

Discovering Italy

It has been sometime since our last newsletter. The *inspiration* for this one came from our recent trip to Italy. We experienced some of the best food and wine that Italy has to offer; and it wasn't expensive or complicated. Some of our best meals were prepared by us in our rented apartments and villa. For example, in Venice we purchased fresh fish from the giant open air fish market and complimented it with wine from the local "jug" shop, where for a few Euros you could have them fill your used one Liter plastic water bottle with wine to take home. In Tuscany, we enjoyed the local pasta called pici, a fatter version of spaghetti, with a fresh homemade tomato sauce that included some pancetta, sliced thin for us by the local butcher. Once we arrived at Lake Como, risotto was in order; prepared with porcini mushrooms and pesto and enjoyed with a local white wine.



BYOB wine shop in Venice

Discovering differences between our cultures is what makes traveling so much fun.

Some guidebooks are written to "Americanize" your experience by aligning your expectations to our American ways. On this trip, I fell into the expectation trap while setting out to visit the local wineries. In California, we are quite fortunate that most wineries are geared towards the consumer by offering you the ability to "drop-in" for a wine tasting. Quite the opposite in Italy; where appointments are still required by most wineries. Large wineries in Italy are also considered medium sized by California standards, so a number of the places we visited were not much bigger than our own micro-size winery. Generally the hospitality was warm and welcoming, even without an appointment, but it was also hit and miss. If they were closed, they were closed; even if people were there working...no exceptions. I guess, given that we don't have a tasting room, folks trying to visit us sometimes experience the same thing.

Where Californians (winemakers, winery owners and consumers) could learn a lesson or two is in our wine making style. In the case of Italian style wines, it was rare to find a wine that exceeded 13.5% alcohol and that was loaded with oak. Even in the case where the wine received some barrel aging, the oak did not hit you over the head like it does in many California wines. I have had customers who have asked, "Where's the oak?" in our wines because our winemaking style goes gentle on using new oak just as the Europeans do. As for alcohol, high alcoholic wines don't complement food in the same way that wines with lower alcohol and a little more acid do. We are blessed in California by having consistently warmer weather than our counterparts in Europe. As a result, our fruit becomes riper, which creates bigger fruit forward wines with more alcohol. To my palette, these lower alcohol European cousins are better balanced, with solid acids that help provide a foundation for the food you are eating.

Now that we are entering our sixth season producing wine, it's become clearer to me as the winemaker just how difficult it is to walk that fine line of mature fruit, balanced acid and reasonable alcohol. This is something that I will keep in mind this crush.

Planning a trip to Venice, Tuscany, Piedmont, or the Lake Como area?
Email us for some tips...

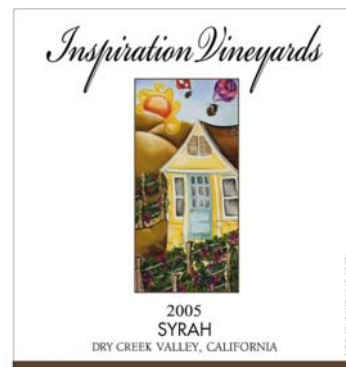
Introducing 2 new wines!

One of our main goals when we founded Inspiration Vineyards and Winery was to produce wines that compliment food. We began by producing the King and Queen of all wines, Cabernet Sauvignon and Chardonnay. However, our line-up was missing two equivalent (and some would say superior) varietals that are found in the Northern Rhone Valley of France: Viognier and Syrah. They've just been added to our list of available wines.

Our Viognier is grown just a short distance from our own Chardonnay vineyard in the Russian River Valley. The grower takes great pride in the care of his small vineyard, producing excellent fruit that truly represents what Viognier is all about. Wow is all I can say about this white wine because it is packed with flavors of apricots and spice. We produced 26 cases in 2005, and have 6 cases left. You don't want to miss out on this summer sipping pleaser, so get it while it lasts!



One of my wishes as a commercial winemaker came true with the release of our first Syrah. I worked with this vineyard during our R&D years, but needed to postpone producing this until the winery was more established. With my Viognier source now identified, I was able to make this wine in the tradition of the Northern Rhone. I co-fermented 3% Viognier with the Syrah to provide additional flavors and complexity. Medium to full bodied, this wine exhibits a nose of blackberry, tea and tobacco; “meaty,” followed by a rich mouthful of chocolate and coffee flavors. Ready now to compliment your meal, this wine also has the potential for many years of aging.



Our website is now more secure!



We recently updated our website security. When we initially launched our online winestore, we used a certificate that belonged to our Internet Service Provider. Although this provided you with 128-bit security, it also displayed a warning message that the certificate owner did not match the website that you were entering.

This created a lot of confusion and in the end, created uncertainty for our customers.

As a result, we now possess our own “Web Server Certificate” that provides 256-bit encryption protection. You will now see a little padlock in the bottom right hand corner of your web browser when you visit our online winestore at: <https://www.inspirationvineyards.com/winestore.html>. You can also view the certificate, found near the bottom of the page next to the shipping table. Look for more changes in the future as we improve our online winestore ordering system.

2005 Release Notes

2005 Chardonnay, Russian River Valley, Estate

Looks can be deceiving! As a result of one less racking and no flavor-stealing filtration, we ended up with a little bit more sediment in our 2005 vintage than we have in the past. This is also perhaps one of our best Chardonnays, very rich and Burgundian in style with an abundance of apples and pears on the nose along with a rich mouth feel. There is nothing wrong with the sediment; if you would prefer your wine to be as clear as possible, store upright for a few weeks after receiving it, and then decant prior to serving.

2005 Pinot Noir, Los Carneros, Sonoma County

Our biggest challenge in 2005 was to extract color during primary fermentation. We don't add fancy enzymes like some Pinot producers; we work with what we have been given by the sun gods. Light bodied and earthy, with mellow flavors of black cherry, earth and tobacco; this wine continues to improve with bottle age. I predict that like our 2002 vintage, it will be showing best in another 12 months.

2005 Zinfandel, Alexander Valley

This is definitely one of our crowd pleasers. Like the 2003 vintage, this wine is very showy with rich and intense flavors of raspberry & coffee. Here's another example of a wine that shows really nicely out of the gate, but will improve and become more complex with age. My favorite combination is to serve this with BBQ pulled pork, although one of my friends disagrees; he likes this zinfandel with braised duck breast.

2005 Zinfandel, Russian River Valley, Estate Old Vines

If you liked the 2004 vintage, you won't be disappointed with the 2005! The good news is that we were able to produce a 2nd barrel of this vintage because Mother Nature was in our favor. Medium to full bodied, layered with concentrated flavors of raspberry, cranberry, and black cherry along with spice notes of cardamom, clove, bay and white pepper. A totally different style than our AV – this wine can hold it's own against a good Cabernet Sauvignon.

Current availability and prices

| | 2003 | 2004 | 2005 |
|---|---------|---------|---------|
| Chardonnay, Estate ~ Russian River Valley | | \$18.00 | \$18.00 |
| Viognier, Russian River Valley | | | \$29.00 |
| Zinfandel, Estate Old Vine ~ Russian River Valley | | | \$28.00 |
| Zinfandel, Alexander Valley | \$25.00 | \$19.00 | \$19.00 |
| Pinot Noir, Sonoma County ~ Los Carneros | | \$24.00 | \$24.00 |
| Syrah, Dry Creek Valley | | | \$24.00 |
| 2003 Cabernet Sauvignon, Dry Creek Valley | \$25.00 | | |

Upcoming Tasting Calendar

Thursday July 12 @ Cotati Corner Fine Wines & Gifts, Cotati 5:00pm to 7:30pm — fee: \$5

For more info:



www.cotaticorner.com

Sunday August 19— Family Wine-makers of California Annual San

Francisco Ft. Mason Tasting

Noon to 4:00pm— fee: \$45