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Wine

Wine making in Scotts Valley

SCOTTS VALLEY is not a place that immediately comes to mind when I think of fine wines. I don't mean to put down Scotts Valley; some of my best friends have been in Scotts Valley. It's just that when I think of Scotts Valley, I think of horizontal redwoods, airplanes, and the freeway to San Jose. But nonetheless, Scotts Valley is gaining a reputation for good wines, thanks to Roudon-Smith Vineyards.

At this writing, there are some fifteen bonded wineries in Santa Cruz County, and Roudon-Smith, founded in 1972, ranks as one of the oldest. It began with Bob Roudon and Jim Smith, both engineers in the Silicon Valley, both lovers of wine. After playing around as home winemakers for a bit, they decided to get serious and—what the heck—start a winery.

Initially, the winery was located underneath Bob's house, off Mountain View Road. This worked fine for a time, but all good things must pass. They quickly ran out of room, and so, in 1978, they moved the winery over to Jim's place. In Scotts Valley. A true partnership.

Roudon-Smith has grown in the years since their start: from using a re-built, homemade crusher that could only handle one 40-lb. lug box of grapes at a time (and which constant-ly jammed), to a new Zambelli crusher that handles six tons an hour; from 18 tons of grapes in 1972, to 140 in 1980; from fermenting in open-topped plastic containers, to using modern, temperature-controlled stainless steel; from making 1,000 cases of wine, to over 10,000; from working nights and weekends, from taking their annual two-week vacation during the harvest so they could make wine, to working full-time at the winery and hiring a full-time employee.

Despite all these changes—in equipment, size, and locale—certain things remain the same. "Hopefully," says Bob, "we haven't changed from when we made a thousand cases. We're still doing things the same way, only slightly larger." Current plans call for a maximum production of 12,000 cases per year, "and that is where we'll stay."

Roudon-Smith still uses time-honored, traditional methods of winemaking—not because "it's good enough for them," but because "it's good enough for us." The wine is fermented and aged in small lots, keeping the vineyards separately from each other. (Roudon-Smith, except for small vineyards at each of their homes, buys all its grapes.) In this way, each vineyard's identity is preserved. If significant, the wines will then be bottled separately, with the vineyard (or region) identified on the label.

This means that, while Roudon-Smith makes three wines, it might have several "versions" of the three wines.

Actually, Roudon-Smith *mostly* makes three wines. "50% of our production is Chardonnay," Bob explains. "25% is in Cabernet Sauvignon, and 25% in Zinfandel. We also make some Petite Syrah, and experiment a little with Pinot Noir." The Pinot Noir is not for sale, but if "the experiment" turns out, they might make it available. In addition, the "old" winery is being used for champagne production, also still in the experimental stage.

All of the wines are aged in small, 50-gallon oak barrels. The Chardonnay is aged in French oak. (In fact, it is partially *fermented* in oak, partly in stainless.) The reds usually age in American oak, but the 1978 Sonoma Cabernet was aged in both French and American, and Bob is quite happy with the results. Future Cabernets will probably be in both woods.

Minimal cellar treatment is the rule. As a result, the wines possess a richness and complexity that some wineries lose in the effort to be "more commercial." But the results are worthwhile! Roudon-Smith Vineyards is located on Bean Creek Rd., in Scotts Valley. It is open for tasting on Saturdays only, and only if you call first. Its phone numbers are 427-3492/438-1244. Roudon-Smith wines are also available in wine shops in the county. □

Tasting Notes:

These are but a few of the available wines from Roudon-Smith.

1978 Chardonnay, Edna Valley—clear and bright, a rich, golden color; very apricoty in the nose, with good amount of oak—but not excessive; well balanced, full-bodied; long, intense flavors in the mouth and finish. The most surprising thing about this wine is that it's 16.1% alcohol—you'd never guess it—and, as Bob says, "you'll either love it or hate it." I love it.

1978 Cabernet Sauvignon, Sonoma—good, deep color and clarity; varietal aroma evident in complex bouquet of fruit, earth and oak; excellent flavors in the mouth; slightly rough in the finish, but this wine—while nice now—deserves time to age and realize its full potential.

1978 Zinfandel, Old Hill Ranch—deep garnet color; good varietal spice in the nose, classic Zinfandel; the spicy flavors are evident in the mouth, as well; good astringency and body bode well for the future. The winery describes this wine as "our finest Zin to date," and I cannot disagree. It is superb.