

Lake County Seeks to Elevate High Altitude Wines

What are the characteristics of winegrapes grown at high elevations? What qualities do those grapes express in wines? Should wineries market these wines as originating from high altitudes?

These questions were discussed on June 14 at an altitude of 2,000 feet in Snows Lake Vineyard in Northern California's Lake County, at a symposium featuring speakers from as far away as Australia, Italy and Argentina.

Ernesto Bajda of Bodega Catena Zapata in Mendoza, Argentina, spoke of the positive effects of high elevation sites on his company's Malbec vineyards. He presented three Catena Zapata Malbecs for tasting, and showed the results of his research on the grapes that made them, grown at altitudes between 2,850 and 5,000 feet.

His research showed that:

- Harvest-time minimum and maximum daily temperatures were lower at the higher elevations.
- Total anthocyanins increased dramatically with higher elevations.
- Total tannins went steadily up with higher elevations, while bitter monomeric tannins decreased.
- Malic acid retention was 2-3 grams per liter higher in the 5,000 feet fruit than the 2,850 fruit.
- Sunlight is more intense at higher elevations, resulting in increased photosynthesis and production of resveratrol.
- Skins were five times thicker at 5,000 feet than at 2,850 feet.



These attributes generally produce high-quality wines, but sometimes they are too much of a good thing. Leo McCloskey, president of Enologix, discussed several California regions producing highly rated and high-priced wines, and demonstrated that Lake County wines, mostly grown at higher elevations than Napa and Sonoma, are more tannic, which hurts their acceptance in the marketplace.

Randle Johnson, director of winemaking at Bodega Colome, a high-elevation Hess Collection property in Argentina, said that not only is high-elevation grapegrowing complicated, it's also very expensive.

Developing a mountain vineyard presents challenges, including power supply, water rights, environmental impact reports, erosion, rootstock selection and varietal choices. Pressure from insects, birds, rodents, wild pigs and coyotes is often more intense.

In a session called Marketing, From Mountain to Table, moderator Paul

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■ California Tightens Cargo Rules

Trucking firms transporting grapes within California face potentially costly equipment expenditures, delayed deliveries and hefty fines resulting from new regulations. All cargo must be tied down with straps running side-to-side, but most trailers used to haul grapes are not so equipped. According to the California Association of Winegrape Growers, "Meeting the regulations would be near impossible, as containers are not meant to be secured in the manner proposed. If tie-downs were required, the top portions of the containers would be bent and forced downward onto the fruit, thus crushing the load and damaging the fruit," president Karen Ross explained. "Methods that have been safely and efficiently utilized for decades will no longer be allowed, and equipment will have to be retrofitted or alternative methods developed. Failure to comply will result in ticketing by the CHP, with each violation subject to a fine of \$700."

At least for this year, there is a temporary fix. An exemption was granted for intrastate transportation of perishable agriculture products. Each carrier must request the exemption. CHP will provide a letter authorizing the exemption, and a copy must be carried in each vehicle. Carriers must also file monthly reports detailing the number of loads; miles driven; accidents; driver hours and driver violations. The exemptions will remain valid until Dec. 1, 2007.

■ Wine Bottle Plant Breaks Ground

A ceremony was held June 28 at the new Cameron Family Glass Packaging plant in the Port of Kalama, Wash. It's the first new glass plant built in the United States in 30 years that will manufacture glass exclusively for the wine industry. The facility is expected to create at least 90 jobs when it is completed in the latter part of 2008.

The 175,000-square-foot, state-of-the-art facility will be the largest eco-friendly wine bottle manufacturing facility in the world. Its hydro-powered electric furnace will be the largest anywhere for wine bottle production, and will utilize the waterways of the Columbia River. The company will make recycling a top priority for the facility. Bottles will be made at least in part from recycled glass.

■ Lake County Group Tasting Room Opens

Matt Hughes, co-owner of Zoom Wines of Kelseyville, Calif., opened a new group tasting room, Lake County Wine Studio, in Upper Lake, sharing the space with the Noggle, Six Sigma, Dusinger and Spencer Roloson brands. All are small wineries producing 2,000 to 5,000 cases per year. The Wine Studio was born because Zoom Wines had no tasting room of its own.

Lake County Wine Studio will pour up to 15 different selections from the participating wineries every day, Hughes said. "We have spent time with the other wineries to make sure we are presenting their wines correctly," he said.