



Arlequin Wine Merchant
Three Bottle Monthly Club: October 2018
\$69.00 (tax & shipping not included)

ŠTEMBERGER ZELEN, KRAS, SLOVENIA 2015

List Price \$32/ Arlequin Regular Price \$30/ Wine Club Exclusive Reorder \$26

The Kras—a.k.a. *Carso* in Italian—is Europe’s first cross-border appellation. Straddling western Slovenia and eastern Italy, this limestone plateau is gaining an international reputation for unique wines from focused, small-scale estates. Sebastijan Štemberger is a largely unknown, mostly self-taught talent crafting multi-faceted natural wines of real finesse. He initially studied winemaking at the Yugoslav state school (in the mid-80 – it was the only option at the time) where high-volume, conventional production models were standard. To work closely with nature, and make unique wines of place, Sebastijan had to teach himself, and learn by doing. Eventually, eighteen years ago, Sebastijan and his wife Loredona purchased an old farmhouse in the town of Šepulje, home to a neglected vineyard of 200-year-old Teran vines. Farming organically, they also own 20 acres of vines planted on a remote hillside north of town, planted to white grapes, including Zelen, a variety indigenous to western Slovenia. For this wine, Sebastijan lets his Zelen grape skins and juice ferment together for 3 days, adding no yeasts, then drains most of the juice off to complete fermentation without skin contact. He allows the remainder—about 30 percent of the wine—to remain on its skins for 11 months (!). Bottled unfiltered and unfiltered, this Zelen is a perfumed, minerally, silky white of both freshness and delicacy. Kras wines are customarily enjoyed with cured ham, a regional specialty which the Štembergers also excel at producing. Or pair it with light seafood, poultry or white meat dishes, such as flaky white fish or cutlets in a caper and lemon sauce.

DOMAINE DE LA VERDE “ORA”, VACQUEYRAS, RHÔNE VALLEY, FRANCE 2015

List Price \$27/ Arlequin Regular Price \$23/ Wine Club Exclusive Reorder \$21

Vacqueyras is a 12th Century village in France’s Rhône Valley. Like 16 other elite villages in the Côtes du Rhône, its wines are able to claim *cru* status, with the establishment of an eponymous appellation. Lying about halfway between Gigondas and Châteauneuf-du-Pape, Vacqueyras has been famous for its wine for centuries; its name comes from the term *Val Queyras* or *Valley of the Stones*, a reference to the smooth, distinctive cobbles deposited by glaciers across the valley millennia ago. Domaine de la Verde is a new wine label from an old Vacqueyras estate—its vineyards were first planted in the late 1800s. But, until very recently, the owners had sold off its grapes to negociants. Nicolas Camallonga, whose parents purchased the property in 1963, is the young scion who long dreamt of building a winery on the property and making the wines himself. This red is one exemplary result of his efforts. Like all Vacqueyras, it’s based on Grenache, which must comprise (by law) at least 50% of the blend. For his “Ora” cuvée, Nicolas blends in a substantial portion of Syrah (25%) and Mourvèdre (20%). He matures the Grenache in concrete, and part of the Syrah and Mourvèdre in oak barrels. It’s fragrant and spicy, with alluring scents of blackberries, raspberries and plums, and a juicy, voluptuous palate defined by smooth red plum, spice and berry flavors. It makes a fabulous contrast to the other red wine this month, which is also based on Grenache. Pair with *coq au vin*, seared duck breast with plum chutney or a pepper-crust beef filet.

ALVARO PALACIOS “CAMINS DEL PRIORAT”, PRIORAT, SPAIN 2017

List Price \$30/ Arlequin Regular Price \$27/ Wine Club Exclusive Reorder \$25

Some wines are so great they change the perception of an entire region, which is what happened to Spain’s Priorat after Alvaro Palacios created the first vintage L’Ermità in 1993. Made from ancient Garnacha vines, this now-legendary red is widely considered to be the most important Spanish wine of the modern era, and helped catapult this tiny, remote corner of Catalonia, to world-class status on the world wine stage. Today, Priorat is one of only two Spanish wine regions to hold the elite DOCA classification (the other being Rioja), and Palacios is a winemaking legend. Fortunately for those of us who don’t wish to spend \$10K on a case of l’Ermita, Palacios also makes this Camins del Priorat, a Grenache-Carignan-Syrah blend sourced entirely from vineyards around the village of Gratallops. Grown on steep slate terraces, Gratallops’s powerful, full-bodied red wines reflect the heat of this arid region and the structure that comes from mountain-grown grapes. That said, Palacios shows his penchant for finesse in this wine. In a region where oak, ripeness and tannin are sometimes overboard, the 2017 Camins del Priorat is a fresh, vibrant take on Priorat. Palacios picks grapes at moderate ripeness, then ferments their juice in a combination of steel and cement tanks and large wooden vats. The wine matures for 8 months in mostly older barrels and wooden vats. The result is red that’s rich but suave, with floral-edged aromas and flavors of ripe plums, anise and blackberries. Soft tannins and loads of fruit define the lip-smacking finish. There’s plenty of stuffing in this bold red to stand up to wild game and thick-cut steaks, but it’s also supple enough to accompany white meats and roasted poultry without overwhelming them. Our favorite pairings are bacon-wrapped pork loin and chicken tagine with prunes, but a vegetarian moussaka works beautifully, too.