



Viticulture Association of the Santa Cruz Mountains

The Grapevine

January, 2009

VINE TALK

Winter 2009

Happy New Year yet again! It's amazing to think that we are almost ready to close out the first decade of the millennium. It has been a great run for Santa Cruz wine grape growers and everyone is to be congratulated for their dedication to excellence. Wines from our humble appellation continue to garner attention and accolades. It starts in the vineyard. Cheers to everyone!

In January we see the bones of the vineyard. Dormancy is the time to repair trellis wire and stakes, straighten rows, and deal with hardware problems. It is best to perform these tasks after pruning because it is easier to see the infrastructure. There is no canopy and there is less wood to work around. Flag hardware issues as you prune so they are easy to find for repair later.

Winter is the time to perform weed control before undesirable plants get a chance to grow big. This can be accomplished easily with hoes or flamers in smaller vineyards. If you use the Internet, Google "Red Dragon Propane Flamers" or "propane weed control" for more information. Another option during dry conditions is to use tractor implements to mechanically remove as much vegetation as possible. You can also go in with a weed whacker on larger weeds. Be sure to get in there before the weed flowers and seeds form or you will just add to the seed bank of undesirable plants in row. Herbicides can be an option. If you go this route pay attention to the chemical's mode of action and your vineyard's soil type to protect ground water. When the weather warms up the weeds will grow exponentially. Get them under control now to reduce effort later.

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Next Meeting

January 20 at Alfaro Family Vineyards – Pruning Workshop, & Flower/Fruit Set & Yield Improvement

2:00pm. Workshop on Pruning. Bring your pruners (sterilized, please) – you will practice in the vineyard. Richard Alfaro will also demonstrate a flame gun for weed control.

3:00pm. Larry Bettiga, UC Extension Farm Advisor, will talk about flower and fruit set and physiology, and vineyard practices to improve yield.

- A representative from the CDFA will bring us up to date on the spread of the Light Brown Apple Moth, progress in eradication, and availability of traps for our vineyards.

- And we will present the new subregions of the Santa Cruz Mountains and their flavor profiles.

As always, bring a bottle of wine to share for tasting at the end of the meeting. Remember that the after-meeting tasting is strictly that - a tasting. Drink responsibly or bring a designated driver.

Directions to Alfaro Family Vineyards on back.

President's Corner

We are starting out the New Year with what we anticipate will be the first in a year of ambitious programs. Our program-meister, Rachel Ormes, has been hard at work on January's meeting, as well as one planned for the end of February (more to come on this), and is looking forward to topics to help you in the vineyard through the rest of the year.

We did not realize when we originally scheduled the meeting for Tuesday that it is Inauguration day, but there is still plenty of time for those interested to watch the event and still come to the meeting in the afternoon. Come early for an in-vineyard pruning workshop, starting at 2:00pm.

(continued)

(Vine Talk, cont.)

Walk your vineyard. Take note of where the vineyard is strong and where there is weakness or missing canes. The vigor of a vine will dictate how you might prune it for the coming year. Watch for new gopher holes popping up as soon as the soil warms. Get the first generation of gophers under control now. Many growers have had tremendous success with the cinch traps demonstrated by Thomas Whitman at one of our previous meetings. Check our website for contact information. Many of the vineyards I work with have abandoned chemical controls and other trapping methods for the cinch traps because they are so effective and relatively easy to use.

Patience is key in pruning just as it is in almost every aspect of wine. Each year we finish the holidays and awake to the New Year full of ambition. Instead it may be time for yet another cup of hot chocolate, perhaps an espresso, or even a glass of your very favorite wine that somehow escaped the family celebration. It is a time for reflection and evaluation of where your vineyard is today and where you want it to be. Consider the history. Are there spots susceptible to frost? Is there a block that always buds first? Is there an area that ripens before it's time? Is there a spot that never fully matures in season?

All vines will bud out in spring even if you never prune at all. But you can influence the timing of bud break somewhat by timing the pruning. The very act of cutting into the wood awakens the vine and begins the annual process of renewal. If you have an area susceptible to spring frost perhaps that spot should be pruned last. Or perhaps it should be pruned twice; once with long spurs so that the apical buds will burst forth early and then again to protect the tissue in the basal buds from the spring cold. Perhaps save the vineyard blocks that ripen too soon for last. If one block is too vigorous, leave many spurs and then finger prune the green shoots. Another option is to leave a "kicker cane" or a cane that is 3 or 4 feet long. After bud break cut it off. This will eat up some of the energy in the vine and reduce vigor. Cut a weak vine back to its healthiest spurs and do not ask too much of it this year. Don't leave too many buds on it.

Older, thicker vines can be susceptible to Eutypa if large pruning wounds are left open. If it is necessary to make big cuts, consider doing it closer to spring, when the sap is running. Sap bleeding out of a wound (positive pressure) prevents entry of harmful organisms. Try not to

prune in the rain. It's no fun and it's bad for the vine.

When you have found the right time to prune, balancing your decision between having enough people power to accomplish the goal before bud break and timing the cuts to coincide with the natural rhythm of the vine, you can begin. There is seldom the perfect day but attention to past growth patterns will offer direction in what to do now.

After that it is a matter of choosing your cuts. Prune out damaged and infected wood and do not allow spurs or canes to cross in front of each other. Always imagine the future. See in your mind's eye the shoots emerge from each bud. Each shoot in turn will most likely carry two clusters of fruit. See where that fruit will form in the canopy and try to create a space for it. Clusters like light and air and bits of shade so that they are never too hot or too cold or too wet.

Another option is to hedge prune and leave lots of spurs and finger prune in the spring for the same effect. It is essential to properly follow up this method or your canopy will be dense and impenetrable.

Create a beautiful beginning for your vines. Remember that every cluster needs its place and there must be room within the canopy for drying breezes and soft sprays.

If we don't get enough rain this winter you might consider a little extra water to make up the deficit. February is also a great time for compost, gypsum and lime. Most soils love calcium. Check your lab report for mineral deficiencies and imbalances.

Take that extra breath and your favorite bottle and make some plans. The rush is just around the corner. The vintage will come.

Prospero Ano Nuevo!

Prudy Foxx
Foxx Viticulture
Santa Cruz Mountains

Copies of all of Prudy's Vine Talk columns since 2004 can be found on our website at www.vascm.org.

President's Corner, cont.

Then, during the meeting, Larry Bettiga will shed some light on last year's conditions that resulted in shatter and low yields (last Spring's frost, high winds), and look at the physiology of bud and fruit set, and what we can do to improve yield.

We will also have a representative of the CDFA to bring us up to date on the Light Brown Apple Moth, its spread, steps being taken for eradication, and the availability of traps for your vineyard.

And, we will explain the new subregions of the Santa Cruz Mountains. Through Prudy Foxx and I, the Viticulture Assn. played a role in defining these subregions. We worked closely with AppellationAmerica.com on a series of evaluations of our appellation wines (for Chardonnay, Pinot Noir, and Cabernet/Bordeaux varieties). What started as a way of organizing flights for the tasting turned into a discovery of distinct flavor profiles for various geographic areas:

- Skyline
- Los Gatos/Saratoga
- Summit Rd.
- Los Ranchos (following along Hwy. 17)
- Corralitos
- Ben Lomond (the only sub-AVA)

These 'subregions' are a way to better understand the grapes produced and the wine that results in our vast and diverse appellation with all its microclimates. In no way should it suggest a move towards sub-appellations. Instead, it better defines our terroir, and has the potential of further promoting the excellence of our winegrapes and wine. Further information on the subregions and a link to the coverage on AppellationAmerica.com is on our website at www.vascm.org.

This subregion concept is going to be the basis of the tech session (organized by Prudy) and Grand Cruz tasting at Pinot Paradise. This will give everyone a chance to explore the unique flavor profiles of each subregion (at least for Pinot Noir). Pinot Paradise is March 28-29, and tickets are on sale from the SCMWA.

On behalf of the Board, we are looking forward to an excellent season for VASCM and for our vineyards in the Santa Cruz Mountains. We hope to see you at an upcoming meeting.

- Mary Lindsay

2009 Memberships Are Due. Please find a membership form with this newsletter.

More Events

Unified Wine & Grape Symposium, January 27-30, Sacramento www.unifiedsymposium.org

Eco-Farm, January 21-24, Asilomar www.eco-farm.org/

World of Pinot Noir (WOPN), March 6-8, Shell Beach www.wopn.com

Includes a focus tasting and panel discussion on Santa Cruz Mts. Pinots from Thomas Fogarty, Silver Mountain, Muns Vineyard, Martin Alfaro Winery, Mt. Eden, Vine Hill. Also bringing their Santa Cruz Mts. Pinots to WOPN: Hallcrest, Cinnabar, Black Ridge, Heart O' the Mountain.

Pinot Paradise, March 28-29 www.scmwa.com

March 28: Pinot Pathways

March 29: Technical Session and Grand Cruz Tasting at Villa Ragusa conference center, Campbell

Last Inventory of Vineyards in the Sky Available to VASCM Members

The remaining inventory of ***Vineyards in the Sky—The Life of Legendary Vintner Martin Ray***, is being offered by the publisher at a clearance price of \$9.96 per copy (60% off the the \$24.95 retail price) to VASCM members. This is a fascinating memoir/biography about the charismatic and often controversial Santa Cruz Mountains winemaker who created and marketed pure varietal wines, beginning in the 1930s. His table wines and champagnes received high nationwide acclaim at a time when wine connoisseurs considered all other California wines vastly inferior to European vintages, many even undrinkable. It also covers the colorful history of winemaking in our region with pioneers such as Paul Masson (whose Mountain Winery Martin Ray owned after Prohibition ended, before creating his own vineyard estate on neighboring Mt. Eden). Books are \$9.96 each (tax included) plus \$2.80 for shipping and handling.

If you are interested, send your order to THE BOOKMILL / P.O. Box 3225 / Saratoga, CA 95070. email to bookmill@ix.netcom.com. If you are interested in a quantity for reselling (i.e. tasting room sales), please include your California re-sale number.

Directions to Alfaro Family Vineyards for the 1/20 meeting:

420 Hames Road, Corralitos:
Exit Highway 1 South towards Monterey.
Take the Freedom Blvd Exit.
Go approximately 4 miles to Hames Rd.
Follow Hames Rd to the stop sign.
Turn right for 1 block onto Pleasant Valley Rd and jog back
left onto Hames Rd. Follow Hames Rd to the top of the hill;
winery entrance is on the left.

**Officers of the Viticulture Association of the
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Newsletter



**Next Meeting & Workshop: January 20 -"Pruning, Bud/Fruit Set" at
Alfaro Family Vineyard**