



Mail-order wine

Monrovia man carries on father's tradition / A10

Lancers roll on

Amat beats Mater Dei in CIF opener / C1



Wine of the Month Club

Paul Kalemkiarian Jr. carries on a family tradition: the Wine of the Month Club. The Monrovia businessman purchased the mail-order business, now with 13,000 members, from his father in 1989.

Di-vine inspiration

Wine of the Month Club run by Monrovia businessman

By Kevin Smith
Staff Writer

For Paul Kalemkiarian Jr., wine is a complex and mysterious thing.

And therein lies the appeal.

"Wine is agricultural, and it carries an unknown element about whether it's a good or bad vintage," he said. "If you bought a Heineken 20 years ago it would taste the same as it does today. But wine ... it's different. They make the best with the grapes they are given."

Kalemkiarian ought to know. As the owner of the Wine of the Month Club in Monrovia, he is forever looking to find wines that are both rewarding — and economical.

"I'm the guy who tastes 400 wines a month and selects the ones we can use as great, value-oriented wines," he said. "It's not like manufacturing widgets."

Kalemkiarian is carrying on a tradition his father, Paul Sr., started when he launched the enterprise back in 1972. It was, in fact, the nation's first mail-order wine club.

"My dad was a pharmacist and he also owned a wine shop next door," he said. "Customers would come into the wine shop and ask for advice. So he started delivering wine monthly to people."

Kalemkiarian Jr. began working at the shop at an early age, and in 1989 he purchased the business from his father.

"We don't sit on wines and massage them, but we're very good at comparing wines next to each other and getting the best value based on price," he said.

And the prices are certainly reasonable. The uninitiated might expect a wine club to promote costly vintages. But that's not the case here.

"We have three levels in our club," Kalemkiarian explained. "In my most popular club the wines average \$9 a bottle. The second one averages \$14 and the third is about \$19 a bottle."

Kalemkiarian does admit, however, that at least one of his wines is geared toward an upper-end market.

"I have a wine in my cooler at the wine shop that's \$500," he said.

From a Firestone Merlot to a Dona Florencia Char-

Ladder of success

Paul Kalemkiarian Jr.

TITLE: Owner

BUSINESS: Wine of the Month Club

LOCATION: 907 S. Magnolia Ave, Monrovia

PHONE: (800) 949-9463

WEB ADDRESS: www.wineofthemothclub.com

SECRET OF SUCCESS: A thorough knowledge of wine, and a rich family tradition of finding good, reasonably priced wines

donnay or a Stoneburn Sauvignon Blanc, the Wine of the Month Club has something for every wine lover. And the club has plenty of them — 13,000 or more members nationwide at last count.

The business operates a wine shop at 907 S. Magnolia Ave. in Monrovia that also offers made-to-order food and wine gift baskets.

"I love it," said Yves Vincent of San Diego, who has been a Wine of the Month member for the past 15 years. "I like it because of the quality of the wines, but mostly it's the service. If I get a case and two of the bottles are corked (having been opened), I just call them and they send me two more."

Vincent said he usually buys anywhere from a case to four or five cases of wine a month through the club.

"Sometimes you can get a \$20 bottle of wine for \$4.99," he said. "They may have bought a large quantity of wines and made a hell of a deal. I like the club because the wines are much higher quality — and less expensive."

Wine of the Month Club member Robert Spider is also impressed by the operation.

"If you call in your order by phone, the people there are extremely knowledgeable and they'll practically bend over backward to help you," he said. "It's that personal touch that I like."

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