

Fall-Winter 2004-2005

SECOND SEASON

This time of the year marks what we refer to as the start of the "second season". Our primary season, the grape growing season, has just concluded with another very successful harvest and with the first good rains of the year coming quickly on its heels the "second season" is off to a great start. While the vines and deciduous trees are losing their leaves and becoming grey and bare the earth in the vineyard is springing to life and turning an emerald green. Besides being pleasing to the eyes there are several distinct benefits to the vineyard from the growth of the second season crops.

Being a mountain winery has always posed the problem of slope. For thousands of years farmers have terraced hillsides, essentially creating level steps up and down the hillside to allow them to use the same farming techniques that the more fortunate valley farmer could use. In 1998 we had to replant our largest Cabernet Sauvignon vineyard. Instead of keeping the terraces we decided to contour the hill smooth and plant the vine rows straight down the fall line. This has revolutionized our relationship with erosion; historically one of our biggest problems. Now we can grow our cover crops over the entire surface of the vineyard during the rainy season and inhibit erosion more than ever.

Another benefit from the cover crops are the positive changes to the soil composition. The tunnelling of the root systems of the grasses and grains provide increased passageways for water and nutrients to penetrate below the surface to the vines root systems. Certain plants also produce needed nutrients like nitrogen that the vines need during their growing season. Compost is also provided by the second season crops, in that everything that grows in the vineyard stays in the vineyard. The mowing that is done in early spring leaves the vineyard rows covered in cut vegetation that again inhibits soil evaporation and retains the late spring moisture well into the summer and provides composting material for the following fall, further enhancing the soils' composition.

We have all noticed that walking in the vineyards after the first big rain in the fall has become much less slippery than it was six years ago when we first started implementing these techniques because the soil composition has markedly changed.

Perhaps most importantly to the consumer though is the effect on the final product, the wine. I firmly believe that our improved farming practices have led to healthier more vibrant vines and this has directly led to wines that have a more expressive and voluptuous nature. Last Christmas Robert Parker gave us our highest scores in our history for our 2001 vintage. I think that the 2000 vintage though was our breakthrough vintage; the first year that we really saw the benefits of our improved farming techniques. Last summer we entered our 2000 Cabernet Sauvignon in the California State wine competition (the biggest of its kind!) and since we release over a year later than most wineries we were up against mostly 2001s. Well we got 98 points (the highest score given this year!) the double gold medal and was deemed best of Napa Appellation!

So here's to another great second season-cheers!

--Michael Keenan

