

REGION OF THE MONTH

AMADOR COUNTY

WINERY from cover interested in wine and says that he was always looking for opportunities to get into the business. Finally, after selling their flavor company in 1998, they had the money and decided that "we had to do this now." Napa real estate was prohibitively expensive, and Sonoma County wasn't much better. Chaim and Elisheva settled on the Sierra Foothills, where they had friends, and purchased a 209-acre parcel of uncultivated land between the south and middle forks of the Cosumnes River in Amador County's Shenandoah Valley.

In addition to planting 20 acres of vineyards with Zinfandel, Syrah, Petit Sirah, Primitivo, Cabernet Sauvignon, and Cabernet Franc, and with plans to plant another 50 acres, Chaim and Elisheva have built a 12,000 square-foot, state-of-the-art winery, perched on a hillside with spectacular views of their vineyards and a panorama of the Sierra Foothills. The facility, which features two art galleries, is built to enable the winery to produce 15,000 cases of wine annually.

Chaim says that when people drink his wines, they will detect a common denominator, which he calls his style. "I like my wines to be fruity. What you smell first is a fruity aroma. Then you drink the wine, and the taste fulfills the expectation of the aroma. I don't like wines that go flat in the mid palate. I like wines that have a mid palate structure. This means that what you put in your mouth makes you feel that you have something there, not just water. I like wines that have flavor in the finish and also have a finishing structure. I differentiate between the mid palate structure and the finishing structure, which is usually the tannins that you get, and sometimes they can be harsh in the end."

Tannins don't have flavors, Chaim explains, but provide texture in the mouth, unlike fruit juice, which is smooth. But he says that even

though tannins don't have flavor, they can still influence flavor. "Tannins will block some of the receptors on your tongue, so you won't be able to taste some flavors. Or they will separate flavors, so they'll allow you to taste some flavors but not others. Tannins make the wine big but can also make the wine harsh. I like good balance. When you put the wine in your mouth, it shouldn't have any peaks or valleys. The flavor starts, and then it builds up and crescendos, and then the finish still lingers but has a little more amplitude until the flavor disappears. This is a bell-shaped curve. Like the sound of a bell, the flavor goes higher and higher and reaches a peak, and then it goes down."

What Chaim doesn't like, he says, is strong oak flavor, because it covers the fruit flavors inherent in different grape varieties. "I like to build on fruit flavors, not cover them. I don't like sweet wines either. My wines are dry," which is to say that all the fruit sugar is fermented into alcohol. But he goes on to explain that wine grapes can transmit a sweet sensation, and when used correctly, oak barrels can enhance that flavor in much the same way that vanilla enhances the flavor of chocolate. "Anise has a sweet quality, but it doesn't have any sugar. Mint is the same. So what I'm saying is that when you age wine in oak, it can give the wine very positive flavors that are not associated with wood."

"In the 1970s and 1980s, winemakers in Napa were making Cabernets that were very oaky. Some wineries continue to make these wines. In the beginning, I thought that oak flavor was just part of the wine. But then after drinking many different wines with many different qualities, I realized that this oak flavor was really covering the flavor of the fruit. The more oak you have, the less Cabernet flavor you're getting. Every wine becomes the same. But oak can impart other qualities that I like to build on, like sweetness. It also gives spiciness

to the wine and smokiness and flavors like coffee, chocolate, and vanilla. So I'm very choosy about what barrels I age my wines in. I use predominantly French oak barrels from different coopers, who say that they get the same wood from the same forest, but the barrels that they end up making impart different flavors to the wine, like two winemakers making wine from exactly the same vineyard yet ending up making entirely different wines. So when I choose my barrels, not only do I choose them from different regions, but I also choose them from different manufacturers."

"Making good wine is about paying attention to details," Chaim emphasizes. "I'm very careful with barrel group composition. I age my better wines in 20 percent new oak barrels, 20 percent one-year old barrels, 20 percent in two-year old barrels, 20 percent in three, and the final 20 percent in four-year old barrels. Then not only the age of the barrels but also the forest where the wood comes from and who made the barrels will determine which wine I will age in which barrel group. I use a different barrel group for Syrah than I would use for Zinfandel or Petit Sirah or Cabernet."

Still, the basic component of good wine is good fruit, as any winemaker will say. Chaim likes his fruit to be "beautiful and ripe." But he says that a lot of effort is required to get fruit to mature uniformly on the vine. "Nature doesn't want to do that. Nature is chaotic, and I want control, perfect control. I don't determine ripeness by numbers, by sugar content or any other chemical analysis. I determine ripeness with my palate. I eat the grape. I chew on the skin. I crack the seeds. And this is the way that I decide whether the vineyard is ready to be harvested. I'm doing the most basic things that anybody can do." In other words, scientist though he may be, he's just as comfortable with his artistic sensibilities.



YOUR ACCESS TO OUTSTANDING WINES FROM CALIFORNIA AND ITALY

California Winery of the Month



Flavor Without Peaks or Valleys C.G. Di Arie Vineyard & Winery

Chaim Gur-Arieh's academic studies and professional career in food science have been a rigorous preparation for winemaking, even more rigorous than conventional enology training. His experience has provided him with an elaborate understanding of the winemaking process and its end result, a beverage with more layers of flavor than any other. And because of this background, he is able to think and to talk with remarkable precision about a beverage that we all ultimately perceive in subjective ways.

Born in Istanbul, Turkey, Chaim immigrated to Israel as a teenager. He earned his first degree in chemical engineering at Technion, the Israel Institute of Technology and then moved to the United States to continue his education. At the University of Illinois, he earned a Ph.D. in Food Science. Not surprisingly, his first jobs were with Quaker Oats United and Del Monte Corporation, where he developed new packaged food products. He then founded Food Development Corporation and continued to

develop food products, until he merged the company with his new California Brands Flavors company. Over the next 20 years, Chaim created a database of more than 5000 flavors, ingredients that exist in almost all packaged foods and beverages.

Chaim's academic curriculum included biochemistry, microbiology, and food processing, foundations for winemaking, Chaim explains. "Biochemistry is the chemistry of living stuff, and wine, obviously, comes from a living plant. Microbiology deals with fermentation, and wine is a fermented product. Then winemaking involves processing, and whether you're processing to make vanilla extract or to make wine, you're using the same principal."

Chaim says that after meeting Elisheva Gur-Arieh, who became his wife in 1974, he paid close attention to wine. Now an artist, who has exhibited her paintings nationally, Elisheva was a ballet dancer with a wine collection when they met. Chaim grew increasingly

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