

## The Opera House Gourmet International Wine of the Month Selection for November 2011

### Hawley Viognier 2010

Sonoma Coast, California

As mentioned in September's wine write up, California wines really spoke to me this year. I have chosen five of the twelve months in 2011 to be a California wine. This month's selection is our fifth.

Viognier is a grape varietal that has become more familiar to wine drinkers as its popularity as a white varietal has grown world wide, and particularly so in Virginia. It is native to the slopes of France's Rhone Valley. The grape grows especially well in the warmer climates of California and Virginia. The fruit for our selection was sourced from two vineyards in Sonoma County, California. A portion of the blend comes from Hawley's estate which has been growing Viognier since 1983 (certified organic in 2002). The warmer climate on the hillsides of Dry Creek Valley helps to develop tropical fruit and tangerine notes. The other vineyard from which the grapes were sourced is in the Russian River Valley, where slightly cooler temperatures bring out citrus and apricot flavors.

Viognier is a highly regarded grape varietal that was once very rare due to limited plantings. It is susceptible to vineyard diseases and the limited plantings made it difficult to find. This changed in the last ten years as the willingness of growers around the world discovered the versatility of the varietal.

Hawley Vineyards was established in the early 1990's after John Hawley decided to break from the cooperative wine scene and establish his own small winery. His prior experience as winemaker at Clos du Blos and Kendall Jackson and his well established friendships in the wine industry over the years, allowed him to contract with standout growers. His first vintage was released in 1995. Today, he makes about 5,000 cases a year of nine different varietals of wine. Hawley wines are produced from estate grown vineyards and from sourced grapes from those stand out growers with whom he established connections over the years.

Hawley Viognier is quite different from most because it is barrel fermented with a second fermentation. The grapes came from two sources, the estate vineyards and a vineyard in the Sierra Foothills.

#### **Tasting Notes:**

Aromas of honeysuckle, pineapple, and tropical fruit. This wine is about showcasing the fruit with intense flavors of apricot, mango and white peach. The mouth feel is smooth and buttery with moderate acidity and a long fruity finish. Thanksgiving would be a perfect time to try it.