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Anna Maria Knapp, Owner
75 Pelican Way G1
San Rafael, CA 94901

1-800-700-6227

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Imagine Giuseppe Martinelli, an immigrant from Friuli in northeastern Italy, homesteading and clearing land for a farm and starting a family in the woody wilderness of Sonoma County before the turn of the 20th Century. Today, he would have been less than an hour from San Francisco. But then, without trains, cars, or the Golden Gate Bridge, he was a world away. He never learned much English because he didn't have the time, the opportunity, or even the need since he interacted mostly with his own community of Italian immigrants. His work was organized by day break, sun set, and the rotation of seasons, not unlike what he had left behind in Friuli. Picture his young son Lino, learning English at school, farming his father's small but steep vineyard from the time that he was a young teenager, and later inheriting part of the land, including the vineyard. Sonoma County was a primitive area in the early 1900s, but agricultural activity was growing to meet the increasing needs of nearby San Francisco and Oakland across the San Francisco Bay.

Like Giuseppe, Lino Martinelli built his own house with his two hands, planted gardens and a small vineyard, tilled the earth with a horse and plow, but also acquired a tractor and eventually a telephone. Lino raised four children there and was basically self-sufficient like his father had been, living from what he cultivated on his land and hunted in the woods

nearby. He needed money only to buy fuel for the tractor, his grandson Darek Trowbridge remarks. "I looked at his life and thought, 'That's for me.' I have no idea why, but it struck me deeply. I just loved being out on the land with him, and that's where it comes from, this land-based love. I wanted to make decisions that improved it and do good."

Tall and slender with a warm hand-shake, a ready hug, and a lot of energy, Darek Trowbridge remembers helping his grandfather on many occasions from the time that he was 11 years old and strong enough at least to use a rake. "There was a lot of wild land out there, and my grandfather would go hunting." Sometimes, they would eat *blackbird* stew, which was probably robin, already illegal to shoot then, Darek remarks. "He would make the best chicken stew with all these herbs from his garden, cook it slow and all day long, and serve it over polenta."

Just as a song can evoke the entire context in which a person might have heard it, taste can do the same. Darek remembers not only the slow-cooked stews with herbs from the garden that infused the kitchen with aromas but also the wine they drank, often Zinfandel that was 16 to 17 percent alcohol although Darek has no memory of distracting alcohol flavors. The stews and the wines "went together, and the whole experience was so

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WINERY OF THE MONTH



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awesome." Darek recounts that his grandfather survived Prohibition by running a still. "If you distill wine, it's essentially like vodka until you put it in a barrel and age it, and then it's brandy. He'd sell what he made in San Francisco, of course illegally, and that's how he got the money he needed." Lino made Zinfandel in the same way that he made Port, Darek says, adding alcohol to stop the fermentation and leaving two to four percent of the sugar unfermented in the wine. "It was sweet. I still to this day love those flavors. Zinfandel is just so opulent."

But Darek makes a distinction between wines that are naturally rich and those that are unnaturally so. Through the Bachelor's degree in viticultural at California Polytechnic State University, followed by the Master's Degree in enology at Fresno State University, the memory of his grandfather's wines and the time during Darek's childhood when he drank them inspired him to craft the style of wine that he makes at his own winery today, rich and earthy, and totally without additives of any kind except for a bit of sulfur. The university trains students for corporate jobs with big wineries, he says, teaching them how to add yeast to the fruit, to supplement acid and tannin in the wine, and to increase sugar and color in the form of Mega Purple, finally adding a lot of sulfur to preserve the result. This recipe was not his grandfather's and didn't produce the wines Darek remembered. "The difference really was that my grandfather didn't ever add anything. The grapes came in. We put them in a vat and fermented them. We didn't add yeast or food for yeast or tartaric acid or anything, maybe some sulfur at the end. So I deconstructed myself. Everything that I learned at school, I set aside and started from the beginning. At first, I was really disgruntled with my education."

Even when formulaic wines are initially pleasant, Darek says big wineries that make them are irresponsible. "It's not art," he says.

Without ever tasting the fruit, they might wait till grapes ripen to 27.5 brix, the measure of sugar in the fruit, because they've reduced wines to particular formulas that get high scores. They want a wine that is 15.5 percent alcohol, regardless of the fruit's best expression in the vineyard. "What's missing is complexity and marriage, the marrying of flavors, like when you make a soup, and the flavors blend." In terms of wines that are 17 and 18 percent alcohol, Darek says that on several occasions he has consumed three glasses of such wines, was "smashed," and had to drive home. "As a consumer, that was when I started paying attention so that I knew how much to drink." He adds, "Another thing that I don't like about high alcohol wines is that they're all lush and all fruit in the first three sips, but then I feel like I'm going to get gout. They're too much for my palate."

Darek pursues intense aromas and flavors in a very different way. Unlike white wine, red wine is fermented with the skins and seeds, from which it derives its richer flavor. The challenge is to intensify flavor but diminish harsh tannins that also reside in the skins and especially the seeds. Darek explains that native yeasts in the vineyard add complexity to wine as does bacteria from secondary malolactic fermentation, which converts harsher malic acid to lactic acid. Submerging the cap of solids that rises to the surface of the tank during fermentation so that it mixes with the fermenting wine is an old and common practice and adds complexity. Used by celebrity winemaker Helen Turley, *rack and return* is a more recent method that creates big red flavors but diminishes tannins. The fermenting red wine is drained away from the grape solids, and a portion of the grape seeds, which can impart harsh tannins, are removed from the bottom of the tank. The wine is then pumped back into the fermentation tank. The process is repeated until the fermentation is complete and all fruit

sugar is fermented into alcohol. But before fermentation can begin, the grapes must be crushed and the juice released. Darek does this in the most classic and gentle way by foot stomping, less likely than a metal crusher to release harsh tannins from the skins and seeds. Fifteen or twenty of his best friends show up at the winery, climb into the tanks, stomp on the grapes, and at the end of the day, have a party. "It builds community," he says, and makes wonderful wine.

In 2007, Darek purchased a three-acre property at Fulton in the Russian River AVA (American Viticultural Area) and a little over a year ago opened the tasting room. The first winery to occupy the property was Williams Selyem, famous for Pinot Noir but also for Martinelli Vineyard Zinfandel from Lino Martinelli's Jackass Hill Vineyard. Darek says that his uncle, his mother's brother Lee Martinelli, who owns Martinelli Winery, including about 350 acres of vineyards, was unable to obtain grapes from his own father's vineyard because between 1979 and 1992, Williams Selyem had locked up the fruit with a contract. That his grandfather's grapes were made into wine at what is now Darek's own winery is a connection that he cherishes.

Currently, Darek is making about 2500 cases of wine and buying fruit. "The most important things are that the vineyard is family farmed, that the right varietal is planted in the right location, and that one of the owners is the farmer. A lot of small vineyards hire contract farmers, and those guys slash and burn. They come in, try to make a bunch of money, and don't really put anything back into the land. I know so many of them, and I know how they farm. It's agri-business. That's all it is. I need something more. I need native yeasts and want to make the most individual wines that I can from a particular block. I'm not going to get that kind of fruit if the owners don't care."

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