



Winery & Vineyards

2003 PINOT GRIGIO

Santa Barbara County

Winemaker's Notes:

What a difference a vintage makes. A year ago, in describing our 2002 Pinot Grigio, I wrote, "With this bottling, we once again pushed the frontier of ripeness. It is not the obviously "crisp" wine that the 1999 or 2000 vintages were." Well, with this 2003 bottling, we are definitely back to the obviously "crisp" phenomena that we experienced in 1999 and 2000.

In 2003 we experienced a lot of bloom-time shatter. Or, said another way, the vines did not pollinate very well. If there is little pollination, there is little crop. The term shatter describes the site of the tiny unpollinated berries falling off their clusters at the slightest agitation of the vines. It's not a pretty site. The vines ended up with a 1/2 ton per acre crop, reminiscent of the year I had such a bad set in my Gewurztraminer, that I went on to dub the wine "Suicide Cuvée".

As for the result with this Pinot Grigio, I was a bit puzzled at first, and perhaps I still am. One would think that a really small crop should produce a deeply concentrated, thick textured wine, one that is dripping with fruit character. Yet this wine is one of the most bony wines I have ever made. If it is dripping with anything, it is the characteristic of briny minerals. The delicate, limey, Pippin apple fruit that is there is very consistent with the wine's racy demeanor. So why is this low crop wine so crisp and slender?

Well, here is a crude Babcockian theory. I think that when the crop is more normal, that is, 2 to 3 tons per acre, it's like the vines have something to do. The vascularity of the vines is like a machine with an intricate plumbing system. The vines start by pulling up water and nutrients from the soil. They then rearrange everything into the various compounds that they use as their building blocks in the growing process. Some of those compounds eventually go on to be the building blocks of the clusters of fruit. In a normal year, the vines have someplace to go with those building blocks. In a year when there is not enough fruit, it's like the sink gets plugged up, and the vines go into a serious funk. Because there is no fruit to ripen, it is as if the vines loose their concern with ripening it. There are a few clusters, but not enough to prompt the whole system to produce the metabolites that would go on, in a more normal vine physiology, to give the characteristic smells and flavors of ripe fruit. Instead, the more unrefined elements of the soil get shunted directly to the grapes, and the wine is ultimately better described as mineral than it is apple or kiwi, or some other fruit.

I was drinking this wine the other night at dinner, and I noticed another interesting thing. I was comparing it to some other notable domestic Pinot Grigios. They were all richer, fruitier wines, the kind of wines that will probably fare better in their scores in all of the various wine magazines. But the one that I went back to and drank for its refreshing, palate cleansing qualities, its complexity, and true compatibility with what I was eating, was ours.

Technical Notes:

VARIETAL COMPOSITION:

75% Pinot Grigio, Babcock Estate, Santa Ynez Valley

25% Chardonnay, Babcock Estate, Santa Ynez Valley

VINIFICATION: 100% Stainless Fermentation; 0% Malolactic Fermentation

pH: 3.38 TA: 7.5 g/L RESIDUAL SUGAR: Dry ALCOHOL: 12.5 %

BOTTLING DATE: December 2003

RELEASE DATE: February 2004

TOTAL PRODUCTION: 524 cases 750ml