



Viticulture Association of the Santa Cruz Mountains

The Grapevine
November, 2009

VINE TALK

Post harvest 2009. For most of us harvest is long gone and the fruit of 2009 is either pressed off and in barrel or tank or close to it. 2009 has been a year of contrasts. Bloom time varied from hot spikes to cold wet rain and perfect temperatures in between. The timing of bloom as well as grape variety in your vineyard had an enormous influence on the set and quality of the crop this year.

The year was quite productive despite seasonal anomalies. It was a year to expect the unexpected. Chardonnays and Pinot Noirs came in with exceptional flavor and a perfect balance. Many growers and winemakers alike are delighted at the quality and potential of the '09 vintage in the early ripening varieties.

Some vineyards reported bouts with July powdery mildew infestation and a botrytis. If this happened to you take action this winter. Plan to apply a dormant spray of lime sulfur if possible on your vines. Lime sulfur can be purchased as an organic product. Read the label directions carefully for proper use. This application will effectively contribute to the reduction of detrimental organisms in the spring.

The October storm brought as much as 10 inches of water to many vineyards. This reduced the need for post harvest irrigation though this practice is still a good idea. If you have any green canopy left the vines can still uptake nutrients amended through the drip system or put on the ground. If you had severe set or ripening problems not related to the weather review the nutritional status of your vines and feed them as necessary. Consider putting compost under the vines in late winter to enhance soil biodiversity. Arrange for that compost in advance to ensure quality.

Notice the weed growth under the vines. Keep weed growth in check. Propane flaming post rain is

VASCM Holiday Party

Celebrate the harvest and the holidays!
Friday, Dec. 11, 6:30-9:30,
Sesnon House at Cabrillo College

Sesnon House is run by Cabrillo College students in the culinary program. This will be a buffet featuring winter comfort food. Bring plenty of wine to share. Please be aware that the restaurant's liquor license requires that their servers pour all wine for us.

COST: \$25 per person - includes buffet dinner, appetizers, champagne toast

RSVP TO: June Salsbury w/ payment by check payable to VASCM in advance required to secure reservation: June Salsbury, 160 Spring Hollow Rd., Los Gatos, CA 95033

FOR FUN: Blind wine tasting contest

HURRY: Deadline - Dec. 4th - Seating limited to 64
Directions to Sesnon House on back.

President's Corner

It has been awhile since we have had a program (as you may have noticed...). It is so much easier to front load the year with programs than it is to produce them once we start getting into harvest. I think we all had our hands full with harvest this year. Thank you for your patience.

This year we had four programs (a pruning workshop in January; canopy management in March with Stan Grant, Progressive Viticulture; irrigation and water issues with Mark Bettany, UC Davis Extension and Michael Loik, UCSC; disease detection with Judit Monis of STA Labs). And, a tailgate on ripening and flavors in the vineyard with winemaker Tony Craig. We will be starting out the new year with a couple of programs already well along in planning:

- mid-February: the Sustainability Alliance will present its new Sustainability Certification program,
(cont.)

Vine Talk, cont.

an excellent organic way to maintain low growth without exposing a new seed bank. Never allow weeds to flower or seed if possible. It is getting a little late for cover crop planting but certain seeds can still be quite viable. Barley is an excellent choice for mandatory erosion control because it germinates in cooler temperatures and establishes quickly. Bell beans and other nitrogen fixing crops can be sensitive to cold temperatures so explore your options carefully before going forward.

Review the calendar and establish the pattern for your vineyard as to when to expect bloom, set and harvest. Now is the time to reflect on the year and notice what works and what doesn't. Put vineyard records together, enjoy your accomplishments and dream of vintages to come.

Talk to your winemakers. Enjoy the fall colors. Walk your vineyard and share its beauty with friends. Take notice of broken wires, rotted posts and other structural defects. Post winter pruning is a good time to make those repairs. Plan now, update the vineyard map, and get the materials you need together so the job will go smoothly when the time is right. Enjoy a glass from an earlier vintage for inspiration.

Make the most of the magic of the season and take the time to care for your self. The vineyard needs you!

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.



Gerhard & Diane Schlecht, Miller Hill Vineyard; and Anne & Andre Kobel, with granddaughter, Clos de Madrone Vineyard.

(President's Corner, cont. from page one)

and we plan an opportunity for you to update your self-assessments online. The program also to include a speaker on a timely topic.

- early March: soil fertility and composting, with Amigo Bob Cantisano.

More about these programs will be forthcoming.

Until then, let's share our harvest stories and reward ourselves for all the hard work and mixed emotions we experienced this year with a post-harvest/holiday celebration. This year our holiday party is at Sesnon House, on the Cabrillo College campus. We are glad to provide our support and enjoy the culinary artistry and hospitality of the students in the culinary program at Cabrillo. Details are in the enclosed invitation. Seating is limited, so don't wait to RSVP.

As well, the VASCM played an important role in producing the technical session at Pinot Paradise earlier this year; and was instrumental in producing the history exhibit about our local vineyards and wine industry at the History Museum of Los Gatos. A number of our members participated in this with the loan of valuable items for display. These activities have helped to provide visibility for and underscore the excellence of our Santa Cruz Mountains vineyards and winegrapes.

The Board welcomes your ideas and suggestions for future programs, speakers, and other opportunities to bring to the membership. Please email or speak to any of the Board members about your ideas.

Happy Thanksgiving. And Happy Holidays. And I look forward to seeing you at the holiday party.

Mary Lindsay
President, VASCM

Vineyard Profile: Clos de Madrone and Miller Hill Vineyards

- by Suzanne Purnell

Clos de Madrone Vineyard and Miller Hill Vineyard sit side-by-side on a ridge top slope in the Summit subregion. Perched on what feels like the top of the world (1,750 feet elevation), the Pinot noir vines and owners enjoy one of the most spectacular vistas of the entire Monterey Bay imaginable—it's a slice of heaven!

Clos de Madrone Vineyard

Owners Andre and Anne Kobel are particularly proud of the sustainable viticulture practices of their Clos de Madrone Vineyard. Their acre of vines is organically grown and irrigated with a solar powered rainwater capture-and-storage system funded in part by the NRCS'

EQIP program, that they learned about at a VASCM meeting.

Andre was born and raised on a farm in Switzerland. He left there as a young man with his college diploma in electrical engineering and headed to Canada, and then San Francisco. The first American he met was his wife, Anne. Andre was soon lured to Silicon Valley to work at Fairchild, the cornerstone of the semiconductor industry. Years later, while living and still working in high tech in southern California, he and Anne began to search for a piece of land in northern California and wandered up Miller Hill Road. They stopped and knocked on the door of Gerhard and Diane Schlecht to inquire if they knew of any land for sale, and shortly became their next door neighbors.

As Andre was contemplating retirement as president and CEO of Elanix, Inc., he began searching for the next endeavor that would capture his considerable energy and talents. Encountering vineyard-owner Elmer Erwin at a community BBQ sparked Andre's interest in a vineyard. He was also attracted by the idea of drinking the fruits of his labor. An acre of 800 Pinot noir vines (1103P rootstock, Dijon Clone 667 & 113) soon followed.

Original plans to dry farm the vineyard led to the choice of drought-resistant rootstock; however, those plans required change as the vines were not thriving, producing a sub-par crop. Also, the winemaker's hangtime requirements were difficult to achieve. Buying water by the truckload proved to be too costly as a long-term solution, and immediate availability of water was the number one concern. Encountering Rich Casale of the NRCS at a VASCM meeting provided the answer.

Rich represents a program of UCCE/NRCS (Univ. of CA Cooperative Extension/Natural Resource Conservation Service) to improve water quality education. The Kobels found out about the EQIP (Environmental Quality Incentive Program), which offers technical and financial assistance.

With the funding and assistance of this program, Clos de Madrone Vineyard installed ten 5,000-gallon storage tanks with associated plumbing to catch and store the rainwater from the Kobel's house roof and patio. A mere 15 inches of rainfall fills the gravity-fed tanks (typical rainfall is 60 inches per season). The pumps are solar-powered. EQIP underwrote the cost of the plastic tanks, which represented 40% of the entire cost of the system (not including the solar portion).

Miller Hill Vineyard

Owners Diane and Gerhard Schlecht are equally proud of their beautiful Pinot noir vines, organic practices and a rainfall-capture irrigation system that blends the old with the new.

Another European by birth, Gerhard was born in Germany and left at age 20, bound for Canada and then San Francisco. Next came a stint in Los Angeles, playing semi-professional soccer, which undoubtedly contributed to his robust state today. While still in LA, Gerhard and

his wife, Diane, began searching for some land in Oregon, Washington and Utah. After three years of making offers, they finally bought their 11 acres at Miller Hill in the early 1970s. At that time, the land was covered with old prune and pear orchards.

Early on, the Schlechts discovered their well was not adequate for even irrigating some newly planted trees, so they began asking the local "old timers" what they did for water. An underground 32,000-gallon cistern that captured rainwater from their newly-built house roof took advantage of what was an "old innovation".

Gerhard worked for a time in San Jose in the tool-&-die business. He and Diane opened a liquor and delicatessen business, later followed by a deli located in south San Jose across from the IBM facility. After 13 years as a business owner and close to retirement, Gerhard was searching for a meaningful activity that would keep him active (right around the same time as Andre), and they both decided to plant vineyards in 1999. Rick Anzalone planned and laid out both vineyards, selected rootstocks and clones, installed the trellis systems and planted the vines. Gerhard tends 2,300 Pinot noir grapevines (110R rootstock, Dijon Clone 115), and Gerhard and Andre agreed to share the vineyard equipment.

Facing the same problem: that dry-farming was not working, the Schlechts implemented a smaller scale UCCE/NRCS irrigation solution, also underwritten 40% by an EQIP cost share assistance award. To supplement their existing 32,000-gallon cistern, they installed four above-ground tanks, which added 20,000 gallons to the water storage system. It employs a similar gravity-fed, rainwater catchment scheme as the existing cistern, thus adding the new to the old.

The Wine

For the past six years, the harvests of both vineyards have been sold to Jerold O'Brien, 30-year-owner of Silver Mountain Vineyards, located a short distance away. O'Brien combines the grapes from both Clos de Madrone (2.5 tons) and Miller Hill (6.0 tons) Vineyards and markets them under the single name of Miller Hill Vineyard.

The 2005 Pinot Noir, Santa Cruz Mountains, Miller Hill Vineyard has won both a gold medal (Pacific Rim International Wine Competition) and a silver medal (2008 Dallas Morning News Wine Competition).

A description of the 2003 Silver Mountain Miller Hill Pinot Noir from the May, 2006, *Pinot File* makes one wonder if that writer was describing wine!

Medium bodied with a gorgeous garnet robe. The nose is plush with red fruits and a brambly character. A wine of great elegance that finishes with a peek-a-boo dose of sexy fruit and spice that lingers and leaves you staring at the glass. Beautifully composed, balanced and sleek. Two hours later it was still solid. Wowie! Demure and curvaceous.

Directions to Sesnon House for the Holiday Party:

6500 Soquel Dr., Aptos

From Soquel Dr., coming from Park Ave.: watch for the Sesnon House sign, and make a right onto the Lower Perimeter Rd. before you get to the traffic signal at the college campus. If you are coming from State Park Dr.: pass the traffic signal at the college campus, make the next left onto the Lower Perimeter Rd.

You will see Sesnon House immediately on your left; make the first left into the parking lot in front of the house.

Officers of the Viticulture Association of the Santa Cruz Mountains:

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Newsletter



Holiday Party: December 11