

## PICK & CHOOSE

**JUST RED? JUST WHITE?  
JUST CALIFORNIAN?  
JUST ITALIAN?  
HOW ABOUT A  
COMBINATION?**

### CALIFORNIA WINES

Artisan Series – \$29.50/month, a red and a white  
Winemaker Series – \$59.50/month, 2 reserve reds  
Artisan red–Winemaker red – \$46/month

### ITALIAN WINES

Artisan Series – \$32/month, a red and a white  
Winemaker Series – \$62/month, 2 reserve reds  
Collector Series – \$112/month, 2 collectable reds  
Artisan red–Winemaker red – \$48/month  
Winemaker red–Collector red – \$87/month

### CALIFORNIA–ITALIAN COMBINATIONS

CA Artisan red–IT Artisan red – \$33/month  
CA Artisan white–IT Artisan white – \$29.50/month  
CA Winemaker–IT Winemaker – \$62/month  
Alternate CA & IT Artisan Series – \$29.50/\$32/month  
Alternate CA & IT Winemaker Series – \$59.50/\$62/month

### DOUBLE UP

You can also receive more than two bottles per month. California sales tax is included. Shipping is extra.

riod without dehydrating, so that they develop more intense flavors. He remembers that frost in the spring was a big problem. Below freezing temperatures could kill buds, new shoots, and leaves, ruining a crop. “In 1969 or 1970, we had one year when we had 22 days of frost in April, and the last killing frost of that year was May 15th. We haven’t seen anything like that in a long, long time.” He remembers that vintners saw a lot of rain in the fall. But this year, California saw the earliest harvest that Dale has ever witnessed in his 40 years in the area. “We started picking in August and picked through September, and we were done, totally done in September. I can remember picking grapes on the 20th and 21st of November in the late 60s, and just getting them ripe to 22 or

23 brix [the measure of sugar in the fruit]. Now winemakers are looking for 25, 26, 27 brix, and we would never have been able to get that in the 60s and 70s with the type of weather that we had then. But there isn’t a whole lot we can do about the weather, so we talk about it some, but I don’t know, as vinticulturists, what we can do to change that. We still fortunately have foggy nights in the summertime, which other grape growing areas don’t have, and those real cool nights, and that’s what makes our grapes better than in other areas.”

“When we first came here, most wine was made in cement vats, and while it was good wine, it doesn’t come close to what we’re able to make now, and we continue to make better wines all the time.” ■



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California

## Winery of the Month



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November 2004

**I**n the 40 years that Dale Goode has spent in the wine business, he’s witnessed a warming climate, various supply and demand cycles, an array of new winemaking equipment, and dramatically different vineyard practices, all of which have contributed to vastly improved wines. Nearly 70 years old, he goes to the winery every day in Sonoma County’s Alexander Valley and also consults for other growers in the area. “It’s hard to retire from something that is fun. I’ve never looked at being in the grape business as a job. I get paid for doing what I love,” he says. “It keeps the gray matter going all the time. You have to be thinking about what you’re doing and adapting. Very few industries require as much change and thought as growing grapes, even more so than other agriculture, because we’re dealing with a permanent crop.” >

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**F**ounding partners and grape growers in the Alexander Valley for more than a decade before they began to make wine, Dale Goode and Tim Murphy Started the winery in 1985 in a depressed market when they had trouble selling their grapes. Making their own wine was an alternative to leaving the grapes on the vine. Dave Ready, sales and marketing specialist, joined the partnership in 1985. Tim Murphy died recently, and his three sons now supervise 300 acres of vineyards. Dave Ready's son, Dave Jr., acts as winemaker after having assisted Christina Benz, who is no longer there. So a second generation has now inherited major responsibility.

The grape industry has always been cyclical, Dale recalls. Between the 1960s through the 1980s, supply and demand cycles were three to four years. Larger crops or a spurt in planting would outstrip demand

for fruit, so prices would go down until supply and demand came into balance again. "We started Murphy-Goode in 1985, and we were in a slump at that time when there was more production than there was demand. We came out of that in a couple of years, and from then until 2001, it was just right straight up. There were a lot of people in the grape industry, who didn't think it would ever end. Many of us, who had been in the business for some time, knew that inevitably it would again, for one reason or another, pull back." This time, the collapse was dramatic. There had been overplanting in the 1990s and a sudden decrease in demand for premium wines after 9/11 when the economy seriously weakened, although demand for low-end wines continued to increase. Not only

was there a huge number of new plantings on the Pacific Coast, all the way from California to Washington State, but the unprecedented availability of foreign wines together with a tremendous increase in the number of domestic wineries added to the competition. California alone now counts nearly 1,000 wineries.

But the silver lining in this scenario was that in order to com-



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pete, wineries cut back production and increased the quality of vineyards and winemaking. "You have to make a great glass of wine. It's the only way you can compete. David and the staff do lots of tastings and blending trials, and we pick and choose the lots of grapes that we use. At one time, we probably bought fruit from 25 outside growers, and we cut that back to maybe only ten or eleven that fit especially well into

the style of wine that we want to make here." He adds that the industry is a friendly one, with people helping one another. "Dave Jr. gets together with other winemakers, and they have tastings and discuss ideas and ways of doing things." That kind of cooperation accelerates the learning curve throughout the industry in a way that a secretive industry could not experience.

Most Murphy-Goode estate vineyards are devoted to Char-

donnay and Sauvignon Blanc, because the partners learned over time that their land was more suited to white varieties than red. "When we originally planted the vineyards in the late 60s and 70s and into the 80s, we were flying blind as far as matching varieties to soils... Before we had lots of Cabernet growing down along the river, and we found that the area makes much better Chardonnay and Sauvignon Blanc." In fact, approximately 60% of the winery's production is white wine, except for an area of hilly terrain, where they've planted red varieties. They sell some of their white grapes to neighbors and buy red grapes from others in the Valley. But as Dale mentioned, they've cut back production from 150,000 cases to 120,000, buying less fruit, the best quality that they can find in the neighborhood. They feel that they can make the best wines, producing between 120,000 and 130,000 cases per year, given the fruit that they have available and the capacity of the winery itself.

In the quest for quality, they now have access to extraordinary equipment that can make a big difference in the wine. "The availability of equipment is mind-boggling," Dale says. "We have a filter that we put diatomaceous earth on and then filter the wine through that. It's just amazing what a difference it makes. And they're constantly coming up with different types and shapes and sizes of fermenters. We had a rotary fermenter here for a few years, and

we thought that was going to be the end all. But we found out that we extracted a lot more with the rotary fermenter than we wanted [including harsh tannins]. So now it's gone, and we have pump-over equipment," which pumps the liquid over the solids that rise to the surface of the tank during fermentation, mixing both to extract flavor and color from the solids in a gentle way, a process that was accomplished entirely by hand in the past.

Any winemaker will tell you that wines are made in the vineyard. The quality of the wine depends on the quality of the fruit. Not only must the right grape variety match soil and climate conditions in the vineyard, but how the vines are planted and then trellised as they grow are highly important decisions. The crucial premise here is that the less fruit the vine produces, the higher quality the fruit exhibits. Obviously, when demand exceeds supply, wineries are tempted to increase fruit yields. When demand diminishes, and wineries strive to increase quality, they happily control yield.

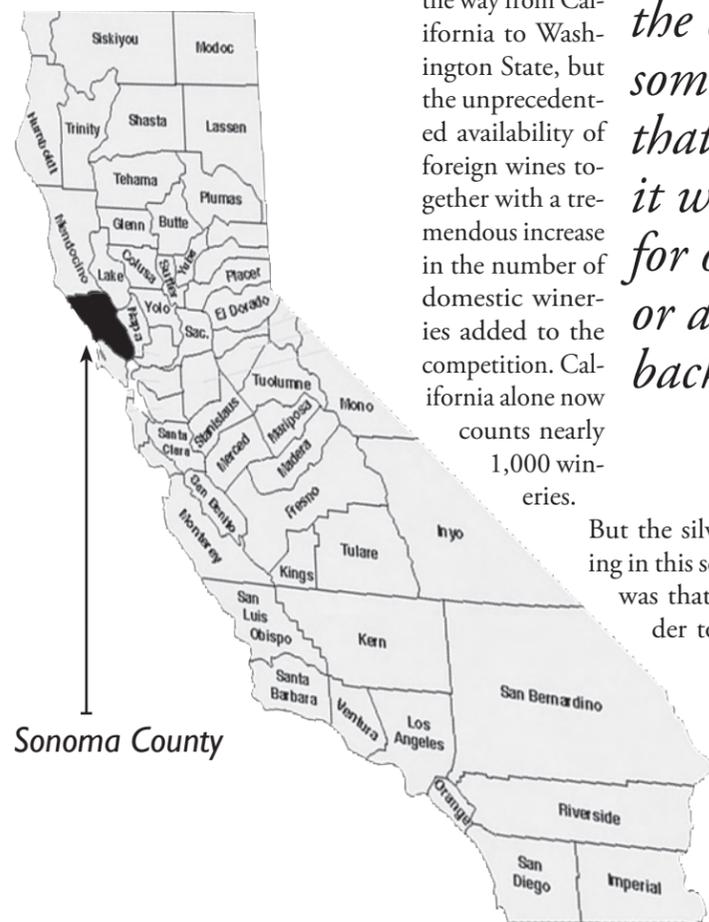
"One of the things that we have

found that I think is really important is that these closer vine spacing gives us more root systems per acre. When we planted 8 feet by 12, we had only 450 vines to the acre. But now if you go 8 feet by 6, only 8 feet between rows and 6 feet between vines, you're up to a thousand vines per acre, and in some cases, when they actually cut it down, and they're on 4 by 4 spacing, they may have 2000 vines to the acre. So what you're doing is you have less fruit per root system that has to support that fruit. So the quality of the grapes that you get out of that is superior. "It's amazing that the business has been here for 5000 years, and we're still looking for the best way to farm grapes," he marvels.

In his long viticultural career, Dale Good has observed another condition that has recently become a hot issue in the wine community as well as the world at large, climate change. Right now, warming temperatures are contributing to better, riper fruit, although much higher temperatures could ripen fruit too soon. Winegrapes need to hang on the vine for a long pe-

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—Dale Goode



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