

Winter 2008

Harvest & Post Crush Review—Getting our Groove On.

The frenzy known as “crush” is over. The entire vintage rests in tank or barrel. At this stage, the wines show beautiful promise, and it seems like the completion of a very nice harvest. Where the 2007 vintage seemed frantic, with operating a new winemaking facility, the 2008 vintage seemed comparatively calm—one could say we “got our groove on.”

In the field, a very late season wrapped up nearly on schedule. We began the vintage with a cool, wet spring—bud break commenced some three weeks behind a typical year. Anxiety grew amongst winegrowers statewide wondering: “Can we ever ripen the grapes in the remaining summer?” I usually don’t fret much in the early season—17 vintages teach that the key month is September. A late bloom can be recovered with a warm, “miracle” September. And just as true, bloom on schedule will never overcome a disappointing fall.

As is usually the case, our Gorge fall was beautiful. September and October remained warm and relatively dry, with one notable weather event during the beginning of crush. On October 8th, the Northwest received an unprecedented severe frost warning. Temperatures at the winery dipped to 24 degrees. Although our estate vineyards, with their steep slopes, were unaffected, after all, cold air runs downhill. However, several area vineyards on flat ground did suffer “leaf burn.” Frosted leaves immediately die, and all ripening on the vine is finished for the season. After the brief scare, we progressed into harvest, with the fruit coming in about a week behind a typical year. Yields were generally smaller due to reduced berry size, translating into intense flavor concentration.

In the winery, the crush seemed so much calmer than our first year. With no rain in the forecast we picked the estate vineyards at a relatively easy three tons per day pace—just enough for two fermentors to process in the same afternoon. This schedule allowed us to target each block for its perfect balance between ripeness and acidity.

Alexandrine arrived from Burgundy the 4th of October, and we picked her pinot noir on October 10th. A few more days lapsed before Rich pulled the trigger on the rest of the estate pinot. Our chardonnay was picked in two sessions separated by a week. Grapes that were to be barrel fermented came off first, owing to their ability to go through malolactic fermentation, which would absorb some additional acidity. The block anticipated to comprise our “unoaked” chardonnay was given a little more “hang time.”

On the crush pad we learned an important lesson—three Hispanic workers equals 15 novice volunteers! We love our friends and family who volunteer each season, and a highly trained special few still devote a week or more of their lives to the crush. But, for the casual one day volunteer, the training, wine lunch and monitoring generate plenty of responsibility on the management team—imagine rounding up a group of very content “day volunteers” to work on the sort line, outside in the cold, following a four

wine lunch. With the guys who work all year in my vineyard it's, "si Heather, no problema!"

While we've just finished reminiscing about the harvest, we're anticipating the pending release of our 2007 vintage. In the past, we released our wines only days after bottling. Today, we deliberately hold the wines to allow some additional development in the bottle. Next spring, you can look forward to stunning new pinot noirs and chardonnays becoming available.

Our Friends of the Vine Wine Club members enjoyed a sneak preview of the **2007 Estate Reserve** and **2007 Cuvée Alexandrine** pinot noirs during a crush open house event. Many took advantage of an opportunity to buy cases at a special "futures" price. While waiting for the new releases, we look forward to seeing you in the tasting room during the few events sprinkled throughout the winter season, or perhaps at one of several wine dinners you can find on our website.

Wishing you and your families the best during the holiday season,

Bob

Robert Morus