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The road leading to the winery of Roudon-Smith is anything but hospitable, though it has been seven months since the mudslides and floods of winter. The road seems more like a newly charted path into Scotts Valley rather than a used thoroughfare. It's not the journey that counts in this case, however, but the journey's end, which is at the intersection of Bear Creek Road and McKenzie Road.

There is no pompous sign there, thank god, just a plain dirt driveway leading toward a box-like winery building with fir wood paneling. And, of course, there are a few dozen vines. You can't get away from them when you live by the grape.

Jim Smith and Bob Roudon often chat during the lunch hour at a wooden picnic table behind the winery building. They are both in their early fifties and showing the first signs of grey on beard and scalp. Smith is straightforward in appearance, slender, with narrow features and a close-cut beard. Roudon, with his red checkered wool shirt, looks like a medium-built lumberjack.

I met Roudon and Smith during a reunion of sorts. They had not seen each other for six weeks. Roudon and his wife, Annamaria, had just returned from a working vacation, during which they attended the Chicago Food and Wine Exposition and then a series of tastings at the prestigious Paris Wine Institute. That was work, because they went as representatives of Roudon-Smith Vineyards. Then, there was a jaunt to Portugal and Morocco (that was the vacation, because they were exhausted).

"There is considerable interest," says Roudon, "not only in our wines, but in all California wines. The French are especially curious."

A winery is a labor-intensive operation. To bring five acres into bearing over a five-year period can easily run over \$70,000, considering current interest rates and equipment costs. Most vineyard owners today are doctors, lawyers, dentists — to know them is to drink cocktails on a spacious veranda, instead of munching Kentucky Fried Chicken and wine at a picnic table. Smith and Roudon are engineers by profession — low-key, middle-class perhaps, but only where money is concerned. Otherwise, one might say that this winery is a reflection of those who built it.

Roudon-Smith is synonymous with organization, consistency, and efficiency, no doubt imparted by these two technical minds. The Smiths and the Roudons have guided everything by hand, building the

Roudon-Smith Living by the Grape



PHOTO: JOE DANIELS

Annamaria and Bob Roudon, and June and Jim Smith, toast the success of their Roudon-Smith Winery with some of their own incomparable wines.

Joe Tarantino

winery, planting the vines and processing each harvest, most of which comes from Sonoma County.

Nineteen eighty-two marks the 10th anniversary of this winery-vineyard operation. It is a feat to be included in international tastings after a mere decade of existence. Like any business fueled more on desire than money, the proprietors here have had to endure some deprivation and an uncertain economy. Luckily, these are sturdy wine soldiers who view ten years as a foundation on which to build.

"Why, Bargetto in Santa Cruz is four times our size," says Jim Smith, "and they're only a small, family business."

The history of Roudon-Smith goes back more than ten years and is as much a product of fate as design.

"June and I moved our family up from southern California in 1970," recalls Smith. "We settled in Sunnyvale, where I took a managerial position at the Amdahl Corporation. I was allowed to hire one co-

worker and, after a pretty long search, I picked Bob."

Roudon, also a southern California expatriate, came north in 1971, not to pursue the lucrative opportunities in Silicon Valley, but to start a winery. "But I had to work back then," says Roudon. "Engineering was my bread and butter."

The two became quick friends. Smith was converted to Roudon's vision and they were born again professionally. It was in Roudon's basement, actually, where their first vintage was recorded, all 600 gallons worth.

After scouting a number of potential winery sites, the families settled in their present location, five miles north of Santa Cruz. They secured a six-acre hillside off of Vine Hill Road, wherein three acres of Chardonnay vines now reside adjacent to Roudon's residence. As of 1981, these vines are responsible for the "estate" wine. But there's not much to speak of — perhaps 100 cases a year from now on. But to those who are dedicated, quality is all that is important,

regardless of quantity. Right now this winery is only a gnat on the elephant that is the California wine industry. But nobody here objects. Small IS beautiful.

Smith, who could easily slip back into the engineer's robe, much prefers this pace. "We have nine-to-five jobs here, but I love it. My wife is actively involved, and Bob's wife handles much of the business paperwork at Vine Hill. In the early days my kids hated the winery, but then, they were the workforce. Survival was hard — it always is in this business. They were reacting to that hardship."

"We like our wines," says Roudon. "We're not so fired up and eager to sell them quickly. We would be happy to drink it and share it with friends." Sometimes, that is exactly what they do.

The reason why small wineries like Roudon-Smith exist and maintain individual identities is to prove the theory that a wine reflects those who make it. "We've attended tastings at the Santa Cruz Mountain Vintners Association and have sampled wines which were made from the same grapes, using the same barrels and similar winemaking techniques, only to find everybody's wine different," says Smith.

The klans of Roudon and Smith definitely have reasons to be proud. Their label has found its way to the eastern United States and to restaurants as far away as Anchorage, Alaska (where they don't need refrigeration for the whites). Of course, we don't have to travel that far to make a purchase. In fact, Santa Cruz has proven a popular sales outlet for the winery's products.

"One of the reasons we came down here was the potential for sales in the Santa Clara Valley," laughs Roudon.

"But Santa Cruz, at only about a fourth the size, is where we make most of our sales," concludes Smith.

Explaining the success of this venture is not easy. Both Smith and Roudon acknowledge a long history of imbibing for pleasure. In fact, that was their principle prerequisite to winemaking. It was the taste of their hobby that encouraged this lifestyle.

Bob Roudon shrugs his shoulders. "The majority of people who drink are not concerned with superior quality. They can't imagine buying a wine to hide in a dark closet. They want to consume immediately. But certain people have the capacity to enjoy the complexity of a fine wine, just as others enjoy fine art or food."

If you want to meet the winemaker and sample the efforts of Roudon-Smith Vineyards, an appointment is necessary (call 438-1244). Tastings are usually held on Saturday, weather permitting. □