

THE WINE PRESS

Gold Medal Wine Club Newsletter: Vol. 18 No. 4

Pietra Santa Winery Edition

In This Issue

PIETRA SANTA
WINERY
Page 1

THIS MONTH'S
WINES
Page 2

SPOTLIGHT PROFILE
Page 5

WINE WIZARD
Page 4

FOOD FOR THOUGHT
Page 6

JUDGE-THE-WINES
Page 7

REORDERS
Page 8



*"With Gold Medal Wine Club,
The Road to Great Wine
Begins at Your Door."*

www.goldmedalwine.com

PIETRA SANTA, KNOWN AS THE GEM OF CIENEGA VALLEY, COMBINES ITALIAN HERITAGE AND TRADITIONAL STYLE IN THEIR CLASSIC WINES

The Cienega Valley's well-established and well-revered Pietra Santa Winery has some new owners, and, as could be expected, a few changes. But, Pietra Santa continues to be one of the dependable wineries in the area that is correctly defined as the North Central Coast Region.

Pietra Santa, translated from Italian as "Sacred Stone," was once part of a

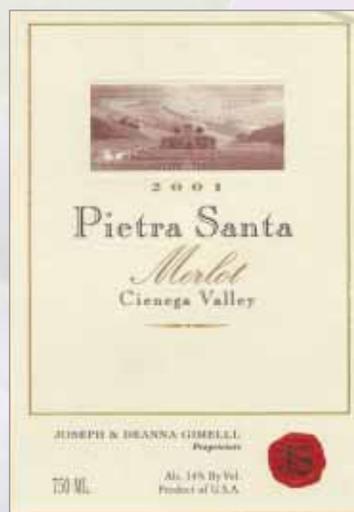
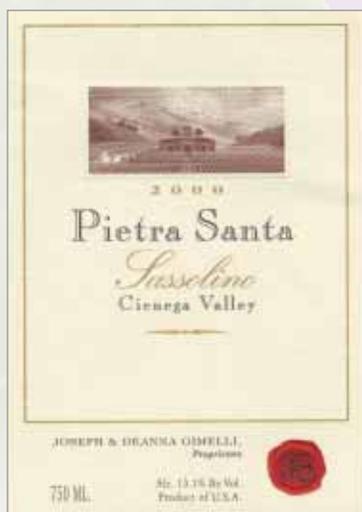
large tract of land in Hollister that had been left unattended for a number of years. In 1989, Joseph Gimelli bought a 455-acre parcel that was located in the small and picturesque Cienega Valley, an area that is literally bisected by the historic San Andreas Fault. Gimelli attacked the herculean task of restoring the property and adding some of his favorite native Italian varietals in order to make world-class wines with his grapes.

Continued on page 4



Owner John Blackburn, on his daily stroll through the vineyard, keeps a close eye on the vines.

Gold Medal Wine Club features two wines each month from only the best small wineries of California. Featured wines include those which have earned medals in the top wine-industry competitions or have been highly rated by a respected national wine publication. On occasion we feature a wine which is of high medal-quality, but due to its very limited availability or by preference of the wine producer, may not be submitted to these venues for review. Each and every selection is a superb wine made in small quantities and with limited distribution. There are over 2,000 wineries in California producing thousands of different wines. Only wines fitting the above criteria are considered in choosing the featured selections each month.



2000 SASSOLINO

The 2000 Sassolino is a Tuscan-inspired blend of Sangiovese and Cabernet Sauvignon, from grapes grown exclusively on the Pietra Santa estate. Sassolino translates to “little stone” in Italian, and is in reference to the granite and limestone rich soils that add interesting characters and flavors to the wine. The 2000 Sassolino was awarded **87 Points – “Highly Recommended”** by the *Beverage Tasting Institute*. On the nose, rich aromas of cherry, sandalwood, sage and vanilla are present, and the wine opens with good concentration and a medium body. The Sassolino is loaded with ripe, mouthfilling fruit, and displays opulent raspberry and blueberry flavors with hints of mint and spice. Pietra Santa’s Sassolino has excellent balance, soft tannins, and a supple texture that pairs well with grilled steaks or lamb chops. Aged 25 months in oak. 54% Sangiovese, 46% Cabernet Sauvignon. Enjoy now until 2010.

2001 MERLOT

Pietra Santa’s 2001 Merlot is the winery’s classic estate varietal. Following an impressive history of award-winning vintages, the 2001 Merlot was awarded **90 Points – “Exceptional” – “Best Buy”** from the *Beverage Tasting Institute*. Brilliantly ruby red hued, this Merlot is robust and intensely fruity, yet beautifully balanced. The Merlot is medium to full-bodied with bright flavors of black cherry and plum with undertones of clove, pepper and chocolate. Layers of flavor with hints of vanilla and cinnamon are expressed on the palate and a lengthy, well-structured finish shows a nice persistence of fruit. The Pietra Santa Merlot is supple and elegant in texture, and powerfully expressive with the ability to age well. Try pairing this excellent *Gold Series* selection with roast beef or pot roast. Aged 25 months in oak. 100% Merlot. Enjoy now until 2011.

WINE CREDENTIAL HIGHLIGHTS

2005 VINTAGE: 87 Points – “Highly Recommended” — *Beverage Tasting Institute*

LEGACY: Pietra Santa’s Sassolino is a proprietary blend of the winery. This is a special wine not only to the family, but also to the winery’s enthusiasts who have anticipated each vintage release since 1993.

Just the facts:

pH.....	3.58
Alcohol.....	13.5%
Total Acid.....	0.57 g/100 mls
Aged in Oak.....	25 months
Cases Produced.....	3,136
Drink Now or Up to Year.....	2010

2005 VINTAGE: 90 Points – “Exceptional” – “Best Buy” — *Beverage Tasting Institute*

LEGACY: A thriving wine in Pietra Santa’s history of winemaking, the Merlot has always been one of the consumer favorites and continues to be one of the quickest sellouts.

Just the facts:

pH.....	3.67
Alcohol.....	14.0%
Total Acid.....	0.69 g/100 mls
Aged in Oak.....	25 months
Cases Produced.....	5,909
Drink Now or Up to Year.....	2011

GOLD MEDAL SPOTLIGHT

Cort Blackburn

After listening to Cort Blackburn's take on the wine business in general, he seems a good deal wiser than his thirty-seven years. The youngish president/general manager of Pietra Santa Winery has a full range of specific ideas about his chosen profession.

"First and foremost," he began, "I think it is almost impossible for anyone entering the wine business to begin to realize just how challenging and difficult it is to promote your business. You can have a great winemaker, a wonderful site with admirable vines and a perfect mix of varietals and it still doesn't mean you will be successful."

Blackburn was handed the reins of Pietra Santa when his family purchased the winery a little more than two and a half years ago. He had graduated from Fresno State with a BS in Crop Science and had taken to managing the family's existing almond and grape growing business. "I am basically a grower," Blackburn admitted, "I enjoy doing things that keep me outdoors. I think the idea of

watching things grow and prosper appeals more to me than other aspects of the wine and olive oil business."

What does it take to be successful as a grower? "I guess it comes down to a person being willing to give a little more than 100% to what he does. He must be a sort of perfectionist that focuses completely on what he is growing, be it grapes, olives or almonds. In the latter two, there is more emphasis on quantity since we are paid by the pound. With grapes, it's quality that really counts so the way you view your vines' production is entirely different." Blackburn also admits to being a wine and spirits drinker and even enjoys, "a beer or two." He delegates most of the winemaking and marketing decisions to winemaker Alessio Carli and his marketing staff.



Cort and Laura Blackburn.

"Why would I want to inject my feelings into the mix when we have someone like Alessio to call on, who has great style and a marvelous following? I make sure the sales and marketing people in our company have their say and that insures that Alessio gets good input as to

what the wine consumers are really interested in."

Blackburn keeps watch on the myriad of competitors Pietra Santa has up north in both Sonoma and Napa Valley, most of whom he feels are better funded than Pietra Santa. "It is a huge challenge to match up with North Coast wineries while we are trying to carve out our own niche. Even if you take out the fact that many have deeper pockets than us, we also have to overcome the fact that we are dealing with a lesser known appellation (Cienega Valley) and that's not all that easy."

He is also confident that his family has managed to build a flexible management team to meet the countless challenges of the wine and olive oil business. He draws upon his experience with growing almonds and grapes for a number of years as great aids to his ultimate success. "I spend a portion of my time (about one-third) on managing the business. That included the larger picture where I must interact with my winemaker and marketing people. The rest of the time I can concentrate on my crops management which is the aspect of the business I really prefer."

Cort Blackburn has set some realistic goals for himself that also bear repeating. He said that he

Continued on page 6

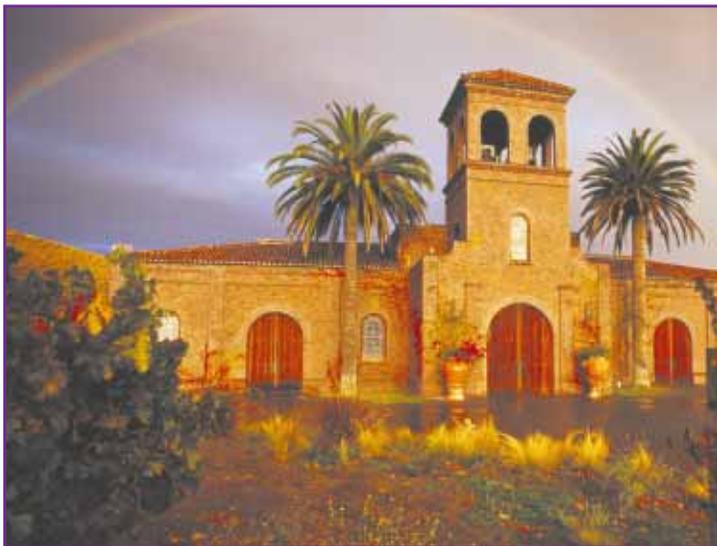


WINE WIZARD

- 1) What does dry farming do for wine grapes?
- 2) What *primarily* determines the color of a red wine?
- 3) What terminology does the U.S. use to refer to its winegrowing regions?

Continued from page 1

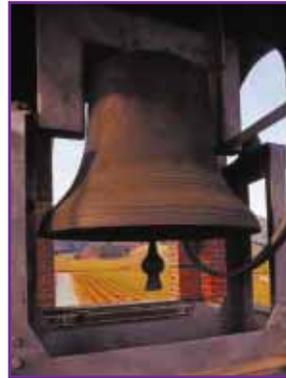
In 1991, Gimelli contacted native Italian (from Sienna) winemaker Alessio Carli to help him design and establish Pietra Santa.



The majestic Pietra Santa Winery stands tall in the saddle of the Cienega Valley.

Carli was immediately impressed with the property's near (25 mile) proximity to Monterey Bay and felt that its cool ocean breezes would beneficially affect the grapes and provide an ideal growing environment for the vines. In fact, some of the vines (Zinfandel) dated back to 1906, and still produced viable fruit. The fact that the area was also inhabited by wild boars was a nuisance but was eventually dealt with by Gimelli.

In 1998, the pair chose a combination of Italian and Spanish Mission architecture for Pietra Santa that included a striking set of bell towers that rise above the magnificent vineyards and winery facility. The bells are rung four times daily at 8, 12, 6 and 12 and were made by England's Chapel Bell Company, the same



When the bells of Pietra Santa toll, they fill the valley with harmonic conversions.

company that produced America's legendary Liberty Bell several centuries earlier.

Once Pietra Santa was finished, the remarkable grounds ranked with

any to be found throughout California. Meantime, the wines of Pietra Santa became recognized as among the finest produced in the entire area, winning numerous awards and honors. The company's first release of about five hundred estate grown cases came in 1994. With almost immediate acceptance, the winery grew to over 60,000 cases by the end of the 20th Century.

Meanwhile, the Blackburn Family had been farming a 500-acre parcel of nearby land for a number of years, and selling the fruit to a number of high quality

wineries. "My family has been farming in California for many generations" offered Jayme Nunn, daughter of Pietra Santa's present owners John and Phyllis Blackburn, and marketing director for the winery. "Being familiar with this area and its potential, we were looking for additional land in the area and Pietra Santa came up for sale. I think the original owners put a lot into the project and simply ran out of gas. The place is so incredibly beautiful that we didn't hesitate a moment."

The Blackburns replanted about forty acres with their preferred varietal, Pinot Noir, to give better balance to the vineyard-varietal ratio. They also added an extensive picnic area for visitors to enjoy while at the winery. "Other than that, we really didn't change much else," added

Nunn. “You know the old saying, ‘if it isn’t broken, leave it alone.’ It was really true in the case of Pietra Santa.”

Today’s annual production sits around the 30,000 case mark, but will swell next year when the much anticipated Pinot Noir becomes usable. “Our plan is to raise our production to around 50,000 cases and then level it off,” stated Nunn. “With our olive oil production, that makes for a really nice mix.”

Oh yes, Pietra Santa also makes a marvelous olive oil, considered by many as among

the finest in California. There are around 5,000 olive trees on the property, a throwback to earlier times in California agricultural development when grape vines and olive trees were often planted side by side by early Italian settlers and growers.

Most of the credit for the olive oil’s success must be given to Alessio Carli who serves in a dual capacity as winemaker and olive oil producer, a rarity among

winemakers. He takes great pride in his wine and olive oil production and has won numerous awards for both endeavors.



Winemaker and Olive Oil producer, Alessio Carli.

For the past decade, Pietra Santa has been a must see destination for anyone venturing through the San Benito Valley. The smallish Cienega Valley is certainly a gem of the entire area and Pietra Santa Winery is certainly the most precious stone in the collection. 🍷

ANSWERS TO WINE WIZARD

1.) Dry farming – farming without irrigation – is completely dependent on rainfall. This farming technique is sometimes chosen because, contrary to popular belief, grapes do not need much water to survive, and only slightly more to produce fruit. Vintners have discovered the “stress” technique, which means the vines’ shoots don’t grow as long, the leaves are smaller, and the canopy is more open, allowing more sunlight on the leaves and the fruit. The grapes are typically a bit smaller and more concentrated with flavor, since the vine is forced to work harder to seek out the necessary moisture and nutrients. Many growers believe that dry farming is ideal for producing premium wines, although the farming is labor-intensive requiring skilled hand-harvesting, and there’s the chance of unpredictable weather. Many are willing to take the risk and follow the dry-farming trend that most of Europe continues to use to this day.

2.) The color of a red wine is primarily determined by the length of time grapes remain in contact with their skins during fermentation. Surprisingly enough, the juice that comes from nearly every variety of grapes when pressed is white or clear. This is true of red grapes as well as white grapes. In order to make a red wine from red grapes, it’s necessary to leave the skins in contact with the juice so that the pigments in the skins can seep out and color the wine. However, when red grapes are pressed and the skins are kept out, the color of the wine remains white and is then considered a ‘blanc de noir,’ or a white wine from red grapes.



3) Winegrowing regions (or appellations) in the U.S. are referred to as American Viticultural Areas (AVAs). AVAs are designated geographic regions that have the same climate, soil, and elevation and similar properties that give the wine a certain characteristic. Currently, there are over 100 AVAs in California alone, and more are being added and divided all the time. AVAs have a huge range in size; some are as large as a state, while others are as small as your local shopping mall. When an AVA is designated on a wine bottle’s label, 85% of that wine must come from that AVA. Unlike most European wine appellations of origin, an AVA specifies only a geographical location and does not limit the type of grapes grown, the method of vinification (winemaking production), or the crop yield. The U.S.’s AVA system, along with many of the European wine appellations of origin, was originally based on France’s Appellation d’Origine Contrôlée (AOC), which dates back to the 15th century. Over time, countries have grown to develop their own vineyard classification systems with unique standards and restrictions.



FOOD FOR THOUGHT

CORT'S CRAB CAKES WITH AIOLI SAUCE

*Pair with Pietra Santa 2001 Merlot
Serves four*

1 Pound of Crab, fresh, cleaned and shelled
1 Egg
1/2 Cup Bread Crumbs
2 Tablespoons Mayonnaise
1 Tablespoon Dijon Mustard
3 Tablespoons Italian Parsley, fresh chopped
1 Teaspoon Lemon juice, fresh squeezed
1/4 Cup Corn, trimmed from the cob, fresh, coarsely chopped
1/2 Teaspoon Tabasco (just enough to enhance the flavors)
2 Tablespoons Extra Virgin Olive Oil
Salt and Pepper to taste

Thoroughly mix all ingredients except the crab. Gently fold in the crab. Form cakes – larger if serving as a main course (4-6), or smaller if serving as an appetizer (8-10). Cook in a large sauté pan until browned and hot all the way through – approximately 10 -12 minutes. Do not over cook. Crab cakes can also be baked at 375 degrees F for 15- 20 minutes. Serve with homemade Aioli Sauce.

Aioli Sauce Alessio

4 Egg yolks
6 Cloves of garlic, fresh
1 Tablespoon Dijon Mustard
1/2 Cup Canola Oil
1/2 Cup Extra Virgin Olive Oil
1/2 Teaspoon Kosher Sea Salt
1/2 Teaspoon White Pepper
Juice from 1/2 Lemon

In a blender on slowest speed – blend egg yolks. While slowly blending, add all other ingredients. Blend the two oils into one container with a pour spout – very slowly stream the oil into the blender mixture, occasionally pushing sauce down with a plastic spatula. Use enough oil to reach your desired consistency. The size of the eggs affects how much oil you need - you may not need all of the oil.

NONNA CARLI'S GNOCCHI

*Pair with Pietra Santa 2000 Sassolino
Serves four*

1 Pound Russet Potatoes (older and thick skinned)
3 to 4 large Egg yolks
1/2 Cup Parmesan, freshly grated
1/4 Teaspoon freshly grated nutmeg
1/2 Teaspoon Grey Sea Salt
1/4 Teaspoon Black Pepper, freshly ground
1 Cup all-purpose Flour, plus more for dusting board and dough
Kosher Sea Salt
Potato Ricer

Preheat the oven to 425 degrees F. Boil potatoes until cooked, drain water and let sit until cool enough to handle, cut in half, and scoop out the flesh.

Pass the potatoes through a potato ricer. You should have about 2 cups. Make a mound of potatoes and create a well in the middle; add 3 egg yolks, the cheese, nutmeg, salt, and pepper. Mix into the potatoes with hands. Sprinkle 1/2 cup of the flour over the potatoes and, using your knuckles, press it into the potatoes. Fold the mass over on itself and press down again. Sprinkle on more flour, little by little, folding and pressing the dough until it just holds together. If the mixture is too dry, add another egg yolk or a little water. To test if the dough is the correct consistency, take a piece and roll it with your hands on a well-floured board into a rope 1/2-inch in diameter. If the dough holds together, it is ready. If not, add more flour; fold and press the dough several more times, until it reaches desired consistency.

Keeping your work surface and the dough lightly floured, cut the dough into 4 pieces. Roll each piece into a rope about a 1/2 -inch in diameter. Cut into 1/2 inch-long pieces. Lightly flour the gnocchi as you cut them. Form each 1/2 inch piece into the classic gnocchi shape rolling it along a gnocchi board (or ridged butter paddle, or the tines of a large fork turned upside down). Rest the bottom edge of the gnocchi board on the work surface, and then tilt it at about a 45° angle. Take each piece and squish it lightly with your thumb against the board while simultaneously pushing it away from you. It will roll away and around your thumb, taking on a cupped shape – with ridges on the outer curve from the board and a smooth surface on the inner curve where your thumb was. Lay them on a baking sheet lined with parchment paper or waxed paper, and lightly dust them with flour, while you work on the rest. Once finished, set gnocchi filled cookie sheet in front of a fan on low for 1/2 hour turning gnocchi after 15 minutes. You can also freeze the gnocchi.

When ready to cook, bring a large pot of water to a boil and add salt. Drop in the gnocchi and cook for about 90 seconds from the time they rise to the surface. Remove the cooked gnocchi with a skimmer, shake off the excess water, and serve with your favorite marinara sauce.

Continued from page 3

intends to focus on his career and family (four children) as much as possible. This will enable them to

enjoy the outdoors and the fruits of his labor that success is able to offer.

When the Blackburn Family purchased Pietra Santa, a great deal

of thought was given toward changing the name, possibly to Blackburn Family Vineyards. After much research, Cort decided that

JUDGE-THE-WINES RESULTS

In this section we publish the cumulative, on-going tallies of the Judge-the-Wines Scorecards which are provided in each delivery of wine and mailed back in by Club members. We believe it is fun as well as educational to think about and record the different characteristics of the wines you sample. No matter how acute you think your palate is, the person next to you will probably have a different thought or opinion about a certain characteristic of the wine you are sampling. It can also prove beneficial to record your impressions of the wine for reference at a later date.

Below are the most recent tallies of the Scorecards returned. Gold Medal Wine Club specializes in featuring small-sized wineries and small-production wines. Depending on availability from the winery, all members may not receive every wine that is listed below. The Scorecard results which are printed in green indicate the wine selections that as of press time are still available for reorder.

2005 Peju Province Merlot

MEDALS:	GOLD	SILVER	BRONZE
RESULTS:	93%	5%	2%

2005 Serenity Pinot Grigio

MEDALS:	GOLD	SILVER	BRONZE
RESULTS:	92%	6%	2%

2005 Midnight Cellars Chardonnay

MEDALS:	GOLD	SILVER	BRONZE
RESULTS:	90%	7%	3%

2005 Midnight Cellars Syrah

MEDALS:	GOLD	SILVER	BRONZE
RESULTS:	91%	7%	2%

2005 Mayen Creek Chardonnay

MEDALS:	GOLD	SILVER	BRONZE
RESULTS:	90%	7%	3%

2005 Mayen Creek Cabernet Sauvignon

MEDALS:	GOLD	SILVER	BRONZE
RESULTS:	92%	5%	3%

2002 Van Ruiten Reserve Syrah

MEDALS:	GOLD	SILVER	BRONZE
RESULTS:	91%	6%	3%

2004 Van Ruiten Old Vine Zinfandel

MEDALS:	GOLD	SILVER	BRONZE
RESULTS:	93%	6%	2%

The above wines were recently featured. Due to space limitations, the entire list of available wines is not listed.

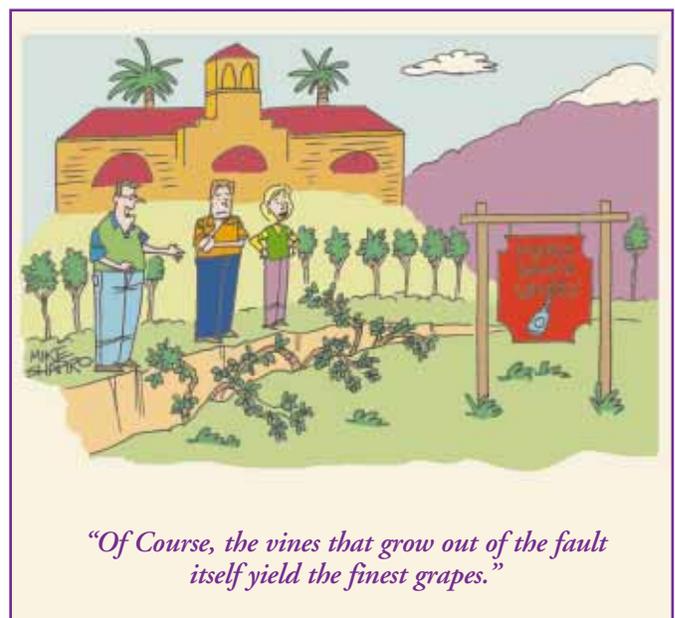
To see our entire inventory and reorder online, go to: www.goldmedalwine.com/member

■ Indicates wine is still available

better marketing would help revive a label that already was assured of a sizeable consumer following.

“After a year and a half we are still reestablishing ourselves,” he finalized. “Most people say we have come a long way but the battle continues every day. The wine industry might just be the most competitive business in the entire country.”

Cort Blackburn’s children (aged 9 – 4) are also in his thoughts as possible successors to the Blackburn Family farming tradition. But that’s a long time away, and right now Cort Blackburn is content to see his offspring having fun and just being kids. 🍷



“Of Course, the vines that grow out of the fault itself yield the finest grapes.”

©Mike Shapiro/CartoonResource.com

THE GRAPEVINE

Comments from us and Club members

Thank you to everyone who cast their vote for the **Top Ten Wines of 2007**. The *Gold Series* winning wines are as follows:

10. Clos LaChance 2005 Meritage
9. White Oak 2003 Merlot
8. San Simeon 2003 Opaque Red
7. Ledgewood Creek 2004 Cabernet Sauvignon
6. Madrona 2003 Cabernet Sauvignon
5. Van Ruiten 2004 Old Vine Zinfandel
4. Mayen Creek 2005 Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon
3. KitFox Vineyards 2003 Foxy Red Blend
2. Van Ruiten 2002 Reserve Syrah
- 1. Bradford Mountain 2004 Zinfandel**

We must say, voting a **Double Gold**, **Critics Gold**, and **Gold Medal** winner as the **Top Choice for 2007** shows us that *Gold Series* members have great taste!

Terri Sanders voted for her favorite Top Ten Wines online and her name was drawn as the winner of the Mixed Case of 2007 Top Ten Wines. "The *Gold Medal Wine Club* is a great way to sample the best of California wines without ever leaving home!"—*Terri Sanders, ID.*

Members who send in their wine ratings on the provided Scorecards are eligible to receive a bonus half-case of any *Gold Medal Series* wine that is in stock if your name is drawn. Drawings are held each month. (Maximum of one Scorecard per wine per membership)...GMWC

R E O R D E R

The Pietra Santa 2000 Sassolino and 2001 Merlot are two admirable wines, both expressing the origin and unique climate and soils of the Cienega Valley estate region. Each wine has limited allocation and is no longer available at the winery, making the Sassolino and Merlot special offers to *Gold Series* members.

PIETRA SANTA WINERY	Retail Price Winery-Direct	Club Price 2-Bottle Members		Club Price 4-Bottle Members	
2000 Sassolino* Cienega Valley	Half Case-6 \$108 Full Case-12 \$216	\$82 (\$13.67) Save 24%	\$142 (\$11.83) Save 34%	\$72 (\$12.00) Save 33%	\$129 (\$10.75) Save 40%
2001 Merlot* Cienega Valley	Half Case-6 \$90 Full Case-12 \$180	\$68 (\$11.33) Save 24%	\$125 (\$10.42) Save 31%	\$63 (\$10.50) Save 30%	\$115 (\$9.58) Save 36%

Reorder Hotline: 1-800-266-8888 • www.goldmedalwine.com/member

Reorder Faxline: 1-800-266-8889

*Availability is limited.

Note: Shipping and tax (if applicable) not included in the above prices. Call for details.