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Markko Vineyard

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A VINEYARD CYCLE

But wine is a challenge that never ends, because no two wines and no two seasons are ever alike. The leaves fall, the wood grows hard. The snow comes, and the naked vines stand out in the empty night, alone and unprotected. What will happen to them this year? What form will the pruning take in the early days of spring? Each vine must be examined and trimmed according to how well it grew the previous summer, and how well it survived the winter. Then the sap runs, the growth starts once again. No two springs proceed in the same way. Maybe it will be cold and wet, or maybe unduly warm, bringing unseasonal growth and the chance of being caught by a late frost. Will June be cool? How many sprays will we have to use to keep at bay the ever lurking bugs and blights that prey upon the vines? Will late summer be hot and dry, bringing the acid down and the sugar up to the peak of perfection? Or will it rain during the ripening period, forcing more liquid into the grape than the ripened skin can hold, causing it to burst and spill the juice on the berries below, which in turn will cause them to rot? Will the birds be kind or will they literally destroy the harvest? And what about the yellow jackets, which in their search for liquid, any liquid, punch holes in the grapes, reducing each bunch to a soggy mess?

Then it is over (generally before one is quite prepared) and the grapes are in and the winemaking has begun. In most other fruit growing endeavors this is the end of the line, but with wine it is just the beginning. An apple is picked, an apple is shipped, an apple is eaten, period. But to the winemaker the crucial time is at hand. No two fermentations ever go exactly alike, and the young wine must be watched as an infant is watched. Will it turn mouldy sick, or will it bound exuberantly upward into excellence? And even as the winemaker ponders these matters the leaves are falling, the wood is growing hard, the snow falls and the vines renew their never ending battle with the cold. The whole cycle is beginning again, and it is a challenge not only to the vines but also to the winemaker. One must be an optimist, I think, to be a successful vineyardist, and if I am nothing else I am that. The challenge must be confidently met as we met it for more than twenty years, and if one does not have complete faith in the ultimate outcome, then the challenge is not worth facing. I have enjoyed this challenge and though unhorsed in many a joust, I have ridden out each spring with the sure conviction that nothing can possibly go wrong this time.

It is this inevitability, this being at the beck and call of a gigantic force too complex to understand, that the neophyte winemaker finds so hard to fathom. There can be no long-range planning during the growing season for the simple reason that there can be no long-range planning of the weather. In the winter, with snow on the ground and the vines asleep, the work of bottling, labeling, racking, evaluating can proceed on a more or less preplanned schedule. But in the summer everything must hang loose. No fine, quiet, clear and cool day can be squandered on inside work, for this is a luxury that may cost the winemaker dearly. It makes no difference that he has made plans to bottle on Tuesday and Wednesday. If a spraying is coming up, and the vines need tying before the sprayer can run the rows, the bottling must wait if Tuesday dawns fair. The orders? The orders can wait. The grapes cannot.

WINE EDUCATORS CONFERENCE

The Society of Wine Educators met in July at Cornell University. The Conference brought together interested members from every vinemaking region in the country for a discussion of the wine industry and its direction. Tastings were held throughout the Conference including samples of Markko’s ’75 Chardonnay and ’76 Riesling. Arnie joined a panel of other educators for a review of “What’s New in Eastern Wine Grapes.” A brief summary of his remarks follow: “Although we have come far in the last ten years, the big shift to vitis Vinifera wine grapes has not really materialized as fast as expected. The largest percentage of growth in Vinifera plantings has been in the Finger Lake region of New York State. Ohio and Pennsylvania have been slower to respond, but the success of the New York plantings should encourage growers to work in that direction. The wine industry often moves slowly in long cycles, thus the discovery and confidence needed to grow vinifera commercially is still on the horizon.”

WHAT’S NEW!

Markko now offers Underridge wine in a larger three-gallon size. The thick cardboard box contains a multi-walled plastic bag lined with saran which collapses as the wine is drawn preventing any exposure to the air. A pop-out valve on one side allows for easy serving. The manufacturer suggests a six month shelf life for the boxed wine. Our experience does seem to bear this out. This package is ideal when serving large groups or even smaller ones who prefer the convenience of easy refrigerator storage. For information on how to order boxes, please refer to our price list and accompanying notes.
OFF THE LEES . . .

The LEWS (Lake Erie Wine Society) held its fall meeting September 23rd at Bill Worthy's Grand River Winery. Some 65 members were on hand to sample various wines from the region and tour the newly-completed Winery . . . A small panel of tasters, known for their expertise and impartiality, spent a recent evening at Markko sipping the night away. Tasters Dave Skiba, Ron Schneider, Paul Mimmillo and Steve Kenyon evaluated Markko wines at the request of Vintner Arnie Esterer, whose impartiality is in some doubt. Thanks go to all panel members. Their findings were most helpful in establishing Markko's progress at this point in its young life . . . Many friends have inquired about the pottery lining the tasting room shelves, so in response, we gladly share the following: The artists are Joe Cooper and his wife Jane, who live and work in Worthington, Ohio. Their quiet, elegant pieces are handsome additions to our cellar. The items are for sale and can be carried home with you for a nominal charge. It should be noted that aside from his love of potting, Joe is an ardent wine lover, knowledgeable taster and unwavering champion of Markko's cause . . . The American Wine Society Conference meets November 2 - 4 in Baltimore. Once again, Markko wines will share the spotlight with other regional wines during the three days of lectures, informal tastings and unending repasts . . . “the conviction remains to this day, that in wine-tasting and wine-talk there is an enormous amount of humbug.” (T. G. Shaw — 1864)

WINTER — UP AND COMING

For the bird watcher, hiker or cross-country skier, Markko and the surrounding environs offer many miles of trails, cleared and readied for your use this winter. Enjoy a quiet run through the winter woods, or a hike in the sleeping vineyard where footprints from other seasons and busier times lie buried beneath the snow. And finally, when too chilled to move further, you are welcome to share a warm fire and a glass of wine in our Cellar. The ensuing ‘glow’ should revive the spirit and dispel the cold! Groups are welcome if you call ahead.

READERS ASK . . .?

Q. How long should wine age in the bottle?

A. There is much discussion on this subject, most of which is inconclusive. My experience has been that the characteristics of each wine determine whether wines improve or do not in the bottle.

Experts tend to go on a theory that red wines should age longer than white, high acid wines longer than low, and high sugar longer than low sugar. Consumers might consider this when tasting or buying wine.

Because of the relative youth of Markko wines, we are only now beginning to predict the ‘life’ of each. To date, we find that the ’73 Chardonnays are still improving while the ’73 Rieslings have peaked and show their age. (Check your own cellar. You might do well to drink those Rieslings now.) A good rule to follow is drink the white wines when aged 2-4 years and the reds after mellowing — about 3-10 years.

— A. W. E.