

Crescini anticipates spring debut

By JEFF HUDSON

Grapes and fermentation have been around Richard Crescini for most of his life. His grandfather was a home wine maker, and his father was once employed at a vinegar works in Aptos.

But by 1962, when Richard graduated from Watsonville High and entered Cabrillo College, his grandfather was no longer making wine. Later, when Richard decided to start making his own wines, he

"had to start from scratch," learning the rules of wine making for himself.

Richard and Paule Crescini made wine at home for six years, using a small crusher, a few oak barrels and a room burrowed into the hillside for bottle aging.

So in 1980, when they opened the Crescini Winery just below their Soquel home, it was really an extension of an ongoing project. Bonding the winery allowed them to make more than the 200 gallons per year home wine makers are allowed for personal consumption

under the law. It also means they can sell the wine in stores.

Crescini Winery had its first crush in October 1980. The first year's production was about 800

Eleventh in a series

gallons, made up of Cabernet Sauvignon and Petite Sirah (made from Napa County grapes), Chenin Blanc (from Monterey County), and a small batch of Merlot for blending.

They will start bottling the Chenin Blanc sometime next month. Once they've got the label



Photo by Sam Vestal

Richard Crescini's grandfather taught him to appreciate home wine making

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approved and printed, the wine will be available to the public, probably in March or April. The other wines will follow sometime in the summer.

Crescini will make no more than three wines a year. As a home wine maker he specialized in reds, and as a bonded winery he will continue to concentrate on them, especially the Petite Sirah and Cabernet. He values highly the knowledge that comes from working with a particular grape over a period of time.

"It takes a number of years to pick up the best combinations possible ... looking at the yeast, blending a number of different strains during fermentation. They do different things to the wine," he says.

"I'll sometimes have two or three separate lots and do different blends. It takes at least four years for the wine to really mature so you can see how well you've done." By staying with varietals he knows well, he hopes to build a reputation for consistency.

Crescini ferments his wine in stainless steel and ages it in French oak barrels. But, he adds, "I don't like a *lot* of oak, just kind of in the background." He prizes the spicy flavors, particularly in his Petite Sirah.

Crescini is also sensitive to the sometimes skyrocketing cost of wine grapes, which is sending the per-bottle price of some small wineries into the stratosphere. "It all starts with the grape, and builds from there. I could be the best wine maker in the world, but I won't get anywhere with bad grapes. We want to start with the best grape possible, and to get the premium grape you have to pay the premium price.

"But if I can sell the wine for \$6 a bottle, I'm not going to charge \$8 just because someone else does. I don't want to sacrifice ... but I'll try to restrict the price as much as I can."

The Crescini Winery was built to handle around 2,000 gallons a year, a figure Crescini expects to build up to slowly, while continuing his career in radiology at Dominican Hospital.

Because of the limited quantities produced and low public profile, wineries of this size are sometimes referred to as boutique wineries.

"I guess that's what we are," says Crescini. "We don't expect to become a huge winery. But the public is becoming much more aware of small wineries, and people are seeking out their wines."

However, don't expect to visit the Crescini Winery for tasting. Zoning regulations rule out such activity in the Crescinis' residential neighborhood. Instead, tastings will be held periodically in town.