

Subject: Oranewood Wines News No.17, June 3rd, 2005

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To Our Wine Aficionados,

Introduction

I have been talking about my March trip to California for several months now. In this newsletter I talk about the last two wineries we will be representing as a result of the trip. While none of our wine is cheap, we do think of some of it as premium wine; that is, by my definition, wine that would cost \$25 or more in a store. These last two wineries produce premium wines in small quantities. I think Arizona is going to love them.

Box Score

New Restaurants/bars:	0
New Retail outlets:	2
New Sales people:	0
New Wineries:	2

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Upcoming Events - <http://www.oranewoodwines.com/wine-events.htm>

These events are usually described on our web-site.

New Locations

Sportsman's Fine Wines & Spirits – Arrowhead
Sportsman's Fine Wines & Spirits – Phoenix

New Winery – Lucas Winery – Lodi, CA

I arrived a little early for my appointment, parked my usual Hertz rental (a Toyota SR5 Airbag, according to the marks on the steering wheel) by the sign that said "Girl Surfers Only" and went in search of the owner, David Lucas. David took me into the barrel room for the tasting and explained why this recently built winery is so unique. Having been a viticultural consultant with Mondavi for many years, he developed lots of opinions about the process of growing grapes and making wine. One opinion resulted in this winery that minimizes movement and filtering of the wines following the harvesting of the grapes. Fermentation occurs outside the barrel room in tanks that are elevated so that when it is time to barrel the wine it can be gravity fed into the barrels. No pumps, no filters. The barrels lie on stones at ground level and are not moved. David is also very particular about the barrels he uses – he buys them new, uses them briefly for chardonnay and then the next year for the Zinfandel. David told me that as a consultant he asked where barrels came from and was often appalled that the wine maker had no clue. The vineyard, Zinstar, was the first Lodi vineyard, planted in 1978; the new winery was completed in 2000. When Alison was selling wines for Oranewood, she once asked me where a customer's accent was from. My response was that he didn't have an accent. Of course, the guy was from London, and me being a Brit means that only other Brits have no accent. I mention this because the Lucas wine maker, Heather Pyle-Lucas, is from the Cotswolds (60 miles from where I grew up). Heather also worked at Mondavi and continues to be a consultant winemaker. She has a special project that produces their Zinfandel Reserve. Knowing the key to good wine is good grapes, Heather personally tends that part of the vineyard. The winery production is small. They produce premium Chardonnay (no malolactic, only a touch of oak), Zinfandel and Zinfandel Reserve. David is a once and continuing surfer dude, so I vacated the reserved parking spot.

New Winery – Strata Vineyards – Napa, CA

The primary purpose of my trip to California was to pour wine at a charity wine auction in support of my daughter's nursery school. When I first wrote about it I quickly got a response from Debby, my daughter, who suggested that I clarify that it's really my grandson's nursery school - my daughter was "merely" co-chair of the charity event. My pouring wine was intended to loosen the purse strings of the attendees. Also pouring was a gentleman called John Johnson, who was pouring Strata Merlot. We exchanged tastes and business cards. John has been growing grapes for 25 years and planted the Strata Merlot grapes in 1995. John's partner, Dave Cofran, has been in the wine business for 35 years, including 20 years as COO at Silver Oaks, a position he took when Silver Oaks began operations. Dave eventually retired as Silver Oaks General Manager, however, we know that retiring doesn't mean that you have to stop doing what you enjoy doing - especially if it's making wonderful wine. John and Dave now produce a Napa Merlot. Their vineyard is in the Oak Knoll sub-appellation of Napa Valley. That is the area including, and immediately to the North, of Napa Town. The land has layers of soil and the wine has layers of complexity that lead to their name – Strata. Their first vintage was 1999; the 2001 vintage is on the truck to Arizona. Stand by!

Rambling

Well May is historically our slowest month of the year, contributing only 5% to the total year revenue. (8.5% would be par for a 1/12th of the year.) We have, however, gone past the empirical breakeven point. This is the point where an actual profit is detectable and contrasts with the theoretical breakeven point which is when we calculated that we would break even. We have had four months of profitability, albeit small. Wow.

Feedback

We received some feedback asking whatsup with our horses. Well, whatsup is that they are now in our back yard. Part of our overall cash flow reduction (along with keeping our '94 Celica on the road) was to move our three horses and one belonging to friends onto our property. This gives us a morning noon and evening workout putting hay in feeders and shoveling the byproducts into a dumpster. Our little Jazzy, who was born during a Scottsdale Culinary Festival winemaker dinner, is now three years old: friendly, inquisitive, charming and a wonderful on-going project for Laurie.

Cheers,

Richard and Laurie

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