



Heritage Vineyard Update

By Rod Berglund

Winemaker for the 2000 Vintage

With the 2000 Heritage Vineyard Zin now safely through malo-lactic, it is safe to reflect on the zin of the century (actually the last zin of the century to be exact)!

When first asked if I was interested in making the 2000 ZAP zin I was enthusiastic. After all, it would be the last one of the millennium (or first of the new, depending on how you count) and it would be quite an honor. Plus, it would be simple. It was Zin and since a large part of what we do is Zinfandel it would be a piece of cake. But, then the doubts set in. Making wine for oneself is pretty safe. If someone doesn't care for the style you can always respond that it's MY wine and that's the way it is. Making it for someone else not only carries a different set of responsibilities but a different set of expectations. Plus the fruit was coming from a region with which I had no experience, and, unlike all of the zinfandel vineyards we use, it was from young vines. Well, life is about new experiences plus it was a little late to back out, so with great excitement and a little bit of trepidation, I looked forward to the harvest of '00.

The year itself was rather unusual. A textbook perfect spring was interrupted in June by a severe three-day heat spell. Temperatures soared as high as 100 degrees in the coastal counties. Plant life of all types was affected. Redwood trees along highway 101 in Sonoma county turned brown along their western sides, as did other native trees including oaks. Even poison oak (which I thought was impossible to do damage to) withered and appeared to die. Grapevines were also severely affected. In our vineyard we lost about half of our syrah crop as the young vines lost most if not all of their leaves and clusters shriveled. Zinfandel was not spared either with lots of the tender new young grapes turned into raisins. What appeared to be disaster in the making however was mitigated by the return of gentle weather, which persisted throughout the summer. However, as harvest time approached it was clear that the earlier heat spell had indeed had an effect. Vineyards, which always seem to ripen in a logical order, seemed to be ripening in a different order. In some vineyards parts of the vineyard were approaching ripening while others were nowhere near maturity. The Heritage Vineyard

had its own set of problems. Zinfandel by its very nature ripens somewhat unevenly. To complicate this even more the Heritage Vineyard is composed of several replications of numerous selections taken from old vineyards around the state. Some of the selections were more vigorous than others, some were large clustered some small, some had fairly heavy crops and others fewer clusters. All in all it is a very diverse vineyard. Fortunately the management is first rate and the vines were babied not only through the heat spell but right up until harvest. I was provided with regular updates on numbers (sugar, acid and pH) on a continuing basis. However, when the next heat spell came (in September) and the call came that harvest time was near (as in RIGHT NOW!) I was unsure. A number of the selections were perfectly ripe but some needed more time. But with only 6 vines per selection in a block this small selective picking was not an option. Plus, some of the vines were in serious danger of desiccation if the heat persisted. The decision was made, the fruit was brought in and the wine was made.

During the three plus weeks the grapes spent in the fermenter it seemed to go through various stages. Each time we punched the cap it seemed to react differently. At times it was quite vigorous, at other times it seemed to be in danger of stopping. In the end it finished its primary fermentation without great difficulty if a big slowly. Malo-lactic, however, seemed to take forever. By early March however it finally finished.

And how is the wine? I am very happy to say that it appears to be a major success. It is very different that the zins we usually make (as it should be coming from a very different growing region), showing more vibrant red fruit, elegance and charm. It is already fairly complex, has good balance and structure and should continue to improve over the next year in barrel (all older French oak in order to not overwhelm the vineyard character). But most of all it is exciting because it reminds me of why Zinfandel is so wonderful. It makes, without doubt, the most amazingly diverse wines of any grape type and this wine is a microcosm of that diversity.

(Editor's note: Our deepest gratitude to Rod for getting this article to ZAP when he had just returned from overseas. Great job!)