

Spring-Summer 2009

SUGARS AND ACIDS TOGETHER, OH MY!

We saw something in the vineyards in 2005 during the ripening process that we had never seen or heard of before. That is for about a week we saw acids and sugars go up together. Normally acids and sugars have an inverse relationship, when the sugars are going up during the ripening process the acids are going down. And the trick with hitting just the right time to pick is catching the moment before the spread between sugars and acids gets too big.

The weather in September of '05 was not the usual textbook California dry and warm weather. We had an unusual cool period near the beginning of the month. The sugars had begun to rise and the acids had begun to fall but when the cool weather hit they both reversed direction. This is rare but not unheard of. Now when the sun came back out and warmed up the vineyard the sugars made the U turn and began to go up again but what was really unusual was for almost a week the acids kept going up as well. We had literally never heard of this before.

The weather generally remained somewhat mild for the rest of the harvest season and we were able to pick at a relatively calm pace and with slightly higher than normal natural acid levels. The resulting wine in barrel showed a wonderful precision of flavor, bright, defined notes, seamless velvety tannins, and a remaining dark sense of undefined richness. My overall assessment, or grade, for the vintage was very high, equivalent to the rich and robust '04 vintage. In the back of my mind though, I wondered how Parker would rate these wines. The '05s were decidedly more elegant and refined than the very rich '04s. The '05 vintage, more like great Jazz or classical music compared to the rock and roll of the '04s, and the general assumption about Parker is that he prefers rock and roll.

Not so surprisingly he did rate most of the wines a point or two lower. The reason I am bringing all of this up is that I have been genuinely surprised by how much the '05s have matured in the bottle in the last six months. We released the Napa Cabernet in April and the Reserve Cabernet this week. I had not tasted either wine for 6 months prior to release and I was quite amazed at how much richer and more defined these wines have become with more bottle time. Parker rates the wines when they are very young, two months after bottling. Not so surprisingly the Wine Enthusiast, which tasted the wines very recently for review in their August issue, rated all the wines two points higher.

I had a very special feeling about the '05 growing season as it was unfolding which I mentioned in newsletter #14. I feel this may be one of our longest-lived and most interesting vintages.

Cheers to the Future,

Michael Keenan