

THE SONOMA WINE JOURNAL

ISSUE 2 – POST-HARVEST 2007

Greetings. This is the second issue of **THE SONOMA WINE JOURNAL**, our post-harvest extravaganza. And in terms of both the quality of the fruit picked this harvest in Sonoma County, and the content of this issue, we could not be more excited.

Harvest Report 2007

Why is 2007 destined to be a special vintage in Sonoma? First, in stark contrast to the heavy rains that drenched Sonoma from January through early April of 2006, 2007 started off with an unusually dry winter and spring, which left most of Sonoma with rainfall totals that were approximately 30% below their seasonal average. Consequently, most vines in Sonoma County kicked into action a week or two early, spurred on by the shorter rain season. As of June 21, 2007, most grape varieties had already completed their bloom. By that time, it was clear that this year's viticultural daemon would be shatter, a condition where a significant number of berries do not form, leaving a tiny green nub where the grape should have grown, and winegrowers complaining about a lack of fruit on the rachis of the clusters. Although shatter results in fewer grapes, it does not negatively affect the overall quality of the wine, and if anything, the lower yields result in more concentrated wine. Shatter and shot berries were reported in nearly every AVA in Sonoma, portending lower yields than 2006.

Second, in addition to the lack of berries, many vintners and winegrowers saw unusually small berries. In the Russian River Valley, Green Valley, and Sonoma Coast, I saw Pinot Noir berries the size of small blueberries, and cluster morphology reminiscent of small pine cones. Consequently, yields this year were off by 25% in many areas of Sonoma, however the low juice-to-skin ratio in the berries confirmed that this year's wines will have excellent concentration. The other potential issue this year was a brief August heat spike combined with a lack of fog in the Russian River Valley. On August 23, the temperatures in Sebastopol reached 96F, and this mini-spike compelled a number of wineries to bring in their Pinot Noir and Chardonnay fruit between August 25 and August 31. For these winegrowers, the concern was that if the heat continued, the fruit would dehydrate and start to raisin, leading to overripe flavors in the wines, and also lower acidity in the grapes. Most of those who waited to pick after this mini-spike harvested their remaining fruit before the rains hit around the third week of October. I have spoken with dozens of Sonoma winemakers, almost all of whom are ecstatic about the quality of the vintage. All in all, it looks like the 2007 harvest will have finished about two weeks earlier than 2006 for most Sonoma County growers. Congratulations to all growers and wineries on a high-quality harvest.

This issue features articles on Fred Scherrer, Scherrer Winery, Arnot-Roberts Wines, Shane Wine Cellars, and Freeman Winery, and tasting notes on dozens of other wines.

OUR PHILOSOPHY OF WINE TASTING AND WINE CRITICISM

Our philosophy of wine tasting, our “ABC’s” if you will, are as follows:

Amplitude: In winespeak, this means the state of being full-bodied, large-framed, and broad on the palate. Many great wines, but not all of them, have this extra degree of size without seeming heavy or overbearing in the mouth, and this contrast sets them apart from other wines. Amplitude is generally a positive descriptor, especially when a wine is full-bodied without being heavy.

It is easy, however, when tasting wines in a “blind” setting (when you do not know the identity of the producer), to be attracted to a wine that by virtue of its sheer size and extraction stands out amongst its peers. This is one of the greatest dangers in wine criticism. Simply put, a bigger wine is not necessarily a better wine. Amplitude can be a function of over-extraction, high alcohol, or overripeness in the grapes that made the wine. In such cases, the enormity of the wine may overwhelm the tastebuds, and mask certain deficiencies. Thus, while amplitude is generally a positive trait, a wine that is all size and without nuance can never be considered a truly great wine.

Balance: This is the most important criterion for any wine. A wine is balanced where the alcohol, fruitiness, tannins, acidity, and oak (if used in the winemaking process) co-exist in harmony.

Character: Admittedly, character is a highly-subjective descriptor. What we mean by character is that the wine should tell an interesting, engaging, and perhaps unique story through its color, smell, and taste. For some people, a wine’s character is derived from its ability to clearly communicate the attributes of the geographic site (such as soil type, climate, and altitude) where the grapes were grown that went into the wine. The combination of such geographic factors is referred to as “terroir.” People who celebrate terroir generally believe that the greatest measure of a wine is its ability to clearly express the vineyard from which it came. For others, a wine’s character is based on its intrinsic aromatic and flavor profile, and its ability to provide drinking pleasure, regardless of site expression. Whether a wine tells a story of terroir, or offers a hedonistic punch of juicy fruit flavors, so long as the wine offers an interesting and pleasurable drinking experience, it can be said to have a praiseworthy character.

Depth of Flavor: A wine’s depth is a measure of its concentration of fruit. A great wine should not taste watery or diluted, but should be packed with ripe fruit flavors. A wine with admirable depth possesses a richness that goes beyond the initial palate sensation, and is thus said to be a “multi-layered” wine.

Varietal Correctness: A varietal is a specific variety of grape, such as Syrah, Pinot Noir, Chardonnay, Cabernet Sauvignon, etc. The doctrine of varietal correctness holds that a Syrah should taste like a Syrah, and not a Cabernet Sauvignon.

Wine Criticism: Our philosophy of wine reviewing is premised upon the principle of laudatory criticism: if we like a wine, we write about it; if we do not like a wine, we do not waste our time or our readers' by chastising it in print. As noted below, the wines we enjoy are rated at least 80 points. Accordingly, although we provide categories for wines rated below 80 points, they will almost never be written about in these pages.

SCORING METHODOLOGY

Wines are scored from 1-100 based on the following scale:

95-100: A degree of excellence that is so rare as to be legendary.

90-94: An excellent wine, which exhibits varietal correctness, character, admirable depth of flavor, balance, and nuance. An excellent wine should be "complete", which is to say that it has an attractive initial flavor on the tastebuds (in wine parlance, this is called the "attack"), a persistence of flavor and richness beyond the initial taste (or "mid-palate presence"), with the taste continuing to pleasantly haunt the mouth well after the wine has been swallowed (the "finish" or "back end" of a wine).

85-89: A very good wine, offering varietal correctness and an attractive character.

80-84: A good wine, varietally correct.

75-79: Drinkable, but not particularly memorable.

70-74: Drinkable, but not particularly enjoyable.

65-69: Drinkable, but very disappointing.

0-64: Simply not worth drinking in our opinion.

When a "+" is added to a rating, this indicates that the wine shows a likelihood of improving over time. A "Judgment Reserved" connotation is applied where the quality of the wine is not able to be perceived due to a defect or flaw that in all likelihood may not be representative of other samples of that bottling.

WINE SAMPLES

The Sonoma Wine Journal welcomes wine samples for review and publication. Samples should be sent to: The Sonoma Wine Journal, c/o Mr. John Dawson, 57 Brushy Ridge Road, New Canaan, CT 06840. We may also be contacted at sonomawinejournal@gmail.com or at (707) 536-8541.

The Most Humble Rock Star You've Never Met

Fred Scherrer, Scherrer Winery

Through a cloud of beige dust kicked up from the gravel road, I see the outline of an industrial building that could not be more out of place here on the floor of the bucolic Green Valley. It's mid-afternoon, and the curtilage around the no-frills structure is so devoid of activity that the site looks almost abandoned. A knock on the side door goes unanswered. I step inside, into what appears to be a dimly lit recording studio. There is a rack of electric guitars on the side of the wall immediately to my left (is that a Gibson hollow-body?), a keyboard and microphone stand in the middle of the room, and on the right, an effects rack filled with various recording equipment. As I put down my oversized Latin Percussion conga, a door on the far side of the room swings open, and I catch the faint smell of wine and the warm smile of the most humble rock star you've never met, Fred Scherrer of Scherrer Winery.

Soft spoken, tall, and gangly, with a scruffy dark beard and lumberjack shirt, Fred bears a close resemblance to Beastie Boy bassist MCA (Adam Yauch) circa *Paul's Boutique*. By the time that album was released (1989), Fred, a third-generation winegrower, had already studied enology at U.C. Davis, worked at Field Stone Winery, put in three years at Greenwood Ridge in Mendocino County, and begun a stint as associate winemaker at Dehlinger Winery. During his tenure with Tom Dehlinger, Fred gained an understanding and appreciation of the nuances of site character in the Goldridge-laden soil of Dehlinger's vineyards off of Vine Hill Road, which are located in the northeastern portion of Sebastopol, only a couple of miles from the warehouse where Fred and his wife, Judi, now make their own wine.

Fred established Scherrer Winery in 1991, while still serving as associate winemaker at Tom Dehlinger's eponymous winery. Dehlinger allowed Fred to make and store the first couple of vintages of the Scherrer wines at the Dehlinger facility. Ed Scherrer, Fred's father and a long-time Alexander Valley grape grower, supplied Fred with Zinfandel and other grapes under a deferred payment schedule, in exchange for which Fred ultimately paid more for the fruit than his father would have received from other buyers. Scherrer's first vintage amounted to 600 cases, and current production is around 4000 cases annually.

After an hour-plus jam session in the music studio/computer room, during which Fred displayed his mastery with the guitar and his fondness for classic rock (we covered Cream, the Rolling Stones, and the Beatles, switching off vocal duties), we moved into the central barrel room to discuss Fred's winemaking philosophy. To this day, Fred still does all the cellar work himself, and makes wines that he "wants to taste." He finds making Pinot Noir the most fun, Cabernet Sauvignon the easiest, and Zinfandel the most difficult, the latter assertion one that I have heard from a number of winemakers in Sonoma. In terms of his French oak barrel program, Fred thinks that Rousseau barrels and Francois Freres barrels work especially well together. Tasting through his wines, it is

clear that Fred places a premium on balance, purity, and site expression over flashy oak and high alcohol.

Scherrer's most recent bottling amounted to 1800 cases of Pinot Noir, 900 cases of Zinfandel, 90 cases of Syrah, and the remainder divided between Cabernet Sauvignon, Chardonnay, and a dry Rose. Fred believes that his Russian River Valley blend is typically as good or better than his single vineyard wines, and tasting his easygoing cherry and sassafras dominated RRV bottling, it is hard to argue otherwise. Moreover, consumers should take note, as the Scherrer Sonoma County and Russian River Valley Pinot Noir bottlings are consistently THE best Pinot Noir values in the U.S. market.

As for his 2006's, Fred sees it as a good vintage, with some variability based upon yields and botrytis. He did not use any whole clusters for his Syrah in '06 because he felt the raw materials with which he worked were not appropriate. In 2006, and in most vintages, his Pinot Noirs are aged in 30 to 40% new French oak. Fred uses practically no new oak in his Syrah. All of the Scherrer Chardonnay goes through malolactic fermentation.

Fred's finest wine to date might well be the 2004 Hallberg Vineyard Pinot Noir, which is comprised of grapes grown at a site owned by Emeritus Vineyards, not far from the Scherrer Winery. The Hallberg Vineyard is located on the Graton/Sebastopol border, on the Green Valley side (the west side) of Route 116 as you travel north past Occidental Road. The vines are planted to the "Elite" clone, which is a proprietary clone of Emeritus, and which provides greater acidity than other Pinot Noir clones or selections. The Hallberg Vineyard is farmed by Kirk Lokka, a burly giant of a farmer who is widely respected for his attention to detail in the vineyard and his commitment to growing the best fruit possible. The 2004 Scherrer Hallberg Vineyard Pinot Noir is dark ruby-violet in the glass, and offers a cornucopia of bing cherry, red plum, raspberry, sassafras, peony, and dried orange peel aromas. On the palate, the deliciously ripe red berry/red plum attack leads to layers of fleshy, soft Pinot Noir texture, with a perfect caress of acid on the long finish. As for his latest bottling from this site, even the ever-modest Fred had a hard time holding back his enthusiasm for his 2006 Hallberg Pinot Noir.

Scherrer also makes a variety of Zinfandel wines. Regarding his non-vintage "Zinfandoodle" bottling, the back-story on the unusual name is as follows: When Fred was about 15, his father gave him permission to make a little wine at home. One of Fred's uncles, Mario, tasted the wine, which was a Zinfandel, and said, "Fred, don't make any of that zinfandoodle, make me something good, like a muscadoodle." My, how palate preferences have changed . . .

Winery jam sessions aside, tasting the Scherrer Winery Shale Terrace Zinfandel is where you really get the sense that you are in the presence of a "rock star." This vineyard-block-specific bottling from a bench of volcanic sediment in the Alexander Valley consistently offers layers of stony, slate-like flavors that are wrapped around notes of clove, anise, blackberries, cassis, and the scent of new motor oil. This is perhaps one of the most unique, elegant expressions of Zinfandel one can find. Similarly, the

Scherrer Cabernet Sauvignons are attractively loamy, soil-driven wines that emphasize earthy cassis flavors over any pre-determined style. For wine lovers seeking a sense of terroir or a sense of place in their wines, these are the kinds of wines you drink and then say to yourself, “rock on.” And, if you ever find yourself in the Graton area, and in need of a jam session partner, you might want to give Fred a holler.

John Dawson

Tasting Notes:

Scherrer Winery Scherrer Vineyard Alexander Valley Chardonnay 2000: Lemon colored. Beautiful floral aromas are married with notes of melted butter and popcorn. This ripe, medium to full-bodied expression of Chardonnay is both hedonistic and food friendly. Shockingly, the wine had been opened for three days, ungasped, and was still fantastic. 13.9% alc. Drink now-2011. (93 points)

Scherrer Winery Scherrer Vineyard Alexander Valley Chardonnay 2004: Pure popcorn kernel aromas are followed by ginger and jasmine. Nice impression of acid on the midpalate. Vibrant and concentrated, this needs time. 14.5% alc. Drink 2008-2014. (90 points)

Scherrer Winery Dry Rose 2006: Dark salmon-pink, with peach tones at the rim. Straightforward strawberry and peach flavors are blessed with hints of spicy white pepper and earth that add nuance. 60% Zinfandel, 40% Pinot Noir. 13.5% alc. Drink now. (87 points)

Scherrer Winery Old & Mature Vines Zinfandel Alexander Valley 2005: Planted to 8’ x 8’ spacing, with many of the vines going back to 1912. Ruby-violet. Framboise-like aromas are lifted and ripe, and are followed by rich flavors reminiscent of red-raspberries. Will continue to improve for the next 4-5 years. 14.2% alc. Drink 2009-2014. (90+ points)

Scherrer Winery Old & Mature Vines Alexander Valley Zinfandel 2002: Aromas reminiscent of sweet cherries and loamy earth, turning spicier and more raspberry like on the palate, with attractive notes of thyme and rosemary stem on the long finish. For all of its flavor, the wine maintains excellent balance. Drink now. (91 points)

Scherrer Winery Zinfandoodle v.4.5: A blend of 2004 and 2005 vintages. Red violet at the rim; notes of lavender give way to flavors of Santa Rosa Plums and wild cherries. Simple and ready for quaffing. Drink now. (86 points)

Scherrer Winery Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 2004: Sourced from the Bliss Vineyard (located near the Lynmar tasting room, on the east side of 116) and the Emeritus Vineyard. Red-ruby colored. Flavors and aromas reminiscent of red cherries, sassafras, flowers, herbs. Savory and long in the mouth, with a good impression of

acidity and a hint of minerals on the long finish. A benchmark wine. 850 cases. Drink now-2009. 14.5% alc. (93 points)

Scherrer Winery Fort Ross “High Slopes” Pinot Noir 2004: Ruby core. A charming bouquet of violets, plums, black cherries, orange oil, cloves, and rock dust. Lively sweet cherry-like flavors dominate the attack, with a note of iodine on the finish. Great depth, tannins, and concentration. 24 months in barrel, 2/3rds new French oak. Approximately 70 cases. Drink now-2010. (93+ points)

Scherrer Winery Hallberg Vineyard Green Valley Pinot Noir 2004: (See article for comprehensive notes). Legendary. 14.5% alc. Drink 2008-2014. (95 points)

Scherrer Winery Scherrer Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon Alexander Valley 2002: Nearly opaque, with a black and red tones at the core and rim. Gorgeous cassis-like aromas marry with chocolate notes on the attack and lead to loamy, tarry earth tones that are similar to a Nebbiolo. Expansive volume and richness. The wine is 24-36 months in oak, and gets racked twice before bottling. 14.5% alc. Drink now-2010. (92+ points)

www.scherrerwinery.com -- (707) 823-8980

My Aim Is True

The two quintessential attributes of a good wine writer are a keen olfactory sense and a fluid pen. And, although I have been endowed with a particularly sharp sense of smell and a sensitive palate, I am painfully aware of my shortcomings as a writer.

Fortunately, I have come to recognize that I possess a third trait beyond the realm of sensory perception that compensates for my inadequacies. It is an ability to taste a wine while talking to its winemaker, and to know if the wine is an unadulterated reflection of the land in which it was grown and the character of the winemaker who fashioned it, and also to know if that combination benefits the wine.¹

Duncan Arnot Meyers, winemaker and co-founder of Arnot-Roberts Wines, makes wines that are refreshing and full of substance, somewhat understated, and which have a lot of backbone, characteristics that apply equally well to Duncan. Shane Finley, winemaker at Shane Wine Cellars, makes aggressive, raw, fun, and endearingly soulful wines that are as animated as Shane. In the articles that follow, we go “exploring the undercard,” and jump into a review of the wines made from these two young winemakers who, in addition to serving as assistant winemakers at two of Sonoma County’s most well-known wineries, are turning out wines that are as special as they are true.

¹ Admittedly, this sounds like some Sebastopol coffee shop hocus-pocus (speaking of Sebastopol coffee shops, I’d like to give a shout out to Alexis at My Friend Joe’s, whose coffee is the fuel for most of the punchdowns that go on in West County), but it is simply a combination of empathy and mesoclimate intelligence.

Putting the Art in Artisanal

Arnot-Roberts Wines

Making great wine is difficult enough. Even the most talented winemakers will admit to you, usually in private, that every harvest is a stress-fest. They fret over each pick,² over each fermentation,³ and over each new barrel of wine added to their cellar.⁴ This is more than understandable, as showtime only comes once a year in this business. What separates Duncan Arnot Meyers and Nathan Lee Roberts, the founders/winemakers of Arnot-Roberts Wines, from other great winemakers is their unwavering dedication to making wines that are truly hand-crafted, regardless of how much extra time and effort that entails. In addition to making an annual production of around only 1,000 cases, every year Nathan goes to France to select the wood for their barrels, has the pieces shipped to California, and then they themselves build the barrels in which all of their wines age. It is this extra step in the process that best exemplifies their artisanal, detail-oriented approach to winemaking, an approach that has yielded exceptional results for this micro-producer of Syrah and Cabernet Sauvignon wines in just a few years.

Both Nathan and Duncan grew up in the eastern hills of Napa, near the Atlas Peak area. Since they were children, Duncan and Nathan have been “exploring all the hills and mountains of Sonoma and Napa, experiencing first hand the variety of soils and expositions.” Duncan’s earliest winemaking memory is from 1979, when, as a seven-year old, he used a wooden stake to do punchdowns on a batch of homemade wine his father was making in the family garage. Nathan’s introduction to the world of wine also came from his parents. Nathan’s father, Keith Roberts, was one of the first coopers in California. While working for Robert Mondavi in the early 1970’s, Keith learned how to assemble upright wooden tanks and barrels that had been shipped over in pieces from Bordeaux, and later went to Bordeaux to learn aspects of the cooperage trade from the renowned cooper Phillippe Demptos. Duncan and Nathan became friends while in the third grade, through the American paramilitary organization known as the “Cub Scouts.” As they grew up, Nathan followed in his father’s footsteps and became a master cooper, while Duncan studied enology at Napa Valley College and U.C. Davis, and later worked in the cellars at Caymus, Acacia, Groth, and Kongsgaard Winery.

In 2002, the duo started their brand, and made a small amount of Cabernet Sauvignon from Sonoma Mountain, as well as a Syrah-Zinfandel-Sangiovese blend. In 2003, they made a Syrah from Lee Hudson’s famous Hudson Vineyard in Carneros, a Syrah from Beckstoffer Ranch in Rutherford, and also a Cabernet Sauvignon bottling from the Wild Iris Vineyard in the Chalk Hill AVA of Sonoma County. Currently, their production focuses upon Syrahs and Cabernet Sauvignons, but they will also be releasing a Chardonnay in 2008 sourced from the Green Island Road Vineyard in Southern Napa.

² E.g., did the pickers start early enough? Are the grapes being handled as gently as possible?

³ E.g., should I have used a commercial strain of yeast to get my fermentation started? Are my temperatures too high?

⁴ E.g., assuming this wine turns out to be pretty good, will anybody buy it?

The Arnot-Roberts wines are made and stored at Pax Wine Cellars in Santa Rosa, where Duncan serves as the assistant winemaker. Duncan stressed how supportive Pax Mahle and Joe Donelan (the founders of Pax Wine Cellars) have been of Duncan's own project. When asked whether Pax has influenced his philosophy of winemaking, Duncan noted that he is now more open to the inclusion of stems in his winemaking. Consequently, the Arnot-Roberts Syrahs went from being 100% de-stemmed in the 2003 harvest, to 100% whole cluster in 2004, and he and Nathan now aim for as high a whole cluster component as possible, depending upon the vintage conditions and the ripeness of the stems.

To date, the Arnot-Roberts Hudson Vineyard North Block Syrah is my perennial favorite from this producer. The vines are about 19 years old, and the earth in this section of the Hudson Vineyard is comprised of sandy marine deposits overlaid and interspersed with volcanic loam and chunks of solidified volcanic ash, which allows for good drainage. From this block of vines, Arnot-Roberts gets the clone 99 "Beaucastel selection" of Syrah. The clone 99 has larger berries than most other Syrah clones, and is also prone to larger yields, but here the vines are cropped back to one cluster per shoot. By keeping the yields low, they are able to obtain a wild, meaty, savory, animal quality not as common in other commercial Syrah clones.

This wine is made in small open top bins, and then is barreled into between 0% and 30% new French oak, without any fining or filtration. Unlike most other wineries, they do not use any sulfur dioxide (SO₂) on the grapes at the crusher, but wait until two months before bottling before adding the SO₂, so that the wine has a better chance of "evolving on its own." This is a risky approach to winemaking, as sulfur is usually added earlier in the winemaking process to preserve the wine and also to prevent bacterial spoilage. According to Duncan, however, there is enough tannin in the fruit with which he works to help preserve the nascent wine without the need for sulfur, and by diligently topping up their wines and monitoring their evolution on a daily basis, they are able to proceed through vinification as naturally as possible.

As can be imagined, the Arnot-Roberts barrel-making regime is intense but fluid. They wait until all the fruit is brought in and analyzed before building their barrels. After reviewing the tannin levels in the wines, they select their barrel types accordingly, to get just the right amount of tannins from the oak. Although they source French oak from a variety of forests and suppliers, they prefer the forests of Allier and Fontainebleau for Syrah. For their Cabernet Sauvignons, they typically source wood from the Tronçais and Centre forests. The results are extraordinary. Although there is a kiss of new oak on the Cabernets, it is consistently well-integrated with the fruit and acid of the wine. Likewise, the Syrahs speak first and foremost about their terroir and fruit, and the oak does not even register in those bottlings. Although these wines are difficult to find, due to their small production, they are worth the extra effort. After all, Arnot and Roberts are all about putting in the extra effort themselves.

John Dawson

Tasting Notes:

Arnot-Roberts Hudson Vineyard North Block Sonoma Coast Syrah 2005: Dark purple color, turning magenta at the rim. Incredibly pronounced aromas of blue and black fruits, ripe grape stems, cinnamon, mint, and grapefruit oil, with an attractive muskiness that unites the cornucopia of fruit flavors. This full-bodied Syrah displays massive yet round tannins on the palate, an attractive "grapey" texture, and a flavor profile dominated by perfectly ripe dark berries, black olives, black licorice, and plums, with notes of black soil. The long, graceful finish rounds out this complete wine. 250 cases. 14.3% alc. Drink now-2013. (94+ points)

Arnot-Roberts Griffin's Lair Vineyard Sonoma Coast Syrah 2005: Ruby-violet, shading towards magenta at the rim. Savory aromas reminiscent of grilled steak, chocolate, white pepper, stems, iodine, and herbs. This medium-bodied wine is surprisingly smooth-textured in the mouth, and showcases tangy, salty, blueberry and cherry-like flavors, with an ashy-soil component emerging on the finish. 75 cases. 14.3% alcohol. Drink 2008-2012. (92+ points)

Arnot-Roberts Griffin's Lair Vineyard Sonoma Coast Syrah 2006: Ruby-violet, with aromas and flavors of blueberry pie, grapefruit rind, Alpine strawberries, and grilled meats. Barrel sample. (92 points)

Arnot-Roberts Hudson Vineyard North Block Sonoma Coast Syrah 2006: Purple core, violet at the rim. Ripe and lush, this wine shows black and blue-fruit flavors with freshly-picked mint and attractive peat moss-like scents emerging over time in the glass. Delicious and complete. 100% whole cluster. The wine had a long fermentation (around 18 days). Barrel sample. (93-94 points)

Arnot-Roberts Alder Springs Vineyard Mendocino Syrah 2006: From the Emerald Pool section of the Alder Springs Vineyard. Virtually black, totally opaque, this densely packed wine is both rich and lithe. Outstanding mouthfeel, with flavors reminiscent of black cherries, moss, blueberries, and mulberries. Barrel sample. (93+ points)

Arnot-Roberts Wild Iris Vineyard Chalk Hill Cabernet Sauvignon 2005: An attractive bouquet of spring flowers, dark soil, and crème de cassis leads to a precise, medium-bodied wine full of ripe, sweet flavors of red berries, cassis, and vanilla. An elegant wine that is more about minerality and aromatics and less about fatness and weight. Extremely well balanced, with great purity and rounded tannins. Reminds me of the riper vintages of Leoville Las Cases, but with sweeter fruit. Barrel sample. (93 points)

www.arnotroberts.com

Say It Loud: Shane Wine Cellars

Shane Finley, associate winemaker at Kosta Browne Winery, is running a few minutes behind this afternoon. Over the primal grunts and funk vamps of a James Brown song playing in the background, Shane is conducting a private tasting of the Kosta Browne wines for a group of visiting winemakers, and to his credit, he wants to give them a thorough run down of the Kosta Browne 2005 wines. Which means, as he explains to me with a sorrowful look, that my interview with him to discuss his own winery project, Shane Wine Cellars, will have to wait about 30 minutes. So what does Shane do? With the flair and deft hand of an experienced host, he grabs a bottle of Kosta Browne Garys' Vineyard Pinot Noir 2005, a half-finished bottle of the KB Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir '05, and a Reidel Burgundy glass, tells me to make myself comfortable, and have as much of the wines as I'd like while he finishes up his private tour.

Two hours later (just kidding), Shane and I are tasting a barrel sample of Syrah from Shane Wine Cellars' inaugural vintage, and the Pinot Noirs I tasted moments ago are a distant memory. A self-described "champion of flavor," Shane's first vintage demonstrates his ability to craft dense, dark, full-bodied wines brimming with fruit that envelop the palate without relying on the flash of new oak or high alcohol. Having worked with a number of the world's great Syrah-masters (Copain, Domaine Pierre Gaillard, Torbreck), it is not surprising that his first commercial release features three different Syrah bottlings. What is surprising, however, is that Shane hit a proverbial home run in his first commercial release.

Shane fondly recalls his stint working for Pierre Gaillard in the Northern Rhone. While in France, Shane lived in a small, 12th century village where no one spoke English, and where many of the locals looked at him with a sense of bewilderment. For someone so upbeat, and who radiates *joie de vivre* as he does, this must have been difficult for him to endure. Fortunately, Shane was soon introduced to Pierre Gaillard's *vigneron* friends, including Jean-Michel Gerin and Yves Cuilleron. Tasting with such accomplished winemakers, Shane explains, was both intense and intimidating, as they would interrogate him with regards to flaws in the wines, real or imagined, to test his palate. The advice he received from Gaillard to "make a balanced wine, wines of which you are proud" continues to guide his approach to winemaking.

Back in California, Shane worked for a number of wineries, and ultimately joined the Kosta Browne team. He speaks in superlatives when discussing his boss, Michael Browne. According to Shane, from working with Michael he has learned to have "a lot of patience with the wines, and not to overreact." Shane describes his wines as "one part James Brown, one part John Lee Hooker: smooth coolness, bluesy, balanced, but with some depth; but at the same time, they are expressive. They have good volume in the mouth, then like James Brown- wham, there's a kind of a punch to the mouth [in terms of] *gras*, voluptuous, fat." Shane likes fermenting with up to 50% whole clusters, which he sees as contributing an "olivey, dark carbonic" character, and which he believes helps in the extraction of flavor at the fermentor. According to Shane, when fermenting with

whole clusters, “the juice flows through at a different angle, like an ant farm, so you get a better extraction.”

For 2006, Shane Wine Cellars only produced 220 cases, but this should bump up to around 600 cases for the 2007 vintage. Tasting through the Shane Wine Cellars 2006’s, the quality of the wines is uniformly high, and their flavors uniformly rich and pure. Having tasted through many different barrels to get an accurate sense of the component parts of the various wines, these are wines that would make any winemaker, or his mentors, for that matter, justifiably proud.

Tasting Notes:

Shane Wine Cellars Jemrose Vineyard Bennett Valley Syrah 2006: Murky purple core, becoming brighter at the rim. Aromas of black pepper, freshly cut grass, and a mellow campfire are followed by the smell of braised beef. This juicy, full-bodied wine renders the palate awash with a whirlwind of black fruit flavors, and an attractive coffee bean note emerges on the long finish. Raw and uncompromising, this is a must for anyone who collects Californian Syrah. Barrel sample. (93 points)

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NEXT ISSUE: ISSUE 3 – WINTER 2008

The next issue of The Sonoma Wine Journal will feature a comprehensive report on the 2006 vintage in Sonoma County, with tasting notes on dozens of wines, an extensive “Food, Wine , & Friends” section, as well as our list of the Top 50 Wineries of Sonoma County. If you would like your wines to be covered in that issue, please send wine samples and relevant winery literature to The Sonoma Wine Journal, c/o Mr. John B. Dawson, 57 Brushy Ridge Road, New Canaan, CT 06840. We may also be contacted at (707) 536-8541.

THINK SONOMA (Like Hiking? Try Armstrong Woods)

DRINK SONOMA (Martinelli Winery tasting room is open 10-5)

EAT SONOMA (Try Seaweed Café in Bodega Bay 707-875-2700)

From East To West (County That Is)

Freeman Vineyard and Winery

When it comes to marketing wines in person, Ken Freeman is either the hardest working person I know in the business, or the first person in Sonoma County to have been successfully cloned. Whether it is at a small, Sonoma Coast-themed wine tasting sponsored by a distributor in San Francisco, or the annual Hospices of Sonoma charity event in the Russian River Valley, or at the bar of a wine-oriented restaurant on a random Tuesday night, there's the avuncular Ken, standing over his wines and telling the story of Freeman Vineyard and Winery. If only Freeman Winery's wines were as ubiquitous as Ken; current production totals 4,000 cases annually, many of which are sold abroad.

Ken and his wife, Akiko, established Freeman Winery in 2002, and are based in western Sebastopol, in the building that for many years housed Williams Selyem Winery. I can recall going there one evening during the harvest of 2002; at the time, the facility was basically a no frills laboratory cramped with barrels and fermentors. Since then, Ken and Akiko have built a gorgeous cave into the side of the hill behind the winery, which houses the most attractive barrel room in all of West County. The cavernous ceiling and subdued, formal lighting set a solemn tone, and one quickly senses that this is not merely a winery, but a place especially designed to be conducive to reflection and repose.

Akiko was born and raised in Japan, and her family's farming roots in that country goes back seven generations. Akiko has shared winemaking responsibilities with a number of winemakers over the years, most recently with Ed Kurtzman and Eric Buffington. In that capacity, every vintage she has created a blend from the best barrels in the cellar, which are then combined and bottled as the "Akiko's Cuvee." Ken grew up in Scarsdale, New York, about 25 minutes north of Manhattan, and caught the wine bug by spending countless hours on weekends at the famous Zachy's Wines and Liquors store in Scarsdale village. In addition to running the winery, Ken maintains his day job as an investment banker.

Nearly every morning and night Ken and Akiko are entertaining either for his banking clients or the winery. Ken travels to Tokyo for both of his jobs, and having lived in Indonesia, Hong Kong, and Singapore, and in light of Akiko's connection to Japan, the pair have made significant inroads into the Japanese wine market. They import more than 300 cases of year to Japan through the country's premier wine distributor. According to Ken, "historically, the Japanese are big Burgundy drinkers; the style of Pinot they prefer is more understated, one that goes well with Japanese cuisine."

Tasting through the Freeman Vineyard and Winery portfolio, it is easy to see then why these offerings have been so warmly accepted by the Japanese market. The wines are consistently elegant and restrained. The Freeman 2005 Pinot Noirs are models of equilibrium, showcasing great purity of Pinot Noir fruit with soft edges and no traces of alcohol. Ken and Akiko have successfully carved out their own niche in the world of

Sonoma County wine, and I look forward to tasting, and drinking, their wines for many years to come.

John Dawson

Tasting Notes:

Freeman Winery Ryo-Fu Russian River Valley Chardonnay 2005: Bright straw. Aromas of jasmine and white flowers, with a hint of pear. Stony and crisp in the mouth, with a touch of popcorn kernel and toasted brioche on the back end. Very dry, with good acid. “Ryo-Fu” is Japanese for “cool breeze.” 30% new French oak. 14.1% alc. Drink now-2010. (91+ points)

Freeman Winery Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 2005: Violet-ruby colored. Gorgeous savory, umami-like aromas intermingle with notes of dried rose petals. On the palate, cherry and violet tones are buttressed by fine acid, with notes of stones and soil emerging on the long, dry finish. Drink now-2010. (89+ points)

Freeman Winery Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 2005: Dark ruby-garnet. Alluring sappy aromas of ripe, sweet cherries, red berries, and crayons. Fantastic satiny texture, with zesty flavors of cardamom and other spices emerging on the gentle finish. Most of the fruit for this medium-bodied wine comes from Ted Klopp’s Thorn Ridge ranch. Drink now-2011. (91 points)

Freeman Winery Keefer Ranch Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 2005: Violet toned. Waxy, dark cherry fruit flavors give way to savory flavors with hints of grilled meats, rosemary, and earth. Excellent balance, this will reward cellaring. Drink 2008-2015. (91 points)

Freeman Winery 2005 Akiko’s Cuvee Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 2005: Ruby. Enticing aromas reminiscent of rhubarb, bing cherry, ripe strawberry, pine needles, orange zest, and ashy soil. Velvety and soft on the palate, the wine is a model of symmetry. Long finish. Delicious. Drink now-2012. (92+ points)

www.freemanwinery.com (707) 823-6937

TASTING NOTES- WINES AND WINERIES OF SONOMA COUNTY

B.R. Cohn Winery Sonoma Valley Zinfandel 2005: Bright ruby-purple. Aromas and flavors of red currants, plums, and anise compete with an herbal green streak in the wine. 15.1% alc. Drink now-2009. (83+ points)

B.R. Cohn Winery Olive Hill Estate Sonoma Valley Cabernet Sauvignon 2005: Dark ruby-violet. Bright fruit flavors that recall black currants, black cherries, and mint finish with an ashy, soil-inflected component. 100% Cabernet Sauvignon. 14.2% alc. Drink now-2011. (86 points)

B.R. Cohn Winery Sonoma Valley Merlot 2004: Ruby. Cedar aromas and black cherry flavors with a soft, round texture, this could only be Merlot. The fruit is countenanced by soft tannins and the right amount of acid, this is a good wine that will likely improve over the next few years. 14.3% alc. Drink now-2010. (87+ points)

DuMOL Russian River Valley Chardonnay 2005: Perhaps the greatest “Russian River Valley” appellation blend that I’ve ever tasted, across all varietals. Green-tinged gold color with a brilliant luster. Leesy aromas reminiscent of almonds, brown sugar, and nutmeg are amplified by French oak. Showing great natural acidity, this medium to full bodied wine displays spicy apple and lemon flavors that yield to notes of orange oil and coconut. Drink now-2011. (93+ points)

Dutton Estate Jewel Block Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 2005: Very light garnet. Bursting with ripe strawberry aromas and a touch of wood, this well-balanced wine is both rich and delicate at the same time. The slightly tart attack becomes more forgiving and floral toned with air, as attractive notes of black tea and lavender emerge on the long finish. Drink now. 14.2% alc. (91+ points)

Dutton Estate Dutton Ranch Russian River Valley Chardonnay 2004: Bright straw hue. Attractive floral bouquet gains complexity with a dose of peach and lemon flavors. Some popcorn notes emerge on the mid-palate, where this medium to full-bodied wine also shows good extract. 14.2% alc. Drink now-2009. (87+ points)

Hannah Estate Pinot Noir Russian River Valley 2005: Ruby-violet. Notes of smoky oak and peanuts quickly blow off to reveal classic RRV aromas and flavors of sappy black cherries. The chewy tannins and moderately biting acid and counterbalanced by the concentration of fruit. More ripe fruit emerges on the lingering finish. Needs time. Drink 2008-2012. 14.6% alc. (88+ points)

Inman Family Winery OGV Russian River Valley Rose of Pinot Noir “Endless Crush 2006”: Beautiful, light rose color, with a pearly, salmon luster. Aromas of unsweetened guava, flowers, wet strawberries, and white pepper. Flavors reminiscent of ruby grapefruit and spearmint dominate this medium-bodied, totally dry rose, which is notable for its tart crispness. Best rose of 2006 to my palate. Drink now. (89 points)

Kistler Vineyards Bodega Headlands Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 2004: Dark ruby. Enticing aromas reminiscent of spicy black gumdrops and red licorice turn savory, and also gain minerality, with aeration. On the palate, this full-bodied wine shows exceptional Pinot Noir purity, with layers and layers of dark cherry flavors and dark soil notes. Great volume in the mouth, without being cumbersome. Legendary. Drink now-2018. (96+ points)

Korbel Russian River Valley Le Premier Method Champenoise 1999: Light yellow. Creamy, milk-like aromas with a dose of biscuits and melted butter. The wine comes across as quite dry on the attack, with some apple and lemon-like flavors emerging on the back end. Attractive in a simple, pleasing manner. 37% Pinot Noir, 63% Chardonnay. 12% alc. Drink now. (86 points)

Kosta Browne Garys' Vineyard Santa Lucia Highlands Pinot Noir 2005: Dark violet, becoming brighter at the rim. A dazzling array of creamy oak, red fruit, and pine needle aromas, followed by flavors that call to mind sappy blackberries, red raspberries, forest floor, pepper, and earth. The resinous flavors from the oak integrate well with the fruit. Complex and complete, this is a gorgeous wine, which manages to disguise its 15.2% alcohol quite well. Drink 2008-2015. (93+ points)

Kosta Browne Koplen Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 2005: Dark violet. On the nose, notes of orange zest, toasted sesame seeds, dark soil, and black cherries. Lithe and spicy on the palate, with a trace of heat emerging on the long finish. 15.3% alc. Drink now-2010. (91 points)

Kosta Browne Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 2005: French oak and spicy cherry aromas abound. On the palate, the wine is rich and soft-textured, however the alcohol is too much for the simple, sweet-cherry fruit flavors, which turn syrupy on the back end. 15% alc. Drink now-2009, and preferably with a slight chill on the bottle. (87 points)

La Crema Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 2005: Garnet, with some bricking at the rim. Aromas and flavors of cherries, vanilla, autumn leaves, shitake mushrooms, and hint of oak. Crisp and subtle, this medium-bodied wine shows a tasty citrus note on the finish. My house Pinot Noir. 13.9% alc. Drink now. (89 points)

Lambert Bridge Winery Crane Creek Cuvée Dry Creek Valley 2005: A dazzling array of pure cassis, cherry, red currant, cherry Twizzlers, cedar, and white pepper tease the nose. On the attack, juicy berry flavors turn plummy, with traces of vanilla and soil on the long finish. Approximately 80% Merlot, with the remainder a blend of Cabernet Sauvignon and Petit Verdot. This winery has really improved since Jill Davis took over the winemaking duties full-time, and it has become one of the premier Sonoma wineries working with the classic Bordeaux varietals. Drink now-2011. (92+ points)

Lambert Bridge Winery Sonoma County Cabernet Sauvignon 2005: Dark ruby, with a dark core. Ripe blackberry aromas give way to thick cassis and black cherry flavors.

Rich but balanced. Notes of black pepper and cedar emerge on the long finish. Drink 2008-2012. (92+ points)

Littorai Charles Heintz Ranch Chardonnay Sonoma Coast 2005: Bright, almost brassy yellow. Pure yet complex aromas reminiscent of ripe meyer lemon, honey, freshly-picked mint, lanolin, pineapple, and wood. In the mouth, salty and extracted, with striking acid and a long finish. Deft use of French oak, which is present but subdued. Decent minerality on the long finish. (92 points)

Littorai Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 2005: Solid ruby, turning violet at the rim. The gorgeous, sweet red rose and sandalwood perfume is married with seductive red fruit flavors reminiscent of cherry, cranberry and rhubarb, with a touch of earth. Spicy black cherry-like flavors meet a delicate, forest floor counterpoint on the palate, with notes of leather and white pepper in the background. With aeration, a hint of leather and cola emerges. Fine impression of acidity that matches the fruit and tannins well. This straightforward Pinot Noir aims to please, and succeeds in doing so. 14.2% alc. Drink now- 2011. (91+ points)

Martinelli Martinelli Vineyard "Tessa Lee" Sauvignon Blanc 2005: Stainless then 4 months in oak. Tart, majorly acidic, good concentration, with aromas and flavors reminiscent of green peas, grass, and lychee. 14.2% alc. Drink 2008-2011. (89+ points)

Martinelli Russian River Valley Chardonnay 2005: Pale straw. Notes of clarified butter, lemons, freshly-squeezed apples, cinnamon, and apple pie. Comes across as quite clean on the palate, with good acid to balance the fruit. Salty on the finish. 14.3% alc. (91 points)

Martinelli Russian River Valley "Bella Vigne" Chardonnay 2005: Notes of cold, unsalted butter, toasted baguette, apple pie continue on to the palate, which also shows a fine minerality and concentration. Seemingly lower acid profile than the Russian River Valley bottling. (92 points)

Martinelli Terra Felice Russian River Valley Syrah 2004: Deep purple core, turning nearly magenta at the rim. Rich, meaty aromas are complemented by notes of root beer, bark, and blue and black fruits. Dark berry flavors are met with the counterpoint of black pepper and brown spices 14.8% alc. Drink now. (89+ points)

Martinelli Giuseppi & Luisa Russian River Valley Zinfandel 2005: Pure violet. Flamboyant, jammy berry aromas that call to mind boysenberry, blueberry, and mulberry. Full-bodied and rich, this deeply extracted wine offers plenty of spicy ripe fruit, which turn liqueur like with aeration. Not for the faint of heart, but with sufficient stuffing to age well. Drink now-2015. (93 points)

O'Connor Vineyards Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 2005: Aromas and flavors of sour cherries, black pepper, and dirt are amplified by a lavish display of new oak. With aeration, the wine shows good acid, spicy whole cluster elements and some tannins,

which stick out a bit and need time to resolve. Promising. Drink 2008-2010. 14.6% alcohol. (89 points)

Peay Vineyards Scallop Shelf Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir 2005: Bright ruby. Gorgeous aromas of black cherries, wild strawberries, cinnamon, Indian spices, and Play-Doh. Cherry, raspberry, red-fruited flavors, with traces of brisk tea, are underpinned by dry and substantial tannins. Reminiscent of a Chambolle Premier Cru. Great impression of acid keeps the flavors moving across the palate, through the long finish. 14.2% alc. Drink 2008-2013. (93 points)

Peay Vineyards Marsanne/Roussane Sonoma Coast 2005: Light dusty yellow with a greenish tinge. Aromas reminiscent of pineapple, lemon, honey, white flowers, minced herbs, oak, grains, and nuts. Viscous and wide on the palate, this medium-to-full bodied white exhibits nutty, waxy lemon-pineapple flavors with a hint of lavender, lactic-like notes, nervy acidity, and admirable length. A very well balanced wine. 60% Marsanne, 40% Roussane. 13.8% alc. Drink now-2010. (90 points)

Peter Michael Winery “L’Apres Midi” Knights Valley Sauvignon Blanc 2005: Straw colored. A viscous, glycerin-rich Sauvignon Blanc that showcases ripe fruit and wood, with traces of ginger, lemon oil, and a gamy, pork-like note on the finish. Drink now-2008. (87+ points)

Porter-Bass Vineyards Russian River Valley Chardonnay 2005: Stony yellow, with a greenish hue. An enticing bouquet of oyster shells, lemon oil, jasmine, white flowers, mint, French oak, local sea salt, and a hint of roasted corn. The sweet entry demonstrates great cut and precision, outstanding phenolics, and lemony, rich, Chardonnay flavors, all of which are amplified by the high-quality French oak and which become even more expansive and vibrant on the mid-palate. The wine grows tannic and almost salty on the back end, and will become even more irresistible with mid-term cellaring. This is simply a gorgeous wine, and there is more than enough natural fruit flavors and extract for the oak. Drink now-2011. 14.5% alc. (94+ points)

Porter Creek Vineyards Creekside Vineyard Russian River Valley Pinot Noir 1998: light garnet. Great mineral and high-toned, secondary aromas of dried flowers, black cherry, and saffras. Well integrated on the palate, with hints of leather, plum skin, and sweet, dry Autumn leaves. 25% new French oak, with Remond, Mercurey and possibly some barrels from Cadus. Exquisite balance between fruit, earth, flowers, and minerals. Amazing wine. 13.2% alc. (94 points)

Sebastopol Vineyards Three Blocks Syrah Russian River Valley 2004: Bright ruby/violet. Effusive, high-toned aromas of sweet cherries and cracked pepper. On the palate, this complex Syrah shows flavors of black raspberries, brown sugar, with a meaty edge. Great impression of acidity, which lifts the fruit. This medium-bodied wine has the requisite tannins to age. Sourced from the Gail Ann’s Vineyard, the Carol Ann’s Vineyard, and the Cherry Ridge Vineyard, the former two sites being across from the

renowned Saralee's Vineyard on Slusser Road. 748 cases. Drink now-2011. 14.2% alc. (91 points)

Sebastopol Vineyards Rose of Pinot Russian River Valley 2006: Light ballet-pink robe. The delicious smell of cherry pie leads to peppery, gooseberry-like flavors. Ample texture for a rose. Very well done. 14.2% alc. Drink now. (88 points)

Beyond The Mayacamas

USA

Cambria Julia's Vineyard Santa Maria Valley Pinot Noir 2005: Ruby, lighter at the rim. Aromas of red cherries, orange oil, plum skin, dry autumn leaves, subtle oak, and a hint of lemon zest. The attack is marked by strong acidity and fine tannins, but this mid-weight, earthy effort could use a bit more depth and fruit on the finish. \$21 13.7% alcohol. Drink now. (87 points)

France

J. Bavard Bourgogne Rouge Les Champans 2005: Translucent dark ruby. A pretty nose of wet boxwood, lavender, flowers, juniper berries, and spicy Pinot Noir fruit. Sharp distinction on the palate, where the surging acidity gives way to juicy red berry flavors. Nicely textured, this tongue coating, medium-bodied wine rides out on a soft but persistent finish. Drink 2008-2014. (89 points)

Spain

Las Rocas Vinas Viejas de San Alejandro Calatayud Garnacha 2005: Dark ruby-black, nearly opaque. Lifted aromatics from a dose of volatile acidity are dominated by notes of menthol, basil, sun-dried tomatoes, raspberry jam, cheap incense, and a trace of alcohol. Briary red fruit flavors in the mouth, well structured, with obvious heat on the disjointed mid-palate. Medium-long, warm finish. 14.5% alcohol. \$12 Drink now-2010. (84 points)

Tres Picos Borsao Garnacha 2006: Dark violet-ruby toned, with a purple-magenta hue at the rim. A cornucopia of heady aromas reminiscent of boysenberries, black raspberries, black cherries, red licorice, cold sausages, freshly crushed mint, and a hint of vanillin. On the palate, this is very much like a barrel sample in every way, as the wine is juicy, utterly primary, but not fully integrated. A wall of tannins is really speaking at a different end of the room from the fruit. Lacks the garrigue notes of the 2005, at least at this juncture. The 14.5% alcohol does not detract from the wine. A nice mineral, earth tone emerges on the long finish. Drink 2009-2012. (89+ Points)