

Borra's amazing Spring releases: the moonshine is the sunshine



Borra winemaker Markus Niggli sees the light...

It is so ironic: that many contemporary American winemakers, who by resorting to Old World methodologies, are now considered to be the most daring winemakers of today. The new style is the old style; or as *The Youngbloods* once sang, *the moonshine is the sunshine, shining twenty minutes later...*

Do you have a "contemporary" taste in wine? If so, you might be stunned by the latest releases from **Borra Vineyards**. This may come as a surprise, since Borra is also the oldest bonded winery (in business since 1975!) in **Lodi**. But if you have been under the impression that they make stick-in-the-mud, old school wines, then let us set the record straight: Borra now produces the most "contemporary" style wines grown in Lodi today, period. Let's discuss...

First, the distinctions: what is "Old World," and what is "New World?" Old World refers to the style of wine long associated with wines produced in European countries – France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Portugal, Austria, etc. Except for the usual exceptions, European wines tend to taste

- Lighter in alcohol
- Higher in acidity (i.e. more pointedly tart)
- Drier to the taste
- Less overtly fruity in the aroma and flavor
- Invariably less oaky, and
- Often earthy (smells and flavors suggesting minerals, or loamy, composted soil)

On the other hand, New World wines – those of the U.S., Australia, New Zealand, Argentina, Chile, etc. – tend to be more fruit focused. Hence, the obsession with "varietal character" among consumers and critics outside of Europe. Besides tasting fruitier, New World wines tend to be higher in alcohol, lower in acidity, and thus softer, rounder, and heavier in body. Nothing wrong with that, especially if that's what you prefer.

Lodi's Borra Vineyards, however, is a great example of an American winery veering more towards European styles. A lot of this has to do with the fact that Borra's winemaker is **Markus Niggli**. Mr. Niggli is Swiss born and educated, and was originally lured to the West Coast by winemaking motivations as well as a fortuitous marriage to an all-American/California girl, who he happened to meet at a convention in Florida.

And so, reinterpreting Lodi grown grapes with Old World sensibility was not exactly an awkward step for Niggli. Consequently, in recent years Niggli has been working with third generation Lodi farmer/owner **Steve Borra** to get grapes picked a little earlier to achieve more natural acidity in the wines, along with less overt fruitiness and alcohol (because alcohol is a direct byproduct of fermented sugar, if you start with less sugar you end up with less alcohol).

You may ask, why haven't California winemakers been doing this all along? Good question. The simplest answer being: for the longest times Californians have been loathe to harvest grapes at lower sugars, like 20° or 21° Brix (i.e. sugar readings), out of fear that at that level grapes aren't "physiologically ripe" – not flavorful enough to make decent tasting wine. Winemakers like Niggli don't have that fear. They feel that as long as grapes are cultivated reasonably well and not over-cropped, in their mind there is ample enough flavor at 20° or 21° Brix – especially for crisp, lighter style wines. Call it faith, call it guts or just blissful ignorance – but this is one of the hallmarks of contemporary style New World wines.

Niggli is also putting the lid on aggressive use of oak barrels, and he is fermenting just about all of his wines with indigenous (i.e. "wild," "native" or "natural") yeasts, which results in less vigorous fruit expression (since yeast flora found naturally on skins of grapes are almost always less efficient than yeasts cultured in labs) but, often enough,

more earthy, microbial smells and flavors — the tertiary (or more non-fruit) complexities more typical of European wines, and rare in American wines.

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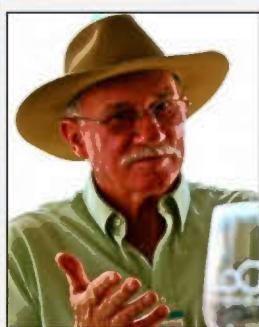


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Borra's "Artist" White



Owner/grower Steve Borra

LoCA
Thoughts
with
Ben Kolber



Ergo: the 2012 Borra Artist Series Lodi White Wine (\$18), which is composed of 85% Kerner (a German crossing of Riesling and a grape called Trollinger) and 15% Riesling. First thing you need to do is suspend all disbelief: Germanic grapes *can* grow well in Lodi's Mediterranean climate, as long as don't try to turn them into something like "Chardonnay" and understand that you'll never be able to make Bernkasteler Doctor (who can?). In this case, Mr. Niggli – who tells us he came out more with a Spanish "Vinho Verde style of wine," rather than a Germanic one – has crafted a mouth wateringly crisp dry white wine that is as light as a feather on a Southern breeze. The nose is effusively fragrant, like Pippin apple and orange peel, with soothing touches of rising bread dough. The acidity is lemony fresh without being sharp, and rounded out by just a whisper of sweetness. The acid still high enough that the wine finishes dry, with a definite mineral feel to go along with the citrusy fruit.



Mokelumne Glen grown Kerner

In respect to technique, the Borra "Artist" white was stainless steel fermented at 55° F. for three weeks completely on native yeast, and did not see a second in oak: a wine that is all about the grapes – the Kerner picked at 21° Brix, and the Riesling at 20.8° Brix; fermented separately and blended later – which were grown by the Koth family on their Mokelumne Glen estate (for more on the Koth's wonderfully crazy collection of over 40 German and Austrian grapes grown in Lodi, see Mokelumne Glen's beautiful obsessions). Of course, many California white wines are typically "adjusted" for acidity, since California grown grapes usually don't have enough. The Borra white's citrusy acidity is 100% natural – absolutely nothing added, just made from grapes picked early enough to retain it.

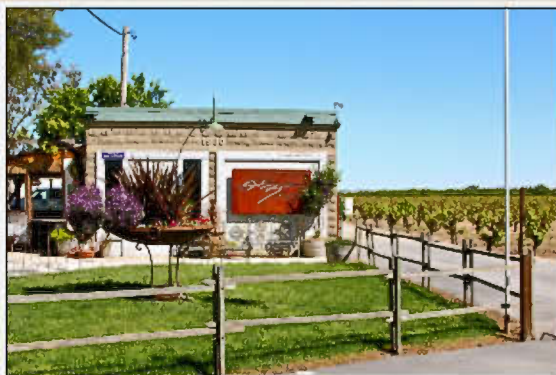
As if that's not enough, even more of a revelation is the 2012 Borra Artist Series Lodi Riesling (\$15). Skeptics, or people who don't know Lodi, would say *unmöglich* – you *cannot* grow Riesling in Lodi. So how do explain this pure, lithe, crisply balanced, refreshingly clean and flowery scented white wine? Also stainless steel fermented on native yeast (zero oak!), the only thing added to the Borra Riesling is a little bit of *süssreserve* (unfermented juice from the same lot of grapes) to give just a touch of sweetness (4 grams/liter) to balance out the natural acidity (grapes picked at 20.8° Brix), lengthening the floral fruit flavor in a barely "off-dry" finish.

The two Artist Series whites are brand new to the Borra portfolio, but they have making immensely popular whites and reds under "Fusion" labels during the past few years. The newly released 2012 Borra Lodi Fusion White Wine (\$17) is a dry, medium bodied, hugely scented blend of Viognier (90%) and Gewürztraminer, suggesting tropical white flowers, lychee and honeydew. 100% native yeast, stainless steel fermentation; with just enough acidity to zip up the naturally aggressive, gripping qualities of these two high-phenolic, perfumed grapes. Even better, the wine finishes clean as a whistle: absolutely none of the bitterness so typical of Viognier or Gewürztraminer based whites grown all over the world.



Borra Rose

Then there is what may be the winery's best Spring release of all: the 2012 Borra Lodi Rosé (\$17): a bright, bosomy, rosy colored, bone dry pink wine, gushing with ripe cherry and strawberry jam-like fruitiness, with intriguing, mind bending undertones of loamy earth – like a garden in a glass! Grapes for the rosé come from the Borra family's own vineyards: Barbera (70%), from the home ranch in Mokelumne River, contributing the wild cherry zing and earthiness; and Syrah (30%) from their Gill Creek Ranch in Clements Hills, piling on the bushels-of-strawberry fruitiness. Again: as real and authentic as a wine can be – no inoculated yeast, no artificial acidity, zero oak... just the pure, unadulterated taste of Lodi earth and fruit!



Borra home ranch

