

compliances, record keeping and accounting—all the boring stuff that no winemaker enjoys doing.

“As typical Italian parents, we’re in no rush to send our babies out of the home. In Friulian, children are called frus, like the ‘fruits’ of a tree (or vine). We tend to keep our frus in the nest for quite a while, smothering and providing them with all sorts of attentions, but withholding any judgment: Those Friulian fruits are never spoiled when they finally leave; they are indeed stronger and more resilient. In a similar fashion, each vintage of Arbe Garbe is released relatively tardily, with importance given to bottle as well as barrel aging.

The Malvasia Bianca is best paired with antipasti, pasta, risotto, fish dishes and cheeses.

#### Matthiasson White Wine:

9% Sauvignon Blanc, 20% Ribolla Gialla, 14% Semillon and 7% Tocai Friulano, from Ryan’s and Vare vineyards; 860 cases produced Steve and Jill Klein Matthiasson



Our 2010 Matthiasson Napa Valley White Wine is our New World conception of a mythical ideal Old World wine—a California wine with a spiritual connection to Friuli, Italy, but also drawing inspiration

from the great whites of the Loire, Graves, Alsace, the Rhone and old-school Napa. This wine is an attempt to get at the core of what white wine is all about, thus the seemingly vague but actually precise name. It’s the white wine we have been searching for to put on our own table.

The Sauvignon Blanc and Semillon come from Ryan’s Vineyard, which sits on a streak of alluvial gravel in the center of the valley floor in the south part of Napa. It is right in the path of the daily wind currents that pull up through the valley from the San Francisco Bay towards Calistoga. Native grasses are planted under the vines to compete for moisture and nutrients and encourage the roots to forage down deep in the gravelly soil. The Ribolla Gialla and Tocai Friulano are from the tiny Vare Vineyard, in the mouth of Napa’s Dry Creek canyon, right next to the creek. The rocky fluvial soil and cool air drainage of the canyon work perfectly with the variety. Ribolla Gialla is an extremely old variety, cultivated since medieval times in the Collio region of Italy and Slovenia. Steve has been running the farming in both vineyards for 11 years now, and picks the fruit out of sections of the vineyards that have high natural acidity and low sugars at full ripeness.

Assembling a blend rather than working with a single varietal allows us to craft a balanced and complete wine. The Sauvignon Blanc brings a clean fresh citrusy acidity and some tropical char-

acter. The Ribolla Gialla brings seashell minerality, nuttiness and structure to the blend. The Semillon contributes viscosity and a ripe fig and beeswax character that adds gravity and weight. The Tocai Friulano adds spicy aromatic notes. The varieties are all co-fermented so that they marry into one wine.

Our first vintage was in 2005, when we made 50 cases. Steve had just returned from a “pilgrimage” to Friuli, Italy, the home of Ribolla Gialla and Tocai Friulano, and he discovered that the blended white wines of the region had an acidity and freshness that was combined with richness and roundness in a way that he had never before tasted in a white wine. It was a revelation to experience both of these opposing characters in the same wine. Those wines, and particularly the wines of Miani, inspired us to craft our own White Wine blend.

Ribolla Gialla can be very tricky to grow, and Steve learned a lot about growing the grape on his trip to Friuli. It’s very touchy, growing very vigorously with a little bit of water, or suffering quite a bit if stressed, and is susceptible to every known virus. But, like most things, it grows very well in the Napa Valley; it just needs to be picked when it’s ready, rather than letting it get over-ripe.

Our Tocai Friulano bud wood was brought in from a 100-year-old vineyard and almost half of the vines died when we grafted them into the Vare Vineyard. The half that survived produce very low yields and only ripen to 18 brix (9%–10% alcohol). That component of the blend is delicate and ethereal.

Sauvignon Blanc is very vigorous, which tends towards green flavors. The California native grasses [that we plant alongside the vines], along with dry-farming methods, keep the vines balanced and allow us to pick with full ripeness at low sugars.

Semillon vines can over-produce fruit. We thin more than half of the fruit very early, making sure that all of the fruit sees sun on all sides of the bunch. This is important for the viscosity of the wine, that waxiness, which balances the acidity of the Sauvignon Blanc.

Our involvement in the wine business is truly a team effort. Steve is the grape grower and winemaker, but Jill’s background in agriculture lets her help brainstorm when things need to be figured out in the vineyard. Jill’s focus is on running the business side—keeping the books, doing the retail sales and keeping the website going, etc.—but we both do whatever we can to market the wine, and we’re always brainstorming new ideas on how to improve the business.

Most of the support for our wine comes from the sommelier community, which has recognized how [well] it pairs with food. Jill was the program director for the Community Alliance with Family Farmers for years, and worked to help connect farmers to markets, including facilitating farmers’ markets and CSAs (community-supported agriculture subscription programs) early on, so she really understands local food, which helps us understand and communicate with chefs and sommeliers. We still grow a few acres of fruit trees, which Steve farms and Jill sells to restaurants and the Napa Farmers’ Market, as well as making jams to include in our wine club shipments.