and bright texture, refreshing acidity, and fine-grained tannins. I imagine a young, spirited Hemingway drinking this in between ambulance runs during World War I. It is delicious, complete, and perfectly quaffable with just about any dish, for any occasion. And no, we did not leave out a digit when we priced it. You can believe your eyes.

This is a 2009, but Elvio forgot to put the vintage strip on the label.

**\$8.95** PER BOTTLE

**\$96.66** PER CASE

#### CORSICAN STANDOFF

by Chris Santini

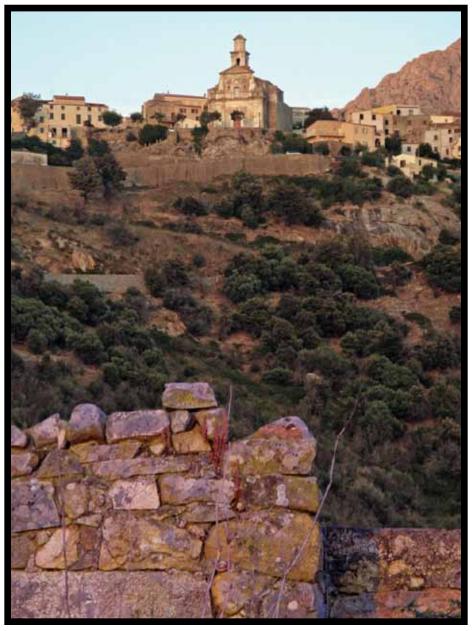
PICTURE THIS IF YOU WILL: on one side you've got Antoine Arena, the audacious outlaw cowboy of Patrimonio with wines a-blazin', flanked by his two sons, making the wildest and most expressive wines ever to come out of Corsica. On the other side, you've got ol' man Michel Angeli of Domaine de Gioielli, the Lone Ranger, quietly turning out classic, refined Cap Corse whites and rosés the way no one else seems to know how to do anymore.

At Arena's place, there might be hordes knocking at the door (often unsuccessfully) to visit the fearless champion whose cuvées brought Corsican wines out of obscurity. Everyone who visits leaves with stars in their eyes, ever more determined to spread the gospel of this family's Patrimonio.

Further north at Domaine de Gioielli, if you can find the place (good luck), you'll see no hordes, just a seasoned artisan working alone in a small amphitheater of vines that surround his home and cellar. In fact, Angeli never intended to make his wines known beyond his neck of the woods and never exported anywhere, not even to mainland France(!), until Kermit and I went to see him to do some old-fashioned Corsican negotiating (we made him an offer he couldn't refuse). You'll be glad we did. So what to drink? The craftsman of the Cap, or the legend of Patrimonio? Line 'em up and see what happens . . .

Start with some dueling Vermentinos! Patrimonio limestone up against Cap Corse schist, with the mineral verve and stone fruit swagger of Arena's Carco blanc compared to the sea breeze and citrus of Gioielli's Cap Corse blanc. Next bring up Arena's rosé—the first time this wine has ever made it into the U.S., by the way—with its hints of smoked Corsican charcuterie and a vibrancy and crispness that make this wine feel alive. Tough match against the soft, easygoing, and lusciously generous rosé from Gioielli, a mouth-filling masterpiece. We did our part. You be the judge.





Corsica © Gail Skoff

#### THE VIEW FROM BEAUNE

by Chris Santini

T IS COMMON KNOWLEDGE here in Burgundy that you can tell a lot about a vigneron by the lowliest appellation in their portfolio. If you get some *terroir* and soul on a generic Bourgogne appellation, then you know the winemaker is doing something right. Of course it is not just around Beaune that this rule holds true. Taste any of our producers' lesser-known bottlings and enjoy the opportunity to have a peek and a tease of what they're capable of with their top cuyées—but at a fraction of the cost.

#### 2009 GENTIL D'ALSACE BLANC DOMAINE MEYER-FONNÉ

Here's a prime example. Gentil is known as an easy-drinking, everyday Alsatian white wine. Remember Edelzwicker? Meyer takes it one large step beyond with this blend of noble Alsatian varieties, mixing the best of what each has to offer. I find gingerbread, roses, and petrol in a dry, delicious style.

**\$16.00** PER BOTTLE

\$172.80 PER CASE

## 2009 BOURGOGNE "CHAMPS CADET" ROUGE DOMAINE DE LA CADETTE

Renowned here in France, especially in Parisian wine bars, for its Vézelay *blanc*, Domaine de La Cadette makes this bottling under the generic Bourgogne *rouge* appellation, yet this is no generic Pinot Noir. It is from an organically farmed, stone-littered parcel isolated in the forests behind Vézelay. A sip of it is a veritable autumnal walk through the woods—you'll find earth, wild cherries, and *trompette de la mort* mushrooms in there. Try to find that in your average overcropped, wrong side of the RN74 Bourgogne *rouge*!

**\$26.00** PER BOTTLE

\$280.80 PER CASE

#### KERMIT LYNCH WINE MERCHANT—TERMS AND CONDITIONS

All wines purchased from Kermit Lynch Wine Merchant are deemed sold in California and title passes to the buyer in California. We make no representation relative to the customer's right to import wine into his/her state. In placing an order, the customer represents to Kermit Lynch Wine Merchant that he/she is at least 21 years of age and the person to whom delivery will be made is at least 21 years old.