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sociated with high acidity. The more acid a wine has the lower it's pH. However, you can have a wine that has high acidity and also a high pH. So they're not always related. Generally speaking, the more acidic things are, the lower their pH. Wine's pretty complicated, and pH has a lot to do with the biological and chemical processes that go on inside the wine. pH is intimately related to many of those processes. TA is how sour the wine tastes. Winemakers are concerned with pH, although consumers need not be so much. Chances are that high pH wines are lush and more approachable when they're young but possibly don't age as well, although there are exceptions. So the wines you normally drink range from, on the very low end, three or four grams of acid per liter. A very soft, lush Syrah maybe would be as low as four. That's really low. Normal acidity for reds is five to six grams per liter. Normal for whites is probably 5.5 to 7.5, 5.5 being low. Eight would be high. Most of the wines that you drink are somewhere around six to seven grams per liter of acid.

I'm hearing that this current emphasis on extremely ripe fruit is creating rifts between winemakers and growers because the grapes dehydrate when they hang on the vine, so growers get paid less.

Bill: Grape growers who go back many years, know that wineries all wanted the sugar between 22 and 23 brix. They were used to picking at that, and then all of a sudden, winemakers said, "No, no. We have to have 26 or 27 brix." And growers know that it simply takes longer in the vineyard to get the sugars higher. And they know that the longer the

grapes hang out there, they're probably drying up. Growers are like the rest of us. They talk to one another. One will say, "You're not going to want to pick at 27 sugar, because you'll lose 20% of the weight." They start thinking, "Well, maybe I won't," even though it's tough to measure. They get paid by the ton, so if the total tonnage in a vineyard goes down, their total income goes down. The come-back that some growers have developed is "OK, if you, the winery, want to buy my grapes, why don't you buy all the fruit in my ten-acre vineyard, and you decide when to pick. I don't care. You just pay me by the acre." This kind of an arrangement is becoming more common. When a winemaker says, "Well, everyone is getting \$4000/ton for Cabernet, and I'll pay you the same, but I want you to prune back heavily, and then I want you to leave your grapes out till they've dehydrated." That's pushing too far.

Mark: There's some indication that there's a biochemical limit to how concentrated you can get the solids inside the cell wall of the grape, and it's probably somewhere around 24% sugar by weight, around 23 to 24 brix. That's probably all the cell can do in terms of keeping carbohydrates in and keeping water out. So there's a good chance that if you're talking about 25/26/27 degrees brix, it's from dehydration.

Bill: One of my criteria for buying grapes from people is that we have to enjoy dealing with them, because there are lots of grapes out there, and you don't have to deal with people who aren't fun to hang out with.

Mark: So far that hasn't led us to make any really bad wines. I respect the premise, but I'm not sure it's the best way to go about it. It's worked though. It's definitely worked. As Bill is wont to say, "It all works out." ■



Cut 1.5 inches exactly off this side of the sheet.



California

Winery of the Month

Working Relationships

Tulocay Winery

Winter is waning in the Napa Valley, and as the weather warms, biochemical processes will awaken in the now dormant, barren vines, which will erupt with foliage and eventually produce fruit that will end up in our glasses. Even if they own their own vineyards, most winery owners will buy at least some fruit from other growers, so that they can make wines whose grapes would not prosper on their own property. Most wineries have established relationships with farmers, from whom they buy fruit and negotiate farming methods that the winemakers prefer. In other words, the relationship between winemaker and farmer is a close one that includes both cooperation and sometimes conflict. Bill Cadman established Tulocay Winery in 1975 and has always purchased all of his fruit from grape growers. Without the limitations of his own vineyards, he has purchased fruit from a variety of growers, most near his winery in the Napa Valley but some as far away as El Dorado County in the Sierra Foothills, picking and choosing the best fruit for the specific wines that he decides to make. Bill Cadman, his winemaker Mark Bunter, and I sat down for a conversation, repeatedly interrupted by bursts of laughter, in which we talked about how they work together. The upshot of our conversation is that they are making their delicious wines with good fruit and classic methods, avoiding the fads that inundate their business. I repeat the conversation with minor editing for added clarity. ➤



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January 2005

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How long have the two of you worked together?

Bill: Since Mark was about 12. I have some very old photographs.

Mark: No, I was 17. I used to live down the street and met Bill when I was in high school. When he found out how close I lived, he asked me to come up and help with bottling. I was pretty casual about it for a long time. Eventually, I went to Napa College and studied winemaking and viticulture and took extension courses at U.C. Davis. I became the winemaker here in 1997.

Bill: He got old and said, "Maybe I should get an education and a real job. His business card now says "winemaker," and mine says "CFO," which stands for Chief Forklift Operator.

Mark: Which he is.

What kinds of things do you disagree on? Is there some issue that comes up more or less regularly vintage after vintage? You say, "I want to do it this way," and you say, "I really don't think you better."

vintage? You say, "I want to do it this way," and you say, "I really don't think you better."

Bill: I've always had kind of a laissez faire attitude about making wine. The grapes are where it's at. You really don't do too much with them. But if you're a winemaker, you want to make wine. Mark wanted to fiddle around with things, so that's where we disagree mainly. I like adding SO2, and Mark doesn't. So our joke is that when he adds a little SO2 and goes home, I can walk out and add as much as I want. That's the advantage of living on the premises.

Mark: It's like that Mark Twain anecdote that when he left the house at 16, his father was the stupidest fool on the planet. When he went back at 21, he was amazed at how much the old man had learned.

But, yeah, there's kind of a philosophy to making wine but no hard and fast rules. Bill was used to working without numbers. He'd check the brix (sugar) and



Tulocay owner, Bill Cadman

the pH and TA (acid), but I think that was about the extent of it. Pick the grapes right to get the good brix and then add the SO2, and that takes care of it. But I had access to more information. We worked with some grapes that gave us funny numbers, funny meaning that the numbers didn't accurately reflect how the wine would taste, like TA numbers that were really low when the grapes came up the driveway. So I looked at that and reacted. The acid is really low by anybody's standards. We've got to fix that. Well it turns out that those particular grapes had complicated chemistry. The fruit comes up the driveway. I measure the acid. It's really low. I throw the fruit into the fermenter. I ferment it. I press it. I throw it into barrels. I check it, and the acid is higher, and the pH has gone down. That shouldn't have happened. And the wine tastes balanced, whereas when I tasted the juice that came up the driveway, when I crushed, it really tasted flat. It tasted syrupy, like it didn't have enough acid. There's an explanation, but it's complex. We've got a joke, "the dynamic winemaking matrix." It's like everything's changing all the time. Bill likes to pull my chain about that. But it's just a learning curve. By the same token, if you say, "We're never going to add anything to any wine, then you're tying your hands. Conceivably, there's the time when you'd be a bad winemaker if you didn't intervene.

Bill: Yes, that's an indefensible position too. I think what's helped is that I'm cynical by nature, and all of these trends that come up.... In the early 80s, Chardonnay had way too much oak, and about the same time, it was a cool thing to ferment Pinot Noir on the stems. You had to throw stems into the Pinot fermenter because they were doing it at Domaine Dujac. Hell, we paid for the damned stems. Let's get some flavor out of them. The industry tends to start all of these trends with a big fanfare, and then with a

whimper, everyone says, "Well maybe this wasn't such a good idea after all." And they quit putting the stems into the Pinot Noir. I think I've avoided a lot of those temporary pitfalls.

So when Mark comes to the winery, and he tells you that there's this great new technique that he wants to use, what do you say?

Bill: B... S...

So how would you describe the Tulocay style?

Mark: We generally try to make wines, with the exception of Zinfandel, more like wines that were made 20/30 years ago with moderate alcohols. We don't wait to pick until the fruit has 27 brix. We're usually the first ones to pick the vineyards that we source from. Other winemakers who make wines from those vineyards normally pick a little after we do to a lot after we do, because we want acidity. We want balanced fruit so that we can have naturally balanced wine. We don't want wine that's too alcoholic, too high in pH, too woody tasting, too raisiny tasting. Winemakers these days are willing to put up with all of those things because they believe they're getting more flavor.

Bill: With the exception of Zinfandel, most of our wines are around 13.5% alcohol. These days all of a sudden, that's too low, but I think it's right on, especially for Cabernet. There are winemaking advisors now who are recommend-



Tulocay winemaker, Mark Bunter

ing a certain flavor in the wine that you might call over-ripe because they think that it'll score highly in competitions. They'll tell you to pick this particular vineyard at 28 degrees brix and don't worry about the pH being high and the acid being low because you can adjust those later. And also you can de-alcoholize wine. So if you want an over-ripe flavor, which you get by picking grapes that are over-ripe, then all of that sugar is going to ferment into alcohol, but there's a technique for reducing the alcohol. So these days, you can fine-tune a wine. But we don't like to do that. Our style is to pick when the pH is low, and the sugar is adequate, and the acid is good, and just go with it.

Mark: The people who are expounding this style have made wines that have gotten high scores from critics. So everyone goes maaaaaa. They follow along.

They don't want to take chances on missing the boat.

In other words, you walk the walk. Your wines are truly made in the vineyard. Everybody says that, but then they're adding acid, de-alcoholizing the wine, and probably need to employ other techniques to achieve a semblance of balance.

Bill: Yes, exactly. And we like long-lived wines. Sunday, I had lunch here for about 12 people, and as is my wont, I brought out some older wines. After one or two bottles, I tend to go down into the cellar and liquidate some of the inventory. We had a 76 Cabernet Sauvignon and a 76 Pinot Noir that were both delicious. So what gives wine longevity? People think, like with Cabernet, the more tannic it is the longer it's going to last. But I think the pH is a whole lot more important. I've had Chardonnay that has been ten years old and was delicious, picked at low pH and good acidity. Obviously, Chardonnay doesn't have a lot of tannin to begin with, so I think the pH is a really important issue when it comes to longevity.

In ten words or less, what exactly is pH for all of us who flunked chemistry?

Mark: pH is the measurement of how reactive the acid is, how strongly it acts like an acid. It's actually a measurement of the hydrogen ions. Low pH is normally as-

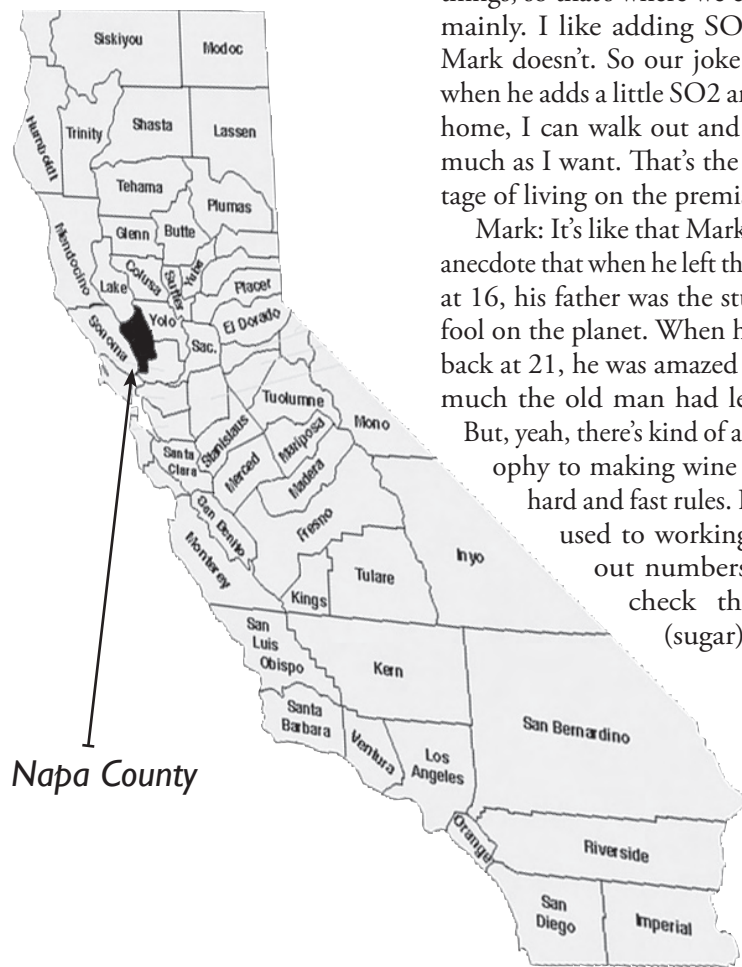
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