



Dennis Bassano checks the aging red wine.

(Sentinel photos)

Grover Gulch Winery

They Love Their Wine

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Dennis Bassano and Reinhold Banek both love wine so much that they decided to start a commercial winery in order to support their habit, so to speak.

Grover Gulch Winery of Soquel was bonded by both men in 1979 and since then, Bassano and Banek have made 2,000 gallons of wine at the winery located at Bassano's Glen Haven Road home. The first wines are due to be released on the market next year.

"We're not in this for a livelihood as such," Bassano, a plumber and sailboat racer, said. "We're into supplementing our income and it's also nicer to be able to make a lot of wine and a variety as a bonded winery."

"It's obvious we both have a habit and this supports our habit," Banek laughed.

When they made wine just for their own consumption, they were only allowed by state and federal laws to make 200 gallons each a year. This amount of wine was drunk so fast that the two men never were able to let any wine age.

Their homemade wine was made in an old shack, but the

commercial wines are made in a new, 1,000-square-foot building which both men hope to double in size someday. Their ultimate goal is to make 3,000 gallons each year.

Below the winery is the operation's namesake, Grover Gulch. Bassano explained that the canyon got its name from a man named Grover who was the first person to log the area.

Grover Gulch Winery has a casual air about it. The winery building sits under a grove of redwood trees, which naturally keeps the building at the cool temperatures that are necessary for proper wine aging.

Wooden signs made by Banek — a home and furniture designer — decorate the building and some antique equipment, including one of the first wine presses used by Bargetto Winery, add a historical feel to the otherwise modern winery.

Bassano is proud of his search for bargains in winemaking equipment. He explained that when he and Banek decided to go commercial, he contacted some old Italian families in the area and came up with some ancient, but useful, equipment.

One of the special finds is the

grape crusher which came from a salvage yard. "When we found it, it was a pile of junk. It looked like an old car," Banek said of the now shiny-clean crusher.

Another way the two men found to cut costs was to just make red wines. In order to make white wines, Bassano said, one must buy steel tanks and refrigeration equipment.

Making of red wines, however, is simpler and requires less equipment. The wine is aged in wooden barrels, instead of steel tanks, and needs no special refrigeration.

Both in 1979 and 1980, Grover Gulch Winery made Petite Sirah, Cabernet, Zinfandel and Carignan wines. Some 850 gallons was produced the first year and 1,150 was made in 1980.

The two men haven't ruled out the making of white wine all together. They do plan someday to make a Chardonnay, which is one white which can have a little color and, therefore, can be aged in a barrel.

Whites normally are aged in stainless steel so that they are relatively clear. The wood from the barrel gives a white a yellowish tinge.

One special thing the two men plan to do with their wines is to

carefully label which barrel each wine comes from.

Banek explained that when wine is drawn from the large fermenter and into barrels, the first 400-500 gallons from the fermenter is "free run," meaning it freely runs from the fermenter into the barrels without having to be pressed.

But at the top of the fermenter, the wine has a lot of pulp and must be put through a press before it can go into barrels for aging.

The "free run" wine, therefore, is much different than the wine that is pressed, even though all of the wine in the fermenter comes from the same grape.

The "free run" wine will be much lighter, Banek said, while the pressed wine has a lot more tannic acid and more color.

Therefore, since wines from the same grape can vary so drastically, Banek and Bassano will label on the bottles which barrel the wines came from and the prices will vary accordingly.

One of the wooden signs made by Banek states "Tasting Room." While the winery is still too young for visitors to come and taste, Banek and Bassano plan to hold tastings by appointment once they start releasing their wines.

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