

# THE WINE PRESS

Gold Medal Wine Club Newsletter: Vol. 9 No. 4

Whitehall Lane Winery Edition

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

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## WHITEHALL LANE CATAPULTS TO UPPER ECHELON OF NAPA WINERIES

San Francisco wine merchant, Tom Leonardini, had just a casual interest in owning a winery. A casual interest, that is, until 1993 when he heard that Napa Valley winery Whitehall Lane was up for sale.

Tom was well aware of Whitehall Lane. The original founders, architect Art Finkelstein and plastic surgeon Alan Steen, built the winery in 1980. The two purchased the property in 1979 and completely replanted its 21-acre vineyard to Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet

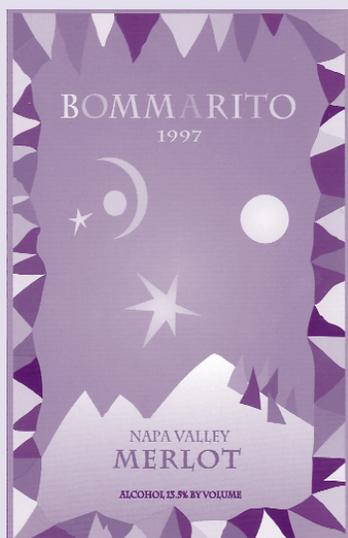
Franc and Chardonnay. The vineyard was planted before the turn of the century, but the varietals were not well suited for the area and were in poor shape. While the new vines matured, wine was produced with grapes purchased from numerous other Napa Valley growers. In 1985 they started to blend their estate grapes into the wines, resulting in a string of impressive Merlots, and Cabernet Sauvignons. These two varietals quickly emerged as their flagship wines upon

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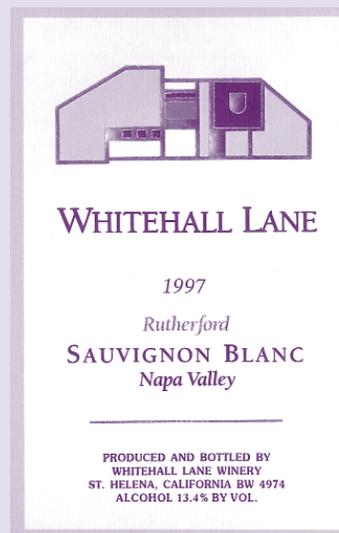
*Whitehall Lane Winery is located on a 26-acre ranch in the heart of Napa Valley.*

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 800 wineries in California producing thousands of different wines. Only wines fitting the above criteria are considered in choosing the featured selections each month.



## 1997 MERLOT

Whitehall Lane's *Bommarito* Merlot is named after one of Napa Valley's pioneer winegrowers, Dominic Bommarito. This month, Gold Medal Wine Club proudly introduces the winery's first vintage of the Bommarito Merlot. This excellent Merlot has very ripe fruit aromas of black cherry and plum and rich toasty spice in the nose. Wonderfully satisfying, from its up-front fruit aromas to its clean cherry, berry, and vanilla flavors, it tracks evenly from front to back and leaves lingering notes of fruit, subtle oak and spice. Smooth tannins and a rich, velvety finish make this wine extremely enjoyable to drink today. Harvested from three separate Rutherford vineyards in Napa Valley. Try it with Beef Stroganoff or spicy Lasagna.



## 1997 SAUVIGNON BLANC

The 1997 Sauvignon Blanc was produced from 46-year-old vines from Whitehall Lane's fabulous Bommarito vineyard in the Napa Valley. Crisp and refreshing, this wine delivers pleasing aromas of grapefruit, honeydew melon and notes of toasted vanilla and spice. Medium-full on the palate and brisk but never acidic, it is clean and focused, with flavors of lemon, lime and melon that linger nicely in the mouth. *The Insider's Wine Line* publication rates the wine an impressive 87 points, saying it has a "fruity bouquet of melon, grapefruit, fig, mango, and vanilla. On the palate, the flavors of melon, spice, pineapple, and vanilla are rich and flavorful, followed by a medium long, fruity, moderately creamy finish." Bound to be a great partner with all sorts of tangy shellfish and a wide variety of broiled fish entrees.

### WINE CREDENTIAL HIGHLIGHTS

**1997 VINTAGE:** *Silver Medal*—World Wine Championships; *Silver Medal*—New World International Wine Competition. With many more competitions yet to report in, this wine will undoubtedly pick up its share of Gold Medals as it continues to age in the bottle.  
**LEGACY:** The 1997 vintage is the inaugural release of Whitehall Lane's Bommarito Merlot.

**1997 VINTAGE:** *Silver Medal*—West Coast Wine Competition; *87 Points*—The Insider's Wine Line; *86 Points*—Wine Spectator.

**LEGACY:** An increasingly important varietal for Whitehall Lane, winning consistent high ratings each vintage.

#### Just the facts:

pH . . . . .	3.62
Total Acid . . . . .	.56 g/100 mls
Alcohol . . . . .	13.5%
Cases Produced . . . . .	6,120
Aged in French & American Oak . . . . .	12 Months
Drink Now or Up to Year . . . . .	2005

#### Just the facts:

pH . . . . .	3.44
Total Acid . . . . .	.57 g/100 mls
Alcohol . . . . .	13.4%
Cases Produced . . . . .	4,096
Aged in French Oak . . . . .	5 Months
Drink Now or Up to Year . . . . .	2002

# GOLD MEDAL SPOTLIGHT

## Tom Leonardini

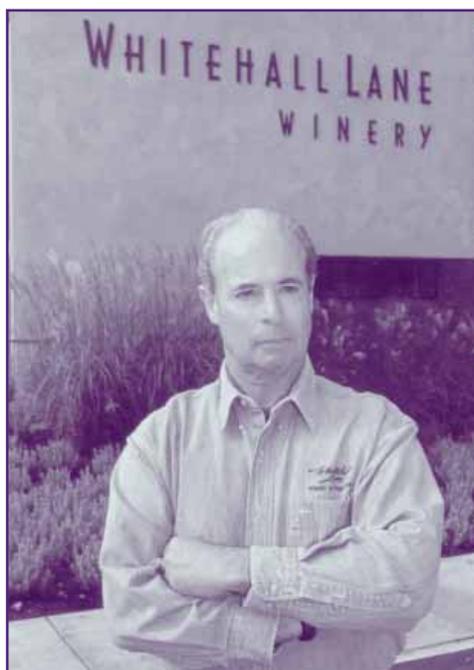
Tom Leonardini turned the tables. Seven years ago, he claimed back a bit of California real estate from foreign owners by buying Whitehall Lane Winery.

Whitehall Lane's owner was Japanese businessman Hideaki Ando. The winery proved to be too much of a cash drain to his real estate investment company in Tokyo, where a recession hit as hard as it did in the U.S. The company's cash crunch, together with poor management of the winery, fueled the sale of Whitehall Lane. Tom successfully negotiated a deal with Ando to purchase the winery. Success, though, is not new to Tom Leonardini.

Tom was born and raised in San Francisco. He attended college nearby at the University of San Francisco where he studied business accounting. His mother's family had founded a major car rental firm, National Car Rental. After graduating, he worked there as their northern California General Manager. He left two years later at the ripe old age of twenty-four to start his own car rental service, which he called Pacific Car Rental System. Then five years later sold his interest in that company to start yet another car rental company!

He named his new venture American International Rental Car.

During the late 1970s and early 1980s, Tom grew his new car rental company to 16 offices throughout California. In 1985, he again sold his company, this time to Capital Southwest, headquartered in Dallas, Texas.



*Owner Tom Leonardini has taken his winery to a new level of prominence.*

He muses about how he and his wife Karen used to buy a lot of Ruffino Chianti when they were married almost 30 years ago. They graduated to finer wines after they bought a new house that came with a small makeshift wine cellar. "The 'cellar' was cooled by a Sears air-conditioner. "We used to fill up the cellar up then give the wine away as presents to our friends and family," he says, smiling.

Over the years, his palate grew

more discriminating. So much so that after he sold his American International car rental company, he opened up a fine-wine shop in downtown San Francisco. His wine shop, the Napa Valley Winery Exchange, gave him convenient access to some of the best wines in the world. Accordingly, he built a home wine cellar as impressive as his wine collection. His state-of-the-art cellar has motion and temperature detection devices, complete with smoke and fire sensors that are wired directly to the fire department! A few years back, *The Wine Spectator* even wrote a full-page article telling about it.

Tom and Karen Leonardini live in the community of Hillsborough, just south of San Francisco. He goes up to the winery during the week and is back home again on the weekends, often commuting several times during the week. Tom Jr., the eldest of their two sons was brought on recently as Whitehall Lane's National Sales Manager. Kristen, the oldest of their three daughters opened up their retail wine shop in San Francisco. Another daughter, Kimberly, recently joined her father to manage the winery's tasting room. The Leonardinis' other children, Katie, and Tony, are not presently involved in the wine business. "We're not your typical new winery owners who only spend weekends at the winery," insists Tom. "This is not just a hobby. We're committed to making superior wines." 🍷



## WINE WIZARD

- 1) Should all wines be decanted before drinking?
- 2) What kind of wine should you reject if presented to you at a restaurant?
- 3) *What is sediment. Why should it be removed before drinking the wine. And how do you remove it?*

*Continued from page 1*

which Whitehall Lane's early, high quality reputation was built.

In 1988, Japanese businessman Hideaki Ando approached Art and Alan with an offer to buy the winery at a price they couldn't turn down. Foreign investment in California real estate was still running rampant. Many overseas investors, it seemed, had developed a "Donald Trump" syndrome buying up everything in sight and counting on double-digit real estate inflation to justify their top-dollar purchase. As we now know, many of these investments did not work out that way. And so it

went with Ando and Whitehall Lane. As the economy worsened, the all-too-familiar story of not being able to service the debt started to slow things down. To make matters worse, the winery was being managed remotely from Japan, and it languished from lack of attention.

Amazingly, though, the quality of wines produced at Whitehall during this time period did not suffer. Between 1988 and 1993 the number of different wines increased as did overall production. At its production peak of about 20,000 cases, nine different wines were offered, including 3 different bottlings of Cabernet Sauvignon, a Chardonnay, Merlot, Cabernet Franc, Sauvignon Blanc, Pinot Noir, and red Meritage. The wines were still very high quality and continued to sell well. Unfortunately, the winery suffered greatly from lack of focus and direction. Tom Leonardini knew this. He was also aware of Whitehall Lane's reputation for great wines. So when it went on the block in 1993, Tom jumped at the opportunity.

Immediately, Tom made sweeping changes in both the physical plant and strategic direction. All of the buildings were completely renovated. Virtually all of the old, outdated winemaking machinery was thrown out and replaced with state-of-the-art equipment. New oak barrels were brought in. A sophisticated night air cooling system to control the temperature inside the winery was constructed. Then he brought in a

new General Manager, Mike McLoughlin, and all new support personnel to run the winery on a day-to-day basis.

In the vineyard, strategic changes also took place. Plantings were shifted around and added in different spots of the vineyard to take advantage of the ideal soil composition for each varietal. A 14-acre vineyard in Napa was acquired in 1994 to strengthen the already formidable estate Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot programs. The additional acreage allowed the winery to expand production and keep these two varietals at the forefront of the Whitehall's offerings. In 1995-96, two more parcels were added, the Bommarito and Oak Glen vineyards, both in Napa county. And now, one more vineyard is in the works, which will bring the total acreage to about 110. Without a doubt, Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot are *the* wines that have forever etched Whitehall Lane's reputation into the Napa Valley wine lore.

Currently there are three versions of Cabernet Sauvignons—an extremely limited *Leonardini Vineyard* bottling, a *Reserve* offering and a *Napa Valley* version. The 1995 Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon was recently **rated as the best red wine in America** by *Wine Spectator* magazine, and the Leonardini version was not far behind. Both the Leonardini and Reserve wines are produced from estate vineyards. The Napa Valley Cabernet is made from

both estate and contract vineyards.

The winery's Merlot offerings have made quite an impact too, achieving 90+ point ratings every year this decade. Gold Medal Wine Club is very pleased to launch Whitehall Lane's newest Merlot, *Bommarito*. Whitehall Lane purchased the storied Bommarito vineyard in 1995, and recently decided to bottle a Merlot bearing the same name to commemorate this historic Napa Valley pioneer. Dominic Bommarito who was born in Sicily in 1889, immigrated to America in 1903 and began farming his Rutherford estate in 1929. He was a founding member of the important Napa Valley Co-op at

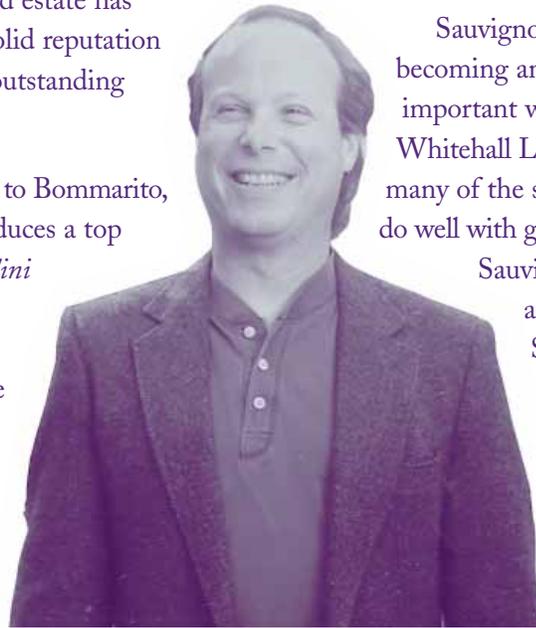
Greystone and tended to his Rutherford vineyard until his death in 1963. For decades, the Bommarito 25-acre vineyard estate has maintained a solid reputation for producing outstanding fruit.

In addition to Bommarito, the winery produces a top quality *Leonardini Merlot*, made entirely with grapes from the Leonardini vineyard. The *Napa Valley Merlot* is a blend of fruit from

several vineyards in Napa. We can unequivocally state that all three Merlots are exquisite.

Sauvignon Blanc is becoming an increasingly important wine to Whitehall Lane. Fortunately, many of the same areas that do well with growing Cabernet

Sauvignon grapes also do well with Sauvignon Blanc. The winery will continue to boost Sauvignon Blanc production



*Winemaker Dean Sylvester has kept Whitehall Lane's wines in the spotlight.*

*Continued on page 6*

## ANSWERS TO WINE WIZARD

1) *No, but most young wines improve by being allowed to breathe for an hour or so. Aeration, or allowing the wine to "breathe," allows the bouquet to develop. Old red wines need special treatment, and here experience is your best guide. For red wines 5–10 years of age, decant the wine about 2 hours before serving and leave the neck of the decanter open. For older wines, decant about an hour before serving and put a stopper in the decanter. For wines 20 or more years old, decant and serve.*

2) *Any wine that has a bad odor or a sour or metallic flavor. Wine should smell and taste like wine, not smell of rotten socks or locker rooms or taste sour or burnt. You should reject any wine that is presented already opened. Insist on seeing the wine opened at your table. There are a number of things that can happen to cause a wine to go bad, but the most common cause is that the wine becomes oxidized as a result of too much air contact. Oxidized or "maderized" wines have a burnt or cooked smell and taste. Getting a "maderized" bottle of wine is one of the hazards you run when you accept a bottle that has been opened out of your presence.*

3) *Most fine wines, especially wines older than 5 or 6 years, throw a sediment or deposit in the bottle. This sediment is nothing more than the result of the wine's development and, hopefully, improvement. It is not only normal but also desirable. If the sediment becomes mixed in with the wine before drinking, it will affect the wine's taste, making it harsh and bitter. It also looks undesirable floating in the glass. One way to remove sediment is to stand the bottle upright for several hours before drinking to allow the sediment to collect at the bottom of the bottle. Then over a light, carefully pour the wine into a clean decanter. When the sediment appears in the neck of the wine bottle, stop pouring, and you will have a clear, sediment-free bottle of wine.*





# FOOD FOR THOUGHT

*From the kitchens at Whitehall Lane Winery, two favorite recipes to pair with this month's featured wine selections . .*

## BUNS PASTA PABLO

### SALSA:

6 roma tomatoes, seeded, cut into 1/4 inch cubes  
1/2 medium sized yellow onion, finely diced  
1/2 bunch cilantro, chopped  
1 teaspoon salt  
Juice of 2 limes

### PASTA:

12 ounces Capellini, Angel Hair, or Linguine  
1 tablespoon canola or vegetable oil  
1 tablespoon finely chopped fresh garlic  
3/4 pound Boneless chicken breast, cut into 1/2 inch diagonals  
1/4 teaspoon salt  
1/4 EACH thyme, basil and oregano (dried)  
1/2 teaspoon fresh ground pepper  
8 ounces Chicken stock  
1 teaspoon butter

*Combine all salsa ingredients and set aside. Bring a large pot of water to a boil, add a dash of salt and then pasta. Cook until al dente. While pasta is cooking, make the sauce. In a large sauté pan, heat oil over medium heat. Add garlic and cook until softened. Add the salsa, chicken stock, and cooked, drained, pasta. Lift and stir to combine. Bring to a boil, then simmer until sauce reduces somewhat. Makes two 6 ounce servings. Enjoy with a glass or two of Whitehall Lane Sauvignon Blanc!*

*Variations: Pasta Pablo can be made omitting the chicken or substituting prawns, clams, or mussels. Cook prawns in the same manner as the chicken, until they are nearly white; don't over-cook. Add clams or mussels to sauce when adding the pasta. Cook just until open, then remove from sauce and use to garnish individual servings of pasta.*

## CAJUN MEATLOAF WITH MUSHROOM SAUCE

### Meatloaf Ingredients:

1/2 pound Ground Sirloin  
1/2 pound Ground Pork  
1/2 onion diced  
1/8 cup minced garlic  
1 cup chopped parsley  
salt and pepper  
2 eggs, beaten  
1 cup Italian Bread Crumbs  
2 Anaheim chili peppers, chopped  
1/2 pound Chorizo

### Meatloaf Sauce:

14 ounces Can of beef broth  
1 tablespoon of butter  
2 cups mushrooms, sliced thin  
1 onion, sliced thin  
4 cloves of garlic pressed  
1-2 cups of white wine  
1 cup warm water and 1/2 cup flour mixed well (this thickens sauce)  
Salt and Pepper

*Preheat oven 350 degrees. Mix well, all ingredients, except the chorizo, in a bowl. When thoroughly mixed, lay out the mixture on a flat surface about an inch thick in a rectangular shape. Make a sausage-like roll of the chorizo and lay in the middle of the meat mixture. Roll up the meatloaf around the chorizo. Place in a baking pan and bake for one hour. With about fifteen minutes remaining on the meatloaf, make the sauce. Melt the butter in a large saucepan and add the onions. When lightly browned, add the mushrooms and garlic, sautéing for about five minutes. Add the white wine and beef broth, cooking over medium heat. Cook for five minutes more, adding salt and pepper to taste. Slowly, about a quarter cup at a time, add the water and flour mixture to thicken the sauce. When the consistency is to your liking, turn the temperature to low. When the meatloaf is finished cooking, slice and top with the mushroom sauce. Then enjoy with a glass of Bommarito Merlot!*

*Continued from page 5*

each year. The fabulous 1997 vintage featured this month is made primarily with fruit from the Bommarito vineyard, harvested from 46-year-old vines.

Rounding out the field is the always-important Chardonnay

offering, along with small lots of Zinfandel. Winemaker Dean Sylvester is responsible for all phases of winemaking as well as overseeing the 110 acres of vineyards that the winery owns and contracts.

Production today is about

30,000 cases per year, which is about the maximum their facility can handle right now. "I'm just not interested in growing too much more," says Tom Leonardini. "Above this point, it requires a whole new level of overhead, then all of a sudden it's not fun anymore."

# JUDGE-THE-WINES RESULTS

In this section we publish the cumulative, on-going tallies of the Judge-the-Wines Scoresheets 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 Scoresheets 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 Scoresheet results which are printed in green indicate the wine selections that as of press time are still available for reorder.

## Smith e3 Hook—1995 Cabernet Sauvignon

MEDALS:	GOLD	SILVER	BRONZE
RESULTS:	91%	5%	4%

## Smith e3 Hook—1997 Viognier

MEDALS:	GOLD	SILVER	BRONZE
RESULTS:	88%	7%	5%

## Smith e3 Hook—1995 Merlot

MEDALS:	GOLD	SILVER	BRONZE
RESULTS:	93%	4%	3%

## Eos Winery—1996 Cabernet Sauvignon

MEDALS:	GOLD	SILVER	BRONZE
RESULTS:	88%	8%	4%

## Eos Winery—1996 Chardonnay

MEDALS:	GOLD	SILVER	BRONZE
RESULTS:	90%	5%	5%

## Eos Winery—1996 Zinfandel

MEDALS:	GOLD	SILVER	BRONZE
RESULTS:	90%	4%	6%

## Sandstone Winery—1996 Merlot

MEDALS:	GOLD	SILVER	BRONZE
RESULTS:	94%	5%	1%

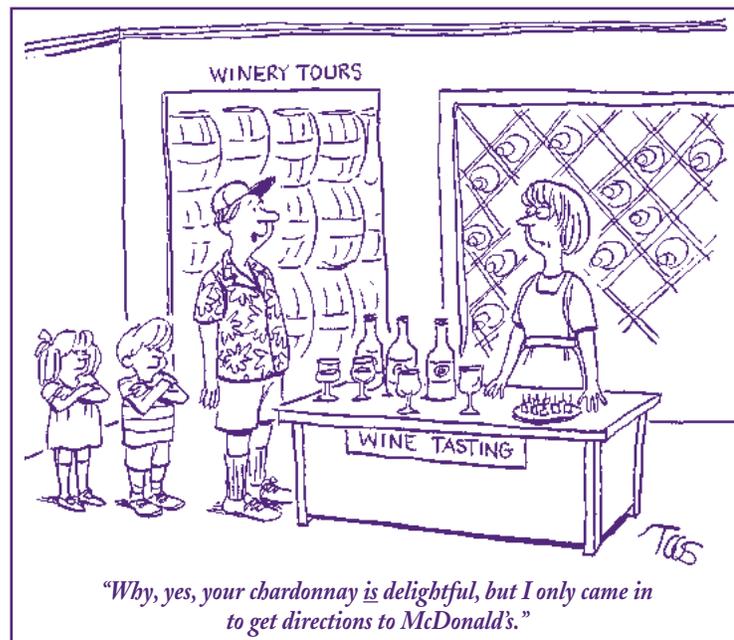
## Sandstone Winery—1997 Chardonnay

MEDALS:	GOLD	SILVER	BRONZE
RESULTS:	91%	5%	4%

The above wines were recently featured. Due to space limitations the entire list of available wines is not listed—please call to inquire about other previous favorites.

■ Indicates wine is still available

Tom is committed to improving quality even beyond what it is today. “It is important to me that the quality is maintained year-in and year-out,” he says. And by dramatically improving the plant and equipment, the winery has been able to more efficiently, allowing them to keep their wines in an affordable price range. “We don’t want to be the highest priced guys in the market,” says Tom. “We aren’t selling mystique. We want to sell very good wine that people buy to drink and enjoy, not necessarily to cellar away for years and years.” 🍷



“Why, yes, your chardonnay is delightful, but I only came in to get directions to McDonald’s.”

# THE GRAPEVINE

*Comments from us and Club members*

While 1998 seemed to be *The Year of the Cab*, 1999 is beginning to look like *The Year of the Merlot!* Although we normally try to feature a broader mix the varietals from month to month, recently we have discovered a string of exceptional Merlots that have been *too good to pass up*. When dealing with small production wines, sometimes we have to grab 'em before they disappear. But if you're a Merlot fan, you must be doing cartwheels by now. Or, for those of you who prefer other varietals, take heart. Looking ahead to future months, we have a good stretch of wonderfully different varietal wines coming up, including a few varietals we have never before featured in the club. Happy Tasting!

*Just one word . . . [the 1995 Smith & Hook Merlot was] . . . delicious!*  
Mike Boswell, Score 51

*Excellent vintage! Enjoyed [the 1995 Smith & Hook Cabernet Sauvignon] with friends and everyone raved about it!*  
John Favale, Score 52

*[The 1995 Smith & Hook was the] Best Cabernet Sauvignon I've ever tasted! Gold Medal all the way!*  
Donald Meng, Score 48

*[The 1995 Eos Cabernet Sauvignon was] An impressive Cabernet. Wonderful oaky aroma and flavorful aftertaste. Definitely a Gold!*  
Gary & Carol Smith, Score 55

*[The 1996 Eos Chardonnay was] Absolutely wonderful, I already ordered a half-case extra!*  
Philip Tippen, Score 49

*I love a full-bodied Merlot and thought [the 1996 Sandstone Merlot] to be excellent!*  
Marie Blot, Score 51

Maximum score is 55. Members who send in their wine ratings on the provided Scoresheets 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 4 times a year at the end of each quarter. (Maximum of one Scoresheet per wine per membership)...GMWC

## R E O R D E R

Whitehall Lane is a small but firmly established winery located in the heart of Napa Valley. Their wines have catapulted on to many wine enthusiasts' *most-wanted-list* ever since Tom Leonardini bought the winery in 1993. Check out the quality of these two great wines, including the inaugural release of their Bommarito Merlot, honoring Napa pioneer, Dominic Bommarito.

WHITE HALL LANE WINERY	Retail Price		Club Price		Club Price	
	Winery-Direct		2-Bottle Members		4-Bottle Members	
<b>1997 Bommarito Merlot*</b> Napa Valley	Half Case-6	\$90	<b>\$72</b>	<b>(20% Off)</b>	<b>\$67</b>	<b>(26% Off)</b>
	Full Case-12	\$180	<b>\$135</b>	<b>(25% Off)</b>	<b>\$125</b>	<b>(31% Off)</b>
<b>1997 Sauvignon Blanc*</b> Napa Valley	Half Case-6	\$78	<b>\$62</b>	<b>(21% Off)</b>	<b>\$58</b>	<b>(26% Off)</b>
	Full Case-12	\$156	<b>\$115</b>	<b>(26% Off)</b>	<b>\$106</b>	<b>(32% Off)</b>

**Reorder Hotline: 1-800-266-8888**

**Reorder Faxline: 1-800-266-8889**

\*Availability is very limited.

Note: Tax & shipping are not included in the above prices. Call for details.