



WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 7, 2016

Gallica

At first glance, [Gallica](#) could be mistaken for yet another ego wine project; a small portfolio of limited production wines, the flagship of which is an organically-farmed, estate-bottled Napa Valley cabernet. We've heard this story many times before.

Or have we?

A closer look shows that these bottles are not typical at all. For starters, only the cabernet is from Napa. The others are from far-flung reaches of northern and central California. The syrah is from the Santa Lucia Highlands, mostly known for pinot noir. The Rhône blend is from Amador, a lesser-known growing region about 40 miles east of Sacramento - if known for anything, it's zinfandel. And Calaveras county, where the albariño is sourced? It's deep in the Sierra Foothills; gold rush country, people!



As a champion for underdogs and the overlooked - and having had some very positive experience with wines from each of these regions - these off-the-beaten path sources piqued my interest. Eschewing the traditional Napa Valley passion project quiver (cab, merlot, chard, and sauv blanc - all from Napa) suggests a winemaker with both the gumption to color outside the lines and a commitment to an alternative philosophy.

Even without having popped a cork, I want to know more. Who is this Rosemary Cakebread? What is she after? More to the point, why?

The samples of her wines, descriptions of which follow, help inform some of the answers. For more of the picture, I had the chance to ask her via Google Hangout during a virtual tasting.

While firmly planted in the heart of Napa Valley history and plenty experienced (Spottswoode, Mumm, etc.) Rosemary is not the establishment. In fact, she's a bit of a self-described rebel. Yet she doesn't need to take the easy route or demand attention through excess. Addressing her winemaking through the dual lenses of consumer and creator, she is committed to both adventure and moderation. Contemplation and surprise are what she seeks in her wines. These subtle tensions echo in her craft.

Yes, these wines are expensive. But in acquiring them, you're not just getting a beverage, you're participating in a journey. A journey that's part discipline, part rebellion, and all delicious. Is it what you want for Christmas? Silly question - Christmas is about giving, not getting. (But in case you're looking for ideas for me, here you go.)

Enjoy.



2015 Gallica Albariño Calaveras County \$36

An extrovert, this curvy, come-hither white flaunts its plump, honeyed fruit outlined by a subtly steely trim. On more intent examination, there's more than just a fun-loving quaffer here. The slight viscosity is accompanied by a soft mineral clang on the mid-palate. As it warms in the glass, suggestions of savory intrigue add to the complexity on the persistent finish. Oiy.

2014 Gallica Red Blend Amador County \$50

Open, accessible, even gregarious. Light-hearted, but well-made. And damn hard to put down. Rhone blend (GSM with a dash of viognier). Better than good.

2014 Gallica Syrah Santa Lucia Highlands \$60

Good syrah - great syrah, even - can often be found growing in the background where pinot noir enjoys the limelight. The Santa Lucia Highlands, where this syrah is grown, is one such place. [As discovered some years back](#), winemakers still eek out a few cases of this inky bliss each year. Gallica's version delivers strong blue fruit framed by black pepper on a silky texture that makes it quite enchanting. More than just pretty, this wine exudes elegance without a need to boast. Hits the northern Rhone target squarely with coy meatiness.

2013 Gallica Cabernet Napa Valley \$160

Uncorking a wine in its infancy presents some jarring contrasts, making patience an essential component of evaluation. On opening, this a tight, unyielding ball of cabernet potential. Sticking your nose in the glass is like poking your head into a toasted barrel. Aromatics are dominated by vanilla-lined oak and the attack is an impenetrable wall of tannic energy. Thankfully, I decanted this eight full hours before really returning to it. After this period of extended relaxation, the wall came down and puddled like an expensive negligee. Balancing magnificent intensity and serenity all in one seamless package, this incredibly perfumed experience encapsulates why drinking great wines is such a thrill. Rosemary's target is a cab that will be great in 20 years without hitting anyone over the head - and on this she nailed it.

