

Subject: *Orangewood Wines News No.15, April 4th, 2005*

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To Our Wine Aficionados,

Introduction

Another fun month in the wine business, this made especially so because the Cave Creek voters chose others for the council, to Laurie's and my relief. So on with the newsletter.

I was in Napa Valley early in March, pouring wine from Noceto, Ventana and Young's at a charity auction event. (Thanks to each of them and to Frank Family, Napa Cellars and RustRidge for their auction donations). I took a few days and visited 11 wineries. Some of the stories from my trip are in this newsletter, others will be forthcoming.

Box Score

Restaurants/bars:	0
Retail outlets:	0
Sales people:	0
Wineries:	+1

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

These events are usually described on our web-site.

New Winery - Wilderotter Vineyard

If you are driving in the Sierra Foothills and choose to head east from Plymouth on Shenandoah Road, you bear left after a few hundred yards to stay with Shenandoah Road; then within a couple of miles there is Young's Vineyard on the right. Shortly thereafter is a right turn on Shenandoah School Road and just down there is a new tasting room for Wilderotter Vineyard. Last summer a certain Dennis took this trip three weeks after the wine room opened and he had such a great time with the owner, Jay Wilderotter, he decided to try to bring the wine into Arizona. The first I knew of Dennis's trip was when Jay called me saying I had been recommended by David Fish at the Jug 'n Barrel as a potential distributor. So, one set of samples later, I included Wilderotter on my itinerary.

It turns out that Jay was an air force pilot, but farming was in his blood, so he bought the property 14 years ago and sold the grapes. He also custom crushed some wine and now has his own equipment and makes a modest amount of a few wines: Roussanne, Zinfandel and Syrah. (He also has a Viognier, but has sold out.) We, in turn, are shipping a modest amount of his wine and expect to have it on the shelf at Jug 'n Barrel next week. In the meantime, Dennis has not been standing still; other wine store owners are calling me...

Rambling

In much of the corporate world there is a yearly ritual in which your manager gives you a performance appraisal. Here's what was good, here's what's OK, here's where you need improvement. In a network of independent businesses, such as a wine distributor working with wineries, mutual performance appraisals would be helpful. "Here's my perception of you, what's your perception of me?" I was in the Napa area pouring wine at my daughter's preschool's annual charity wine auction, so I took the opportunity to visit five of our wineries. None are perfect, but then neither am I to them. I'm trying to figure out what makes wineries easy to work with so that I can point out any difficulties I am having.

Perhaps the most important attribute is communication. Does communication flow easily and often? Symptoms of poor communication are surprises. The prices go up, a vintage runs out, the varietal is discontinued. Any of these things, can mean that effort to sell the wine is wasted - effort that would not have been spent had we been forewarned.

The second feature of good wineries is consistency. The style of the new vintage should be similar to the previous one. What I mean is that if I try the vintages side by side I recognize that they come from the same winery. Even though there were weather differences as the grapes grew or improvements to the winemaking, the wines should seem related.

Third is that I need some good stories about the owners and their wineries. I have come to realize that fermented grape juice, no matter how tasty, does not by itself justify the price you pay for it. Part of the charisma of the wine is the story behind it. Ideally you have visited the winery so that opening a bottle of wine evokes memories of a happy occasion. If not, I like to give you some background so that you can imagine that the winery is a fun place to visit and hence their wine may be a dream of a future visit.

So, I'm visiting Latcham Vineyards in Fairplay and standing in the tasting room talking to my contact, Heidi, about some of these things. Originally I met John Latcham, but most of my communications are now with Heidi. I'm introduced to Margaret Latcham, who joins in the conversation, and then Frank Latcham, who started the vineyards in the early 80's, comes out to say hello. What a chance to learn more! Frank was a lawyer in his former life and he certainly looks like Hollywood's prototypical country lawyer. He said he wanted to own a vineyard when he realized that people visit wineries with the expectation of having a good time. This contrasted with the expectations of clients visiting his law office. In the early 70's he considered buying 14 acres in Sonoma, but with 4 small children the asking price of \$1,400/acre was too steep. Latcham Vineyards sells 85% of its wine either at the tasting room or through the wine club. They have only 4 distributors, of which we are one. I got my appraisal when he referred to Orangewood as "the distributor who pays their bills". Good work, Laurie – keep up that image. And I thought it was my irresistible charm that did it!

Enough!

Richard and Laurie

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