

Vintners not in a hurry

By JEFF HUDSON

If you aren't familiar with Soquel's Grover Gulch Winery, don't be too hard on yourself. The winery, founded in 1979, hasn't yet bottled its first year's production. This isn't laziness. It's just that Dennis Bossano and Reinhold Banek, partners in wine making, like to age their wine for a long time before selling it.

Grover Gulch is a small winery — they made around 1000 gallons of wine in '79, 1300 gallons this year. They make only reds — Cabernet Sauvignon, Petite Sirah, Zinfandel and Carignan. According to Banek, "the main reason is that we aren't crazy about the whites, though that's where the money is, especially with Chardonnay. It's also a whole different setup, with stainless steel instead of redwood tanks."

What sort of wines can we expect? "We make the wines as big as possible, leaving the skins on the juice for as long as we can. It's generally cool here, and takes ten days or so for fermentation," Banek says the style is "more Italian than French — not so much oak. We prefer the fruiti-

ness... a lot of tannin and color." But he admits that "wine made in that style takes longer to mature. That's why a lot of other wineries don't leave the skins in for so long. They can move the wine quicker."

Many wine lovers routinely hold red wines for several years before drinking them. Grover Gulch will hold its wines for three or four years, releasing them "when they're ready." The '79 Carignan — which Banek expects to be Grover Gulch's first release — will probably be bottled in the next few months, then left to age until the summer of '82. The '79 Cabernet won't go up for sale until mid '83. "Some people have to release wine early, and I'm sure they realize that it's not ready. We're real serious about aging bottles before we sell them. It makes such a difference," says Banek.

The '81 Cabernet was made from Napa County grapes, but most of Grover Gulch's wines have come from the Santa Clara Valley vines, particularly an old, non-irrigated vineyard near Gilroy. They prefer the dry-farmed vines "because they give more

color and tannin, for the kind of wine we like to make." American oak cooperage is used for barrel aging.

Bossano and Banek started making wine in '69, using plums from a neighbor's tree. After a few years they switched to grapes, and after a "really good" Carignan from Santa Clara Valley grapes, they decided to make it a serious venture.

They built the winery themselves. The hillside building is cool year round, thanks to the extensive shade of nearby redwood trees. Banek, who is also a wood carver, also made the signs and decorated a drab supporting column with a carved grape arbor.

Future plans include an 8 foot by 50 foot underground room, where the bottles will be stored. Next year, they may also try their hand at Pinot Noir: "It has the reputation of being a difficult wine to make, but with our shading and coolness we shouldn't have any big problem."

They will also be adding another room to the winery, which will allow for an eventual expansion to around 3,000 gallons of wine annually.



'We're real serious about aging bottles before we sell them. It makes such a difference.' — Reinhold Banek (at left)

Photo by Kurt Ellison

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