

winemaking

VARIETAL FOCUS Grenache



Lance Cutler

Lance Cutler has been a working winemaker in Sonoma County for 35 years. He has been a contributing editor for *Wine Business Monthly* for more than 10 years. His unique perspective on winemaking has led to our Industry Roundtable series and Varietal Focus series. Lance is also the author of four books, including *The Tequila Lover's Guide to Mexico*.

GRENACHE IS ONE OF the world's most widely planted red winegrape varieties. A versatile grape, it can produce lovely Rosé, delightful, light red wine or big, long-aging reds. It works well as a standalone varietal but is equally at home in blends. More than anything, what makes Grenache so popular is that it is prolific and grows under a wide variety of vineyard and climatic conditions.

Grenache most likely derived from Northern Spain and spread quickly to Southern France. It thrives in hot climates and manages well under drought-like conditions. Currently about 500,000 acres of Grenache are grown worldwide. France and Spain remain the largest principal growing regions for the variety with 250,000 and 170,000 acres, respectively. Italy (primarily the south) has 55,000 acres, the United States (mostly California and Washington) has 10,000 acres and Australia has 8,000 acres.

Grenache is the dominant variety in the Southern Rhône where it can be blended with a dozen other varieties, and Châteauneuf-du-Pape, where it is often blended with Syrah and Mourvèdre. The thin skins and lack of deep color in Grenache make it the perfect variety for full-bodied Rosé wines, and it is the primary grape of Tavel and Lirac Rosés. In Spain, where it is known as Garnacha, the grape does well as a standalone varietal, especially when produced from old vines. It is also blended with Tempranillo or Carignane to good effect. Grenache was introduced into Australia in the mid-1800s, quickly becoming the most widely planted varietal in the country. One-hundred years later Shiraz and Cabernet Sauvignon took over as the top varieties, but Grenache is making a comeback, especially in Grenache/Syrah/Mourvèdre blends (GSM).

In the 19th century in California, Grenache was widely planted in the San Joaquin Valley where growers exploited its high yields and fruit-forward character to make low-cost jug wines. In the late 20th century, the Rhône Rangers movement rescued Grenache and proved it could make a delectable, age-worthy wine if grown in cooler climates with controlled yields. However,

a look at current plantings gives the truth of the matter. A total of 6,000 acres of Grenache are planted in California, and more than 5,000 acres remain in high-yield, low-quality regions.

Grenache likes hot, dry soils that are well drained, but it seems to thrive in schist and granite soils where it yields more concentrated wines with complex flavors. Grenache is a vigorous variety with a strong wood canopy and upright shoots, making it a prime candidate for head pruning. It has thin skins that are lightly pigmented, so vines producing large crops tend to make pale wines with low tannins. Controlling crop size is essential for quality Grenache. Low-vigor rootstocks can improve fruit quality as can pruning techniques and proper soil types.

When farmed well, Grenache wines have a telltale strawberry, black cherry, almost candied apple character. Cool-climate sites and soil types can add complex elements of anise, orange peel and cinnamon notes. It tends to retain good acidity, giving the wines energy, backbone and longevity.

For this Varietal Focus we looked at three distinctive regions across California. El Dorado County has become a hotbed of Rhône varieties and yielded three distinctively styled wines. **Tracey** and **Jared Brandt** from **Donkey and Goat Winery** submitted a Grenache blend. **Chuck Mansfield** gave us his new **Four Fields** Grenache, and **Chris Pittenger** contributed Grenache from **Skinner Vineyards**. Edna Valley on the Central Coast brought us **Bob Lindquist** from **Qupé Winery**, one of the first proponents of Rhône varieties, especially Syrah. **Craig Jaffurs** of **Jaffurs Wine Cellars** grows his Grenache on three separate vineyards in Santa Barbara County, and **Mikael Sigouin's Keana Wine Company** Grenache comes from Terra Alta Vineyard in the Santa Ynez Valley. Sonoma County gave us two wines from Dry Creek Valley: Rhône pioneer **Steve Edmunds** of **Edmunds St. John** shows his Rocks and Gravel blend from Unti Vineyard, and **Anne** and **Mike Dashe** of **Dashe Cellars** gave us their Les Enfants Terribles. From nearby Sonoma Valley we tasted **Landmark Vineyards'** estate Grenache made by **Greg Stach**.



Sonoma County

Sonoma County is huge and diverse. There are 64,000 acres planted to 72 different grape varieties in 16 distinct AVAs. Soil types, climate and elevations are varied throughout the county from the much cooler coastal regions to the warmer inland valleys. Normal annual rainfall averages 25 to 35 inches, but hardly any of that falls during the months of May through October, leading to a long, dry summer growing season. Along the coast, fog rolls in directly from the Pacific Ocean while inland valleys get fog rolling in from San Pablo Bay that pours through mountain gaps. This means there are a lot of very cool nights and very warm days. Cooler regions in Sonoma County are known primarily for Pinot Noir and Chardonnay. Warmer valley areas have made reputations on Zinfandel, Merlot and to some extent Cabernet Sauvignon. Rhône varietals seem to do well in both the cool areas and the warmer inland valleys.



Edmunds St. John

2012 Rocks and Gravel, Unti Vineyard, 250 cases, 13.7% Alc. \$27

Steve Edmunds is the proprietor and winemaker of **Edmunds St. John** winery in Berkeley, California. He is also a poet, essayist and songwriter. A self-taught vintner, he founded his winery in 1985. He has established a cult following that loves him for concentrating on more subtle, lower alcohol expressions of his chosen varietals.



According to Edmunds

“I want to produce a wine that is an elemental, unfettered expression of its origin in place and time. That requires picking the grapes at that point when the flavor has come fully into focus and is at its most energetic. Once picked, I am trying not to add or subtract anything from the raw material. The vintage decides what kind of wine is to be made.

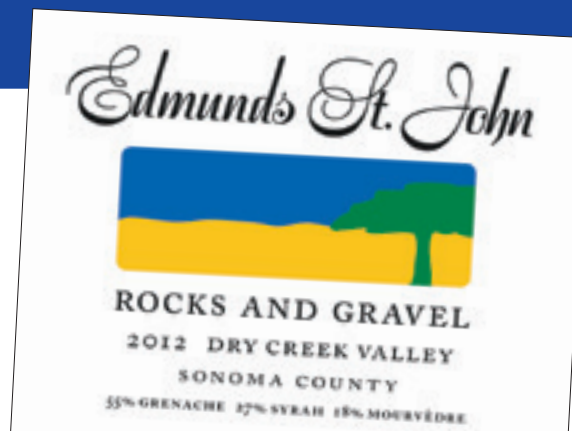
“The grapes for this wine come from Unti Vineyard in Dry Creek Valley and are farmed biodynamically. The soil is Haire/Manzanita silt loam at about 200 feet in elevation. Grenache and Mourvèdre are planted 5x9 feet, and the Syrah is 6x10 feet. The Grenache is planted on 110R rootstock and is 50 percent Alban and 50 percent Tablas A clone.

“While I might make suggestions about what to do in the vineyard, these people are very good farmers, so I am comfortable with letting them do what they decide to do. Usually we’ll thin weak shoots and clusters after set. We use minimal leaf pulling on the Grenache, and we thin again at veraison.

“Deciding when to harvest is crucial. I taste the fruit and watch the pH. I wait for elaborated, energetic flavors that are focused. I want the pH to be relatively low and usually at the point where the flavors are in place, about 3.5 pH, but I want the green, abrasive tannins to sweeten up.

“Grapes are harvested by hand into half-ton macro-bins. Grenache and Syrah are destemmed, but not crushed after a bit of sorting if needed. The Mourvèdre is crushed by foot and fermented whole-cluster. We add no SO₂ at the crusher; and while there is no overt cold soak, it usually takes three to four days for the ambient yeast to begin fermentation. We ferment in a 500-gallon concrete tank and bins, punching down twice a day. Peak temperatures are in the high 70s to mid-80s. We ferment to dryness and then press, combining free run and press juice. Grenache and Syrah are pressed together, and Mourvèdre is pressed separately to be blended later.

“From there the wine goes back to the concrete tank and to stainless tanks. We use no oak. Malolactic fermentation is spontaneous in tank and usually finishes before December. We add 10 to 15 ppm SO₂ post-ml. The wine is racked to an upright, blended and goes back to tank. It gets racked once more in April or May, gets cross-flow filtered and bottled in June or July for September release. Using no oak and concrete tanks, along with early bottling, keeps the wine fresh and energetic.”



Tasting Notes

Edmunds: Well, it is a bit reductive right now, but I think it smells pretty harmonious. One of the striking things to me is that I don’t smell any of the individual varieties. It smells like an integrated wine. It seems pretty bright. There is a real depth of flavor and a bit of saltiness. The texture of the tannins and the acidity help hold it together. It is a pretty big wine, but it just tastes young to me.

Dashe: I like it a lot. I agree that you can’t pick out any particular variety, but it does smell like a well-integrated red wine. There is a kind of earthy, spicy, almost tobacco aroma. In the mouth, it has a really beautiful, bright red fruit, and a beautiful texture with a nice tannic finish. It is just beginning to show itself.

Stach: I get a sort of earthiness on it, but I like how lively it is in the mouth. There is a lot of red fruit, but the acid drives the wine through. I get a lot of mineral on this wine. It is very fresh.

Brandt: What some of you say is reductive, I liken to Mourvèdre, which I like. I definitely enjoy the earthy minerality and saline characters. It is very lively with good acidity. It is young, but it definitely has some depth and should age well. It is extremely well-integrated, which may have to do with your co-fermentations or the concrete vessels you age in.

Mansfield: There is a lot of red fruit on the aromas, but it has a dried fruit character. It has more yeasty character and that Rhône-style, meaty flavor, especially toward the finish. It is a touch creamier and more complex from that standpoint with less directly ripe fruit.

Pittenger: This wine is more savory with some nice reduction, leading to herbal and floral notes more than candied or jammy red fruit. The palate shows mouth-watering acidity. He has maintained an old-world sensibility even though this fruit comes from a warmer climate area. This has great structure.

Sigouin: It has a reductive opening; but as it gets more air, it opens up. The color is great. I get a high-tone floral element in the nose, along with red fruits and cinnamon spice. The mouth is juicy with cranberry and cherries, with rhubarb and a spicy core. There are a lot of different things going on. It is well-balanced with acid and nice tannin.

Jaffurs: I like this wine. I think reduction in Rhône wines is good, and it is blowing off as we sit here. This is distinctively a blend with nice, even flavors and good acid. It has nice fruit flavors and a really long finish.

Lindquist: When I first smelled it, I thought that it was stinky, but it blew off right away and keeps improving with air. It has so much complexity aromatically. It is not so much Grenache but more Châteauneuf-du-Pape with the Syrah and Mourvèdre. I need to get some for my cellar.

Dashe Cellars

2012 Les Enfants Terribles Grenache,
 Dry Creek Valley, 477 cases, 13.9% Alc. \$24

Anne and Michael Dashe are a husband-wife winemaking team. The two have more than 40 years of combined winemaking experience and established their winery, **Dashe Cellars**, in 1996 with a Dry Creek Zinfandel. In 2007, they created their Les Enfants Terribles wines, which attempt to create “Old World” style wines using special vineyards from cooler climates, with lower alcohols, modest oak and minimal handling.

According to Dashe

“The model for this wine is really Grand Cru Beaujolais—a lighter style, partial whole-cluster, semi-carbonic maceration wine. The goal is to show off the vibrant, balanced, bright fruit character of Grenache while also showing off its lightness and delicacy. We want to create a velvety texture to the wine without too much extracted tannin, along with some spice complexity from the Grenache.

“We look for cool-climate vineyards that ripen in mid- to late-October. These cool-site vineyards give us longer hang times, which help preserve acidity and brightness. The vineyard is sandy loam with lots of embedded rock. Elevation is 100 feet, and vine spacing is 4x7 feet. We use a Grenache Noir clone planted on 3309 C rootstock. The vineyard is traditionally farmed and irrigated.

“We have experienced growers, and we let them do their jobs without too much intervention. The vines are cropped at 4 to 5 tons per acre, which further delays ripening. We leaf-pull the morning side, drop shoulders and green clusters after veraison, and then do a final fruit drop about two weeks before harvest. To determine when to harvest, we taste and watch pH. There is a watery thinness to Grenache when it is unripe, which converts to a more intense flavor when ripe. Grenache can also be weedy with unbearable tannins before it softens with ripeness.

“Grapes are hand-picked to half-ton T-bins and trucked to the winery early in the morning while still cold. We add 30 ppm SO₂ at the crusher. Then 10 percent of the grapes are whole-cluster-fermented (looking for brown stems), and 90 percent is destemmed only and then sorted for MOG, mold, etc. There is no official cold soak, but it usually takes four days before native yeast begins fermentation.

“We ferment in stainless steel tanks using two punch-downs daily and one delestage during fermentation. Peak temperatures are between 85° F to 88° F. We press at dryness and go into a 900-gallon French Foudre or 500-liter French puncheons. The wood helps keep the yeast in suspension, creating some toasty and creamy components. Malolactic is native in these containers, and the wine sits on the lees until bottling. If the wine gets stinky, we’ll rack it. We use no SO₂ until bottling in April or May after cross-flow filtration. The wine is bottle-aged for two months before release.”



Tasting Notes

Dashe: It has a very delicate nose with quite bright fruit, almost like dried cherries or dried cranberries. It has a bit of toastiness and pepper spice but with lots of vibrant fruit. In the mouth it follows through with bright cherry or cranberry red fruit. It has a lovely velvety texture that is both bright and lively with a clean finish. It has a variety of flavors that are in balance, so I find it both complex and balanced at the same time. Then there is this tiny tannic bite to the finish that I love with this wine.

Edmunds: I think it is terrific. This wine has been evolving in the glass. The Grenache character is really coming through, a kind of spicy thing that is reminiscent of Muscat, almost. I love the texture. The use of the wood is very well done. It gives the wine a certain suppleness, without imparting a lot of oak flavor. It seems really balanced and fresh. Delicious.

Stach: I always get a bit of Tootsie Roll on Grenache, which is sort of an orange-chocolate note. I get a lot of that in this wine. I also get that hard cherry candy character. It is a very pretty wine. I love the structure. There is a bit of grip in the back, which tells me it is Grenache.

Brandt: The liveliness on the nose of pressed red berry and cranberry is vibrant, but the tannin and grip give it a great texture. The velvety character is lovely. I think this would make a fantastic companion at the table. I also think it will age extremely gracefully.

Mansfield: The aromas lead me to believe there is more extraction here, but the mid-palate is quite juicy with mouth-watering balanced acidity. The aromas remind me more of a French-style Grenache while the flavor has more of that candied, clean California Grenache character.

Pittenger: I get just a shade darker flavor profile than the El Dorado wines. There is a floral nose with some nice baking spice. It is brighter on the palate than the nose predicts. It is very polished and supple with some nice tannins on the finish.

Lindquist: This is on the ripe side, with pretty cherry red color. It has a bigger tannin structure with some softer acidity than we get here in Santa Barbara, but the pH is in check. It doesn’t have a lot of Grenache aroma. It smells like a blend. There is almost a Zinfandel berry character, and I like it quite a bit.

Sigouin: I really like the nose. I get cherry, perfume and elegance. There is a hint of clove, and it is really pretty. There is a lot of cherry and cranberry going on and then mineral and spice. It has good tannin weight and good acid.

Jaffurs: It is a fruit-driven, Jolly Rancher type of wine. It is pretty, clear and focused. I like it. It has a nice mouthfeel. It has cherry, strawberry, rhubarb and Christmas spice in the mouth.

Landmark Vineyards

2010 Grenache Steel Plow Estate Vineyard,
200 cases, 14.8% Alc., \$35

Greg Stach graduated from **California State University, Fresno** in 2001 with an enology degree after working as both a journalist and sommelier. He has made wine at **Landmark Vineyards** for 10 years. In 2008, Stach and winemaker **Eric Stern** convinced Landmark's owners to plant Grenache and Syrah at the estate vineyard. This 2010 vintage was the second from that vineyard.

According to Stach

"We are going for a California fruit-based Châteauneuf style with a nod to Burgundian wine making. Steel Plow, our estate vineyard, was too hot for Pinot Noir, but it is perfect for Grenache and Syrah.

"Our vineyard was planted in 2008, so it was very young fruit for this vintage. The soil is alluvial wash from Adobe Canyon. The elevation is 440 feet, and vines are planted at 4.5x6 feet. The rootstock is primarily 420A to reduce vigor with a small amount of 110R.

There are four YCVS clones: Entav 224, Entav 287, Entav 136 and Entav 362. The vineyard is traditional/organic, irrigated and it produced 2.1 tons per acre in 2010.

"We aggressively fruit-drop before veraison. We shoot-position, drop wings and any pink bunches. We do not leaf. We want shade and want the fruit kept in the shade. While I am aware of the chemistry, I pick primarily on flavor. I want ripe flavor without any prune character. I wait for the tannin to subside, and I look for brightness of flavor.

"The fruit is usually very clean, so there is little sorting necessary. We pick into half-ton bins, destemming as we pick and adding 30 ppm SO₂ while leaving as many whole berries as we can. We use a five-day cold soak at 50° F during which we punch-down once a day. We'll warm up the must in the sun and let the fermentation proceed with native yeast. If we need to, we'll inoculate with RC 212 or D 254. We punch-down twice a day early and late in the fermentation and use one punch-down and one pump-over daily during peak fermentation, which usually hits 85° F to 88° F. We press at dryness, mixing free run and press juice together. The wine goes to neutral 60-gallon French oak barrels and 500-liter puncheons where it goes through native malolactic.

"After malolactic, we add 60 ppm SO₂. The wine ages for 15 months on the lees without stirring. We top barrels but do not rack them, maintaining 30 ppm SO₂. The wine is bottled without filtering and gets six months of bottle-aging before release."



Tasting Notes

Stach: I get some mint and really dark cherry fruit with a tad of iodine in the nose. In the mouth, I really like the tannin structure. I think the wine is energetic, but I like how soft the tannins are.

Edmunds: It is an attractive wine. It is substantial with an intensity level that I like. The nose is attractive with a Kirsch-like character. There is a sweetness on the palate that contributes to a really long finish.

Dashe: It is extremely interesting wine. The first two [Sonoma County] wines (St. Edmunds and Dashe) had a delicacy to them, while this in comparison is a whole level up in terms of intensity. There is an initial hit of oakiness along with vibrant, spicy, darker black cherry fruit. It is big and lush with a sort of chocolate-dark cherry flavor. It is a big, round, luscious wine.

Brandt: This is a richer, more lavish wine. The aromas are of darker fruits, and I get the impact of the oak and the Syrah as well. On the palate, the texture is heavier and more intense. It is interesting to see the versatility of Grenache. When picked later and with more oak, it is a completely different wine but still very enjoyable.

Pittenger: This is a riper style with a darker fruit profile. I like the dried fruit quality with some oak. The palate is lush but with good tannins to balance the weight on the palate, I get a lot of Syrah elements out of this wine with almost a gamey quality on the finish. There is a lot of structure and polish to this wine.

Mansfield: I get a lot of that barrel-driven spice character. There is some gaminess with stone fruit plum character. It has a velvety texture across the whole flavor profile, probably from the Syrah. The tannins are present and linger. This wine is much more gamey than wines from El Dorado County.

Jaffurs: This is really rich and full. There are some nice aromatics with fruit, spice and cherry. It is higher in alcohol and lower in acid. It is bigger and riper than the other wines. The center has some pretty fruit but not particularly Grenache.

Sigouin: Right off the bat, the Syrah takes away the Grenache character of it. There seems to be some amount of oak on this wine. In terms of the style they were going for, it is big, full and fruit-forward. It is a bit low in acid for me. It seems a bit top-heavy.

Lindquist: For me, this is the most New World wine that we've had. It has some new oak, but it is not over-oaked. It is less Grenache and more New World red wine. It is not too heavy, but it definitely has some alcohol. I prefer more freshness and acidity.

El Dorado County

El Dorado County's wine history dates back to the 1848 Gold Rush. Poor economics and a dwindling population after the Gold Rush weakened the wine industry, and Prohibition drove the last nail into the coffin for wine production in the county. In the late 1960s a few growers started planting experimental vineyards. Once again, El Dorado County's climate, elevation and granite soils were thought to be perfect for growing quality grapes. By the late-1980s, with the introduction of Rhône varietals, vineyard acreage soared, and now it is up to 2,000 acres.

El Dorado has three basic soil types: volcanic rock, fine-grained shale and decomposed granite. These soils offer good drainage. The area is cooled by elevation instead of the fog common to the coast, so the vines tend to receive more direct sunlight, which growers feel leads to full ripening without herbaceous character while maintaining good acidity. Many winemakers feel that these are perfect growing conditions for Grenache.



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Donkey and Goat

2012 Five Thirteen, 389 cases, 14.1% Alc., \$35

Donkey and Goat is another husband/wife winemaking venture. **Tracey** and **Jared Brandt** trained in France where they learned to make wine as naturally as possible, eschewing cultured yeasts and bacteria, nutrients, crushing machines and new oak. Donkey and Goat's first vintage was in 2004, placing them among the pioneers that paved the way for the natural wine movement. They were named one of five "Winemakers to Watch in 2011" by **Jon Bonné** in the *San Francisco Chronicle*.

According to Brandt

"This wine is inspired by Châteauneuf-du-Pape. We blend five varietals to make a food-friendly, versatile red wine that is enjoyable when young but will evolve into something far more intriguing in coming years.

"While all of the grapes for this wine come from the El Dorado Foothills, we use three different vineyards: Fenaughty, Swansboro and Lightner. Elevations for these vineyards range between 2,500 and 2,800 feet. Soils are mostly decomposed granite or gravelly loam. Vine spacings vary between 8x6 to 8x10, depending on variety and vineyard. Most of the rootstock is 3309, and Grenache clones are either Tablas Creek or Alban.

"All of the vineyards are farmed sustainably with some dry farming and some minimal irrigation when necessary. The key for our style is acid management. We need good acidity in the grapes if we are to achieve our style. This means we do little leaf pulling, trying to maintain a shaded fruit zone with good air flow. Most of the Grenache is head-pruned, which encourages phenolic ripening but not necessarily with high sugars.

"We walk the vineyards, sampling grapes and looking for vine balance. We watch the pH and acidity, not the sugar. We believe that grapes have multiple peaks of ripeness. Given the choice, we prefer to pick at earlier peaks rather than late ones. We wait for green tannic flavors to dissipate and soften. We want flavor and acid. In the Grenache we look for strawberry intensity as a key to determining when to pick.

"Grapes are hand-picked into bins and stored overnight in cold storage. All of our grapes first go through a sorting table. We generally destem Grenache without crushing and ferment it separately. Other varieties may get some whole-cluster fermentation and are often co-fermented. We do not use the crusher on the machine; but when needed, we will do a foot stomp. No SO₂ is added until bottling.

"Fermentation usually begins after three or four days with native yeast. We punch-down once a day to begin, moving up to three punch-downs per day at peak fermentation when temperatures are typically in the mid-90° F range. All fermentations are carried out in wood, which breathes and insulates. It holds temperatures and rounds out the acidity.

"We press at dryness, separating free run from press juice for blending at a later date. The wine is stored in neutral oak vessels where spontaneous malolactic is carried out. It takes as long as it takes, which means it varies from vintage to vintage. We have never used a new oak barrel, but the wines are aged in neutral oak. In the case of Grenache, it is usually aged nine months sur-lie, with occasional stirring of the lees. The wine is racked only for blending prior to bottling and is bottled with no filtration or fining. It is aged four months before release."



Tasting Notes

Brandt: I think the Grenache definitely comes through, although I am also getting a bit of Mourvèdre funk. There is earthy minerality and some herbal, basil character. There is a classic El Dorado iron taste. It is young, pretty well integrated but not showing like it will with age. It has just been released and needs more time.

Mansfield: The perfume is wildly different from the other two El Dorado wines because of the other varietals. The flavors tell me that they are leaning toward earlier harvest and more acid-driven fruit with less oak. It reminds me more of a French style.

Pittenger: There is varietal complexity with different elements. The Grenache is less dominant. It has more violets and floral notes. There is plenty of red fruit, but I love the complexity and the balance on the palate. It is seamless from start to finish. It is delicious with a clean finish.

Dashe: It is very interesting with high-toned acidity that you can almost smell. There is a spiciness and a wet, fresh earthy component that I like a lot. In the mouth, there is very bright, assertive fruit with vibrant acidity. It is a mixture of red and black fruit with a long complex finish. Stylish wine.

Edmunds: The wine keeps changing in my glass. At times it smells like a wine that has been in the bottle for six or seven years in the way that it has a complexity you don't expect from a wine this young. There is some real high-tone character, including some menthol, like bay laurel or eucalyptus. It is well-blended. I can't pick out individual varieties. I like the spiciness of it, and it has a great level of complexity.

Stach: I think it is a very complex wine. I get some strawberry with a lot of stone fruit on the nose. I really like the amount of acidity in this wine that keeps the wine bright and pushes the length through. It is very complex wine, more Rhône-like than straight Grenache.

Lindquist: The first thing I get is that kind of meaty, almost gamey aroma, not in a bacterial way at all but more in a reductive style. It is clearly Grenache, but the sediment is impeding the aromatics a bit. It is nice in the mouth, ripe but not over-ripe. There is a mineral texture that is nice.

Jaffurs: The reduction is holding down the aromatics, but it is pretty underneath. I like the texture of it. I like the way it feels in my mouth. There is a nice Grenache quality to it, masked a bit by the Syrah. There is a chalkiness to it.

Sigouin: I think this wine is pretty site-specific. I can taste the granitic soil here. You can chew on it. I like the entry. There is a brown sugar tartness to it. I think it would open up more with some air.

WINERY	Edmunds St. John	Dashe Cellars	Landmark Vineyards
Wine	2012 Rocks and Gravel, \$27	2012 Les Enfants Terribles Grenache, \$24	2010 Grenache Steel Plow Estate Vineyard, \$35
Blend	55% Grenache, 27% Syrah, 18% Mourvèdre	100% Grenache	81% Grenache, 19% Syrah
Winemaker	Steve Edmunds	Michael Dashe	Greg Stach
Style goals	Want to pick with a perfect expression of flavors to create a wine that is focused, lively and energetic	The model is Grand Cru Beaujolais: lighter style, partial whole-berry, semi-carbonic maceration to enhance bright fruit character with a velvety texture and not too much extracted tannin	An expression of a California fruit-based Châteauneuf style
AVA	Dry Creek Valley	Dry Creek Valley	Sonoma Valley
Vineyard	Unti Vineyard	Various	Steel Plow Estate Vineyard
VINEYARD DATA			
Predominant Geology (soil type)	Haire manzanita silt	Sandy loam with embedded rock	Alluvial wash
Elevation	205 feet	100 feet	440 feet
Vine Spacing	5x9 feet	4x7 feet	4.5x6 feet
Rootstock	110 R	3309C	420A to reduce vigor, bit of 110R
Exposure	360 degrees	South/East	Northeast/Southwest
Clones	Half Alban, half clone A	Grenache Noir	Entav 136, 224, 287, 362
Irrigation or Dry-farmed	As needed irrigation	Irrigated	Irrigated
Farming (organic, Biodynamic, traditional)	Biodynamic	Traditional	Traditional organic
Production	2.5 to 3 tons/acre	4 to 5 tons/acre	2.1 tons/acre
Vineyard Practices	Thin weak shoots, clusters after set; leaf pull to mottled sunlight; thinned again at veraison	Green drop at veraison; late drop 2 weeks before harvest; pull leaves morning sun side	Aggressive fruit drop and winging; any pinks are removed; no pulling leaves
WINEMAKING DATA			
When to Pick	Track pH trajectory, taste, pick when flavors are in focus	Sugar, pH flavor development, brown seeds	Wait for tannin to subside and looking for brightness of flavor; aware of chemistry
SO₂	None at harvest, maintain 10 to 15 ppm post-malolactic	30 ppm at crush	30 ppm at crush
Crush Format	Destem Grenache and Syrah; crush whole-cluster Mourvèdre by foot	10% whole-cluster, balance destemmed only and sorted	Sort and destem, 90% whole berry
Cold Soak	Wait for yeast, no overt cold soak	4 days waiting for yeast to start	5 days at 50° F
Yeast	Ambient	Native	Native or RC212, or D254
Fermentation Temperature	Mid 80's F at peak	Up to 88° F	85° F to 88° F
Fermentation Technique	Punch-down 2 to 3 times daily	Pump-over twice daily	Light punch-downs during cold soak, one punch-down, one pump-over during active ferm. One punch-down daily after 0° Brix
Nutrients	None	None	Usually not needed
Tank Types	Concrete or bins	900-gal French oak fondres, 500-gal French oak puncheons	One ton fermenters
Malolactic	Spontaneous in tank	Native	Native
Racking	December or January, then April or May	Once after ML finishes	Only to bottle
Oak Program	No oak, aged in concrete and stainless steel	100% neutral French fondres and puncheons	100% French neutral barrels and puncheons
Barrel-aging	None	6 months	15 months
Filtration	Cross-flow	Cross-flow	None
Bottle-aging	3 months	3 months	6 months

WINERY	Donkey and Goat	Skinner Vineyards & Winery	Four Fields Wines
Wine	2012 Five Thirteen, \$35	2012 Grenache, \$26	2012 Grenache, \$20
Blend	45% Grenache, 20% Syrah, 19% Mourvèdre, 10% Counoise, 6% Cinsault	100% Grenache	90% Grenache, 10% Mourvèdre
Winemaker	Jared and Tracey Brandt	Chris Pittenger	Chuck Mansfield
Style goals	Make a Grenache-based southern Rhône style blend that is food-friendly, enjoyable and can evolve into something intriguing with age	Produce an elegant and restrained Grenache with minimal handling in the winery	Make a Grenache that is complex, fruit-forward and complete as a varietal wine. I want to over-deliver at its price point
AVA	El Dorado	El Dorado	El Dorado
Vineyard	Fenaughty Vineyard, Swansboro and Lightner	Skinner Vineyards, Fenaughty Vineyard, Swansboro, Stoney Creek	Goldbud and Fenaughty Vineyard
VINEYARD DATA			
Predominant Geology (soil type)	Decomposed granite with red clay loam	Various	Volcanic Aiken clay loam
Elevation	2,500 to 2,800 feet	2,740 feet	2,800 feet
Vine Spacing	Mostly 8x6 or 8x10 feet	8x5 feet	High density triple rows and 8x7 feet
Rootstock	3309	3309 or 101-14	3309
Exposure	Various	Southeast to South	Northwest-facing
Clones	Alban, Tablas Creek	AlbanII, TCVS C, TCVS D Entav 513	Alban
Irrigation or Dry-farmed	Some dry farm, some irrigated	Irrigated	Irrigated
Farming (organic, Biodynamic, traditional)	Sustainable	Non-certified organic	Traditional/Sustainable
Production	3 tons/acre or less	2 to 3.5 tons/acre	3 tons/acre
Vineyard Practices	Minimal fruit dropping because of low vigor, leaf pulling for air flow, minimal sprays	Minimize direct sunlight; V trellis with umbrella canopy; leaf pull on interior; several passes to maintain fruit as uniform as possible	Head-trained vines with 7 to 9 two-bud spurs; pull leaves in fruit zone; in heavy years clusters dropped to one per shoot
WINEMAKING DATA			
When to Pick	Walk vineyard, examine plant, taste grapes and watch acidity, allow tannins to soften	Pick on flavor backed up by Brix and pH readings	In order of importance: flavor, fruit vitality, physiological ripeness, chemistry, upcoming weather
SO₂	No SO ₂ until bottling then 45 ppm total	20 to 30 ppm	20 to 40 ppm, depending on fruit
Crush Format	Sort and destem with no crushing	Destem with some whole-cluster	Cluster-sort, destem, not crushed; vibrating sorting table to open-top fermenter
Cold Soak	Waiting for spontaneous fermentation	3 to 5 days at 55° F	3 to 5 days
Yeast	Spontaneous	Native	Native
Fermentation Temperature	Varies with peaks around mid-90's F	85° F to 88° F at peak	Peak high 70's F or low 80's F
Fermentation Technique	Punch-down from once to three times daily as fermentation gets active	Punch-down twice daily	6 a.m. and 6 p.m. punch-downs with dry ice added every 6 hrs during cold soak; 6 a.m., noon, 6 p.m. punch-downs during fermentation
Nutrients	None	DAP and BIO ferm staggered throughout initial fermentation	Determined by YAN
Tank Types	Various	Stainless or bins	Open top fermenters
Malolactic	Spontaneous	Inoculate at press	Inoculate at 5° Brix
Racking	Sur-lie until bottling	Only to bottle	Prior to bottling
Oak Program	Mostly French tanks with German ovals and some Hungarian	100% French, 50% Hogsheads (300 L), 20% new oak	Francois Freres, Medium or Medium +, all second or third fill
Barrel-aging	9 months	11 to 16 months	10 months
Filtration	Unfined and unfiltered	Unfiltered	Cross-flow
Bottle-aging	4 months	6 to 9 months	6 months

WINERY	Qupé Winery	Jaffurs Wine Cellars	Kaena Wine Company
Wine	2011 Grenache, \$35	2010 Grenache, \$34	2011 Grenache, \$38
Blend	87% Grenache, 13% Syrah	100% Grenache	100% Grenache
Winemaker	Bob Lindquist	Craig Jaffurs	Mikael Sigouin
Style goals	We want to use traditional stylings like open-top fermenters and aging on the lees in neutral French barrels to create an elegant, spicy wine with balanced alcohol	Produce a balanced, focused, medium-weight wine with true Grenache flavors of strawberry, spice, cola and bramble with some increased tannin from stem inclusion	I try to best express the varietal and the vineyard site while using Châteauneuf-du-Pape as inspiration
AVA	Edna Valley	Santa Barbara County	Santa Ynez Valley
Vineyard	Sawyer Lindquist Vineyard	Larner, Thompson and Ampelos Vineyards	Terra Alta Vineyard
VINEYARD DATA			
Predominant Geology (soil type)	Clay, gravel, loam, calcareous mudstone	Gravel loam	Limestone and clay
Elevation	400 to 500 feet	450 to 820 feet	1,350 feet
Vine Spacing	5x9 feet	Various	Various
Rootstock	101-15	1103 and own	5C
Exposure	Southwest	Various	East
Clones	Mostly Alban, some Tablas C & D	Alban and 362	Tablas A
Irrigation or Dry-farmed	Drip irrigation	Drip irrigation	Irrigated
Farming (organic, Biodynamic, traditional)	Demeter-certified Biodynamic	Sustainable	Traditional
Production	3.2 tons/acre	1 to 2.5 tons/acre	2.75 tons/acre
Vineyard Practices	Green harvest, VSP with shading; pull leaves for air circulation, not sun	Wing and fruit drop to less than 3 tons/acre; keep fruit in shade; pull leaves interior only	Drop a lot of fruit and wing clusters; pull interior leaves
WINEMAKING DATA			
When to Pick	Taste, appearance, Brix and pH	Look for loss of weedy, green tannic flavor; want brown seeds, woody stems, slight raisining; 23 to 25° Brix; pH 3.2 to 3.5	Pick based on taste; wait for tannin maturity
SO₂	30 ppm at crush, 60 ppm post ml	None until malolactic is complete	30 ppm at crusher
Crush Format	Sort in vineyard and at hopper; 30% whole-cluster; balance destemmed only	Field sort, destem with no crushing or whole-cluster	one-third whole-cluster, two-thirds crushed and destemmed
Cold Soak	2 to 3 days at 55-60° F	24 to 48 hours	7 days
Yeast	Native	RC 212 or D254	Native
Fermentation Temperature	Peak around 88° F	85° F to 90° F max	86° F
Fermentation Technique	Pump-over till fermentation starts then punch-down twice daily; press before cap falls; straight from press to barrel to minimize oxidation	Punch-down 1 to 3 times daily	Punch-down two to three times daily
Nutrients	Pre-fermentation, Biodynamic-approved	As needed according to YAN	Fermaid at one-third sugar depletion
Tank Types	1.5-ton bins	1.5-ton fermenters	1.5-ton bins
Malolactic	Malolactic in barrel	Malolactic in barrel	Native in barrel, 6 months to complete
Racking	Shortly before bottling	May or June	One racking, take half the lees
Oak Program	100%-neutral French barrels	Mostly 1- to 3-year-old French and American oak	3- to 5-year-old French oak
Barrel-aging	16 months	18 months	22 months
Filtration	100 pads	EK and 200 pre-bottling	Cross-flow
Bottle-aging	4 months	6 months to 1 year	3 months

Skinner Vineyards & Winery

2012 Grenache, El Dorado, 384 cases,
15% Alc., \$26

Chris Pittenger moved to Napa in 2003. He spent harvests alternating between Southern and Northern hemisphere wineries, including **Robert Biale Vineyards**, Rhône producer **Torbreck** in Australia and **Kim Crawford** in New Zealand. In 2005, he settled in Sonoma County, working at **Williams Selyem**, followed by four years with **Marcassin** under **Helen Turley**. He worked concurrently as winemaker for **Skinner Vineyards & Winery**, starting in 2007. By 2010 he and his family had moved to El Dorado County to focus on Rhône varieties for Skinner and his own **Gros Ventre** Pinot Noir from Sonoma County.



According to Pittenger

“We want to make an elegant and restrained representation of Grenache, expressing the unique soils and climate of El Dorado. We use 100 percent Grenache to showcase what the variety can do when treated minimally in the winery.

“Although this wine is 100 percent Grenache, the fruit comes from four different vineyards. The different soil types, elevations, exposures and clones allow us to make a complex wine even though we are using a single variety. Elevation of the vineyards is 2,700 to 2,800 feet, and most vines are planted in 8x5 foot configurations. Rootstocks are either 3309 or 101-14. Clones include Alban II, TCVS C, TCVS D and Entav 513. The vineyards are a combination of minimal impact, farming non-certified organic.

“In the vineyard we try to minimize direct sunlight as much as possible. We use a V-trellis to let in dappled light and allow canes to flop to develop an umbrella effect. Each block is handled differently, but the goal is to elongate the growing season with a steady progression of ripening. Leaves are pulled from the interior, and several passes for dropping fruit will be made. We will sometimes pick fruit that is lagging behind to use in Rosé production. The goal is to harvest uniformly ripe grapes.

“We pick primarily on flavor backed up by Brix and pH readings. I am looking for that ‘just ripe’ flavor. I want freshness and good acidity but with no green or herbaceous character. Typically grapes are destemmed, not crushed, and run through our sorting table. There is no set protocol for whole cluster, but we will use as much as 50 percent on specific blocks, depending on vintage.

“We ferment in open-top, 2- to 3-ton stainless steel fermenters, along with plastic Macro T-Bins and S-48 bins for the smaller lots. The open-top tanks have glycol cooling set at 55° F while the bins are stored in a cold room at 50° F for three to five days. After cold soak we use native yeast to carry out fermentations. We will make minimal acid additions when necessary on a case-by-case basis. DAP and BIO Ferm are staggered throughout initial fermentation to peak fermentation. Two punch-downs per day are typical, but some rare cases call for us to use an irrigator over the top. Temperatures max out at 85° F to 88° F.



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Tasting Notes

Pittenger: I get more red fruit on the nose, raspberries and cherries with some dried herbs and wild sage. I am getting some vanilla oak spice. The palate is fresh with mouth-watering acidity and confirms the red-fruit, Jolly Rancher aromas. Nice structure associated with fruit tannins, oak tannins and a bit of whole cluster. Typically, a bit disjointed at this time of year. Six months from now it will all come together. I like the refined, velvety tannins.

Mansfield: This has more fresh, ripe red fruit than the Four Fields wine, which is more candied. It was picked with a lot of vitality because the fruit is very pronounced. The mid-palate has nice texture. There is more oak, but it helps make a complex finish and extends the profile of the wine.

Brandt: I'm having a hard time getting past the oak on the nose. It overwhelms the fruit a bit. It is spicy and toasty. On the aromas alone, I wouldn't identify this as Grenache. The style here is riper and gives a lush rendition of Grenache.

Stach: I get ground coffee on the nose and a lot of oak. There is more plum and dark fruit. There is some pretty strawberry/cream soda in the mouth, and I like the tannin structure, which has some grip, without being over the top.

Dashe: I like this wine. There is definitely an oak component on the nose, which is strong. Underneath that I get some fresh strawberry character that I really like with some of that minty clove spice. In the mouth it was brighter with more acidity and more delicacy than I was expecting from the nose. It finished very clean and pretty with some tannic grip. The mouth was lovely.

Edmunds: I notice the wood a lot. It also strikes me as pretty ripe. I think it holds the alcohol reasonably well, but it is definitely a big style. The texture is the nicest part of the wine, but the wood tannins dry things out a bit. It is definitely red-fruited, and Grenache is a primary flavor.

Sigouin: Obviously, there is some use of oak on this one, and it overshadows the pure Grenache aromatics with smoky, almost Moroccan spice character. In the mouth it has that tart cherry, cranberry, rhubarb flavor. It is a very up-front type of wine, with oak and spiciness on the backside.

Lindquist: To me, the oak is just too prominent in this wine. This is in such a different direction from the other Grenaches. Underneath there is some pretty interesting fruit, but the oak masks it. The oak is in the mouth as well. So far, it is my least favorite wine.

Jaffurs: I agree that the oak pokes out the most, but it is a different region; the grapes are riper. Maybe the oak is a way to make the wine more complete. It is interesting wine. If I had it in isolation, I think I would like it more. It is big, powerful and has cherry and spice, but it is different from the other wines.



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Four Fields Wines

2012 Grenache, 120 cases, 14.6% Alc., \$20

Chuck Mansfield grew up working in the fields with his father, **Ron**, the legendary grape grower in El Dorado County. He graduated from **Cal Poly San Luis Obispo**, majoring in wine and viticulture. After an internship in Australia and a stint at **E&J Gallo**, he joined **Hop Kiln Winery** as head winemaker in 2007. He continues as winemaker for Hop Kiln, but this **Four Fields Wines** venture is the first wine from his own label produced from grapes grown by his father.

According to Mansfield

“I want to create an example of El Dorado Grenache that is complex, fruit-forward and complete as a varietal wine, and I want it to over-deliver at its price point.

“The grapes for this wine come from two vineyards: Goldbud and Fenaughty. One has primarily granite soil, which gives a more angular Grenache, and the other has clay loam, which produces Grenache with smoother tannins. The elevation is

2,800 feet, and the vineyards are Northwest facing. Rootstock is primarily 3309 with a bit of 101-14, and we use the Alban clone. We farm traditionally/sustainably, and the vineyard is irrigated.

“We have gone to high-density triple rows (1,200 to 1,400 vines per acre) to maximize sun capture. The vineyards require intense management, and controlling the canopy is the key. The vines are head-trained, sort of vertical cordons, with seven to nine two-bud spurs. Leaves are pulled in the fruit zone, and cluster wings are thinned. We want sunlight on the basal clusters, not on those higher up. In heavy years, clusters are dropped to one per shoot. Usually we are harvesting 3 tons to the acre.

“Flavor is the primary factor in determining when to pick, and acidity is essential. Grenache can be tannic; and if alcohols are high, the wine becomes too astringent. We prefer a pH under 3.5 with sugars around 24° Brix. Fruit is typically cluster-sorted, destemmed, not crushed and run along a vibrating sorting table into an open-top fermenter. About 10 percent of this wine was whole-cluster-fermented by lining the bottom of the bins with whole-cluster fruit.

“We store the tanks in a cool place for three to five days. I am looking for an aqueous extract and slow fermentations. We use native yeast to carry out fermentation, unless off-aromas develop in which case we use AMH. We’ll add acid if pH or flavor requires it but usually don’t need it. We determine by YAN if nutrients are necessary but usually just add micro-nutrients and never use DAP.

“During cold soak, we punch-down one to two times daily, adding dry ice and keeping bins covered. During fermentation, we punch-down every six hours. I like peak fermentation temperatures in the 80s, but this vintage never got out of the high 70s. I try to get different tannic structures into the profile. There is a bit of the rougher green tannins from the stems and seeds of the whole cluster, but you also have tannins from the skin bridging the mid-palate and a little bit of oak tannin on the finish.

“I inoculate for malolactic fermentation with 5° Brix left in a healthy fermentation. Malolactic fermentation usually finishes within three weeks of primary fermentation finishing. The wine is aged for 10 months in **Francois Frères** barrels, all second and third fill. We rack only to bottle, and we cross-flow filter. The wine gets six months of bottle-aging before release.”



Tasting Notes

Mansfield: In the aromas, this wine always reminds me of rhubarb pie. There is that great fruit character but accompanied by bready or toasty notes. There is some holiday spice or cinnamon character. The flavors remind me of old-fashioned hard candy with cherry flavor. My favorite part is the tannic structure. This vintage uses a bit of Mourvèdre because I am trying to bridge that angularity that Grenache can have, but I don’t want it to detract from the Grenache character.

Brandt: It is clearly Grenache with red fruit, strawberries. There is some earthiness and minerality. It’s a little bitter, which I didn’t expect from the nose. I like the texture. This is bit more manly than the others.

Pittenger: The nose reminds me of Christmas tree farms. There is an herbal quality with savory notes. I like the spice and red and blue fruit on the nose. The palate gives more structure than I typically associate with El Dorado fruit, along with spice notes. There is a classic Grenache suppleness that hits your palate right away. There is a freshness on the finish with a nice interplay with the tannins.

Dashe: I get a character in both the aroma and flavor of this wine of strawberry, but it is more of cooked or stewed strawberry than fresh. It’s a bright fruit with an earthy edge to it. There is some spice, and it has a buttery, dactylic character to it. In the mouth, the stewed red fruit continues along with earthy flavors. There is nice texture with medium weight, but it finishes softly.

Stach: I really like the floral component in this wine. I get some rose petal and bright strawberry fruit. It is prototypical Grenache to me. In the mouth the fruit is a bit sweet, which is not bad at all, but it is typical of Grenache. I also get that hint of orange that I really like.

Edmunds: I am struck by what seems like an awful lot of alcohol. It drives the floral side in the nose, but there is something almost soapy about it. Maybe the fruit is riper than I would have chosen to pick it. It is less energetic and a bit leaden. Some of that follows through in the flavor.

Jaffurs: This is a bigger wine. It is riper with a clover nose. It is blowing off. There is a nice, clean finish with a raspberry flavor.

Sigouin: I get a really full, candy apple in the nose, and it highlights the floral elements of violet. It is high tone, like Red Hots with some cinnamon. I like it. It has a lot of Grenache character. On the finish, there is some of that granite, mineral flavor.

Lindquist: This, to me, is the furthest away from the previous wines because they were marked by low pH and higher acidity. This one is definitely higher pH and lower acidity. It has some nice ripeness, without being over-the-top ripe. It is fat and rich in the mouth: a beef stew kind of wine.

Central Coast

As late as 1970, Santa Barbara County had less than 200 acres planted to grapes. Since then, it has been boom time for viticulture and the wine business. Currently, 21,000 acres of premium winegrapes are grown in the county. AVAs, including Santa Maria Valley, Santa Ynez and Santa Rita Hills, have become famous. Pinot Noir and Chardonnay are still the most popular grape varieties, but Rhône varieties are showing great promise.

Most vineyards in California are protected from coastal weather by coastal mountains that run north/south. The Santa Maria and Santa Ynez valleys have transverse ranges that run east/west, exposing the valleys to the ocean. This brings cool breezes and fog in from the Pacific, resulting in moderate summer temperatures with cool evenings and mornings, which allow a slow ripening of grapes. Soils, even on the hillsides, are mostly decomposed oceanic floor, usually with some limestone components, and are well drained. Both the soils and cool temperatures contribute to complex Grenache fruit.

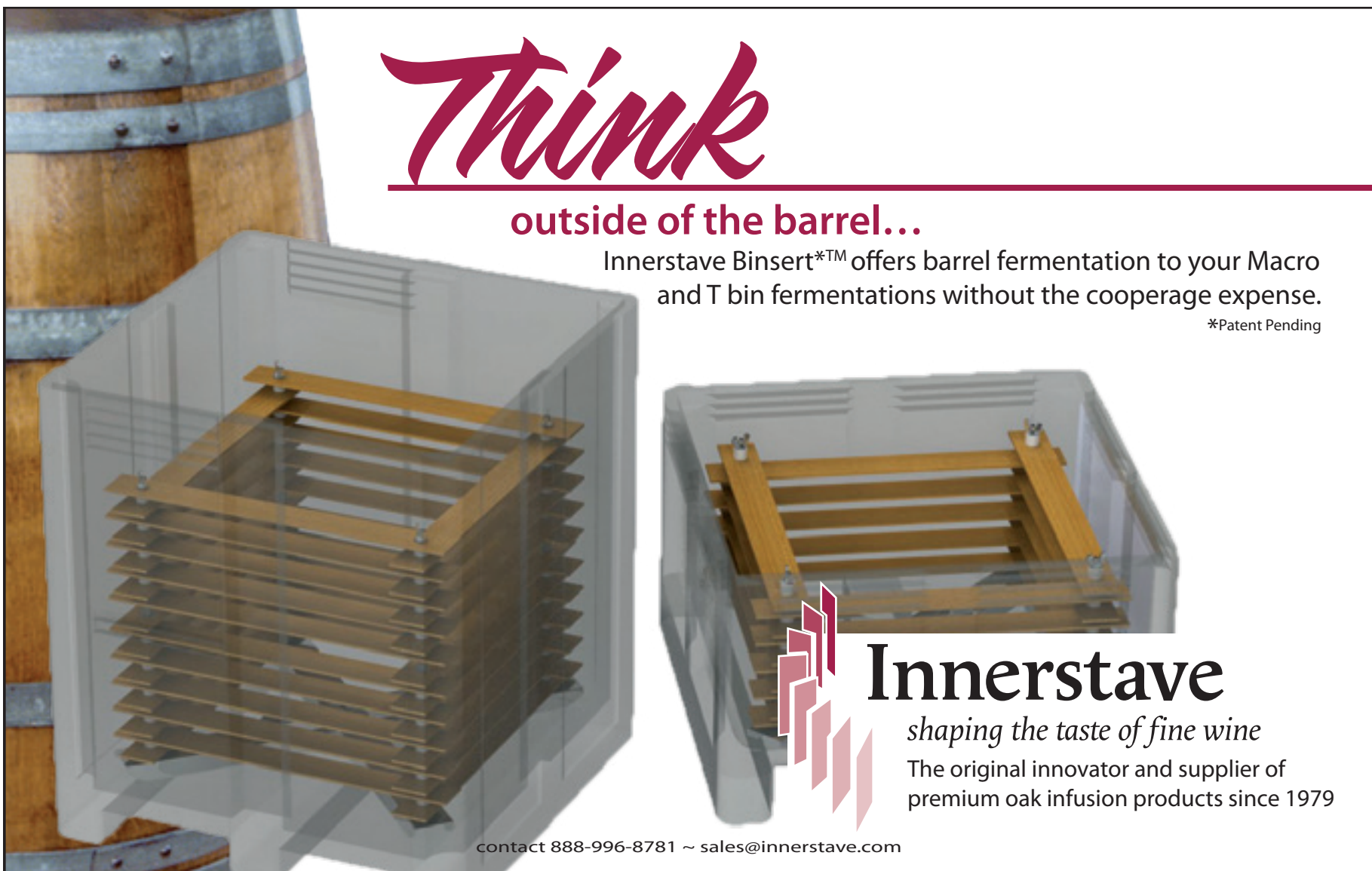


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Qupé Winery

2011 Grenache, Sawyer Lindquist Vineyards,
Edna Valley, 910 cases, 13.5% Alc., \$35

Bob Lindquist is an avid Los Angeles Dodgers fan who happens to make wine. Bob got interested in wine in the early 1970s. He worked for **San Martin Winery**, managed a wine shop in Los Olivos and ended up working with **Jim Clendenen** at **Zaca Mesa Winery**. He founded **Qupé Winery** in 1982 and soon focused on cool-climate Syrah and other Rhône varietals. Qupé now produces 40,000 cases annually.

According to Lindquist

“We are shooting for an elegant, spicy wine with balanced alcohol. We prefer traditional styling made from cool-climate grapes that give us fresh, crisp, savory wine that is not hot and not heavy. We want a wine full of energy, spice and fresh acid.



“Our Sawyer Lindquist vineyard is planted on clay, gravel loam with lots of calcareous Obispo mudstone. The elevation is 400 to 500 feet with a south-west exposure. Grenache is a vigorous varietal, and it needs room to grow, so vine spacing is 5x9 feet. We used primarily Alban clone with some Tablas C and D planted on 101-15 root stock. The vineyard is drip-irrigated and Demeter-certified Biodynamic.

“We try to set a reasonable crop, around 3-½ tons per acre. We feel this size crop gives better balance with good acid levels. It also leads to slower development and better resistance to heat waves, not to mention helping the bottom line. In the vineyard we use VSP and will pull leaves around clusters for air flow, but we try to keep the fruit in the shade. We drop green fruit. We determine when to pick by taste, appearance, Brix and pH. Over the years we have learned that sugar is not flavor; and because we are in a cool-climate area seeking to make balanced wines with moderate alcohol, our experience in determining when we have the right flavors is essential.

“We pick the grapes, get them to the winery and add 30 ppm SO₂ at the crusher. Most sorting is done in the vineyard and some at the hopper, but there is no sorting table. We destem, but do not crush and we use roughly 30 percent whole cluster, which we stomp on to help with later punch-downs. We determine how much whole cluster by projecting the flavor, amplitude and texture we want from the wine. We believe we get complexity, as well as added ageability, from the stems. We will test YAN and add designated organic nutrients if needed.

“After a two- to three-day cold soak at 55° F to 60° F, whatever the alpha yeast is in the winery will carry out the fermentation. We ferment in 6x6 open-top fermenters. We pump-over before fermentation starts and then punch-down twice a day thereafter. Peak fermentation temperatures reach 88° F. We press before the cap falls, using CO₂, because we try to be as reductive in our winemaking as possible.

“The free run juice and press fractions go to different selected barrels, where malolactic fermentation occurs. After malolactic, another 60 ppm SO₂ is added. Barrels are 100 percent neutral French. We do no racking until bottling, but we top the barrels weekly. This wine was aged in barrel for 16 months on the lees before being blended with 13 percent Syrah, which helped with complexity and pH. It was then pad-filtered through 100s before bottling. It received four months’ bottle-aging before release.”



Tasting Notes

Lindquist: This has some of that wild berry, slightly herbal character that comes from cool climates. In the mouth it is vibrant, fresh, slightly fruity with more savory character, with great natural acidity. It is not heavy on the palate, but it is elegant.

Jaffurs: I like this a lot. It is a beautifully brilliant wine with almost purple hues. Aromatically, it has true Grenache aromas. I can smell that cola spice in it. The taste is clean, and I love the tannins. I can almost feel that whole cluster thing in my mouth. Long after the wine is gone, there is this beautiful long finish.

Sigouin: I get those Christmas spice notes with orange rind and some herb from the stem inclusion but really fresh. In the mouth there is cranberry with added weight from the stems. I also get a lot of mineral balanced by the natural acidity. It is a great, elegant style wine.

Dashe: I like this wine. I think it has some really nice, complex red fruit in the nose and some interesting spice to it. It is a bit closed, but underneath there is some tobacco character. In the mouth I get very bright, nice red fruit. It is a balanced, elegant wine whose alcohol doesn’t overwhelm the fruit. The acidity is good, and it finishes clean.

Edmunds: I would agree. There is really lovely balance to the wine. There is something knocking back the aromatics a bit, but texturally it is gorgeous with really good structure and a nice long finish. It is a pretty wine with a very subtle use of wood.

Stach: The nose is a bit pushed down. I get some of that hard, red cherry candy on the nose, but what I really like about this wine is the texture. It is dense without being heavy. Texturally, it is just a gorgeous wine, and the tannic structure is beautiful.

Mansfield: This has bright notes of raspberry. As it opens, it evolves into a more candied character. The candy is more pronounced in the flavor, just before the tannins take hold on the finish. There is some spice and sweet fruit that are very interesting.

Pittenger: I get darker fruit aromas but not on the palate. It is completely in balance. I love the interplay between the weight and freshness of the wine. There are herbal and floral notes on the nose, complementing the darker red fruit. It has a fresh minerality, almost a crunchiness to the finish. The finish has some drying tannins, which elongate the finish and structure of the wine.

Brandt: I agree that the nose is muted. It has hints of the oak, but it is very well integrated. There is a nice thread of acidity; there is a lovely texture. It is balanced with lots of fruit. Nicely done.

Jaffurs Wine Cellars

2010 Grenache, Santa Barbara County,
329 cases, 13.7% Alc., \$34

Craig Jaffurs worked for 17 years in the aerospace industry as a cost analyst before switching to the wine business. He has been making wine since 1989, working harvests as a cellar rat for **Santa Barbara Winery**. He produced wines at home and took courses at **UC Davis** before releasing his first wine from the 1994 vintage. That wine got rave reviews, and **Jaffurs Wine Cellars** was on its way.

According to Jaffurs

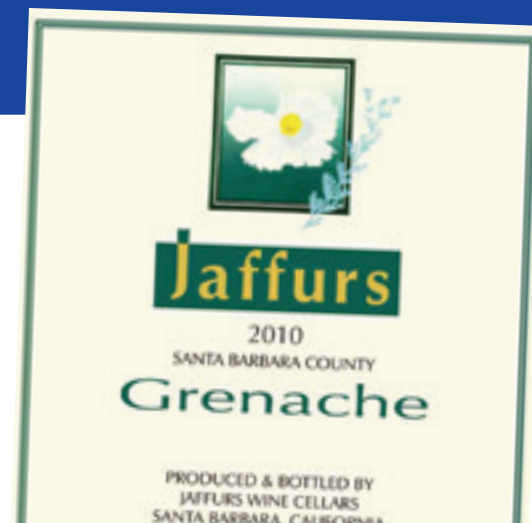
“We are trying to produce a balanced, medium-weight wine with true Grenache flavors of strawberry, spice, cola and bramble. We want ripe fruit that retains natural acidity and native tannins played up via stem inclusion. We want a wine that is savory and elegant rather than brooding.

“This particular wine is a blend of three different vineyards. The Ampelos Vineyard at 350 feet elevation is the coolest, producing darker, heavier, more tannic wine. The Larner Vineyard, at 630 feet, is always the first one picked. It is on sandy soil with limestone and produces smaller berries. Thompson Vineyard at 520 feet is the warmest although all three sites are considered cool-climate. The sandy loam soil contributes strawberry, rhubarb and almost yeasty flavors and produces softball-size clusters.

“All of the vineyards use drip irrigation and are sustainably farmed, with the Ampelos being Biodynamically farmed. We want to keep the fruit in the shade and will only pull interior leaves to create a tunnel effect to allow air flow. This shade slows ripening and preserves color and tannin. We drop wings, touching clusters and green clusters and get 1 to 3 tons per acre depending on vineyard site. We monitor numbers but harvest mostly on taste. We look for brown seeds, woodiness in the stems, softening of the pulp, coloring from broken skins and slight raisining.

“We try to handle the grapes in a minimalist manner. Ampelos and Larner are 100 percent whole-cluster fermented. We simply stomp on the grapes in the bins. The Thompson gets destemmed but not crushed. We add no SO₂ until after malolactic has completed, but will use some SO₂ spray and CO₂ on the grapes during a 24- to 48-hour cold soak to hold them in a sort of suspended animation. We inoculate, usually with RC 212 yeast. Maximum fermentation temps run between 85° F to 90° F, and we will punch-down one to three times per day as needed. We wait until dryness and for the cap to fall before pressing, usually seven to 14 days. Free run and press juice are kept separate and undergo malolactic in one- to three-year-old French oak barrels.

“The wine is racked in May or June, but no pumps are used until filtering and bottling. The wine ages in barrel for 18 months then gets pad-filtered through EK and 200s pre-bottling. The wine is aged six months to one year before bottling.”



Tasting Notes

Jaffurs: Aromatically, there is plum and spice. There is some classic gingerbread holiday spice. In the mouth there is a nice fullness, which I think comes from the whole cluster. This is 100 percent Grenache; and as we've improved our farming, there is more fruit expression.

Sigouin: There is a stem prevalence in the nose with raspberry and spice. You get that dry orange rind character. There are some violet aromatics. The flavors are really delicate in the mouth with well-balanced acidity. It is really spicy with that stem character on the backside.

Lindquist: This shows well with a distinctive Châteauneuf-du-Pape reference point. It has that Grenache character. This has berry fruit across the palate with wide-bodied flavor. There is plenty of acidity, and this comes from a cool vintage. This has mellowed with some extra age compared to the Qupé.

Edmunds: I actually kind of like this wine. It sort of teeters on that oxidized, maderized line, but it has some strawberry fruit to it with some real depth, balance and delicacy. It is persistent with its flavors. It is nicely put together. It seems like the material is beautiful, but there may be a bit of oxidation in here.

Dashe: This is a wine I like much more in the mouth than in the aromatics. It does have some oxidized character, almost canned green beans along with some wood. In the mouth, I think it has stylish character with a nice complex flavor and a mixture of red fruit. It is quite balanced and mouth-coating while still being light. The finish is complex. It is a more European style wine.

Stach: I kind of like this wine. If you look at Châteauneuf, Chateau Rayas is always in that oxidized style. It's a personal matter. It is pretty wine, although perhaps a bit too much oak-driven. I like the red fruits. I think it would go really well with a meal.

Brandt: I don't understand it. To me it is inherently flawed, and I can't get past that. Aromatically, it is hard to get beyond the uncharacteristic aromas. It feels really disjointed. I don't care for it.

Mansfield: The perfume is lighter, almost tomato leaf character. There is fresh red fruit flavor on the palate. There is a good acid balance without any alcohol astringency. The tannins are soft, maybe due to age.

Pittenger: The aromas are more evolved. It shows a bit of age. There are darker and sweeter spice notes with nice floral notes. The fruits are more dried, which is in line with its age. It is well-balanced. It is seductive on the palate, polished and plush with very fine tannins.

Kaena Wine Company

2011 Tierra Alta Vineyard Grenache, 175 cases, 15.1% Alc., \$38

Mikael Sigouin is an irrepressibly enthusiastic winemaker who always seems to be having the time of his life. He made his way from Hawaii to the Central Coast to work for **Beckmen Vineyards** in 1999. He worked at **Fess Parker Winery** before returning to Beckmen in 2007 as their winemaker. He started his own **Kaena Winery** brand in 2001, focusing on Grenache. Today he runs Kaena and continues as winemaker for Beckmen Winery as well. Between the two wineries, Sigouin makes wine from 150 tons of Grenache annually.

According to Sigouin

“I am trying my best to express the varietal and the particular vineyard site while looking to Châteauneuf-du-Pape for inspiration. I want to produce a wine that is feminine and balanced, full of perfume and elegance. I am looking for a wine that is hedonistic.

“We planted this Tierra Alta Vineyard in 2001 and started production in 2004. Soil type is limestone and clay, and it sits at 1,350 feet elevation. The exposure is east-facing with rows running west to east, so there is lots of morning sun. The vineyard is irrigated and traditionally farmed.

“To control crop size we sort of Bonsai the vine a bit, leaving some sprawl on the sun side. We drop a lot of fruit. We drop wings, drop touching clusters and pull interior leaves. We find that 2.5 to 3 tons per acre is sort of the sweet spot for this vineyard.

“I pick based on flavor, especially tannin maturity. Grenache tannins will punish you if you pick too early at this site. I chew both the seeds and the skins to monitor development. When the skins thin, get supple and give color, I pick.

“We pick early in the morning, take the grapes to the crusher and add 30 ppm SO₂. Grapes are destemmed and crushed. Then I add back one-third of the selected stems for a whole cluster effect. The must goes through a seven-day cold soak with one pump-over or punch-down a day. Then the bins are moved into the sun to start fermentation using native yeast. I do not add acid, except to any water I add back to the must, which I usually use to take the Brix from 27.5° to 26.5°.

“I pretty much let the grapes do what they want to do. I’ll add Fermaid at one-third sugar depletion. I punch-down two to three times a day, and fermentation lasts about 21 days with maximum temperatures reaching 86° F to 88° F. I press around 0° Brix, trying to capture fruit weight for the mid-palate and to get balanced tannins. I separate free run from the press juice. Pressing always increases sugar, so the wine goes back into the bins to finish fermentation.

“From there it goes to three- to five-year-old French barrels for aging and native malolactic. I age the wine for 22 months. There is one racking to finalize the blend, and I take half the lees on that blend. The wine is racked again for bottling, cross-flow filtered and gets three months of bottle-aging.”



Tasting Notes

Sigouin: This has some grenadine character with some herb de Provence character. There is a spicy, pomegranate character with some cherry. In the mouth there is ripe cherry and pomegranate again in the mid-palate. There is some weight from the alcohol. The finish is round and long-lasting. The stems help lessen the acidity and contribute to the mouthfeel.

Lindquist: Gorgeous wine. It is riper than the other wines from Santa Barbara with more weight and alcohol. There is a riper note to this with that wild cherry and grenadine character. There is more weight on the palate and more development from the barrel time.

Jaffurs: It is a great wine. The nose is warm in that mature way. It has a cherry range of aromatics and flavor. The whole-cluster shows well. There is a clean finish and maturity that is almost yeasty. I could sit around and drink this.

Brandt: I definitely get much more off the nose. There is red fruit, earthiness and spice. It is vibrant and has a texture I like. It is velvety with nice acidity and nice spice. White pepper is the holy grail of Syrah added to Grenache, and this is lovely.

Pittenger: It has some expressive red, candied fruit on the nose. It is very fruit-driven. There are sweet, toasty oak qualities as well. It has a riper nose but no alcohol burn. The palate confirms the nose. It is polished, luscious and rich with nice, fresh acidity, which makes for a lively finish.

Mansfield: This has that cherry cola character that comes from ripe Grenache and toasty oak. It tastes close to 100 percent Grenache. I don’t get any of the gaminess that I got in some others. It is fresh, bright and full of red fruit. It seems riper than the others from the Central Coast.

Stach: A lot of wines will hit your aroma memories, and this wine reminds me of the crust of an angel food cake. It is a nice, sweet entry that is not too sweet. I like where the fruit is between red and black fruit. Very well-made wine. I like the structure in the mouth quite a bit. I also like where the acid is on this.

Edmunds: The thing I noticed first was just a big streak of wood and alcohol. It seems very oaky and intense. I also wonder if the wine was acidulated because the acidity seems a little bit lacking. The flavors were sweet. The texture was good but on the hot side. The red fruit has that intense Grenache character.

Dashe: It is one of the biggest wines of the tasting. On the nose I get some wood and a sort of baked cherry pie character with that caramelized butter. It is lush with a thickness and density that I think come from very ripe grapes. There is some alcohol there, but it is juicy and has that vibrant, thick red fruit character moving toward black fruit. For such a big wine, it is very stylish and balanced.

VARIETAL FOCUS: *Grenache*

Conclusion

Grenache is a very versatile grape. Its ability to grow well in many different climates, especially hot, dry areas, along with its tendency to set huge crops has made Grenache a major workhorse in jug wine production. While more than 6,000 acres are planted to Grenache in California, the bulk of that goes into lower-tier wines. When California winemakers decided to pursue the many charms of Grenache—its bright fruit, clean acidity and affinity for blending with other Rhône varieties—finding quality fruit was difficult.

Over time, sites in the Central Coast, Sonoma, El Dorado and a few other areas started producing good fruit. Still, there is precious little high-quality Grenache available to winemakers. To give you an idea, El Dorado County, a top-flight Grenache producer, has only 25 acres of the varietal. It is pretty much the same all over: Amador County 13 acres, Napa County 26 acres, Sonoma County 93 acres, even San Luis Obispo County with 265 acres and Santa Barbara County with 196 acres don't amount to much in the scheme of things.

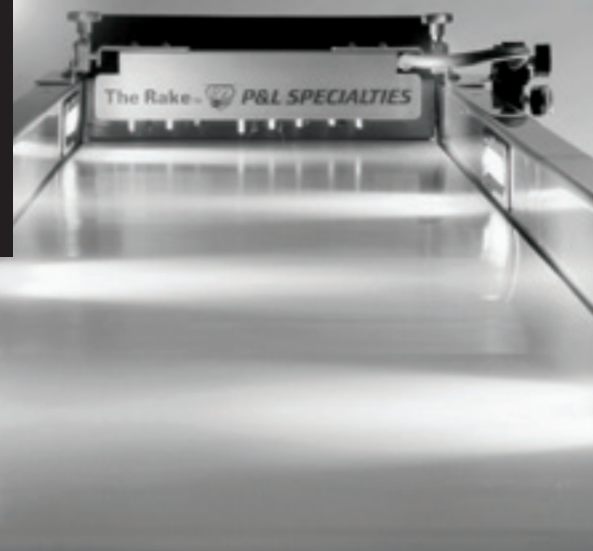
Winemakers enamored by high-quality Grenache looked to France, and to a lesser extent Spain, for their models. The thin skins of Grenache have to be protected from direct sunlight, so leaves are generally pulled in the fruit zone, creating a tunnel effect that allows air to circulate while fruit remains in the shade. Those thin skins and Grenache's tight bunches are susceptible to rot in wet or damp conditions. Growers tend to drop touching bunches, as well as shoulders, in addition to green drops to help control crop size, which proved to be a key quality issue. Every grower and winemaker who participated in this Varietal Focus agreed that Grenache was one of the most difficult varieties to grow.

In spite of the fact that Grenache can be made in a wide variety of styles, determining when to pick can be tricky. If not ripe enough, Grenache can be tannic, very acidic and overly tart. Winemakers say there is a "sweet spot" where the variety shows off its vibrant berry fruit character and can reveal complex notes of Christmas spice, orange peel, black currants and candied apples. Especially when grown in schist or granite soils, Grenache can offer a pleasing mineral component as well.

In the winery, Grenache requires some special attention. Most winemakers refuse to crush berries, instead relying on at least a percentage of whole-cluster fermentation. They prefer fermenting in concrete, neutral oak or stainless steel and aging primarily in neutral oak, although some winemakers going for bigger styles will use a small percentage of new oak barrels. Most participants in this Varietal Focus insist on native yeast and native malolactic. Early bottling seems to be the norm to maintain freshness of fruit. Cross-flow filtration is the filtration of choice, but an equal number believe that bottling unfiltered is better.

Based on the wines in this Varietal Focus, Grenache can make delightful wines full of bright, complex fruit flavors carried on a strong acidic backbone that pairs well with many foods. Currently, it is the new "darling variety" for winemakers, wine writers and consumers. Price points are certainly attractive, with most Grenache selling for \$20 to \$35. A key issue is the scarcity of quality grapes. Participants in this Focus produced as little as 120 cases to a high of just 910 cases of their wines. The small production contributes to these wines being sold out quickly. As production of Grenache-based wines increases, it remains to be seen whether Grenache will maintain its current popularity and sustain continued growth. **WBM**

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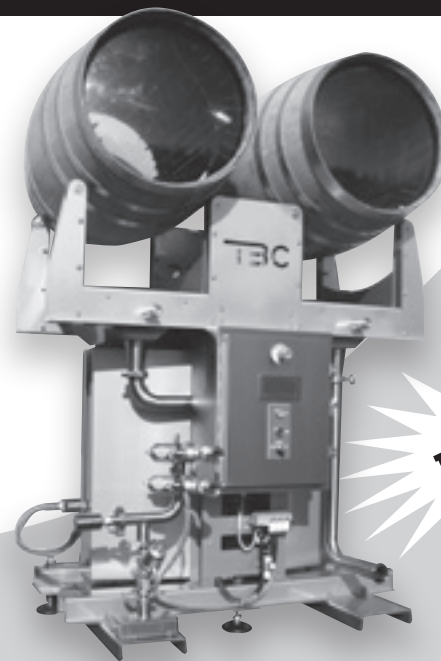
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