

# THE HERITAGE VINEYARD PROJECT

## Back to the Future Research on Zinfandel Stage Is Set for New Phase

By Joel Peterson, Ravenswood



**"I'm thrilled that ZAP's funding of the Heritage Vineyard resulted in ancient Zinfandel clones being propagated and spared from a hearty strain of Leaf Roll virus. Many generations will continue to enjoy old-vine Zinfandel captured from the same stock that made California's most unique and historic varietal."**

Donn Reisen, Ridge Vineyards  
and ZAP's 2007/08 President

### A Quick History

As ZAP members know, our association has been providing major financial support for the comprehensive clonal research and preservation of old vine germ plasm Zinfandel—the historic grape that truly defines the establishment of California as a wine growing region. To date, ZAP has contributed \$260,940 in funding for various projects, including \$39,800 approved by ZAP's Board of Directors in June for the continued research at the Oakville Experimental Station in the Napa Valley run by the University of California at Davis.

The original selection of materials to establish the Heritage Vineyard at the Oakville Experimental Station were collected by UC Davis researchers on "Zinfandel safaris" throughout the state during the early 1990s in response to complaints about the Zinfandel clonal material then available for vineyard planning. Interesting and historical vineyards planted before 1920 which were known to produce distinctive and superb quality wine were surveyed and bud wood selected from plants that appeared to be visually free from virus. These selections were planted on one acre at the Station with technical support of ZAP. This original block was followed from a viticultural standpoint only. Measurements were taken on pruning weight, cluster weight, berry size and crop size. Wine has been made by a selected ZAP wine-maker each year for the ZAP Heritage Vineyard wine since 1997.

In 2003, the research project was expanded to Phase 2 on a new plot of land consisting of 2.4 acres at the Station. Twenty-two selections from Phase 1 that were found to have a wide range of growth characteristics

and to be virus-free were planted in the new trial. These selections were planted in units randomly scattered throughout the vineyard block. Enough vines were planted of each selection to produce approximately one-half ton of grapes, or enough to produce one barrel of wine. Ravenswood has been making small lots of wine from this vineyard for the last two vintages.

### Why is making wine from the Heritage Vineyard important?

The goals of this new phase of the project are to determine the growth and grape production characteristics of each selection and produce wines from these virus free selections to determine what the wine characteristics of each selection are and what differences might exist. The wine production follows a set protocol to maximize the individual clonal selection characteristics. The bottom line is to certify these selections and release those that appear to be distinctive to the general market.

### Current Leaf Roll Virus Threat

For many years it was believed that Leaf Roll virus was a disease of propagation and that it did not spread other than by the propagation of infected wood. We now know that Leaf Roll virus can be spread by a number of different types of Mealy Bug. Unfortunately, there has been a very large infection and spread of the virus in the Oakville area. This is a threat that will necessitate change in the Heritage Vineyard strategy. In order to protect the Oakville Experimental Station, UC Davis has begun a zero tolerance program for Leaf Roll virus at the Station. The Phase 1 planting of the Heritage Vineyard, the vineyard

from which the ZAP Heritage Vineyard wine was produced, was infected with virus when it was originally selected. The Phase 1 vineyard has been removed along with some of the Cabernet Sauvignon in a Leaf Roll virus experiment conducted by the University. ZAP will release the 2005 and 2006 vintages over the next two years from the Phase 1 vineyard.

The good news is that every selection contained in Phase 1 of the Heritage Vineyard has been preserved for future research and the plant material not in Phase 2 can be maintained by the ISDA National Clonal Germ Plasm Repository. Currently, we believe that the Phase 2 selections are unaffected by Leaf Roll virus, which will enable us to continue with the current trial at Oakville until we see evidence that this plot is infected with the virus. The plot will be carefully observed for visual evidence of virus infections.

### The Future—Phase 3 and Beyond

Due to the ongoing threat of Leaf Roll virus and the potential infection of our virus free selections of Zinfandel Heritage clones, a number of actions are being considered. The Heritage Vineyard committee which has been providing technical expertise to UC Davis will make an assessment of the 2006 wines from Phase 2 later this summer. At that time, the Heritage Vineyard Committee will discuss and set a new course of action and develop recommendations for Phase 3. We will keep our members informed as information becomes available.

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