

RECAP NOTES ROUSSANNE SYMPOSIUM

At Tablas Creek Vineyard
Tuesday-Thursday, July 22nd-24th, 2008

- I. Presentation on history of Roussanne in America (Patrick Comiskey)
 - a) Roussanne is known by as many as 20 surnames
 - b) The first mention of Roussanne in American history is through Thomas Jefferson, who named Hermitage white wines as some of the greatest in the world and imported them into the United States
 - c) The first pre-Phylloxera plantings of Roussanne were in the 19th Century and it was used as a blending grape for Petite Sirah
 - d) Roussanne was planted in the 1870s in Sonoma, Napa and Santa Clara Counties, most notably in Natoma Company's 330-acre plot near Folsom
 - e) However, the dual blows of Phylloxera and Prohibition dramatically decreased plantings in California, and in 1927 the last Roussanne vines were pulled from the Natoma property.
 - f) In 1939, U.C. Davis professors brought back hundreds of varieties from Europe, but did not include Roussanne.
 - g) In modern times, the modest revival of Roussanne can be traced to the enthusiasm of many producers for the Roussanne Vieilles Vignes of Château de Beaucastel. First, Randall Grahm brought in what he believed were Roussanne cuttings from Châteauneuf du Pape (later found to be Viognier) and used them in his Le Sophiste blend with Marsanne. John Alban sourced other Roussanne clones from the Rhone and produced his first varietal wines in 1991. Tablas Creek brought in Roussanne from Beaucastel in 1989, but didn't plant any in the vineyard until 1994. Nearly all Roussanne cuttings in California, Washington and Oregon are descendents of those brought in by Alban or Tablas Creek.
 - h) Meanwhile, the Rhone Rangers and Hospice du Rhone organizations introduced and championed Rhone varieties (including Roussanne) to the United States audience. The first large tasting of American Roussannes, in 1998 at the Hospice du Rhone, was notable in Patrick's words as the wines were "as different as they were fascinating".
 - i) The most recent USDA [California Grape Acreage Report](#) shows 177 acres of Roussanne planted in California in 2005 (up from 44 in 1997). Most of California's new plantings happened between 1997 and 2000; the 2005 total is not much increased from the 132 acres planted in 2000 and there are only 10 acres listed as planted but not yet in production.

- II. Roussanne in France (Pierre Perrin)
 - a) Origins: Like Marsanne, Roussanne looks to come from Montelimar in Drôme (26) but we also have record of Roussanne for a long time in Tain l'Hermitage and in Saint Peray (07)
 - b) Synonyms: Bergeron, Roussanne de Tain, Roussette, Fromenteau, Barbin, Martin Cot
 - c) Characteristics:
 - i. Sensitive to powdery mildew and grey rot
 - ii. Sensitive to dryness

- iii. Easily damaged by wind
- d) Color: Roussanne probably gets its name from the light-brownish russet cast of its ripe berries
- e) 4 clones exist and are currently available: 467, 468, 469, 522. These clones give low yields and were selected to produce round wines and aromatic wines. There are all very similar, except maybe the 467 which is less productive and seems to give more flavor. A new clone has been approved: 1040, which is more productive than 467,468,469 and 522. First delivery will be in 2008
- f) At ENTAV nurseries, there is planted in increase blocks:
 - i. 2.04 ha of clone 467
 - ii. 0.87 ha of clone 468
 - iii. 1.22 ha of clone 469
 - iv. 4.18 ha of clone 522
- g) Acreage in France has grown greatly in the last 20 years but is still low:
 - i. 54 ha in 1968
 - ii. 120 ha in 1988
 - iii. 1074 ha in 2006
- h) Roussanne doesn't like the dryness. We mainly find it on poor soils, not very deep, argilo-calcaire.
- i) Out of 869,000 plants ENTAV produced in 2007:
 - i. 446,000 were planted on 110R
 - ii. 148,000 on 3309
 - iii. Other rootstocks include SO4, 140Ru (for dry soils and high calcareous content) and 16149
- j) Generally, ENTAV recommends that the rootstock not to be too vigorous, to avoid leaf and vegetation growth which will increase the risk of grey rot.
- k) Comparison of plantings In 1986 and 2008 (estimated by ENTAV):
- l) In 1986:
 - i. 44ha were planted in Hérault
 - ii. 32 ha in Vaucluse
 - iii. 15 ha in Ain
 - iv. 9 ha in Savoie
 - v. 7 ha in Ardèche
 - vi. 6 ha in Drôme
 - vii. 4 ha in Gard
 - viii. Misc.
- m) In 2006 (ENTAV estimation)
 - i. Approx 200 ha in Languedoc Roussillon
 - ii. 200 hectares in Vaucluse
 - iii. 20 hectares in Ain
 - iv. 14 hectares in Savoie
 - v. 50 hectares in Ardèche
 - vi. 50 hectares in Drôme
 - vii. 10 hectares in Gard
 - viii. 400 hectares in Provence
 - ix. Misc.

- n) Conclusions: Roussanne has been mainly planted in Vin de Pays d'Oc and Languedoc-Roussillon for the last 20 years, where people are mainly producing Vins de Cépages (varietally-labeled wines). Also planted in Côtes du Rhône.
- o) Roussanne at Beaucastel:
 - i. Situation
 - i. Around 3.5 hectares planted
 - ii. Two Roussanne-based wines are produced: Beaucastel blanc is 80% Roussanne and 20% Grenache Blanc, and Roussanne *Vielles Vignes* is 100% Roussanne issued from the oldest block of Roussanne planted in 1930's.
 - iii. Average age of the vines is 40 years old
 - ii. Viticulture
 - i. Head-prune style which are attached between veraison and harvest
 - ii. Rootstock is mainly Riparia, 3309 for the youngest vines.
 - iii. We are planting Roussanne on soils which do not suffer from dryness.
 - iv. Vines break out late and then ripen very fast.
 - v. Early protection for Powdery Mildew.
 - vi. We try to avoid stress situations (from heat, drought, overproduction) which are more and more frequent with global warming
 - iii. Harvest and winemaking
 - i. Young roussanne are harvested early September
 - ii. Old vines block is harvested around the 25th of September
 - iii. Strict control of the oxidation
 - iv. Yields on Roussanne is 24 hl per Hectare on the normal stuff
 - v. Yields is 18 hl per hectare on the RVV
 - iv. Elevage and Bottling
 - i. 2/3 of Roussanne is aged in oak (half of it is new oak)
 - ii. Elevage on Yeast lees to protect the wines. If there is too much combination of SO₂, we rack the wines.
 - iii. We know that Roussanne is sensitive to a violent oxidation after bottling. So very important to measure dissolved oxygen and SO₂ at bottling.
 - iv. Cork finish is very important as we really not want to increase the production of Ethanal.
 - v. Aging
 - i. We recommend our customers to drink Roussanne young or old which means in the first 2 to 5 years then after 10 years.

III. Roussanne Viticulture Problems and Solutions

- a) Many producers (particularly Tablas, Stolpman, Starr, Turley and Anglim) have found a problem with Roussanne vines yellowing early in the ripening cycle and then the grapes not progressing further.
 - i. Yellowing is not consistently the same plants; we've flagged affected plants one year and found them green the next while others turn yellow.

- ii. Symptoms are found across different rootstocks
 - iii. Irrigation does not appear to make much difference.
 - iv. Yellowing appears not to affect vines the first few years they're planted
 - v. Symptoms tend to be brought on by swings in the weather.
 - vi. Stolpman has mitigated the problem by intensive foliar applications of minerals and by reducing yields to limit stress. They speculate that Iron, Magnesium and Manganese deficiencies could cause the problems they see.
 - vii. Others suggested Potassium deficiency, but Turley's plantings in Howell Mountain are on very high Potassium soils and they see the same thing.
 - viii. The problems are all found on relatively hot, highly mineral sites. Sites that are in alluvial soils or are cooler climate do not show this same yellowing problem.
 - ix. Glenrose Vineyard in Paso Robles, with hot temperatures and very high calcium content, does not show this yellowing. But, the owner feeds the vines with sulfuric acid through the irrigation drips to allow the vines to take up more nutrients. Cass, was the only other Paso Robles producer who didn't report much problem with Roussanne, and they acidify their irrigation water as well.
 - x. The conclusion of the group was that the yellowing is some sort of stress-induced problem brought on due to some mineral deficiency, but that it's more likely another mineral whose excessively high levels are preventing the uptake of the essential nutrient rather than a lack of the nutrient in the soils. A possible mitigation is to lower the pH of the soils to alter the uptake abilities.
- b) At Beaucastel, the cultivation of Roussanne is designed to eliminate stress whenever possible (different from their cultivation of red varieties):
- i. They focus on healthy Nitrogen levels in the soil through fish product application.
 - ii. Roussanne vines are planted in areas which are wetter and more fertile.
 - iii. Although appellation law prohibits irrigation, they would support irrigation for whites.
 - iv. Nutrient levels are measured through soil analysis in the spring and petiole analysis during veraison.
 - v. Yields are naturally low, but they are careful not to allow each vine to hang too much crop.
 - vi. They see problems with global drying as much as global warming, and feel that it will impact their whites more than their reds.
- c) Roussanne appears very prone to Botrytis
- i. Both John Alban and Tony Truchard suggest that they see some Botrytis nearly every year. Both are in cooler climates (Arroyo Grande and Carneros) and are usually still hanging Roussanne at the first rain.
 - ii. The group seemed to think that a little Botrytis wasn't a bad thing, and that Roussanne has such a nice affinity for dessert wines that some actively looked for it.
- d) Even for people who don't see the aggressive yellowing, Roussanne remains a challenge.
- i. Qupe says it's the "most expensive to grow and the most problematic in the winery".
 - ii. Always ripens unevenly (benefits from a field crew who can make multiple passes through a vineyard block)

- iii. pH can be very low in a cool climate like Bien Nacido (3.2-3.4) or very high in a warmer climate like Howell Mountain (around 4.0). Seems to vary widely depending on specific conditions.
- iv. Yields of juice tend to be low for a given weight of fruit (high solids content).

IV. Roussanne Rootstocks and Grafting (Tom Nemcik, NovaVine)

- a) In the four years that NovaVine has worked with Tablas Creek, they've sold 24,000 green-growing vines, 17,000 dormant vines and 49,000 buds (another indication that there hasn't been too much Roussanne planted in the last few years).
- b) General observations of Roussanne in the nursery:
 - i. Grafts well and calluses nicely; they get about 80% take in the greenhouse and 70% take in the field.
 - ii. Prone to botrytis when it rains; is more likely than most varietals to need fungicide
 - iii. Struggles with the transition from greenhouse outside. They call it "the princess".
 - iv. It needs "gentle pruning" (hand-tipping, rather than hedging) to even out growth
- c) Recommendations re:planting Roussanne
 - i. Pre-water before planting green growing vines
 - ii. Plant them promptly (by mid-June) to give the vines a chance to better establish themselves by winter
 - iii. Protect the vines from the sun before planting
- d) Discussion of potential Roussanne rootstocks
 - i. 101-14: The leading Roussanne rootstock, particularly in the North Coast. It's forgiving, good on many sites, good in wetter soils and OK with drought; masks latent viruses; tolerant of nematodes; Phylloxera resistant but Phylloxera-created nodes attract other pests and fungi. Tom is worried that 101-14 may be the next rootstock to see widespread Phylloxera-related failure.
 - ii. 3309: A lot like 101-14; a little deeper-rooted; a little more vigorous; not as tolerant of nematodes and slightly more disease-prone.
 - iii. 110R: Struggles in calcium-rich soils; good for fertile soils as it's relatively low vigor; resists fungal infections
 - iv. 1103P: Very good in calcium-rich soils; tolerant of drought; relatively high vigor; flexible for many varietals. The rootstock of choice at Tablas Creek.
 - v. 420A: Very tolerant of lime, but slow to get going
 - vi. St.George: Traditional Zinfandel rootstock. Quite vigorous; unknown lime tolerance; tends to encourage shatter. Truchard uses for Roussanne and very much likes.
 - vii. Overall recommendation: err on the more vigorous side for a Roussanne rootstock, but then pick one that will work for your site. Roussanne is pretty amenable.
- e) Roussanne clonal discussion
 - i. Two Tablas Creek clones (A and C). Neither we at Tablas Creek nor Tom at NovaVine have found any significant differences between the two clones.

- V. Panel Tastings/Discussions (with some brief notes)
- a) Roussanne from different regions/climates (Doug McCrea, Bob Lindquist, Bob Haas (representing Beaucastel)
 - i. McCrea 2006 Roussanne (Red Mountain)
 - ii. Beaucastel 2003 Blanc
 - iii. Beaucastel 2006 Roussanne "Vieilles Vignes"
 - iv. Qupe 2006 Roussanne
 - b) Fermentation choices in Roussanne (Ryan Hebert, Bob Lindquist, Sashi Moorman)
 - i. Tablas Creek 2006 Roussanne
 - ii. Tablas Creek 2006 Roussanne "Bergeron"
 - iii. Qupe 2007 barrel sample
 - iv. Stolpman 2007 "Block 7"
 - c) Roussanne in Blends (Sashi Moorman, Ryan Hebert, Dan Cuzzi, Steve Anglim)
 - i. Stolpman 2007 L'Avion (90% Roussanne, 10% Viognier)
 - ii. Tablas Creek 2006 Esprit de Beaucastel Blanc (65% Roussanne, 30% Grenache Blanc, 5% Picpoul Blanc)
 - iii. Tablas Creek 2005 Côtes de Tablas Blanc (42% Viognier, 33% Roussanne, 19% Marsanne, 6% Grenache Blanc)
 - iv. JC Cellars 2007 Marsanne (98% Marsanne, 2% Roussanne)
 - v. Anglim 2006 Cameo (50% Marsanne, 25% Roussanne, 25% Viognier)
 - d) Roussanne in the Marketplace (Burke Owens, John Alban, Jason Haas)
 - i. Roussanne is not a widespread varietal. No producer there made more than 2500 cases of their Roussanne-based wine.
 - ii. Much of the market associates it with blends (and producers noted that it may in fact make better wines blended)
 - iii. In a crowded marketplace, unusual varieties can't just get by with being unusual. They need to be great.
 - iv. Roussanne (in the words of John Alban) "tends to be a rollercoaster". It varies often widely depending on where it's grown and where it is in its life cycle. And it's a polarizing wine; different people will love and hate the same wine. This makes it more of a challenge.
 - v. Because it's a relatively unknown varietal, you must sell the winery or the label first, and then explain it's Roussanne.
 - vi. Focus perhaps on red wine drinkers, who appreciate the textural and structural character of Roussanne, as well as its ageability.
 - vii. A great "winter white". Better with the richer, creamier flavors of winter.
 - viii. Many wineries who have had the most success have taken it out of the category of a varietal and put it into proprietary blends where the wine becomes an artistic expression rather than one of a category.
 - ix. Similarly, many wineries (think of Bonny Doon's Cigare Blanc or Tablas Creek's Esprit de Beaucastel Blanc) associate the wine with their better-known red blend.
 - x. Wine clubs are a key method for marketing and education (both very much needed for Roussanne-based wines).
 - e) Roussanne with Age (Bob Lindquist, Bob Haas, Burke Owens)
 - i. Qupe 1996 Roussanne
 - ii. Qupe 1999 Roussanne
 - iii. Beaucastel 1987 Roussanne "Vieilles Vignes"

- iv. Beaucastel 1996 Roussanne "Vieilles Vignes"
 - v. Bonny Doon 1989 "Le Sophiste"
 - vi. All remarkable wines, all evolving in beautiful and fascinating ways!
- f) Roussanne as a Dessert Wine (John Alban, Ryan Hebert, Burke Owens)
- i. Bonny Doon 2007 "Vol des Anges"
 - ii. Tablas Creek 2005 Vin de Paille
 - iii. Tablas Creek 2005 Vin de Paille "Quintessence"
 - iv. Roussanne lends itself naturally to dessert wines, whether botrytis or vin de paille. The honey flavors are concentrated and the varietal's proneness to oxidized flavors mitigated.
 - v. The problem is that not only is the market for Roussanne challenging, the market for dessert wines (outside of a few name Sauternes and under \$15 bottles) is if possible more challenging.

VI. Participant List

- Bill Easton (Domaine de la Terre Rouge)
- Bill Sheffer and Molly Dow (Halter Ranch Vineyard)
- Bob Lindquist (Qupe)
- Burke Owens (Bonny Doon Winery)
- Charlie Tsegelatos (Cline Cellars)
- Dan Cuzzi (JC Cellars)
- Doug McCrea (McCrea Cellars)
- Eric Mohseni (Zaca Mesa)
- Ernst Storm (Curtis Winery)
- John Alban (Alban Vineyards)
- Judy Starr and Phil Stevens (Starr Ranch)
- Linda and Tony Truchard (Truchard Vineyard)
- Lood Kotze (Cass Winery)
- Neil Collins, Ryan Hebert, Bob Haas, Jason Haas and Chelsea Magnusson (Tablas Creek)
- Patrick Comiskey (Wine&Spirits Magazine)
- Sao Anash (Rosenblum Cellars)
- Sashi Moorman and Kyle Knapp (Stolpman Vineyards)
- Steve Anglim (Anglim Winery)
- Steve Lohr and Jeff Meier (J. Lohr)
- Tegan Passalacqua (Turley)
- Terry Culton and Paul Sowerby (Adelaida Cellars)
- Tom Nemcik (NovaVine Nursery)