

Sun Valley Vineyard

By Michael Martino



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While Humboldt County has been producing great wines for several decades, this local industry is still in its infancy in terms of reaching its potential for growth. With so much land but so little of it being used to produce grapes, there is plenty of room for newcomers to leave their stamp on the Humboldt County wine scene. One of the new wineries in the area, Sun Valley Vineyards (SVV), is attempting to do just that. Located in sunny Willow Creek, overlooking the beautiful Trinity River Valley, this winery uses a hand-crafted, old world wine producing style to make well-balanced wines that go with everything that Humboldt is known for; oysters, fresh fish, crab, cheese...

All that is Sun Valley Vineyards begins and ends with Wilfred Franklin. He is both Head Wine Maker and Vineyard Manager. On a blustery December day filled with snow and good conversation, Wilfred was kind enough to give a tour of his facilities and educate me about his passion for producing great wine. Wilfred is originally from Humboldt, and was born to an Italian Greek family that very much has wine as part of its culture. He obtained a degree in Botany at HSU and soon found himself working in the viticulture industry at one of the oldest and largest vineyards in San Luis Obispo County, Edna Valley Vineyards. While at Edna he managed the wine lab where his primary

responsibility was to monitor the grapes as they mature throughout the growing season. Ripeness involves the play between acid and sugar levels in grapes. He explained that it is crucial when picking grapes to wait to harvest until they are at their peak ripeness: “The most important step in producing a superbly tasting wine” he says. Judging by the wines I tasted that day, a talent Wilfred has clearly mastered.

Edna Valley Vineyards is a commercial wine maker that produces wine in a similar fashion to the way Budweiser produces beer. Wilfred made it very clear to me that when he first started SVV he wanted to get as far away from that paradigm as possible. He



takes a holistic approach to producing wine. He puts in as much personal attention to each grape vine that he can in order to yield the best crop possible. From there he uses an old world style of producing wine that he explained to me was about letting the quality of the land and the vines shine through in his wines. Wilfred mentioned that many large scale wineries have to add inorganic acids and sugars to their wines to try and force the grapes to be better than they actually are. Something he strives to never do by organically growing the best grapes possible. When you buy a bottle of SVV you can be sure the term hand-crafted aptly applies and that it is certified organic.

SVV has only one vintage currently on the market and it can be found in many of the local stores in the area. It is their 2012 Chardonnay, a light and crisp affair; it is both fruity and refreshing as it rolls over the pallet. Something that would be best enjoyed on a warm summer day while eating kumamoto oysters freshly plucked from the bay. I also tried several of his vintages to be released next summer. His 2013 Sauvignon Blanc captures your attention as soon as the cork is popped. The air is filled with aromas of grapefruit and lemon. The taste is similar in that it is filled with notes of citrus and apple. Would pair wonderfully with crab or Cypress Grove Humboldt Fog.

The other vintage I tried that day was the one I felt most excited about. It was a 2013 Bordeaux blend style of wine, which you may not know is a mix of Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon grapes. I prefer big red wines; wines that are full bodied and rich with flavor. It was my belief that it would be impossible to produce something like this in Humboldt due to its cool

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climate, because Cabernet grapes need many hot, dry days in order to obtain the proper ripeness to produce such a wine. Clearly I was wrong because the SVV 2013 Bordeaux could go up against anything coming out of Napa or Sonoma. It was everything I love in a red wine. It had hints of spice and cherry, it was well balanced, very delicious to say the least. I have been to Willow Creek many times in the summer to hang out by the river. It has an exceptionally hot climate in the summer as compared to the rest of Humboldt and that, as Wilfred explained, it is ideal for producing cabernet. This wine will be released next summer so look for it when it hits shelves because it will not last long.



The story of SVV has a myriad of facets. It is the story of how local boy does good. It is the story of Humboldt style entrepreneurial-ship; SVV uses solar and is certified organic as it strives to be a sustainable business. It is also the story of how the best business is created when passion is mixed with determination, both of which Wilfred employs so well. Based upon what I had tasted, the future of SVV should be a bright one. So if you are out shopping for wine, pick up a bottle of SVV and see what this newcomer brings to the local wine scene.

Visits to SVV are by appointment only.

Feel free to call 215-280-0535

or

email wfranklin@tsvg.com

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