

WINE OF THE WEEK

April 24, 2007

2006 DRY CHENIN BLANC

— *Clarksburg* —

“*A*t a time when so many important wine regions of the world seem to be running out of water it seems appropriate to pay attention to one that has almost too much. Clarksburg is an unusual AVA in the Sacramento Delta in northern California just southwest of Sacramento (and therefore Davis). The water table is so high here that the vineyards have to have special drain systems embedded in them, and when growers want to hasten ripening they actually have to pump water out of the vineyards’ super fertile clay loams.

All of which might suggest that Clarksburg is capable only of producing thin, uninteresting plonk. Not so. Clarksburg Chenin Blanc is some of California’s most distinctive white wine and has been recognised as such for three decades, making the vines some of the state’s more venerable. Other producers of Clarksburg Chenin today include Pine Ridge, an outfit new to me called Chard-No-Way, and Bogle, the only winery actually based in the Delta. Gerald Asher, no less, has called Clarksburg ‘California’s Vouvray’, although please note that Dry Creek Vineyard, Dry Chenin Blanc 2006 Clarksburg is indeed dry, even if not bone dry but just 6 g/l residual sugar – not tasteable.

Based over in Sonoma, Dry Creek Vineyard was already making fine Chenin Blanc from this very special and largely overlooked wine region in the early 1980s and has continued to do so through thick and thin, the thin being the widescale replanting of California’s once-extensive acreage of Chenin Blanc with the other Ch... white grape. This wine is lightly honeyed like a Loire Chenin with great zest and just a little smoky on the nose. At just 12.5% alcohol, this would make a great aperitif – and keeps winning prizes as a partner for shellfish. The maritime labels are a Dry Creek Vineyard thing rather than a Chenin thing; founder David Stare being a mad keen sailor.

The wine style has changed remarkably little over the years and the wine has always had steady distribution in the US at a bargain price. What has encouraged me to bring it to your attention is that it is now being imported into the UK by Bibendum Wine who are currently offering it at the slightly less bargain price of £8.28. I hope they will manage to sell it in to other stockists too.”

Dry Creek
VINEYARD

