

Time for wine

Hard cider's a Pajaro Valley natural

By JEFF HUDSON

CIDER MAKING is as American as apple pie.

Hard cider is full of history. English and French settlers brought cider to this country, and cider making is commemorated in dozens of early prints and paintings. There are songs about cider. When William Henry ("Tippecanoe") Harrison ran for president in 1840, he ran a "log

One of a series

cabin and cider" campaign. Harrison's patriotic broadsides featured an etching of the cabin where he'd been raised, with an American flag, a bald eagle, and a barrel of hard cider by the door.

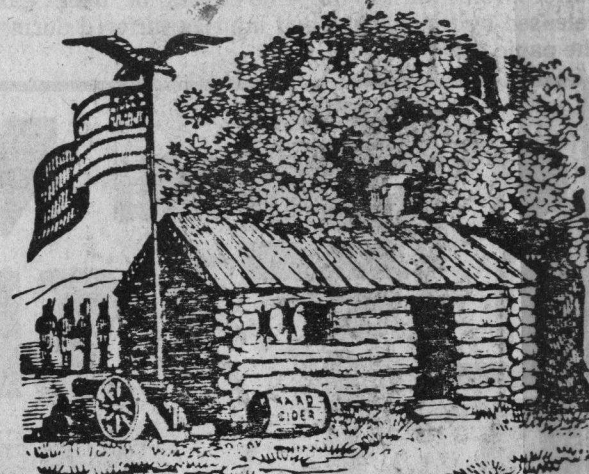
With the abundance of apples in the Pajaro Valley, the area would seem a natural hotbed for hard cider. A number of local wine makers have experimented with the apple, making fine apple wines and apple-berry champagne. But hard cider making has lagged somewhat.

Freedom apple grower Gene Silva didn't exactly set out to be a cider maker. He began his project as an experiment after tasting someone else's apple

wine. His father, Manuel Silva, is a longtime local wine maker. "My dad has always made wine. He's from Portugal, uses an old family method. I decided to try making an apple wine with the same principles he uses with the grapes."

Silva used Golden Delicious apples he'd grown himself on the family's 40 acres. He borrowed a press and got 50 gallons of unfiltered, unpasteurized cider, then put it in an oak barrel to ferment. No special yeasts or sugar were added; only the native yeasts from the skins were present. Because it was winter, the temperature was cool, drawing out the fermentation over three months. At the end of fermentation, Silva racked the cider into another barrel. "At that point it tasted like green apples," he recalls, so he added brown sugar to blunt the tartness.

The result was a clear, still, golden-brown cider, with a dry apple flavor and a nice bite. The alcohol content hasn't been tested, but it's at least as high as wine. Silva points out that it isn't the same as commercial cider. "It's not like the stuff you buy in the store — it's not sweet like soda pop," he says. But he modestly admits that the cider has proven popular with friends and visitors. "It's definitely gotten a good response," he says. "I've had a lot of people ask me how I did it — they think it's just



great. I've had a few people ask me for the recipe, but they haven't gotten it together.

"It's really simple, there's no great skill to it," he insists. "One of the most important things is to have a clean barrel, and don't let the air in. But anyone could do it."

Silva has thought about entering his cider in the county fair, but hasn't decided yet. His family is no stranger to fair competitions — his wife Sandra has won a good many ribbons over the years for packed apple displays.

Silva says he might try making another batch this year, but wouldn't want to go through the paperwork involved in making hard cider commercially.

At the moment, no one is making hard cider commercially in the Pajaro Valley, but a cider works recently opened in Sonoma County, to good public response. Cider making has been on the upswing in New England states for several years. With its ample supply of apples, the Pajaro Valley could be poised on the brink of a hard cider revival as well.

Wine and
Wine making

REFERENCE

ARTS PRANCY



During a respite from the rains, Gene Silva looks over the apple blossoms with his son Bobby (left) and nephew

Mark Clifton (center). Silva makes cider from Golden Delicious Apples grown on family property.

Photo by Kurt Ellison