

2012 BARBERA 2011 ZINFANDEL 2011 SANGIOVESE  
2011 SYRAH BENCHLAND 2011 SYRAH NORMALÉ

## 2011/ 2012 The Tale of Two Vintages

It was the best of vintages, it was the worst of vintages, it was the harvest of frustration, it was the epoch of making balanced wines from California, it was the season of low alcohol/high acid wines, it was the season of lush and fruity wines, it was the fall of despair, it was the summer of grape love, we had everything to lose, we had nothing to worry about—in short, the period was so far like the present period, that some of us are noisier than others, for better or worse, in the superlative degree of comparative tasting only. [1]

In this newsletter we present wines from two distinctly different vintages; 2011 and 2012. One was excruciatingly difficult to manage, the other, a piece of cake. Yet wines from both years have endearing qualities and character. I guess this means we are either getting better at this winemaking thing, or 2011 was not as bad as we initially thought.

To some local vineyard owners, the very mention of 2011 will elicit a vile response delivered with a contorted, bitter beer face. The absence of summer in 2011 delayed grape ripening 2 to 3 weeks beyond normal. Then, confirming a grower's worst nightmare, we had 1 to 2 inches of rain on October 1st. The grape must had hit the fan.

Now we were scrambling to harvest grapes before losing them to bunch rot. In my dad's infinite wisdom, he summarized the 2011 harvest saying, "It takes all the fun out of it."

We thought our wines would be thin and vegetal with green, astringent tannins—all indicative of harvesting less-than-ideally-ripe grapes. But the arduous 2011 Harvest had a serious silver lining. The cool growing season resulted in us making a Syrah, Sangiovese and Zinfandel with complex aromas, bright acidity and lower-than-normal alcohols. The vegetal flavors and green tannins, which we thought would be present, were not nearly as obvious. Hmmm. We might be on to something here.

2012 was about as opposite as it could be from the previous vintage. While it was not a particularly hot summer, it was warm enough to evenly ripen grapes. September weather was moderate and dry, allowing us to choose the precise timing for picking our grapes. In the past we would have "gone for the gusto" and waited until maximum physiological ripeness to harvest. But, because we had good results in 2011, we opted harvest for something less than that, hoping for better balance.

The 2012 wines show more fruit and body than the 2011s. But the wines show a bright core of acidity and some restraint, which is a direct result of us being more confident about harvesting at slightly lower sugars.

Could this be the beginning of a great adventure here in Dry Creek Valley?



*Pip doesn't always drink wine, but when he does, he drinks Unti Barbera.*

*[1] It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way - in short, the period was so far like the present period, that some of its noisiest authorities insisted on its being received, for good or for evil, in the superlative degree of comparison only.*

## 2011 ZINFANDEL

I love this wine.

Our 2011 Zinfandel reminds me of when Zinfandel was one of my “go to” wines. It has tons of berry fruit in concert with dried herbs in a juicy, full-bodied wine with moderate alcohol (for Zin, at least). This is what attracted me to DCV Zin in the first place. Despite the cool growing season, we harvested our 2011 Zinfandel prior to the October rain, probably because of a lower-than normal crop. As such, this wine has a very concentrated berry flavors that back-in-the-day we would call “brambly.”

The word bramble refers to “a prickly shrub of blackberry or raspberry. “ In the 1970s, Sebastiani used to place BRAMBLY in large print underneath Zinfandel on their front label. (If you remember this, best you keep it a secret because it simply means we are both old). It is not one of my favorite descriptors, but it seems appropriate with this wine. Our 2011 Zinfandel is definitely a wine that heeds Trombone Shorty’s call to “take it old school.” In pursuit of balance making Zinfandel? In Dry Creek Valley? Yeah, Baby!

**85 % ZINFANDEL 10% SYRAH 5% BARBERA 1,000 CASES PRODUCED**  
 \$28.00 BOTTLE / \$22.40 WHEN PART OF A MIXED CASE PURCHASE

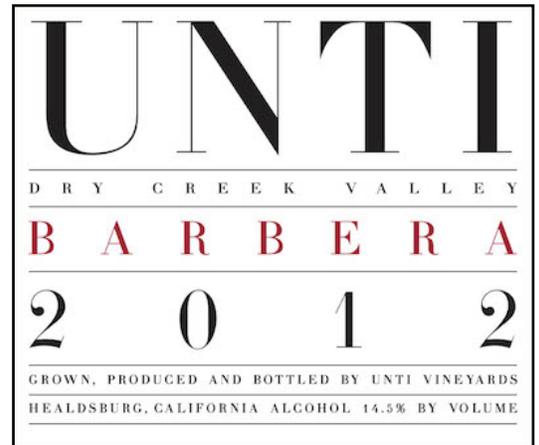
## 2012 BARBERA

### *Send Lawyers, Guns, and Barbera*

I think we can confidently say: Barbera's time has come. If you don't believe me (after all, I am an Excitable Boy), perhaps you'll pay heed to these credible folks:

“No grape has known such a dramatic upgrade in its fortunes and image in the last 20 years than Barbera in Piemonte, north-west Italy.” **Jancis Robinson**, Master of Wine and author of *Wine Grapes* (a book owned by almost every California winemaker) and *The Oxford Companion to Wine*.

“No other red wine has risen so rapidly in favor in recent times as Barbera.” **Burton Anderson**, the first and most prominent American writer to focus on Italian wine. Author of *Vino*, *The Wine Atlas of Italy* and *Best Italian Wines*.



Barbera, like Warren Zevon's music, is a wine almost everybody likes for different reasons. Barbera's lack of tannin, bright fruit and lively acidity make it one of—if not the most—versatile food wines on the planet. Barbera is made in a variety of styles, from light and snappy, to thick and juicy. Finally, Barbera has always struck me as one of the best Italian wines flying under the radar. All of which sounds very Zevon-like.

In 1998 George Unti planted 2 acres of Barbera. We started making the wine in 2002, and were so impressed we subsequently planted 4 more acres. Now, with all of our Barbera vines yielding fruit we made 2,000 cases in 2012, making it the highest volume red wine here at Unti. Needless to say, we are “in it to win it” with Barbera.

Sebastien Pochan offers more info about our history with Barbera and its evolution here in California. Read his piece on our website: [untivineyards.com](http://untivineyards.com)

Just before we release any wine, we scramble to conduct an in-house comparative tasting of the best European versions of the particular varietal wine type. One of the few perks of working at Unti. Thus, we recently tasted a flight of very high-end Barberas, which included the following:

- Braida “Bricco dell’ Uccellone”, Barbera d’Asti 2009 / Braida “Ai Suma” Barbera d’Asti 2009
- Vietti “Vigna Scarrone” Barbera d’Alba 2010 / Vietti “Scarrone Vigna Vecchia” Barbera d’Alba 2010
- Tenuta Olim Bauda “Nizza” Barbera d’Asti Superiore 2009
- Iuli “Barabba” Barbera del Monferrato 2007 / Iuli “Rossore” Barbera del Monferrato 2009

## Are You Sure Giacomo (Bologna) Done It This Way?

All of the above wines depicted what you would expect from modern style Italian wines- ripe fruit, high alcohol, alcohol, new oak and a slight surprise: relatively low acidity.

We then followed up with a vertical of Unti Barbera from 2007 through 2012, in search of some perspective. A few things were very apparent to us. All of the Unti wines were darker in color, fruitier, often lower in alcohol, and much to our surprise, noticeably higher in acidity!

Jancis Robinson, when describing the "modern style Barbera" thinks some Piedmonte producers are intentionally lowering acidity in their Barberas:

*"Many modern winemakers quietly de-acidify Barbera (by adding harmless calcium carbonate for example) to give it extra appeal in an age when wine consumers are—wrongly in my view—taught to be shy of acidity."*

Based on our comparative tasting, I think Jancis might be on to something.

Giacomo Bologna was the man credited with making Piemonte's first "serious" Barbera, Braidà Bricco dell' Uccellone. The two Braidà Barberas in our flight had 16% alcohol listed on the label, meaning they definitely picked their grapes at very high sugars. Whether the result of picking super-ripe grapes or de-acidification, Braidà wines clearly showed lower than expected levels of acidity. Showy, but not snappy.

After 16 vintages of trying to make European-styled wines here in Dry Creek, the last thing we would do is intentionally lower the acidity in our wines. It is what we love about Barbera. Barbera's high acidity only bothers me when the wine lacks depth or concentration. So far, that has not been an issue for us.

Our 2012 Barbera is a fruity, full-bodied version—yet this wine possesses the lively acidity necessary to call it Barbera. If this Barbera doesn't turn some heads of vineyard-owners here, it is only because theirs are stuck in the sand.

**100 % BARBERA    2,075 CASES PRODUCED**  
\$30.00 BOTTLE / \$24.00 WHEN PART OF A MIXED CASE PURCHASE

## 2011 SANGIOVESE

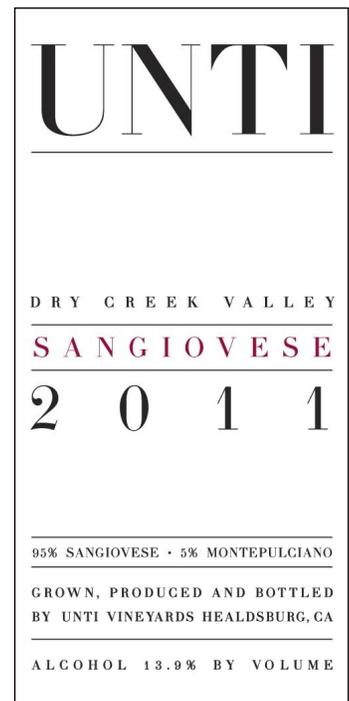
Along with our Benchland Syrah vineyard, our best Sangiovese blocks have been our most consistent source of interesting wine since 1999. This 2011 rendition shows why.

One of the challenges with making Sangiovese here or in Tuscany is to harvest when the fruit has matured past vegetal aromas, flavors and bitter green tannins—without the sugars getting too high, causing higher alcohol levels. In the past, we paid the price by having higher than desired alcohols.

We feared the '11 Sangiovese would suffer from these less ripe characteristics, but the wine shows no sign of it. One reason is because we now derive a portion of this wine from our newly planted Sangiovese Grosso. This 2 acre block is densely planted to low vigor rootstock, which yields less fruit per vine than our original planning. I believe this helps explain our favorable results from this young block.

Typically our Sangiovese shows more fruit than what you find in Brunello di Montalcino wines. Our 2011 has nice tension between cherry fruit and the earthy complexity I like about Brunellos. The '11 also has the firm acidity one expects from Italian Sangiovese, which really gives this wine elegance.

Though not as tannic as our 2009 or 2010, this Sangiovese is still full bodied. I recommend holding on to it for 3 to 5 years.



**95 % SANGIOVESE    5% MONTEPULCIANO    435 CASES PRODUCED**  
\$40.00 BOTTLE / \$32.00 WHEN PART OF A MIXED CASE PURCHASE

**UNTI VINEYARDS**  
**4202 DRY CREEK ROAD**  
**PO BOX 1899**  
**HEALDSBURG, CA 95448**

NEWSLETTER 46: SPRING 2014

2 0 1 2 B A R B E R A  
2 0 1 1 S A N G I O V E S E  
2 0 1 1 Z I N F A N D E L  
2 0 1 1 S Y R A H B E N C H L A N D  
2 0 1 1 S Y R A H

## 2011 SYRAH BENCHLAND & 2011 SYRAH NORMALE

I decided to write about both wines within the same piece for two reasons: 1. The 2011 growing season had the biggest influence on both wines. 2. I'm lazy.

We love Northern Rhône wines, from Côte-Rôtie to Saint Joseph and all points in between. The Syrah aromas expressed there are ethereal; the flavors are focused and precise. Such is Syrah when it is grown in a cool climate. Ordinarily, our Syrahs are not as aromatic; we have a Mediterranean climate here in DCV. Not so much in 2011.

As I've beaten into the ground earlier, 2011 was the coolest growing season we have ever experienced here. Could this be a vintage where we sniff the complexities and balance of No-Rhône? Oui! Both Unti Syrahs this year have brighter aromas, spicier flavors and elevated levels of acid. I have to say, I prefer these two Syrahs to several wines we've made from more heralded vintages.

Our Benchland Syrah vineyard yielded a very small crop in 2011. So much so that we harvested September 23-24, which was a full week before we picked our Sangiovese. Sebastien feels the low yield explains for why we were able to obtain good flavors and friendly tannins at lower than normal brix level. The '11 Benchland has a wide range of floral, olive and almost blueberry aromas and flavors, supported by lively acidity. This 2011 is the prettiest Benchland we've made in recent memory. Really juicy stuff.

**1 0 0 % S Y R A H F R O M T H E B E N C H L A N D V I N E Y A R D      3 5 0 C A S E S P R O D U C E D**  
\$40.00 BOTTLE / \$32.00 WHEN PART OF A MIXED CASE PURCHASE

The **Syrah Normalé** was a bit more challenging, yet with equally positive results.

We normally harvest our winery vineyard Syrah late September to mid-October. In 2011, this meant we were harvesting after the rain, trying to beat the development of bunch rot. This was the frustrating side of 2011 none of us are likely to forget anytime soon. Muddy walks through vineyards trying to determine which block would hold out against mold. Long days at the sorting table culling out bunch rot. Crossing our fingers, hoping the magic of fermentation would somehow make some sense out of what seemed a dire situation. Wow. Were we surprised!

65% of this Syrah comes from our Creek-side block, grapes we thought we had lost to bunch rot in mid-October. Almost two weeks later, after carefully culling through the vineyard for rotted grapes, we managed to harvest four tons of very flavorful Syrah at 23 brix. The balance comes from our winery block (877 clone) and our ditch block (383 clone).

The cool growing season, combined with whole cluster fermentation for a portion of the grapes gave us the olive, white pepper, perfume character that is very much Northern Rhône and rarely seen in these parts. If you are like me, a fan of St. Joseph or Crozes-Hermitage, this 2011 Syrah is a must start in your daily dinner line-ups. Who would have thunk?

One more thing. This 2011 Syrah normalé is another example of an intriguing trend in Sonoma County Syrahs. If you have had wines from our friends at Arnot Roberts or Wind Gap, you are familiar with this style of aromatic Syrah sporting moderate alcohol. It has become very popular in SF restaurants because it shows the more elegant side of Syrah. Just when the Syrah skeptics proclaimed the category stagnant. Touché.

**1 0 0 % S Y R A H    5 7 5 C A S E S P R O D U C E D**  
\$28.00 BOTTLE / \$22.40 WHEN PART OF A MIXED CASE PURCHASE

UntiVineyards.com    4202 Dry Creek Road, Healdsburg CA    707 433 5590

**UNTI VINEYARDS**

4202 Dry Creek Road  
 PO Box 1899  
 Healdsburg, CA 95448

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**\*ALL NEW RELEASE WINES RECEIVE 20 % OFF**  
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*2012 Barbera	<input type="text"/>	@ \$30 =	<input type="text"/>
*2011 Sangiovese	<input type="text"/>	@ \$40 =	<input type="text"/>
*2011 Zinfandel	<input type="text"/>	@ \$28 =	<input type="text"/>
*2011 Syrah Benchland	<input type="text"/>	@ \$40 =	<input type="text"/>
*2011 Syrah	<input type="text"/>	@ \$28 =	<input type="text"/>
*2013 Rosé	<input type="text"/>	@ \$23 =	<input type="text"/>

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Phone#: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

(Discounts: 6-11 bottles=5%, 12-23=10%, 24+=20%) **Discounts** =

SUBTOTAL =

**New Subtotal** =

(Taxes: CA = 8.25 % ; Other States, Call for Rate) **Taxes** =

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