



Carol's Bunch

HAPPY HOLIDAYS!

Sea-Zins greetings to our loyal members of Carol's Bunch! We hope you are all well and safe from all of the insanity of these intense weather climates, from 3-digit heat for months on end (even here in Sonoma County in October!) to hurricanes and flash flooding. Global warming is, indeed, an "inconvenient truth" and one we need to cope with the best we all can. What we really need this upcoming holiday season is to regroup, to refill our souls and to savor our time with those we love over some great meals and happier times...and that means that we need to get this marvelous box of joyful libations into your eager paws early in the season, so we can make sure you have it in time for all of your feasts and celebrations. Let the festivities begin!



First and foremost, I need to say a **huge thank you** to all my staff here for an incredible **25 years** in business! What a long, WILD trip it has been!! This was our **25th harvest** for our little brand, and my 48th harvest personally, and it went like clockwork due to the fantastic teamwork of Chris and Michael in the cellar as well as many volunteers who helped with sorting grapes. Carolyn and Abby kept us fed for lunches and do a great job of

keeping all of you happy via phone, email and in our tasting room and events. Our bookkeeper Linda made it look easy to keep us all legal and paid up (including growers and suppliers), and Steve aced it out there in distributor world, pounding on doors to get us into some amazing restaurant and retail placements. Truly a "Grand Cru," and without them we would not have survived the current downturn in alcohol sales across our industry. We are doing ok, with a bit of belt-tightening like many folks out there, and we are keeping our heads above water with careful planning...and of course, many thanks to all of you for your support!

So...in this shipment you will find five new vintage releases and one reprise of an old favorite, plus a special Carol's Bunch cork puller, a popular gift that can legally travel in your carry-on bag due to its lack of a "knife" (you'll need to show it to TSA folks to make them happy, tho!). Make sure you do not miss that, since it could get lost in your gleeful opening of your box.



We will have some exciting gift offerings for the holidays in a November email... 1.5L magnums of 2016 Peaceland Zin and 2017 Rockpile Reserve Zin... and a new Sonoma County version of our PORT, the 2015 Tawny Sonoma! Keep your eyes peeled!

As for the wines in this shipment...it is a very exciting new batch! We are thrilled with our **2022 "Smooth Operator"** wine from the **Touriga Nacional** grape, sourced for just one year from Nevarez Vineyard in Paso Robles. After a couple of years in older barrels, we discovered a deep-set orange zest essence and super round, soft tannins which we considered very "smooth." Hence, we came up with its nickname, a nod to 1980's popular jazz singer Sade, who had such a smooth sound with songs like "The Sweetest Taboo" and (you guessed it) "Smooth Operator." This jazzy little number stands out for its easy-drinking, sunny personality, and we thought it'd be a great match for so many holiday feasts...only 122 cases produced so you'd better hop on it if you want some more before it is gone!

Continued on back page...

Exciting News of a Wine Cruise!!



FLAVORS OF BURGUNDY

March 26 - April 2, 2026 | 7-night river cruise | AmaCello

CITIES & SIGHTS

Lyon » Mâcon » Tournus » Chalon-Sur-Saône » Seurre » Beaune » Port of Dijon

We are very excited to host a Wine Cruise on the Saône River from Lyon (Rhône) to Dijon (Burgundy) in March 2026! On the ship Carol will do two guided tastings of her wines vs. some "local" French competitors, as well as a group winemaker dinner. Cabins are selling quickly—there are only about 20 left on the whole boat! If you think you might be interested, call Donna Hisey at Expedia Cruises, cell# (714) 801-7674 or email her at dhisey@expediacruz.com



HOSTED BY
CAROL
SHELTON



Here are the details on this box of deliciousness, listed in suggested tasting order!
The total tab for this shipment is **\$160.80**, before any applicable tax & shipping.

2022 SMOOTH OPERATOR **Touriga Nacional**



This “Smooth Operator” is a special one-off bottling from a trial of a “new-to-us” variety named Touriga Nacional. It is actually the national grape of Portugal, the basis of most of their Port wines. There is not much planted in California, so we jumped at the chance to try it out. It seemed a bit unexciting right after fermentation, so we put it into older barrels and tucked it away to decide its fate in the future...and when we tried it again in April of 2024, we were astonished to find a real GEM had developed! Its nickname is a nod to 1980's jazz singer Sade, who has such a Smooth sound! It has super round, soft tannins and deep orange peel essence, very exotic and alluring, hard to resist just one more taste...try it!

No ratings/awards yet—brand new release!

97% Touriga Nacional, 3% Zinfandel, 97% Nevarez Vineyard, Paso Robles
18 months in barrel – all older American oak

Case Production: 122 cases

Aging Potential: 5-7 years (best to drink sooner than later, as it requires no further age)

Price: **\$32.00 / \$25.60 Club First AND last grab (only 22 cases left after club gets 1 bottle each)**

Carol's Tasting Notes: Beautiful nose of deep, candied orange zest, almost to the point of an essence of Grand Marnier (or Cointreau) without its high alcohol. Nose presents other soft fruits as well, like plums and a bit of cherry, and a touch of caramel-crème brûlée. In the mouth it is juicy, round, curvy, very sexy and sleek...just like Sade herself! Lighter bodied, bright in acidity, would pair well with grilled meats or veggies, pork tenderloin, and especially duck à l'orange!

2023 BARBERA D'OAKLEY® **Planchon Vineyard, Contra Costa County**



The 122-year-old Planchon Vineyard in Oakley (where the Sacramento River meets SF Bay) is the source of this interesting “Italianate blend.” The wine's name is a play on the famous “Barbera d'Asti” blend with Dolcetto, though in this case a Bordeaux variety (Merlot) adds structure and elegance to the straightforward black cherry and blackberry fruit of the Barbera grape, and the VERY Old Vine Zin chimes in with its own bright raspberry and spice notes.

No ratings/awards yet—brand new release!

80% Barbera, 10% Merlot, 10% Zinfandel
7 months in barrel – 62% 1-yr-old Hungarian and 38% older French and American

Case Production: 202 cases

Aging potential: 7-10 years

Price: **\$32.00 / \$25.60 Club New release!**

Carol's Tasting Notes: Vibrant nose of black cherry and blackberry, with a kiss of green herbs and earth, black peppery spice and vanilla oak. Mouth shows some nice cherry and pomegranate, and mouthfeel is silky smooth, almost dangerous in how easy it is to drink. This wine would be delicious with tomato-sauced pastas, harder cheeses, and vegetarian dishes like stuffed portabello mushroom caps! Buon appetito!

2020 BACCHI RESERVE **Old Vine Zin, Russian River Valley**



Century vines planted in 1908 in the old head-trained, field blend style are the source of this marvelous gem of a wine! Brenda Bacchi maintains the 115-yr-old family vineyard with loving care, so we felt very fortunate to be able to obtain a few tons of her precious fruit in 2020 only. **We hoarded enough of this beauty to give you this second bottle, but if you want more, jump quickly because there is not much more left after the shipment goes out!**

93 points Wine Enthusiast, 90 points Wine Spectator plus a Double Gold and 6 more Gold Medals!

??% Zinfandel – it's a field blend of Zin with Carignane, Petite Sirah, Alicante, a few mystery grapes?

95% Bacchi Vineyard, Limerick Lane, Russian River Valley – dry-farmed and head-trained 1908 vines

16 months in oak barrels: 33% New French, 17% NEW American and 50% older American and French

Case Production: 296 cases

Aging potential: 15-20 years

Price: **\$42.00 / \$33.60 Club Last grab!**

Carol's Tasting Notes: Oh YUM!!! The nose grabs you immediately with layered oaky spice and a deep mix of red and black fruits! Mocha-cocoa, creamy vanilla oak, a trace of brown spices-nutmeg/cinnamon. In the mouth it is bright and focused with lively blackberry/black raspberry fruit, rich oak toast and long chocolatey finish. Amazing food wine—red meats, grilled stuff, very versatile and also very ageworthy.

2021 ROCKPILE (ROCKY) RESERVE® Zin, Florence Vineyard, Rockpile



Our flagship wine, the very best Zin we produce every year. Carol was a co-founder of the Rockpile AVA with her grower, Jack Florence Sr., whose vineyard planted in 1997 at 1400 ft elevation is the star of the show. It lies above our summer morning fogs and has a much more even growing season, which allows for it to develop very polished tannins and Cabernet-like structure...our "Zin with the Heart of a Cab."

94 pts Wine Spectator, 93 pts Wine Enthusiast, 3 Double Gold/Best of Class and 5 Gold Medals

92% Zinfandel, 8% Petite Sirah

99% Florence Vineyard(s) – 88% Rockpile AVA, 11% Dry Creek Valley

16 months in barrel – 13% each new Hungarian, French and American, 61% older French and American

Case Production: 410 cases

Aging potential: 7-20 years

Price: \$44.00 / \$35.20 Club **New release!**

Carol's Tasting Notes: Nice dark-red in color, big blueberry-blackberry fruit, spicy-chocolatey oak, nicely focused acidity enhances mineral flavors, elegantly structured tannins for aging, super plush loooong finish! Fantastic with rich lasagna or a beautiful prime rib roast!

2021 MONGA ZIN® Old Vine Zin, Cucamonga Valley



The grapes for our beloved Monga Zin are becoming more difficult to obtain with each year of drought that we have here in CA—this ancient vineyard is literally at the western edge of the Mojave Desert, with absolutely no irrigation possible, which makes crop yield about 0.15 tons/acre, <10% of what we get from vineyards up north. To struggle is good, but sometimes we do not get ANY fruit at all. BTW, this is BEST vintage we have EVER produced from Lopez!

91 points Wine Spectator, plus 3 Double Gold and 3 Gold Medals

95% Zinfandel, 3% Touriga Nacional, 2% Rose of Peru (Mission)

95% Lopez Vineyard, Cucamonga – planted in 1918, dry-farmed and **Organically Grown**

19 months in 10% NEW American and 90% older American and French oak barrels

Case Production: 586 cases

Aging potential: 15-20 years

Price: \$30.00/ \$24.00 Club **New to you, but last grab!**

Carol's Tasting Notes: Deep black cherry fruit, dried cranberry, orange zest, like a berry patch in the sun! Dusty vanilla caramel oak, graham crackers and cocoa. Fragrant Moroccan spices or Chinese 5-spice. In the mouth it is super concentrated, with creamy yet tangy bright cherry fruit, long lush finish. Fantastic with heartier fare, but would be great with cranberry relish (we love cranberry here, can you tell?) and roasted anything...especially portabello mushrooms or eggplant parm.

2023 BLACK MAGIC® Late Harvest Zinfandel Dessert Wine



We had to include the brand new vintage of this perennial favorite sweetie to make sure you all had it for the holidays, along with our legendary 72% cacao chocolate morsels in a tin, the perfect complement for the chocolatey-raspberry goodness in this tiny bottle—it is an enchanting dessert all by itself!

Best of Show Dessert Wine, and 1 Gold Medal...so far!

30.5°Brix at Harvest – 5.8% RS and 15.0% alc

100% Late Harvest Zinfandel

100% Sonoma County: 60% Fountaingrove District, 40% Dry Creek Valley

Case Production: 830 half-cases produced, in 375ml bottles

Aging potential: 5-8 years, maybe more?

Price: \$21.00/ \$16.80 Club **New release!**

Carol's Tasting Notes: Mocha, cherry cordial, a whiff of Raisinettes, lovely chocolate syrup with a slight touch of mint chip, black pepper, and blackberry on the nose. In the mouth are explosions of dark chocolate and coffee, with gorgeous jammy black raspberry with a slightly chewy texture and well-balanced sweetness. Be sure to pair it with a dessert that is less sweet than the wine so they won't fight each other—try to use darker chocolate or cocoa, like a flourless mocha cake or tiramisu!

Another new release in this box is the **2023 Barbera d'Oakley**, our third rendition of this "Italianate" blend. We have been loving the fruit from these 122-year-old vines that grow on the perimeter of the Planchon Zinfandel vineyard in the tiny town of Oakley. Barbera's ripe black cherry fruit is the core, complemented by spicy Zin and mellow Merlot. The 2023 shows a bit more of the tangy acidity for which Barbera is famous, which makes it a great food companion, especially Italian cuisine or mushroomy dishes.

The third wine in the flight is a reprise (second bottle) of the **2020 Bacchi Reserve Zin**, from the Bacchi Vineyard on Limerick Lane, planted in the old field blend style in 1908. Another winery has hogged the contract on this fruit for over a decade, but we got a tiny opportunity for a **one-year-only** deal for 4 tons! After lusting after the fruit from this sexy "destination ZIN street" for many years, it was wonderful to finally have the chance to experience its pleasures. This is a classic "OVZIN" in every positive way, super spicy, layered, earthy and jammy, with incredible structure to help it age well for a couple of decades to come. We only held back enough of this beauty to give you this second bottle plus a few for "last grabbers," so if you like it, grab a few of the remaining bottles NOW!

Back to the new vintages, we have the elegant and sophisticated **2021 Rockpile Reserve Zin**, winner of 94 points in the Wine Spectator as well as 93 in the Enthusiast and a boatload of Gold and Double Gold Medals to boot; its beauty speaks for itself as our flagship wine every year. As a co-founder of the Rockpile AVA, we like to think that we set the benchmark for Zinfandel's best expression of its terroir.



Rare 1940's photo of Monga Zin's Lopez Vineyard, planted in 1918 in Rancho Cucamonga

In addition, the **2021 Monga Zin** from Rancho Cucamonga in Southern California is one of the best vintages we have produced from these old geezer "bush" vines that are practically lying on the ground, not standing upright as one would normally see vineyards grow.

They grow on their own roots in 40-50 feet of sand, which brings out lovely bright acidity, unusual layers of spices and dried fruits that are finished with rich caramel-brown sugar-milk chocolatey oak.

Last but ne'er least, we finish up this 6-pack with the new vintage of the **2023 Black Magic Late Harvest Zin**, a perennial house favorite. With only **5.8% RS and 15% alc**, this is not a fiery port-style, but a gentle bridge between dry table wine and dessert. It is best paired with less sweet recipes like tiramisu or bittersweet chocolate cake... and it's a great companion to our traditional tin of 72% dark chocolates!

There you have it, a lovely set of wines to liven up your holidays. May your festivities be rich in flavors and friends, and may you find time to celebrate with gratitude for the many gifts you receive every day.

Cheers! *Carol Shelton*

YELLOW CURRY WITH MIXED VEGETABLES

Serves 6

- 1 Tbsp. yellow curry paste
(we favor the brand "Mae Ploy" at right but use your own fave)
- ½ tsp. Olive Oil
- ½ yellow onion, chopped in 1" chunks
- Two (2) 13.5 oz cans of regular (not lite) coconut milk
- 1 winter squash (like a butternut),
peeled and cut into ¾" cubes (I buy precut from store)
- 1 medium russet potato, cut into a ¾" dice, unpeeled if you are ok with that!
- 16 oz bag of frozen mixed veggies (peas, carrots, corn, edamame, green beans...?)
- 2-3 Tbsp. peanut butter (optional if allergies)
- 1 tsp. sugar
- ¼ cup chopped cilantro (optional)
- ¼ cup chopped peanuts (optional)



In a large skillet (with tall sides if possible) preheat the olive oil over medium high and add the curry paste. Be VERY careful to add only a little curry paste at a time if you are a wimp like me (Carol) because it is very hard to dial back the spice if you start with too much, but you can always add more! Using a wooden spoon, smooch it around the pan till it loosens up, then add the onions and cook till translucent and a bit golden. Add the 2 cans of coconut milk (scrape them out well!) and bring to a light boil, then turn down the heat to medium and let it simmer for about 5 minutes, covered. Add the cubed squash and potatoes and replace cover, let simmer for another 15-20 minutes, till both squash and potatoes are soft and tender but not mushy. Stir in the frozen veggies and simmer another 4-5 minutes till all are thawed and softened, then add peanut butter and sugar to taste, stir well.

Serve over cooked jasmine or basmati rice, garnished with chopped cilantro and peanuts, if desired. This would be great with Carol Shelton Coquille Blanc or Wild Thing Viognier, or even a spicy red like the Barbera d'Oakley or Monga Zin in this shipment!

Last note, if you want to reheat this the next day, add a bit more coconut milk, plain yogurt or broth to thin it down—it will have "seized up" in the fridge overnight!

2025 Upcoming Events

Save the date!

- Jan. 18-19 **Winter Wineland**, 11-4 daily, at the winery
<https://www.wineroad.com/events/winter-wineland/>
- March 1-2 **Barrel Tasting Weekend**, 11-4 daily, at the winery
<https://www.wineroad.com/events/barrel-tasting/>