

# As We Like It

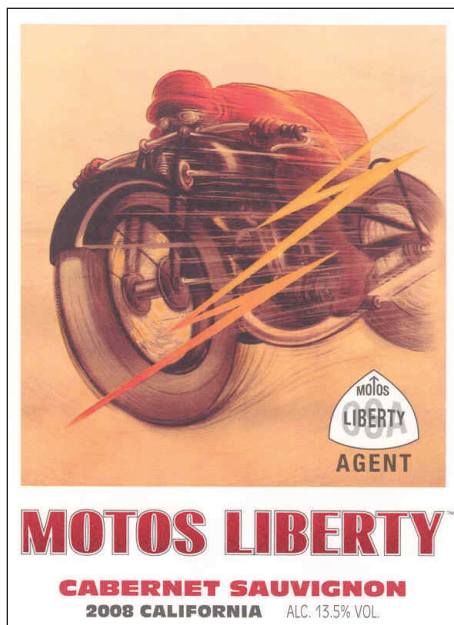
*Motos Liberty, a new California wine brand, offers hard-to-beat value.*

QRW STAFF

The new wine company, Panther Rock, run by a group of three from the Franzia clan — Joey, Damon, and Brian (cousins) — have launched a group of \$10 and \$11 wines that are making news and winning awards — Masked Rider, Wild Hare, and Motos Liberty. It is **Motos Liberty** that has been receiving much of the press lately because it struts its stuff at the **San Francisco Chronicle Wine Competition**, winning “Best of Class/Judge’s Choice” for its 2008 Motos Liberty Chardonnay, a double gold for its 2008 Pinot Grigio (for the \$15 and Under Class), and a gold for its 2007 Merlot (\$10 and Under Class). All the wines are priced around \$10, and represent what has to be some of the best value wines in the industry. John Allbaugh is the winemaker.

Panther Rock sales manager, Joey Franzia, says the company wanted “visually compelling wine labels” (a motorcycle, a masked cowboy rider, a neon colored wild hare sunning itself in a sun chair) and “affordable wines,” designed to “attract Gen X and Gen Y consumers.” The screwcap enclosure bottle comes with tear tabs bearing amusing quotations and are selling nationally at an extraordinary clip. The marketing campaign is working well for a company barely a year old. Franzia’s marketing is skilled and cool with high-impact visibility; he is also quick to point out that his company has no relationship with the Franzia brand boxed wine.

As to the **2008 Motos Liberty** line, there are five major varietals — Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Pinot Noir, Chardonnay, and Pinot Grigio. QRW had no trouble agreeing



with the *San Francisco Chronicle Wine Competition* because at our blind tasting held last April for “California Value Wines (\$12 and Under),” two of the Motos Liberty wines — Merlot and Chardonnay — made the cut for “Best of The Best” (40 Merlots were tasted; 45 Chardonnays). The value/volume wine market is very competitive, and consumers need to know that these wines are well made, offering fruit that is forward, rounded, and finished. The Motos Liberty **Chardonnay** was recognized as one of the top three Chardonnays (straw color, buttery, vanilla notes, with rich tropical fruit); the **Merlot** is not the flabby wine you sometimes get in this price range, and it

has structure, along with strawberry / raspberry notes, a touch of spice, some blueberry, and oak notes; the finish is surprisingly long for a value wine. A wine that should not have escaped our notice, but did, was the **Pinot Grigio**, the perfect summer’s drink. This is a snappy and crispy little number, with pear and apple aromas, and tropical fruit flavors with a satisfying finish. The **Cabernet Sauvignon** had the usual upfront characteristics, but with a surprisingly smooth texture and finish — blackberry, chocolate and coffee all commingled roundly yet firmly. The

**Pinot Noir** was the weakest of the line, although in fairness, it is almost impossible to produce good Pinot Noir at that price. The grape is difficult to grow and not the easiest to source; *terroir* is vital; and vintage is everything. That said, the Motos Liberty Pinot Noir has good upfront fruit, rounded raspberry, and, as with all solid value wines, the wine will not disappoint with a hearty bistro supper. ☞

