



Joseph Swan Vineyards

2005 Summer Newsletter

One of the hot topics of the moment is the changing style of wines worldwide. Movies have been made about it, newsletters abound singing the praises of the “new world style” of winemaking, web sites are filled with passionate discussions about it and grower seminars attempting to deal with the issue are so popular many are turned away. One of the central tenets of this new world style has to do with ripeness and how it is defined.

Until recently this has been a subject of interest mostly to winemakers. However, it has now become a common topic of conversation on many fronts, often heated. What in the world is going on? What is going on is a sea change in the idea of what constitutes ripe grapes and the resulting wines that they produce. From a few powerful wine writers and the wine aficionados who follow their lead to the producers who, when blessed with a high score for producing a wine of a particular style, change their philosophy and winemaking practices, to the growers who suddenly have to contend with wineries that will no longer accept fruit that in the past was happily taken, the question of what constitutes ripe grapes has taken on new meaning with far-reaching consequences.

If one were to follow the lead of viticultural texts, determining when grapes are ripe would be easy.

Maturity is usually defined by the amount of soluble solids (mostly sugar) in the grapes along with the titratable acidity and pH. (pH is the measure of the free hydrogen or hydroxide ions present and is a true measure of the relative acidity or alkalinity.) However, this is within the context of the grapes having achieved these numbers only after having gone through a series of physiological changes. Mother nature cares very little about how we measure ripeness. In reality, the grape berries exist for one purpose and one purpose only—seed dispersal. This ensures the survival of the species. Since grape seeds are dispersed by birds and other animals that eat the berries and then disperse them through their feces, the fruit must achieve a level of ripeness that makes it attractive to these animals. Anyone who has grown a grape vine (or cherry tree or other fruit) knows that birds have an uncanny sixth sense. About one day before you want to pick the fruit, the birds seem to decide that it is time for them to clean you out! However, we have discovered that grapes make wine. The character of the wine is tied directly to the character of the fruit at harvest. Fruit that birds might eat is less attractive to us both from an eating

standpoint and a winemaking one as well since we like the fruit to be riper than birds do

My feeling about grape ripeness has a lot in common with that old adage about art—“I don’t know what good art is but I know it when I see it”. Explaining to someone how I decide when to pick a vineyard is more than a little difficult. We rely on grape samples and analyze the juice for sugar, acid, and pH. However, numbers out of context are simply numbers. In addition I also, especially with pinot noir, look for the browning of the seeds, watch the vines, wait until I see significant yellowing of the leaves in the fruiting zone and watch to make sure that we pick before any desiccation of the fruit. But most of all, I walk the vine rows and taste the berries. I can tell you when a grape is not yet ripe and when it is overripe but that magical moment of full ripeness is elusive. I like to think that I can taste the wine I want to make in those little berries. Perhaps I can, perhaps not. What I can do is taste the wine I don’t want to make when I encounter fruit that is either under-ripe or over-ripe. But all of this begs the question—what is ripeness anyway?



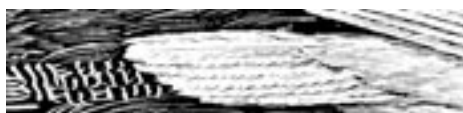
Those of you who have been drinking wine long enough undoubtedly remember the rise and fall of zinfandel in the late '70's and early '80's. As increasing numbers of producers began making wine from zinfandel—many with little understanding of its unique ripening characteristics—more and more high alcohol wines, often with residual sugar, began to appear. While many of them were quite popular, most did not do well in the bottle and the wide disparity of styles without any distinction on the label between the various styles resulted in a collapse in interest in the wines.

Today we are facing a different dilemma. With the new international style of big, flashy, fruit bomb wines being popularized by Robert Parker and, to a lesser extent, The Wine Spectator, a huge percentage of the wine drinking population in this country has never been exposed to wines as they were made 20+ years ago. Wineries are moving to produce wines that are, for the most part, 'wow' wines and not wines that reflect their terroir, go particularly well with food, or that gain complexity with bottle age. Why should we care? Except for a few dinosaurs like me, most people don't. However, it has become a hot topic of late as more and more people are beginning to question the wisdom of the move toward almost standardized wines at the upper end of the price spectrum. One of the glorious things about the rare and expensive wines of the past was their uniqueness. Today one would be hard pressed when presented with a group of high

scoring red wines to determine not only their origin but also what they are made from.

Due to this push to harvest later with ever-higher levels of sugar, we are facing another problem and it is one that really concerns me. That is the level of alcohol in today's wines. In years past, with the exception of some zinfandels and a few late harvest wines, it was unusual to find wine much higher than 14%. Now 14% alcohol level wines are considered by many to be light wines and it's not uncommon to find many varietals topping 15%-- and some to go way beyond that. Part of this is due to the aforementioned tendency to pick later and later with ever-higher sugar levels but it can't be blamed entirely on that. The reasons are complex, but a number of factors are at play here. One is the revolution that has taken place in the vineyards. Virus free vines, better rootstocks, better trellising systems and much better farming have made many vineyards not only better in terms of overall wine quality but also more efficient in doing what the vine is designed to do — promote maturity—and with it higher sugar levels. Combine this with lower crops and the desire to pick later and we are now seeing grapes that used to be harvested at 22.5 degrees brix to 23 degrees brix being harvested at upwards of 27 degrees brix. This accounts for a major part of it, but another factor comes into play as well and that is the increased efficiency of yeast. Before I made my first wine, the rule of thumb to determine the potential alcohol in grapes was to divide the sugar by 1/2. Some time later the rule became multiply by .55. I used this rule of thumb suc-

cessfully for many years. Today however it seems to be at least a .6 conversion factor and sometimes much more. The big unanswered question seems to be "why?" Although lots of theories have been proposed, I have yet to hear of anything that can be proven. Some point to every-more efficient yeasts being isolated and propagated for wine production. While that may be partially true, we rely on spontaneous fermentations for many of our wines and have yet to see a noticeable and repeatable difference in the conversion factor. (Whether the fermentations are truly from wild yeasts or are simply what is floating around the winery from prior ferments will have to be the basis for another and perhaps equally controversial discussion.) While I have made occasional forays into the land of the over-the-top wines, it has either been through error or in my belief that under the circumstances picking the fruit earlier would have resulted in wines with unripe character. We have enough problems keeping alcohols under control as it is. Picking at even higher levels of sugar would compound the problem, since alcohol reduction is not a solution for us. While it is very widely, and some would say appropriately, used, it is not an option for me. While the wines made using this technique can be very good they, in my opinion, no longer accurately reflect their terroir. Since my philosophy is that a wine's first duty is to express a sense of place, it is not a practice that I endorse. The end result then is that we pick fruit when I think it is fully mature and the resultant alcohol be damned. Whether my decision is the correct one or not is open to interpretation. After all it is only one person's opinion.





NEW WINES

2003 Pinot Gris Trenton Station (Russian River Valley)

We sourced fruit for our pinot gris from Saralee's vineyard for several years. In 2004 we made a change to Saralee and Rich Kunde's new vineyard just to the west of us. The new planting of pinot gris is exciting. The vines are planted on a steep slope with both west and east exposure and relatively shallow, poor soils. The crops are lighter and harvest is about two weeks later than the original planting at Saralee's vineyard. Even though the fruit character is different, with more intensity of flavor and a nice mineral component, we have stayed with the same winemaking techniques—barrel fermentation in neutral barrels, sur lies aging, and a complete malo-lactic fermentation.

The resultant wine, even from very young vines, shows amazing concentration and complexity for pinot gris. Aromas of sweet apple and pear mingle with honeysuckle. In the mouth it is rich, and, while not high in acid, it has enough acid backbone to carry the rich fruit. Because the barrels used were older there is no hint of oak, but the barrel fermentation adds to the richness in the mouth. Bottled unfinned and unfiltered. 110 cases,

2003 Chardonnay Trenton Estate (Russian River Valley)

From a small planting of a heritage selection of chardonnay in our vineyard characterized by small crops of very small berried, small clustered, intensely flavored fruit planted 30+ years ago.

The wine is lightly hazy with a very pale lemon yellow color (the wine was neither fined nor filtered). The aromas are reminiscent of wet stone, Meyer lemon, Mexican lime, and a hint of acacia blossom. In the mouth it is at once rich yet lean with flavors echoing the nose (especially the Meyer lemon). The acidity is bright without making the wine tart. The finish lingers

for some time. Despite 100% barrel fermentation, sur lies aging, and a complete malo-lactic fermentation, the winemaking techniques simply act as a framework for the unique character of the vineyard. It is more reminiscent of Puligny-Montrachet than California. 52 cases bottled.

2002 Mourvedré (Russian River Valley)

We have been making wine from these vines for 11 years now and the wine never ceases to amaze me. The combination of old vines planted in an area that, at least in theory, is too cold to ripen this varietal, and very low crops results in perhaps the most unique wine made from this grape anywhere.

It is very deep in color, a beautiful crimson ruby. The aromas are typically ripe plums with a layer of liquid black pepper and this year has it in spades. In the mouth the wine is quite rich but not in a fruit bomb sort of way. The acid is good but not excessive, the tannins are soft and supple, and the wine has great length. While not as versatile a wine as pinot noir (which will match well with almost any food), it is still an excellent food wine. I would serve it the next time I had wild game or, failing that, beef or other red meat dish. It would also work with spicy Mediterranean dishes; unfortunately we only bottled 36 cases.

2002 Pinot Noir Trenton Estate (Russian River Valley)

One of the more common questions people ask me is "What is your best/favorite wine?" That is a tough question and one I can't easily answer. However I can say that if we do have a flagship wine it is most definitely our estate pinot noir. The vineyard was planted back in the dark ages of California pinot noir production, back when pinot noir was almost unsaleable (for good reason). However, the combination of a very fine selection of pinot noir planted in a magical site has resulted over the years in wines that are tremendous in their youth and seem to age almost forever.

The 2002 is very reminiscent of the 2001 in its intense aroma of ripe black berry fruit and oriental spice with a hint of forest floor. In the mouth is very complex and very rich with its sweet fruit balanced by good acid with very supple tannins. Although very enjoyable now, it should improve for several years and continue to drink well for many years beyond that. (Note: last year we pulled bottles of almost every vintage of the estate pinot back to the first commercial vintage of 1973. Although I thought that some were better than others, not a single bottle would have been considered over-the-hill. I was astonished.) A total of 383 cases were bottled.

2003 Pinot Noir Cuvée de Trois (Russian River Valley)

When we first produced this wine, it was meant to be a one time only wine. What I didn't anticipate was the tremendous response it would receive from many of our restaurant accounts. Since the first year when we bottled just over 100 cases, we have increased until it is about 1100 cases, but it sells almost as fast as the first release. The wine is a blend of lots, which have always included wine from our Estate and Saralee's. None of the wine is made with C3 (my shorthand name) in mind. It is always a barrel selection from all of our lots. Many of those who have been buying it from the beginning feel that each new release is the best. I prefer to think that each reflects the best characteristics of the vintage and that since each blend is different, they are simply unique wines.

Slightly hazy medium garnet/ruby color. Deep nose of fruit soup (red berries, red cherries and peaches) with hint of red licorice. In the mouth quite full and rich which is typical for the vintage. It shows plenty of the trademark Russian River Valley fruit with hints of earth and forest floor. The finish is long and lingering. Not as complex as our vineyard designates, it is still a wonderfully satisfying example of Russian River Valley fruit at its finest.

**(Please see adenum on back of orderform)*

Joseph Swan Vineyards
2916 Laguna Rd
Forestville, CA 95436

PRESORTED
FIRST CLASS
US POSTAGE
PAID
PERMIT #470
SANTA ROSA, CA

Return Service Requested

Up and Coming Events

August 19th and 20th. 10th annual Grape-to-Glass

It's back!!! Come and have some great fun and perhaps learn something along the way. This year, due to the impossible logistics of canoe rental and pickup for the area of the river that we canoed, there will be no canoe trip. Instead there will be a wonderful Magical Mystery Bus Tour on Friday. The bike trip will take place as usual but I am hanging up my bike shoes for the year so I won't be along to point out all of the scenic soil types along the way. Our vineyard tour this year will be at Saralee Kundee's Trenton Station Vineyard where we source our wonderful pinot gris. Saturday night ends with the now famous Hog in the Fog Barbecue, wine tasting, and auction. Sunday is Brunch on the Green. For full details and to sign up go to <http://www.rrvw.org> or phone 707-521-2534.

Joseph Swan Vineyards

2916 Laguna Rd. , Forestville, CA 95436
Fax 707.575.1605 Ph. 707.573.3747 Summer 2005
New Release Order Form

_____ 2003 Chardonnay, Trenton Estate-Russian River Valley	4 bottle limit	\$30.00 _____
_____ 2003 Pinot Gris, Trenton Station-Russian River Valley	4 bottle limit	\$16.00 _____
_____ 2003 Pinot Noir, Cuvée de Trois-Russian River Valley		\$22.00 _____
_____ 2002 Pinot Noir, Trenton Estate-Russian River Valley		\$45.00 _____
_____ 2002 Mourvèdre-Russian River Valley	4 bottle limit	\$25.00 _____
_____		_____
_____		_____
_____		_____
_____		_____
_____		_____

Ship _____ Date _____
Wine must be picked up or shipped
within 6 months or a storage charge will be applied.
Delivery address, Residence _____ Business _____
Name _____
C/O _____
Address _____
City _____ State _____ Zip _____
Check enclosed \$ _____
Please charge my Visa _____ MC _____ AE _____
Account # _____
Expiration date _____
Signature _____
All orders must have a daytime phone number.

Total from above _____
10% Case (12 btls or more) Discount _____
Sub Total _____
**Sales Tax 7.75% _____
Shipping _____
Grand Total _____

SHIPPING :	3 btls,	6 btls,	12 btls,
CA, OR, ID, NV	\$13.00	\$17.00	\$24.00
CO, NM, MT, AZ, WA	14.00	18.00	26.00
TX, IA, MN, MO, NE,	15.00	22.00	33.00
CT, DE, DC, IN, KT, MI,	16.00	24.00	38.00
ME, NJ, NC, SC, SD, TN,			
VT, VA, RI, IL, WV, WI, WY,			
GA, LA, NH# of Bottles			

*(Please see adenum on back of orderform)

At this time we can only ship to California and the reciprocal states. However, if you are not in a reciprocal state and wish to arrange shipping, please contact us. We may be able to put you in touch with a company that will ship on your behalf. Because the sale takes place in California and title to the wine passes to you here at the winery, sales tax is due on all wine except wine shipped to the authorized, reciprocal states, when shipping is paid for at time of order.

**(Out of state residents paying for shipment out of state, to the above states, at the time of ordering, can omit sales tax).

Newsletter summer '05 addendum

In case you haven't noticed, we didn't get a newsletter out in February (or June for that matter). Things have been hopping here in Trenton but we hope to be back to a more normal schedule this fall with the next newsletter scheduled to come out sometime in October (depending on our crush schedule).

Futures:

For those who purchased futures of the 2003 Zinfandels, they will be ready for pickup by October 1. We had planned to release them on or about September 1st but we are bottling them later than originally planned. If you paid for shipping, the wine will be shipped out sometime in October, depending on the weather at that time. If you have already made arrangements to come by to pick the wine up in September, let us know and we will pull your wine from the warehouse to have it ready for you. Please give us a few days notice in order to do this.

Shipping:

Weather is always a concern when shipping wine. We only use wine-shipping companies that pay very close attention to the weather, not only where you are but along the route as well. They take pains to ship early in the week to limit the chance that the wine will end up in a warehouse for the weekend. That being said, shipping in the summer is risky. We will be more than happy to hold any wine you order until more friendly weather in the fall.

With the recent Supreme Court decision regarding shipping we have received many calls asking if we could now ship everywhere. The answer is no. The decision only affects certain states and those affected have a period of time to devise a remedy. Two states, Connecticut and New York have new laws that will allow shipping but it will be some time before the mechanisms are in place to allow shipping. In addition, a judge in Ohio ruled that their state laws were not in compliance with the Supreme Court ruling and that shipping is now allowed there. However, shipping companies have not yet indicated if or when they will begin deliveries. We will keep you informed as new states open up.

Other News:

After lots of false starts, we now have the software in place to email our newsletter. Please email us your address (along with your physical address—we do have customers with the same names!) and we will add you to the email list if you like. In addition we plan to finally update our website with notes on the current wines along with a list of available library wines.

We would like to introduce our new employee, Joe Webb. He will be assisting in all aspects of our wineries activities. Make sure that you say hello to him next time you stop by!
Thanks for your patience and support, Lynn and Rod Berglund