

## WINERY OF THE MONTH



### WINERY from cover

Trinitas is that he buys grapes from growers in various appellations rather than cultivating his own vines. "We don't own vineyards," he says. "We're not in that business. We do own nine acres that are attached to our Meritage Resort, and we're beginning to use those grapes in our Bordeaux program. But we buy grapes in appellations that we think are best for particular varietals." He buys Cabernet and other Bordeaux varieties from Napa, along with Chardonnay and Pinot Noir, and he buys Zinfandel from Mendocino and Petite Sirah and Mataro from Lodi. "We're not farmers. We're into winemaking, packaging, and marketing, completely different disciplines than agriculture. We leave farming to other people." He points out that the current glut of grapes in the market place allows him to be flexible, to buy particular grapes from appellations where they excel and to make wines that he thinks consumers want now. In other words, he's not limited to estate grape production, nor does he have the headaches of farming, which he says are substantial.

"There's very little money, if any, in growing grapes. All the money that's made on the grape side is in land appreciation. You make enough money, maybe, to pay your property taxes, your labor costs, but you don't really get a return on your land. If you bought your land for \$50 thousand an acre, ten years from now, it's probably going to be worth \$100 thousand. You make your money that way, which is good, but in the meantime, you have all the heart aches of farming. It's not an easy business. You're subject to both the elements and the market. It's real estate. You're just farming on the land while you wait for it to go up in value."

Despite what most winemakers say, that wine is made in the vineyard, that the wine can be only as good as the grapes from which it is made, Tim disagrees. He feels that the winemaker is the key to making great wine. "I know that I'm rocking the foundations of people who have been in the business a lot longer than me, but just give me half way decent grapes, and I

can make a great wine." Regardless of weather conditions or the differences in fruit from one vineyard to another, he expects never to disappoint his customers. He insists that from year to year, he can make consistently good wines that his customers will recognize as his because of his winemaking practices. "A normal consumer wants to buy a wine that is good and wants to drink it day in and day out. If you're making that wine, you better be delivering it the same way. And don't tell me what your problems are. You didn't have sun, and you didn't have rain. The buyer doesn't care. Only the connoisseurs will say 'if we're going to drink a Cab, we better have a 1975 or a 1978' or whatever. That's fine. But as a practical matter, that's not where the consumer is. With our Chardonnay particularly, our mission is to make that wine taste exactly like last year's Chardonnay. That's what people bought, and if we change it, people are not going to like it. You have to manage that consistency in the cellar because you don't control the field."

Wineries that buy grapes have a lot of influence over how the vines are farmed. They can choose to avoid certain vineyards, which they think are not producing premium fruit or farming sustainably, or they can instruct the farmer to cultivate the vines in certain ways to obtain better fruit. Tim says that only lately has he begun to address organic and sustainability issues. "It's the wave of the future," he says, "and I think it's a great one. We have a responsibility as stewards of the land to make the land better than when we got it. So I think green is a great move. I didn't always think that way. As consumers and purchasers of grapes, we need to hold our growers accountable. We have our Trinitas Growers Society where we bring our growers together and thank them for supporting the winery. We give them wine from their vineyards, have dinner together. We're partners. They grow the grapes. We process them and sell them. We're doing different jobs, but at the end of the day, we're all on the same team. It's im-

portant that we make the wine and sell it in a way that they're proud of, and they are responsible for keeping the land sustainable and minimizing the use of chemicals."

"In the past, I wasn't informed. Many times, the reason you don't think a certain way is that you don't have all the information. That's how I think of my opponent. I don't think he's stupid. I think he's misinformed. Once I give him the information in a sweet way without being argumentative, he should sway over to my way. Either that, or I'm wrong, and I should swing over to his way. Whether you're trying to negotiate a deal or trying to deal with a political opinion, I think it's important that you share the information you have, that brought you to the conclusion that you have, and let the other person share his opinion. When you finish, you're both going to walk away, and if you both listened, one person is going to change his mind. I think that's what life is all about."

Tim believes that wine contributes to empathy, communication, and understanding. He admits that the science doesn't exist, but from his personal experience, he has observed that groups of people who are drinking wine as opposed to beer or hard liquor are friendlier, more engaged with one another, and treat one another in a more civil way. "I'm not saying that you can't get bombed on wine, because you will if you drink enough. But I think the way people consume wine is not just for the wine but for the beauty of the wine, and because of that appreciation, they also share each other's company in a much more friendly and civil way than they might at a beer hall or a martini party. It's a different type of alcohol consumption."

For Tim, wine is also an expression of his Catholic faith, and regardless of the pluralistic society that exists in the United States and the necessity for citizens to respect one another's differences, he is not shy about expressing his Catholic values even in the marketplace and doesn't feel that anyone else should be either. "It is who I am," he says.



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### California *Winery of the Month*



## Sun, Soil, and the Winemaker's Magic *Trinitas Cellars*

In his early 50s, Tim Busch has the energy of a college student and as many ideas, and he has turned a lot of these ideas into successful businesses. A corporate and tax lawyer by training and practice, he owns a chain of high-end supermarkets, real estate, hotels, including the Meritage Resort and Spa in Napa, and now Trinitas winery nearby, which he established eight years ago, not to mention a few other ancillary businesses. And he still practices law. Tim identifies with the German half of his family, which came from Dresden in 1860. Germans are "organized, open, abrupt," he says, not "touch-feely." They like to get things done, do them right, do them quick. But while he is attracted to the challenges of business, he loves entertaining and hospitality, which ultimately led him to the hotel and wine business. "Office and apartment buildings are pretty boring," he says. "You can make money, but there's no excitement in what you're doing. So I got into the hotel business and loved it because it's a real estate business, but you get to enjoy people. They're having fun because they're traveling. The winery is just an extension of that."

Yet even if Tim is in the wine business for fun, his right and left brain work together, and he sees wine as a growth industry and expects to make money selling it. "The consumption of wine has an inverse relationship to beer and spirits. Sales are increasing. Wine is taking over," he says. "That's why all these big corporations are buying wineries." While Americans drink much less per capita than Europeans, they're willing to spend more on wine so that the United States is now the largest retail market for wine in the world.

Trinitas aims at the middle, Tim says, from

\$14 to \$50 a bottle. "We're not looking to sell wine for \$100 or \$150 a bottle. We want to sell to the average person, who enjoys wine." Tim wants to please not only the American wallet but also the American palate, which he thinks prefers fruit-forward wines. Despite all of the education in the business that encourages drinking wine with meals, Americans still enjoy much of their wine either as an aperitif before meals or at social gatherings, unlike their European counterparts, who drink only with meals. So Tim crafts his wines to please equally with or without food. "I'm trying to get to the middle where I think the American palate is and make wine that people like. And I think we're starting to hit it."

Tim marvels at the enjoyment that people take from learning about wine and enjoys participating in their experience. "If you're an open-heart surgeon, you're doing great things for the society, but what you're doing is not a lot of fun. You're dealing with life and death circumstances that are highly intense and stressful. You need a break." In their 20s, 30s, and 40s, he says, people are consumed with developing careers and families and have little time for anything else. "It's like golf. Learning about wine takes them away from daily pressures. It may be trivial but it's interesting and complicated at the same time." When people come to the tasting room and learn how particular wines were made, what the differences are between grape varieties, "they light up." They are fascinated and take the experience home to their families and friends and incorporate it into the way that they express hospitality in their own homes.

The business model that Tim has chosen for See **WINERY** back page



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