

Westside
wine club



West Side Wine Club

September 2015

Monthly Rant

Scheduled Meetings

January 10, 2015

Annual Gala – Archer Winery

January 21, 2015

Crush Talk / Planning

February 18, 2015

Bordeaux Tasting

March 18, 2015

Speaker: Michael Blackard of "Portocork"

April 11, 2015

Tour, Ferraro Cellars

April 22, 2015

Barrel / Carboy Sample Tasting

May 20, 2015

Speaker - Patrick McElligott, Sineann Winery, Chemeketa instructor & wine judge

June 17, 2015

"Open discussion of winemaking issues"

June 27, 2015

Tour, Utopia Vineyards

July 11, 2015

Annual Picnic

August 19, 2015

All Whites Tasting

September 16, 2015

Other Reds Tasting

October 21, 2015

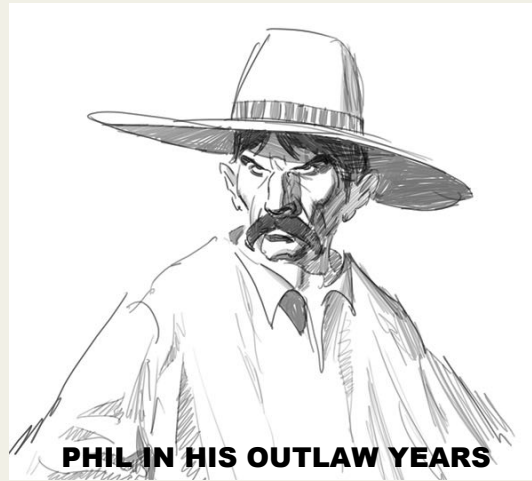
Pinot Noir Tasting

November

No Meeting

December 2, 2015

Planning, Tours, Speakers, Events, Elections



PHIL IN HIS OUTLAW YEARS

The season is on. We received Merlot on August 26th, earliest ever. Brix was 27, so it was well along in its development, and the word from the vineyard in Benton City was that Malic acid levels were low and so was YAN. This is pretty typical of a hot year, same happened last year although fruit wasn't harvested quite so early. I expect this will be common, so watch out that you feed your fermentations properly. The Syrah that arrived a week later had some shrivel, though flavors were fantastic, and brix was likewise 27. Interestingly, and I've seen this with eastern WA/OR fruit a lot, initial TA's were down around 4.0 g/lit. After 10 days of fermentation that rose to a whopping 7.4g/lit. So be careful not to jump the gun on acidifying fruit from out east, potassium in the soil can cause a false TA read to the low side early on, and if Malic is indeed down this can also be a reason for a low number. I know some vineyards in the Willamette have begun harvesting Pinot, but I'm not aware of any club orders coming in yet. That is probably a good thing, we can use the hang time. Whatever is on your docket good luck with it! Phil



Drink Responsibly.
Drive Responsibly.

Information & Trivia

• **Check out** and evaluate a new version of the “must – yeast – nutrient calculator” at nanaimowinemakers.com

• **For Oregon winemakers, 2014 was a near-perfect year:** One of the largest grape harvests on record coupled with a level of quality that the Oregon Wine Board predicts may result in “the vintage of a lifetime.”

• **Randall Graham Announces Crowd funding Campaign to Breed 10,000 New Grape Varieties**

Randall Graham, of Bonny Doon Vineyard, launched a crowd funding campaign to realize his dream of a living lab and vineyard at his 400-acre estate located just outside San Juan Bautista in California's northern Central Coast. Graham hopes to raise \$350,000 with his campaign. The aim is to undertake an ambitious breeding project of 10,000 new grape varieties onsite. Graham has an optimistic vision to undertake, in his words, “the discovery of a new grand cru in the new world.” He envisions planting a vineyard that takes a long view to breed varieties with the innate ability to fight drought and disease pressures in a living laboratory. The model that Graham is proposing is one of fewer inputs (no trellises, end-posts, irrigation, wider vine spacing), and lower output (i.e., lower tonnage due to dry-farming), with significantly higher wine quality as a result. With support from the crowd-funding campaign, a major goal of the endeavor would be to establish a 501(c)3 status which would allow for crowd sharing with the community at large, the findings of the project over the arc of a decade's time. For more information, visit <http://igg.me/at/GrahamCru>

The next regular meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, September 16 at 7:00 PM at Oak Knoll Winery.

Agenda: WSWC members present their best “other reds” This will be all red varieties blind tasting and scoring. Other reds are varieties other than Bordeaux or Pinot Noir (e.g. Tempranillo, Syrah, Petite Sirah, Zinfandel, Sangiovese, Nebbiolo, Barbera, Grenache are not Bordeaux varieties).

1.) Snacks: This will be a potluck; bring a small snack to share.

2.) If you have not paid your dues or signed a waiver, please do so at this meeting.

3.) Bring a wine glass for tasting member wines.

4.) The regular club meeting will begin at 7 pm and end by 9 pm. If you can, get there a little early to help set up. Please help put away chairs and tables at the end of the meeting.

WSWC Website: <http://www.westsidewineclub.com/>

Message Board: <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Westsidewineclub/>

August Meeting Minutes

21 members present

- Bill Brown handed out business cards for “Crush 2 Cellar” a new winery supply in Newburg.
- Phil said merlot is already starting to be picked (19 Aug) at the Chandler Reach vineyard. However, they tend to let their grapes go up to 25 – 26 brix. Most everything else looks to be 2-3 weeks out.
- Don Robinson took wines up to the Washington State Fair in Puyallup for nine WSWC members, thanks Don.
- Results from the Oregon Sate Fair was discussed with predominantly negative comments. Particularly regarding the lack of feedback from the judges.
- Rumor has it that the ETS testing lab has move from McMinnville to Newburg in the same building as Crush2Cellar.

Ted Johnson & Barb Stinger conducted the All whites blind tasting.

Results in the order tasted:

rank

| | | | |
|---|-------------------------------------|------------------------|--------|
| 7 - 2013 Pinot Noir Blanc | Mike Smolak | Swan Vineyard | Silver |
| 9 - 2013 Canidice | Don Robinson | seedless table grape | bronze |
| 4 - 2007 Semillon, Sauv. Blanc | Ken & Barb Stinger | White Bordeaux | silver |
| 6 - NV Orange Muscat, Pinot Gris & Viognier | Jon Kahrs, Jon Brown & Don Robinson | 33% each | silver |
| 1 - 2014 Pinot Gris | Don Robinson | Courting Hill Vineyard | silver |
| 11 - 2013 Pinot Gris | John Hooson & Don Hoffard | | nm |
| 7 - 2013 Viognier | Barb Thomson | | bronze |
| 10 - 2014 Viognier | Paul Boyechko | Lonesome Spring Ranch | bronze |
| 3 - 2014 Viognier | John Hooson & Don Hoffard | | silver |
| 1 - 2014 Orange Muscat | Jon Kahrs | | silver |
| 5 - 2014 Niagra, Riesling | Paul Rogers & Jim Ourada | | silver |
| 12 - 2014 Riesling | Paul Rogers & Jim Ourada | | nm |

Nine Members entered wines in the Washington State Fair in Puyallup. They came away with a total of 27 ribbons. A best of category for white grapes by Mike Smolak with a 2014 Viognier, and 12 blue ribbons, 11 red ribbons and 4 yellow ribbons. See below:

| | | |
|--------------------------|--|---|
| Paul Boyechko | 2013 Merlot | Red Ribbon |
| Paul Boyechko | 2013 Cabernet Sauvignon | Red Ribbon |
| Bill Brown | 2013 Pinot Noir | Blue Ribbon |
| Bill Brown | 2014 Tempranillo Rose' | Red Ribbon |
| Dennis & Marlene Grant | 2011 Tempranillo | Yellow Ribbon |
| Dennis & Marlene Grant | 2011 Sangiovese / Merlot | Red Ribbon |
| Bob Hatt | 2012 Sangiovese | Blue Ribbon |
| Bob Hatt | 2012 Pinot Noir | Red Ribbon |
| Ted Johnson | 2011 Sangiovese / Merlot | Yellow Ribbon |
| Jon Kahrs | 2014 Orange Muscat | Blue Ribbon |
| Jon Kahrs | 2011 Pinot Noir | Blue Ribbon |
| Jon Kahrs | 2010 Mourvedre | Red Ribbon |
| Jon Kahrs | 2014 Orange Muscat / Pinot Gris / Viognier | Red Ribbon |
| Jon Kahrs | 2011 Red Blend | Red Ribbon |
| Don Robinson | 2013 Petit Verdot / Cabernet Franc | Blue Ribbon |
| Don Robinson | 2014 Pinot Gris | Blue Ribbon |
| Don Robinson / Jon Kahrs | 2011 Pinot Noir Blend | Red Ribbon |
| Don Robinson | 2013 Gewürztraminer / Chardonnay | Yellow Ribbon |
| Mike Smolak | 2014 Viognier | Blue Ribbon - Best of Category White Grape |
| Mike Smolak | 2013 White Pinot | Blue Ribbon |
| Mike Smolak | 2013 Cabernet Franc | Red Ribbon |
| Mike Smolak | 2014 Orange Viognier | Yellow Ribbon |
| Ken & Barb Stinger | 2013 Cabernet Sauvignon | Blue Ribbon |
| Ken & Barb Stinger | 2012 Cabernet Franc | Blue Ribbon |
| Ken & Barb Stinger | 2013 Malbec | Blue Ribbon |
| Ken & Barb Stinger | 2013 Red Blend | Blue Ribbon |
| Ken & Barb Stinger | 2013 Mourvedre | Red Ribbon |
| Ken & Barb Stinger | 2013 Pinot Noir | No Ribbon |

Editor: I found this round table discussion to be informative for general winemaking as well as a discussion of additives.

Winemaker Roundtable: Additives

Three winemakers discuss balancing natural methods and using additives to make better wine.

Lance Cutler

WINEMAKING IS PRETTY MUCH a straightforward endeavor. Grapes come into the winery. They are destemmed, crushed or pressed and fermented. Finished wine gets racked, sometimes filtered and then bottled. Simple.

Then again, there are all kinds of things that can interfere with or enhance the process. One of the key contributions that winemakers provide is to decide when to step into the process and when to let it alone. At every step, winemakers can choose to add products that may make a wine taste better, give it darker color or make it more stable in the bottle. We were interested in how winemakers made those choices regarding what to add and what to leave out.

So, we got some very experienced people, sat them down at the roundtable and went through the winemaking process from start to finish. At each stage we asked what additions they made, when they made them and why. The three participating winemakers have close to 100 years of experience making wine.

Jeff Sternfeld is the assistant winemaker at Cline Cellars and Jacuzzi Vineyards

Steve MacRostie founded MacRostie Winery & Vineyards

Charlie Tolbert works for Dick Arrowood, Peter Haywood, Benziger Family Winery, Delicato Family Vineyards and Fetzer Wines, among others.

When grapes arrive at the winery, what is your approach to using SO₂?

MacRostie: There are two ways to look at it: Whether your philosophy is to add no SO₂, or whether you want to make a prescriptive small addition of SO₂ just to ward off any errant microbes that might affect your wine. If there are serious problems with the fruit, then you would want to increase the SO₂ addition.

Sternfeld: We have a protocol that all red grapes, when they arrive at the hopper, get a 40 ppm addition of SO₂. The whites go directly to the press without any SO₂. After the juice settles for two days, we will add about 50 ppm SO₂ the day we add our yeast. We take the temperature down to about 50° F during settling and then add the yeast four to six hours after our SO₂ addition. If the grapes come in moldy, which doesn't happen often, we may increase the SO₂ a little bit.

Tolbert: One school of thought is that by using little or no SO₂, any oxidative things, like browning occurring in the juice, will fall out and not present itself as a problem with the wine.

MacRostie: So by using no SO₂ or minimizing it, you allow lots of browning to go on, which we know doesn't seriously affect the long-term quality of the wine and will eliminate future browning issues.

Tolbert: You know, if we go back in time when everyone had a new winery, we got away from any SO₂ additions with reds or whites. In the intervening time, we encountered problems. I will add 35 to 45 ppm to sound red grapes in the fermenter. With white grapes I would wait until post-fermentation unless the grapes presented a challenge, in which case I would bump up the addition and add it sooner.

Are you adding anything during settling of white juice?

MacRostie: Yes, we will add bentonite to white juice as it comes out of the press, about 1 pound per 1,000 gallons in the press pan. It helps settle the juice before going to barrel for fermentation and gives a good kick for protein stability of the wine.

Sternfeld: For whites, we usually add bentonite when the fermentation is about 10° to 15° Brix. Generally that addition will be 3 pounds per thousand and is used for both clarification and heat stability. After fermentation, we very rarely have to add more bentonite for heat stability.

Tolbert: I will add a couple pounds per thousand, just before the yeast goes in, because you already have it all mixing up. The primary reason is for heat stability. You are going to have to add it anyway. Instead of having to add more when it is wine, why not get a head start on it while it is juice.

What about enzymes during settling or fermentation?

Tolbert: Recently, I'm using color enzymes on red wines. Where those enzymes come in handy is when you are getting grapes from a more challenging location. If you are growing grapes on a hillside in Sonoma Valley, you are not going to have a problem getting color out of your red grapes. But if you are growing Merlot in Merced, then you are faced with a challenge extracting color. It's kind of like, "Why not? Why not get everything you can, color-wise, from that grape."

MacRostie: There are also a whole host of clarifying enzymes that make for easier extraction of juice from white grapes. We have experimented with them and generally don't use them, but they exist. The only red wine we produce these days is Pinot Noir; and like Charlie, we work on experiments using color-extracting enzymes.

Our results show that it is not completely predictable, when you compare fermentation lots of the same grapes with and without the enzymes. You assume the enzyme will give you darker, more tannic wines, but that often doesn't happen. It may also produce wine that is inferior or superior to the control in unexpected ways. I still think color-extracting enzymes are a useful tool in fine winemaking.

Sternfeld: If I don't state this, then our winemaker will have my head. It is the winery's philosophy not to add any tannins or enzymes during fermentation or the aging process. For the most part, since we are using very ripe Rhône grapes and Zinfandels, we don't really have an issue with color. And we have Alicante Bouschet and a bit of Petite Sirah; so if we need more tannin and color, we can use that.

MacRostie: That was more or less my philosophy, to add nothing, but the color enzymes are an exception. One more thing, if you have a Botrytis year making white wine, and you have rotten fruit despite all best efforts to sort, PVPP can be used effectively to get rid of browning precursors.

Tolbert: In a year like 2011, where there was a lot of rain-damaged fruit, I think there was a lot of lysozyme used. Who knows what is on that fruit when it is fuzzy?

MacRostie: Lysozyme can help and be used to prevent growth of *pediococcus* or *lactobacillus* bacteria, which might cause high volatile acidity.

How about using grape tannins or oak tannins to set color in fruit?

MacRostie: We experimented with it very briefly several years ago, but it is not a practice we use. I am amazed at the variety of products out there in this category, but I am not a believer and don't use them.

Tolbert: I'm not using them because the fruit I'm working with today doesn't need a boost. I have used them working with large producers. We would co-ferment wood chips, hoping it would help mask pyrazine. It was hard to tell, if it worked, because I think it sneaks back in later, but you've got to do something.

Sternfeld: We don't use any of that at Cline or Jacuzzi, but at a different winery we tried manipulating tannin and color on high-end Cabernets. We had three different tanks from the same vineyard with different tannin additions. My job was to check the phenolic levels. In each of those tanks the tannin and color levels changed and were different almost exactly as the manufacturers had predicted. However, after three months in barrel, there was almost no difference. The difference disappeared, and it was the characteristics of the particular vineyard that showed through. So the effects of some of these additives are just temporary.

Native yeast or commercial yeast?

Unanimous: Absolutely commercial!

Tolbert: I choose yeast strains with a specific purpose and based on past performance. What I am looking for is a yeast that is going to complete the fermentation. There is nothing more discouraging than a stuck fermentation. Then, I am looking for characteristics from that yeast strain that are desirable. I will use a different yeast strain for Zinfandel than I will use for Merlot.

MacRostie: I have flirted with some native yeast fermentations, but my experience showed issues with their ability to finish, and I didn't see enough qualitative difference worth taking the risk. We use different selections of yeast in various lots. The goal is to blend these different lots to gain complexity.

Sternfeld: Considering that between our two wineries we bring in 38 different varieties of grapes and there are more than 52 different types of wine, completion of fermentation is our number one priority. The Zinfandels and Rhône varieties coming in from Oakley are extremely difficult to work with because they come in at very high Brix and they were planted in very sandy soils, so they come in with very little nitrogen. Preventing a stuck fermentation is very important. Depending on the variety, I might use eight to 10 different yeasts. I use various yeast strains for the Zinfandels, but I might do some Rhône lots with yeast strains promoted as Mediterranean-style yeast. For the Italian varieties I will select an Italian-style yeast that has been proven to be good for Sangiovese versus Nebbiolo or Sagrantino. We use different yeast for different purposes and flavors.

How are you using nutrients?

Sternfeld: Especially with our Oakley grapes we have a very aggressive nutrient program. We will do three different additions using nutrient blends of Superfood, Superferm, Startup and DAP. Sonoma County grapes don't need as many nutrients, so we may just do one or two additions during fermentation.

MacRostie: Yeah, I would say aggressive is our headline as well. We learned the hard way, as winemakers, how to dial in all of the nuances of nutrition for a happy and healthy fermentation. We use Goferm and a general nutrient, a micro-nutrient and lastly a bit of DAP. We run YAN numbers to help direct us. Even if the numbers are satisfactory, we will add some

nutrients prescriptively as well.

Tolbert: You have to adjust the nutrient levels. Working with organically grown fruit, we were prohibited from using DAP, so I got very comfortable using CCOF-approved products and achieving the same results. I think it is better not to add it all at once but in several stages and never below 8° Brix because you want it to be consumed.

Sternfeld: If our fermentations start to stick, we might use 100 percent autolyzed yeast additive and yeast hulls, but I found even adding a nutrient blend with DAP in it will finish the fermentation. Those high-Brix, low nitrogen grapes just need a lot of nutrition.

Do you add H2O when the grapes come in?

Unanimous: Always!

Tolbert: We're just continuing the irrigation cycle. Especially with Zinfandel, for example, which can be 24.5° Brix in the crusher, is 25.5° the next day, is 26.5° the third day and the Brix goes up even at the beginning of fermentation. If you are not adding water, then you will end up with 18 percent alcohol or a stuck fermentation. It is a no brainer with Zinfandel. The trick is not over-adding or under-adding. The rule of thumb is 7 gallons of water per ton for 1° Brix drop, but the challenge is that the higher the Brix, the harder it is to know what the real sugar is. I would never add post-fermentation.

MacRostie: Charlie covered it well. If you are picking grapes based on the winemaker's palate and you are tasting grapes, making a timely pick at say 25.5° Brix, you might be concerned about 15.5 percent alcohol. A modest amount of water can be added to achieve an alcohol level that gives proper balance to your wine. In California, we always have sugar ripeness that gets ahead of other things, so we are faced with that challenge every year. Picking ripe fruit with good tasting grapes and delivering balanced wine without excessive alcohol is the ultimate goal.

Sternfeld: With our high-Brix grapes, we are often dealing with 26° to 28° Brix. We usually let it soak overnight before we do our final Brix analysis to determine how much water to add. We would theoretically like to start fermentation around 25.5° Brix. We'll look at it 24 hours later to see if it needs a bit more. We have to use water, or it won't ferment to dryness.

Do you make acid additions and why?

Sternfeld: We also make acid additions as appropriate for the grapes. A lot of grapes coming in are low acid and high pH. We try to get the acids up to 0.7 TA. Then after the fermentation is over, before we start putting it on wood, we'll do a second tartaric adjustment if it is required.

MacRostie: We have access to a proprietary software program that allows us to do a buffering titration on the must to predict how much tartaric acid you need to add to the lot to achieve the desired pH after malolactic completes. It works pretty well. It has taken some time to get to know it, but we've learned to work with it. Like Jeff, we sometimes need to make tweaks after fermentation.

Tolbert: I've pretty much gotten away from adding acid. Sometimes you are not happy with the TA number. It might be lower than you are used to. To me pH is more important, and I don't get too nervous unless I see like a Syrah around 4.0 pH, but I live with what I get, pretty much. To me it is about, "How does the wine taste?" more than what the analysis says.

What do you add for malolactic fermentation, if anything?

Sternfeld: We always have high alcohol wines to deal with, so the first juice that is produced goes to an inoculum tank. We add the malolactic bacteria cultures to that with nutrients. Some years it works great, others not so much. We use that inoculum to dose the red tanks as they finish alcohol fermentation. Then we use some of the freshly pressed off juice to re-feed the inoculum.

Tolbert: I've had good luck with the Christian Hansen Viniflora CH 16. Although it is against conventional wisdom, I like to inoculate concurrent with fermentation at around 12° to 15° Brix. The fermentation is in the ideal spot for the malolactic bacteria to grow because it is warm, there's lots of stuff for it to eat, and the alcohol is not too high. The risk is that if the ML finishes before the primary, you could have potential problems with VA, but I haven't encountered that.

MacRostie: We used to do that but no more. We wait until our wines are dry before inoculating. We do use both types of Christian Hansen Viniflora. one for lower alcohol and one for higher alcohol. We also do full malolactic on the Chardonnay, which can be hard to get through ML.

What types of fining agents have you used or do you know about?

MacRostie: Our winery does very little fining on red wine. Egg whites are preferred, but we don't normally have tannin issues with Pinot Noir. Chardonnays do require some fine tuning. Isinglass is the go-to product to clarify before bottling. We often use bentonite at the same time. Lately we have used some casein, which helps prevent browning and darkening of the wine. It keeps the color fresh and straw-like as long as possible. We use potassium bitartrate (KHT) for cold stability. The new carboxymethylcellulose is intriguing, but I have not worked with it to provide cold stability.

Sternfeld: We use no fining agents outside of bentonite for the whites, but every tank of white and red wine goes through cold stabilization before any oak aging. We add the KHT and crank the chillers down to 28° to 30°. The wine is usually cold stable in two to three weeks.

Tolbert: I've gotten away from fining any red wine because the new processing equipment gives more whole berries and the presses are so efficient that we are not getting excessive tannins. For white wines, we do heat stability. I have seen some real success on cold stability with electrodialysis at a larger producer. It is one pass, and it is done. You are not chilling the wine down and then heating it back up to bottle using enormous amounts of energy. The taste tests we did were triangulated, and no one could tell the difference.

MacRostie: Unfortunately, that is cost-prohibitive for a small winery.

What is being added to your wines during aging?

Sternfeld: All of our oak flavoring is done with oak staves in tank. That usually takes one to three months, depending on the wine and wine style we are trying to produce. We do have several thousand oak barrels, but they are older. All of the wine rotates between the tanks and the barrels. We make sure that the high-end and Ancient Vine series go into oak for the micro-ox aging that you can only get from barrels. We have experimented with bags of oak cubes instead of tank staves but haven't changed protocols.

Tolbert: Where I am now, we are using barrels. I like to use between 25 and 30 percent new barrels for Zinfandel. For Merlot, I like 35 to 45 percent new oak. I do incorporate barrel staves, not because of the economics but because I like that element of the particular producer I am working with. It is a small percentage. It allows you to tune up wines a couple of months before bottling, which is a very useful tool to have.

MacRostie: Current practice at our winery is 100 percent French oak barrels for aging our red wine and fermenting and aging our whites. We use 20 percent new oak for Chardonnay and 35 percent new oak for Pinot Noir. We have used staves in neutral barrels in the past, which worked well, but trying staves in small tanks for white fermentations and aging proved unsatisfactory.

Do you add CO2 or other gases to your wine?

MacRostie: It is something you should pay attention to with any wine. There are optimum levels of CO2 for various types of white wine and red wines too, so I think every thoughtful winemaker should pay attention to CO2 levels. You can either take it out or in some rare cases put it back in.

Sternfeld: We have optimum levels of CO2 for our wines at bottling. We will strip it out with nitrogen if needed. We also adjust for DO at bottling.

What kinds of additives are used to solve problems?

MacRostie: The two that come up on my radar screen are *Brettanomyces* and sulfides. There is a proprietary product to deal with Brett. A single lot of Cabernet for a consulting client showed significant levels of 4-EP and 4-EG. Sure enough, there were active cells of Brett shown by plating. I used this product, and it did work. It was a fining agent, and it contained the viability of the cells growing in the wine although it did not reduce the Brett character. As for sulfides, we now have tools to determine what type of sulfides are in a wine. It may be expensive, but they can tell you exactly what you have. Copper sulfate solves most of those problems. The real meddlesome are those with the disulfide bond that is so hard to get rid of and requires some ascorbic acid to break the bond so the copper sulfate can get at it.

Tolbert: Brett, VA and sulfides. You have to head these things off at the pass. You know that SO2 and colder temperatures inhibit Brett. There are some vicious strains of VA that can be very challenging, especially when you are shipping wine around in tanker trucks, which increases the risk of contamination.

Cross-flow filtration is pretty effective at removing those bugs causing VA along with elevated SO2 and cold temperature. A friend of mine used to say, "SO2 is the poor man's heat exchanger."

With the reductive compounds, that is where prevention is really helpful. If you can prevent that from starting, whether it comes from residual sulfur on grapes or nutrient deficiencies in the fermentation, catching that early is essential. When you make CCOF wines, you can't use copper, so it is critical that you prevent that stuff.

Sternfeld: Well, so far, we've never had a Brett problem. Our problems would be sulfide, which we will treat with copper if necessary. VA is probably our big bugaboo, especially with the older barrels. We are now totally automated for SO2 checks. Every barrel lot and every tank gets checked every month for SO2 levels and VA.

The other thing that we can do is remove high VA wine out of the barrel lots. Because we own the Olive Press, any nasty barrels go to an off-site barn where we let it go completely over to vinegar and then sell the vinegar.

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This proved to be an interesting roundtable. All three winemakers were candid and forthcoming about how they used various additives. Even though there were definite stylistic differences in the wines they chose to produce, they dealt with many of the same problems and decisions. They all agreed, and I believe them, that they only used additives in an attempt to make better wine.

I noticed that most of the additives used were pretty standard, but the ways they used them varied a bit. They might add them earlier or later in the process, but for the most part they used similar products in similar ways.

Although it was not stated directly, I got the definite feeling that these winemakers tried to make their wines as naturally as they could. Over the years, they had gone through periods using no SO₂. They had tried native yeast fermentations and native malolactic fermentations. They experimented with different enzymes, tannin additives and color fixers, and they had been burned. As natural as they preferred to be with their winemaking, they were more and more sticking with what worked. They were reluctant to believe the wild promises of product suppliers, preferring to run their own experiments and judge for themselves. Changes to their winemaking regimens occurred slowly and bit by bit.

Maybe this is the gift that experience brings to winemakers. They have worked on the edges, lived dangerously and now use what they have learned to make the best wine possible. They add things they think work well and make their wine better. They choose not to add things with unproven promises or short-term effects. This is a sensible way to make wine, so long as experience doesn't make you too conservative

There is a fine balance between making wine decisions based on what you have learned, and making wine that is controlled and produced to be "safe." It seems that some of the most interesting wines are made involving quite a bit of risk. Pushing that boundary makes a lot of sense, as long as you learn from your experience and adjust your winemaking accordingly.



Winemaking Lures the Wealthy, but Not With Profits

By PAUL SULLIVAN

If there is one investment that has more to do with the heart than the head, it's vineyards. It is also one that lends itself to jokes whose punch lines are always about losing money.

But that risk has never deterred wealthy people. Nor has the current economic malaise damped their spirits. These are people who made fortunes in profitable industries like shower doors and title insurance but define success in the winemaking business as breaking even. And most seem to accept the prospect of losing a manageable amount of money over many years.

Don Ross, founder and chairman of Cardinal Shower Enclosures, offers a particularly telling example. He bought 2.5 acres in the Napa Valley in 2003. It came with rows of cabernet sauvignon vines. A lifelong wine lover — he has 7,000 bottles in his cellar — he started making wine under the label Shibumi Knoll. Then, he bought some chardonnay grapes from another vineyard and made that, too.

The business was going along modestly until 2005, when Mr. Ross gave a bottle of the chardonnay to his golf pro who passed it on to his next client, an influential wine critic. That critic later rated the wine a 97 out of 100 in a blind tasting, and Mr. Ross's phone started to ring.

Today, his wine is served at the French Laundry and other fine restaurants in Napa Valley and one in Tennessee, and he sells the rest through his wine club. You would think Mr. Ross has a profitable side business. Alas, no.

"This wine business, we don't make any money," Mr. Ross said. "I do it for love. I sell shower doors for money." He said the costs of making a high-quality but small-production wine make it difficult to turn a profit. There are the salaries of the vineyard manager and the winemaker and also the costs of the bottles, labels and corks.

Yet Mr. Ross's story is far from a cautionary tale in the wine-growing regions of California. It is more of a model. Larry Hayes, whose company Mulberry Trample specializes in discreetly selling a producer's excess wine so the prices of labeled bottles do not drop, said aspiring winemakers would be better off buying a piece of land they like and letting that dictate what wine gets made.

He said the big risk for most wealthy enthusiasts is buying too much land too quickly at too high a price and then thinking that they will be able to get whatever wine they make distributed to wine stores.

"These people really don't have the access or the ability to get distribution through the wine distribution network," Mr. Hayes said. "It's a tough, tough deal. Everyone wants brands that they know. If you're a small producer, that distribution is not available to you. And if you get in, you're not the biggest fish in that pond."

Many people think if they can get a high score, as Mr. Ross did, then everything will be set. But a good review is not something that can be bought.

Aaron Pott, a winemaker and consultant in Napa Valley, said he received calls all the time from people saying they wanted to make a 100-point wine and were willing to pay to do it.

"My first warning is, don't go into the business looking for a certain score," he said. "If you're unrealistic, you're going to be disappointed."

Mr. Pott, who charges a monthly consulting fee of \$8,000, said he weeded out people who did not have their own vineyards but figured they could buy the grapes they needed to make their wine. "You're giving them false hopes," he said. "If they're just buying fruit from someone else, it's not very long-lasting. The contracts could end or the prices could go up."

Even winemakers who seem to be doing everything right struggle with distribution. Bill Foley, who made his fortune in title insurance and other real estate businesses, owns nine wineries in California, one in Washington State and two in New Zealand, and he hopes to buy five more on the West Coast. This year, his Foley Family Wines will sell 1.3 million cases. His distribution, he said, "rides along with Sebastiani," a lower-end brand. His high-end Chalk Hill wines, with 40,000 cases a year, would be a blip on a distributor's screen without the Sebastiani association.

Still, he said he was running his wine business as he did Fidelity National Financial, a holding company he helped build. When he buys a vineyard — he is known in wine circles for his acquisitiveness — he consolidates all the back-office operations, like accounting and wine club management, to free up resources to promote and improve the wines. Having spent tens, if not hundreds of millions, of dollars buying wineries since 2007, he has yet to turn a profit, but the wineries are at least covering their costs. Still, he said he was glad he had done it. "When you're out in the vineyards, drinking your own wines, with your kids, it's fun," Mr. Foley said.

Of all the winemakers and vineyard owners I spoke to, the one who has the least risky and most sustainable model of building his business was Fred Schweiger. The only catch was it took him 51 years to get Schweiger Vineyards where it is today.

Mr. Schweiger, who owned a construction company until two years ago, bought the original eight acres in 1961 for \$250,000; he said that parcel alone is now worth \$3.2 million.

In the intervening years, he cleared the land, planted the vineyards and built all the structures himself on what is now a 55-acre property. Before the vineyard started making its own wine in 1994, he sold the grapes to other wineries at a profit. All along, he paid cash for every expansion until 2002, when he borrowed \$2.5 million to upgrade equipment in the winery. By then, he said, that loan was only 10 percent of the value of the vineyard.

“From an economic point of view, it takes 16 to 20 years to make a profit,” Mr. Schweiger said. “I didn’t hear that until we were in the winery business for five or six years. It wasn’t until last year that we made a profit.”

For those with less patience, there are other ways to try to reduce the risk and financial outlay. Some people eschew the romance of roaming through their own fields and just set up a winery to make and sell wine.

John Sweazey, who made his money in the mortgage business, said he wanted a winery only after he sold his company in 2003. He bought one in Sonoma and called it Anaba.

“Vineyards didn’t appeal to me because I never really wanted to be a farmer,” he said. “Farmers are never happy.” But he found a different set of challenges in having a stand-alone winery.

“Making high-quality wine was easier to do than selling high-quality wine,” he said. “This brand came out with an unknown name in mid-2008 and we struggled.”

Six years into the venture, though, he said the winery was approaching the break-even mark, but it took twice as long as he planned.

One thing these businessmen-vintners share is an amateur’s enthusiasm. They have enough money to hire experts and the business sense to watch profits and losses. It would be easy to criticize investing in vineyards as a rich man’s vanity. But it has always taken a lot of money to make wine. And, on occasion, that investment pays off.

André Mentzelopoulos, who made his fortune in real estate and grocery stores, made a good bet. He bought Château Margaux, one of the most important French vineyards, in 1977. At the time, there had been a string of bad vintages in Bordeaux, and the chateau had lingered on the market for two years.

His daughter Corinne said he paid about \$15 million for Château Margaux and spent the last three years of his life and many millions of dollars on renovations and reviving a great wine. In 1982, two years after he died and Ms. Mentzelopoulos took over, the vintage was called superb by the critic Robert Parker, and the lust for Bordeaux was on.

Ms. Mentzelopoulos said that despite all her family’s success — a 2003 transaction valued the chateau at \$587 million — she still worried.

“You can’t predict anything,” Ms. Mentzelopoulos said. “I don’t know the quantity or the quality of the next vintage. I don’t know my sales or my profit. And if it rained from now until October, there would be no wine to speak of, yet the investment I have to make is still the same.”

It is no wonder that she said that the only time she relaxed was when “the grapes are nice and safe in the cellar.”



Calif.—This year Trinchero Family Estates is celebrating the 40th anniversary of the inaugural release of its white Zinfandel wine.

The pink, slightly sweet wine was pretty much lightning in a bottle for the once-small, family-owned winery that had just been getting by since brothers John and Mario Trinchero bought Sutter Home Winery in 1948. Since its almost instant success, the Trincheros have sold \$6 billion worth of white Zinfandel and still sell between 3 million and 3.5 million cases of the wine per year.

West Side Wine Club

Leadership Team – 2015

- President: **Phil Bard** phil@philbard.com
- Set agenda for the year
- Establish leadership team
- Assure that objectives for the year are met
- Set up agenda and run meetings

- Treasurer: **Barb Thomson** bt.grapevine@frontier.com
- Collect dues and fees, update membership list with secretary
 - Pay bills

- Secretary: **Ken and Barb Stinger** kbstinger@frontier.com
- Communicate regularly about club activities and issues
 - Monthly newsletter
 - Keep updated list of members, name tags and other data

- Chair of Education: **Mike Smolak** Mike@NWRetire.com
- Arrange speakers for our meetings

- Chair for Tastings: **Ted Johnson**, tedj52@msn.com
- Conduct club tastings
 - Review and improve club tasting procedures

- Chair of Winery/Vineyard Tours: **Bill Brown** bbgoldieguy@gmail.com
- Select wineries to visit
 - Arrange tours
 - Cover logistics (food and money)

- Chair of Group Purchases: **Jonathan Brown** jonabrown@gmail.com Bob Hatt & Jim Ourada helpers.
- Makes the arrangements to purchase, collect, and distribute
- Grape purchases
 - Supplies – These should be passed to the President for distribution

- Chair of Competitions: **Don Robinson** don.robinson.pdx@gmail.com
- Encourage club participation in all amateur competitions available. Make information known through Newsletter, e-mail and Facebook

- Chairs for Social Events: **Marlene Grant** denmargrant@gmail.net Barbara Stinger & Mindy Bush – Helpers
- Awards Gala / Holliday parties

- Web Content Editor: **Rick Kipper** kips@lycos.com

Webmaster: **David Ladd**