

August 5, 2009



I am pleased with myself, which, for me, is an unusual condition. We are ripping in Q and P (which will, eventually be Q1, Q2, Q3 and Q4, or 7.5 acres of some of greatest Pinot Noir ever planted, at exactly when the moisture content of the soil is at the right 'plastic limit' to 'hold the rip.' Why is it going to be great? Because the "Q" Pinot Noirs we made in 2006, 2007 and 2008, from vines that were embarrassing to look at, were pretty damn good - and look at the view the vines are going to enjoy.

Before ripping we applied about 100 tons of soil amendments, starting with over five tons per acre of composted organic matter, three plus tons of dolomitic lime, and five plus tons of mined gypsum, which were spread in that order. Here's winemaker David Munksgard inspecting the compost made from organic dairy cow manure, horse manure, cow and horse bedding (mainly straw and shavings) and some grape pomace.



Curiously, no unpleasant smell - below he's inspecting the dolomitic lime.



And finally, the gypsum, it seems he likes to inspect.



Each amendment has a purpose, sometimes more than one (for example, according to Central Missouri Turf Management Inc. there are 37 advantages to using gypsum). We use compost to add organic content to the soil to improve water retention and permeability mainly by creating aggregates, i.e. clumps of soil particles (which why we rip into the cover crop) and not to fertilize. Dolomitic lime is added to raise pH, a problem with Goldridge soils. As for gypsum according to Paul Anamosa, PhD: “Gypsum is a necessary part of ameliorative tillage because it is needed to stabilize the aggregates created at depth by ripping.” It is also used to counteract adverse ions such as magnesium and aluminum. One advantage is that it literally sinks deeper into the soil taking stuff, both good and

bad with it, i.e. it incorporates the lime and the compost. While 100 tons seems like a lot when spread over 7.5 acres it's not that much.

We didn't actually rip into the cover crop. First we had to disc the block so properly incorporate the amendments and make it easier to lay out markers for the bulldozer operator, Pablo of Chenoweth Vineyards.



Why rip? Ripping increases available water by 'softening' the soil, which is then enhanced by the compost and gypsum, to create a specified root zone.



Note that Q is aligned true North, while E Block below was aligned using a compass, hence magnetic North...oops. Of course now that we are engaged in precision farming we don't make mistakes like that anymore, we know that magnetic north is about 16 degrees off of true north.



Meanwhile the shot below isn't relevant, but I like the Mantis nymph, and it seems to like to pose.



Also not relevant, but given the state of things who cares; I was quite taken with the argument made by Alastair Thompson of the Care Not Killing Alliance, as to why it was wrong for the 84 year old conductor Sir Edward Downes to die along side his terminally ill wife: "It says if you are old and frail and feeling a bit rough then it is ok to be euthanized. It makes death a lifestyle choice..."

July 8, 2009



At the risk of making things worse, the vineyards at Iron Horse have never looked better, if a bit shaggy in some places. The nearly 4 inches of rain during the first week of May made all of the difference. Since we've had both fog and heat, whether in the right measure, hard to say, except that the vines are growing and thriving, in particular our Chardonnay, and I've never been one to argue with success. First Clone 4 from C4 Thomas Road.



Next, Hyde Old Wente from Ce Block.



And, a Dijon Clone Chardonnay from F Block. (Please don't try to understand our block numbering system, as long as our winemaker, David Munksgard and I know what's where, then we are fine.)



Last, Z Clone from Z Block.



With all the growth (which is what happens you have heat and water) we could easily use another ten people. As we're bottling the 2008 Sparkings and disgorging the 2005 Brut Rosé (get some while you can) there's no one to spare from the winery. Yet, this week, we have fifteen acres to shoot thin and position; twenty acres that need to be trained; three acres of young vines that need to be weeded (so that when we water we're watering the vines, not the weeds); and six acres of cane pruned chardonnay that need to be shoot positioned and clipped (so we can spray without harming the vines). All the while we are spraying and mowing, so of course not everything will get done exactly when I want them done. However, we have a great crew (seen above with Daniel Roberts in H5 – note how Daniel's knees have colored up since last March). One that can, one day weed Lower A in the early cool hours, then shoot position and clip in Z, while the block they were working in the day before (P2 Thomas Road) is sprayed and then the next morning back to weeding, followed by finishing shoot positioning in Z and going back to shoot thinning in P2. I'd like to write some more about what also needs to be done, but, just too busy.



June 17, 2009

I'm feeling lazy, or, to be accurate, I've been trying to verbalize what we are doing here at Iron Horse Vineyards with Chardonnay and it's taking me longer than I like and this damn recession is just a hell of a distraction. So I figure I'll just post some pictures, again. Starting with 'set' (which has been great), and then all sorts of other stuff I

get to see and shoot with the new camera. I've learnt that the Leica D-Lux 4 is great at close range (Z Clone in Z Block).



Or at work - '06 Wedding Cuvée and '05 Brut Rosé dosage trials - dosage trials are too work.



Even in the field (300 tomato plants are finally in the ground) I'm happy.



It's amazing how close I can get to the object (the Z Clone Chardonnay grafts in Upper A are starting to take off).



It's a great food camera (really fresh 'foreclosure chicken' eggs).



And back again at work - Erica in the office (office people are an important part of making great wine), with Lu behind her (also a key to our survival and success, thank you both).



More food, (Chef Ruben's butter poached halibut, during poaching...butter is good...



And as served).



The colors are amazing (Sweet Peas, I must have picked about 300 so far).



And olives at Scopa in Healdsburg.



But it's not so good with distance shots, like the feeble one of a grey fox outside of our house the other day.



Still, no problems with a female snake fly on my newspaper (the obit section)...



I confess to being fairly ignorant about insects so I e-mailed the shot to Daniel Roberts and our Pest Control Advisor, Kevin Skene. Daniel Roberts decided the poor thing should be killed and, according to Kevin Skene, it was an "Adorable, Sexy, Mature Lacewing looking for other similar neuroptidae for quiet nights, delightful conversation, and long excursions foraging for insects. Interests include reading, going to movies, and eating aphids and other plant-eating insects. Interested in possible LTR. Must be fit to breed and be able to locate food for our children." You'd think we'd have something better to do on a Saturday night than e-mail each other about bugs, but it appears we don't. Damn recession. More to the point, what does LTR mean?

June 3, 2009

The shot below was taken on May 23, 2009 in Train House B, Z Clone, about a week after grafting. The bud is starting to 'push,' which is good.



The next one was taken June 2, 2009, also Train House B, see the touch of green? Not too long until it's a leaf.



So we're putting on milk cartons (actually orange-pineapple juice cartons) before the rabbits eat the young shoots.



F Block, as is the case in most of the vineyard, is in full bloom. At the risk of sounding cautiously optimistic, set is looking good.



The test is to tap the clusters carefully, and hopefully only the caplets fall into your, or in this instance, Daniel Roberts' hand. If they don't then we've got shatter. Which is bad.



So it's a conflicting time. The grape vines have never looked better, and we've never been better at what we are doing, both in terms of growing grapes and making wine. For example, we just 'released' the 2004 Blanc de Blancs, with a dosage consisting of just two mils of sugar, one mil Chardonnay and one mil of Pinot Noir (so fine only 99.87% Chardonnay, but the Pinot is really a blanc de noir so the 2004 is truly our first blanc de blancs, or white of whites), which tastes better than any Blanc de Blancs we've ever made. Yet, the rest of the world just isn't cooperating. For example, in April, during our "Earth Day" celebration, my laptop was stolen from my office (granted it's more of a lean-to but that is no excuse for theft). Then in May some one stole both of my cameras from my truck. I shall miss the Leica V-Lux 1; it took some great shots, like this one.



So my faith in people, already weak (I confess I don't really like people), has taken a turn for the worse. I mean, between Bernie Madoff and GM going bankrupt, the deficit in California and computer and camera thieves, what is one to do? And don't forget the recession. In times past this would be the moment to turn to philosophy for consolation – could be a book title here (insider joke for philosophy majors, hint: Boethius). But 21st century philosophy is remarkably lame. Take Prof. Raphael Enthoven. In his new book, *L'Endroit du Décor*, he defines philosophy as “une promenade, insouciante et attentive, dans l'inachevé.” Which, I shall translate as “a stroll, carefree yet observant, in the incomplete.” Find any comfort in that rot and rubbish? Of course this is from a guy who was married to Justine Levy – the daughter of Bernard-Henri Levy (author of “American Vertigo”), the French media philosopher who is, or was, Rafael's father's best friend, and while married, had an affair with Carla Bruni, now Carla Bruni Sarkozy, first lady of France, who was then living with his father, Jean-Paul Enthoven, and they had a child, Carla and Raphael that is, aptly named Aurelius, before he, Raphael, broke off the relationship, after six years, because, “she was not sufficiently committed,” but not before his then ex-wife wrote a very successful revenge novel. For the record, Bernard-Henri Levy (BHL) is currently married to his third wife Arielle Dombasle, ingénue actress and songstress, which makes we wonder, why not a new reality show, “The Real Philosophers of France?”

So instead I turned to consumerism, I bought a new Leica, a D-Lux 4. Perhaps the best ‘food’ camera I’ve ever had. Look at what does with peas and lettuce:



May 18, 2009

No text (other than this sentence), just pictures, arranged by date taken, starting with a commentary on the state of the economy and ending with the start of bloom (H4 Pommard 5).











May 1, 2009 (i.e. not April, huzzah)

Below is a representation of what most people would agree is beauty, a Peace rose.



Here's another example, the bloom of a Horse Chestnut Tree (pretty exotic looking, actually, for something usually so mundane).



But below is my idea of beauty.



A Z Clone Chardonnay inflorescence in Z Block, and, below, a Pommard 5 Pinot Noir inflorescence in H2 Block.



Of course my guess is that there are those who would find beauty in a Crane Fly (in particular, Prof. Charles Paul Alexander, who identified around 75% of the approximately 14,000 species of crane flies, which seems rather a lot and very hard to do, given how easily they break, except he's dead).



I'm pleased April is over, for a variety of reasons, not the least of which is the weather. We've had to frost protect many, many nights (meaning the temperature dropped below 32F in certain blocks), and yet, we had four days when the temperature was over 80F (including one day with a high of 94.9F). With that kind of heat you can hear the vines grow if you get close enough. Which means we've been busy, mowing, frost protecting, stringing wire in H to deal with the taller young vines, etc. Still, we're at least two weeks later in terms of bud break and growth than last year, which is a good thing. We want it to be warm during bloom and set, but not too warm and a later harvest would be appreciated too. More grapes would also be nice in case anyone in a position of authority is reading this.

Our main task is shoot thinning. For those who don't recall last year's post on shoot thinning, according to the Second Edition of Ron S. Jackson's *Wine Science, Principles, Practice, Perception*, 'thinning' or early spring 'disbudding' have two benefits, first "early removal economizes nutrient reserves and favors the strong growth of the remaining shoots," and second, "improve vine microclimate." (Dr. Jackson is a Canadian who taught mainly at Brandon University in Manitoba, was a technical advisor to the Manitoba Liquor Control Commission and is now "allied with the Cool Climate Oenology and Viticulture Institute, Brock University in Ontario.)

My War on Terroir

In August I will be a 'presenter' at the Russian River Valley Pinot Noir Forum. I will be talking for about fifteen minutes on the first morning about soils, and on the next day, vine training. Given the size (82 acres including Phase II - the blocks planted on AXR) and duration of our replanting activities (Phase I will be done next year, Phase II in 2014), I know a lot about how to train a grape vine. As for soils, well we've had many soil pits dug here at Iron Horse and I've read all the reports, so I know what we have here, but I am totally ignorant about the rest of the Russian River Valley. Which means, time to hit the books.

I've learned that soil is good stuff. It acts as a nutrient reservoir and provides water in a form that can be taken up by the vine roots, or as Dr. Ron Jackson wrote, "only water retained by cohesive forces or sorbed to soil colloids remains available for root uptake." All very interesting to me, but then I prefer an inflorescence to a rose. So how to make it interesting to the poor attendees at the seminar? One word, 'terroir,' a taste of the soil, except I know 'terroir' is just a myth and one I can't buy into.

Most people tell me that it is in my best interests as a grower and principal in an estate bottled operation to shout out 'terroir' at every conceivable occasion. Yet, if we accept 'terroir' as the main explanation as to why our wines are so good, how do we explain why they are better now than they were before? Or why does a Z clone Chardonnay grape on 420A rootstock taste dramatically different than a Hyde-Old Wente clone Chardonnay grape also on 420A and planted on the same day, same training, etc., and only meters away, if 'terroir' is so important? Or why does P6 Pinot Noir from the top 34 rows taste better than the lower 33? Or for that matter than P7 Pinot again only ymeters away but trained differently, if 'terroir' is so important?

Next problem, there are many, many people to whom 'terroir' is a sacred concept, who really believe that somehow, flavors really are transferred from the soil. Influential and knowledgeable people like Randall Graham and everybody in France and Napa. My response is that there are many Republicans who really believe that the only solution to our current economic woes is even more tax cuts for the rich, even more deregulation, less government and school prayer. They are the ones who had been put in charge by the voters in 2000 and 2004. Were they right? I don't think so. Which means let's move on from the rule that just because an idea is old, or really rich people, or loud radio talk show hosts, or even marketing executives, like it, makes that idea right and instead, examine the evidence and consider what the experts have to say?

So back to Dr. Ron:

"Of climatic influences, soil type appears to be the least significant factor affecting grape and wine quality or to be poorly correlated with wine characteristics. Soil influences tend to be expressed indirectly through features such as heat retention, water-holding capacity, and nutritional status."

And

"The geological origin of the parental material of the soil has little direct influence on grape quality. Fine wines are grown on soils derived from all three basic rock types."

The above is totally at odds with conventional wisdom, but then conventional wisdom is rarely based on science. It wasn't until 1854 that Louis Pasteur connected yeast with fermentation. Before Pasteur, the transformation of sugar into alcohol (i.e. how did grape juice turn into wine) was considered to be the result of a 'spontaneous generation.' 'Terroir,' is a wonderfully easy way to explain, that which is really quite complex, why some places are better than others to grow certain varieties and why some growers are better than others. Further, most 'scientific' approaches attempting to defend 'terroir' focus on nutritional components in the soil, and in so doing neglect that we can, and do, adjust those nutrients when we do, or don't fertilize.

In short, 'terroir' is to wine what 'new and improved' is to laundry detergent. If our vegetables taste great, and they do, it's not the soil. Almost all of our plants are started in potting soil in a green house. They taste good because of good seed selection, good care and, particularly with tomatoes and corn; we pick them at the exact best moment of ripeness. Iron Horse is a great place to grow Chardonnay and Pinot Noir for all sorts of reasons, but we are also really good at growing Pinot Noir and Chardonnay and making Chardonnay and Pinot Noir wines, be they sparkling or still, so lets be happy with that.



April 2, 2009



The vines are waking up with alarming alacrity (a sentence I've always wanted to write). Which means I've kind of screwed up. We've had to balance the realities of controlling payroll (for those not paying attention there's, at best, a recession going on), getting ready for frost, i.e. unblocking the sprinklers, such as the one below (shoots go where shoots grow, which is also my fault, because I should have caught it while pruning the row in L), dealing with frost (six nights so far) efficiently (the drought hasn't ended) and tying the canes in C and G before there's too much growth, as in, any growth, and while it looked like we had it all under control, it turns out I didn't. Luckily the guys are up to the delicate task at hand. Still, I'm always impressed how from a single bud like the one above, there will be a shoot, and on that shoot, leaves and tendrils and eventually, grapes.



Science & the Vineyard



Even though most of the work we do involves nothing more complex than a good pair of clippers and a shovel, at Iron Horse we try to be as scientific as possible. For example, because we know how frost forms we take appropriate measures, both active and passive, as opposed to trying to appease or deter Jack Frost. But, science has its limitations. Particularly, in the vineyard, as we only get one crop each year; the season lasts, maybe, seven months; vines last, maybe, twenty-five to thirty years; and the weather is all over the place. Which means it is almost impossible to replicate a problem in a lab or gather enough relevant data to solve many of the issues we need to deal with. One of those issues is Berry Shivel Disorder or BS disorder - which sounds to me, more like a mental condition that affects Republicans and Fox News commentators. Still, if a vine suffers from BS disorder the berries shrivel and taste awful, really sour, or so I have been told, and clearly not suitable for making wine. Usually the guys know to drop the clusters and move on. Rarely do we ever mark a vine affected by BS disorder and then study it. So imagine my delight when leafing through my latest issue of the American Journal of Enology and Viticulture I found the following paper from my colleagues (I am a professional member, in good standing of the publisher of the Journal, the American Society for Enology and Viticulture) entitled "Inception, Progression, and Compositional Consequences of a Berry Shivel Disorder." It is clear that a lot of work was done, good work, from which they discovered there's more happening than simply visible shriveling. Perhaps more significant, although not really detailed to my satisfaction was their ability to determine which 21 vines out of over 2,000 were likely to have BS disorder. As for the conclusion, not very satisfying: "Future work should focus on finding a causal agent and attempting to determine the biochemical sequence of events... in order to eliminate or mitigate its effects," which would be nice if it were to be done. But at least there was some progress. Having determined that "the most consistent and clear effect of the disorder is reduced sugar accumulation," the researchers suggested, "that the name 'sugar accumulation disorder' (SAD) be assigned to this disorder which is identified by these symptoms." So, from now on we no longer have simply BS disorder, we have BS/SAD disorder.

Granted the problem may be that we don't have the kind of money for research in California like they do in Italy, imagine using an MRI as a 'nondestructive technique' to study 'postharvest water stress of winegrapes,' and no one can top the French, who have a center devoted solely to rosé wines, the Centre de Recherche et d'Expérimentation sur le Vin Rosé. We need something like that here. In the meantime, while we're waiting for the release our latest Rosé of Pinot and the 2005 Brut Rosé here's a new view of Mt. St. Helena.



March 17, 2009



Happy St. Patrick's Day. Over the years I've come to notice various signs of spring, such as the mustard in J Block, wild lupines, tulips and Dr. Daniel Robert's knees, still white from the long winter. Daniel was telling the guys how great the pruning was in Z. We're all quite pleased (with the pruning, no comment on the knees).



Meanwhile we've finished pruning, and at exactly the right moment because we're starting to see just a hint of the start of bud break, in only a few blocks, in the form of the occasional Q-tip buds like the one artistically photographed below.



Hopefully we won't see much more growth over the next few weeks while we train trunks in H and J in the morning and in the afternoon, when it is warmer (safer to bend the canes when it is warm) tying the canes in C and G. The guys are pretty good at tying without dropping buds, but every lost bud is a lost shoot, which means fewer grapes. We also prefer the vines hold on a bit more because we really prefer for bloom and set to be later when it's warmer, and hopefully we'll have to deal with fewer nights with frost issues.

Let's Talk Frost

First, frost is bad. According to Canadian expert Dr. Ron S. Jackson here is what happens to the young buds, leaves and shoots:

"Further cooling may result in ice crystal formation on and in plant tissues. As heat is lost from the tissues, water in the larger xylem vessels begin to freeze. Crystallization spreads to water in the cells of adjacent tissues...the resulting dehydration can induce protein and nucleic acid denaturation...causing cell death...Further damage may result from tissue deformation, caused by differential expansion of the phloem and xylem."

In short, not good, the buds look like they've been singed and the shoots sag. The shot below was taken in B North on April 24, 2008 after a particularly cold night and morning.

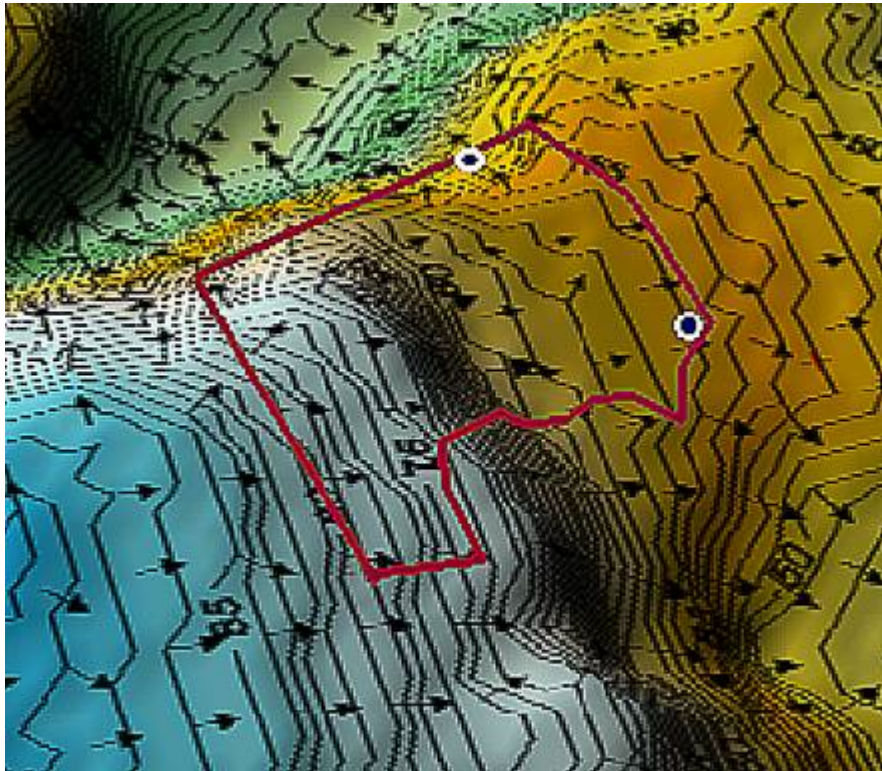


Why do we get frost, after all aren't we in California?

First off, frost isn't the problem. The problem is cold air and the formation of ice crystals both on and in the new growth, which happens when there is a frost, which only happens on clear windless days if the temperature drops below 32F long enough. If it is raining or at least cloudy, then it may feel cold but it will always be above 32F. If the wind is blowing then the air is moving, which means the air molecules are moving, which means they are emitting energy in the form of heat. Hence why some vineyards can be protected using wind machines, or, as in the case of our Thomas Road vineyard, simply being high enough (over 300 feet) with an un-interrupted slope also provides 'protection,' because cold air is denser, hence heavier, than warm air, so it flows down to the creek or other low spots. There can be as much as a five-degree difference in the temperature at the bridge and Thomas Road. As long as the air around vines is above 32F then no ice crystals.

Another reason we like clouds is that if the relative humidity (RH) is high enough that the dew point will rise, which is important, as 'dry air' is a lot colder than 'humid air,' which is why we care about the forecasted dew point during frost season. The dew point is the temperature at which dew forms from the water vapor in the air (trust me, the pretty drops of dew don't appear magically), so if it is close to 33F dew forms, the air temperature then drops below 32F, and provided nucleates are present (and they almost always are), the dew crystallizes and we get frost and the vines may suffer damage as described above. (A more accurate explanation is a lot longer and significantly more complex and involves math.)

As I mentioned above, cold air is heavier, which means it 'flows' and 'accumulates' just like water. Below is portion of a map prepared by Shur Farms Frost Protection. (They make an intriguing system, which uses vertical fans to suck in the cold air and shoot it up thereby raising the temperature.) The outlined block is I. The arrows show the differing flows of cold air.



Note, in most of I the air flows east, down to the creek, but where the dot is at the top, the cold air flows north, right into one of our cellar walls which acts like a dam. As the cold air collects in the lower spots, like creeks (which is dark green above) or in the functional equivalent of ponds, like flood waters it rises and as soon as it reached the height of the vine, things go bad. All of the above is referred to as a radiative frost. Another type is an advective frost, when a mass of cold air moves in. If that happens you're screwed no matter what you do.



We use water to protect our vines. In effect, the water supplies heat to the “vine-water-atmosphere system.” As water evaporates heat is released through fusion, which means even if it freezes around the shoots and buds, they are protected. In theory, micro-emitters, like the one above, are better than standard overhead sprinklers as they use less water. In practice though they are less reliable (with fixed overhead sprinklers the pipes are, for the most part underground, hence insulated) and require a lot more work and maintenance and because they need to be started earlier and run longer, the water savings are nowhere near as good as advertised. But the real issue is reliability; it only takes one bad night to lose a crop. Which is why the guys are out in the vineyard checking all the rows and emitters. Definitely not fun, which is why I don’t do it and why in all the blocks I’ve planned we use standard overhead sprinklers.



February 26, 2009



In the two plus weeks since the last post we've had a shade under nine and a half inches of rain (for those who like the exact number it was 9.43 inches), making for happy ducks, a nice full reservoir, and some flooding, but nothing serious. As we all know, one of the hallmarks of our soil type, Goldridge, is its "excellent drainage," as evidenced below. Note how clean is the run-off from H Block.



Still, make no mistake, we (as in Northern California), are still in a drought, just not as bad as it could have been.

In addition to some welcome rain, we're starting to see the first signs of spring, like the wild mustard below.



The acacias are starting to flower and we already picking daffodils (it helps to like yellow in February). Some of the fruit trees in the orchard are also starting to blossom, which invariably means the moaning begins that somehow bud break will be early, etc. Don't panic. See the apple trees above? Our vines are equally dormant.

California Constitutional Convention: Boy Do We Need One Now

Bear with me on what follows. Everyone knows that the political system in California is barely functioning, and that is not good for Iron Horse Vineyards. The number and amount of various fees we have to pay the State go up, while important services are cut. More to the point we operate on a fairly long time frame. For example Replant Phase II started in 2008 won't be done until 2013. This February we've put together the 2008 Blanc de Blancs, and ordered the labels for the 2004 Blanc de Blancs. Decisions are just that much harder when the State and related fiscal and tax policy lurch from crisis to crisis, and we have many decisions to make.

The reason why everything is such a mess is that our state constitution is a mess. Have you ever read the Constitution of the State of California? I have, at least parts of it. I even have a copy (as last amended November 3, 1998 – so already out of date), a gift from then Attorney General Bill Lockyer; it has my name on the cover and was personally inscribed, "Laurence - thank you for your friendship," by Bill Lockyer (now Treasurer, curiously he has not sent me a signed copy of the state budget or, more appropriate, a recent bank statement).

Included in the special sesquicentennial edition are the Magna Carta (nine pages), the Mayflower Compact (one page) and the Constitution of the United States of America (16 pages, excluding the amendments, another 11 pages if included), consisting of seven articles and twenty seven amendments. By contrast, the California Constitution takes up 154 printed pages. There were 34 articles (now 35 with the addition of Article XXXV Medical Research), of which several have been repealed or renumbered, or to which "no articles have been adopted." Just to make things even more confusing, Article XIII Taxation shares its roman numeral with XIII A, B, C and D, while Article X Water is co-joined with X A and X B, and Article XIX Motor Vehicle Revenues is paired with Article XIX A, Loans from the Public Transportation Account or local Transportation and Funds and Article XIX B, Motor Vehicle Fuel Sales Tax Revenues and Transportation Improvement Funding, for a total of 30 articles.

While our constitution may have many fine provisions, such as Article 1, Section 1: "All people are by nature free and independent and have inalienable rights. Among these are enjoying and defending life and liberty, acquiring, possessing, and protecting property, and pursuing and obtaining safety, happiness and privacy," (note the specific right of privacy). Other provisions just seem downright impossible, such as Section 9 (d) of Article IX: " [University of California] Regents shall be able persons broadly reflective of the economic, cultural, and social diversity of the State, including ethnic minorities and women. However, it is not intended that formulas or specific ratios be applied in the selection of regents." Which begs the question, what is intended? My favorite was the following addition to the required oath of office added in 1952:

"And I do further swear (or affirm) that I do not advocate, nor am I a member of any party or organization, political or otherwise, that now advocates the overthrow of the Government of the United States or of the State of California by force or violence or other unlawful means; that within the five years immediately preceding the taking of this oath (or affirmation) I have not been a member of any party or organization, political or otherwise, that advocated the overthrow of the Government of the United States or of the State of California by force or violence or other unlawful means except as follows: _____

(If no affiliations, write in the words "No Exceptions") and that during such time as I hold the office of _____ (name of office) I will not advocate nor become a member of any party or organization, political or otherwise, that advocates the overthrow of the Government of the United States or of the State of California by force or violence or other unlawful means."

I admit I don't remember having the option of filling in the blank when I was appointed to the California Recreational Trails Committee.

The explanation for the above mess is the initiative process, coupled with a probably well-earned disrespect for the state legislature. Want to make it harder to undo a rule, put it in the constitution. Hence, why the constitution specifies the legal drinking age in California at 21 (Article XX Section 22 (d)). On the other hand, the barriers to getting an initiative on the ballot are pretty low: in 2008, for an initiative statute one needed only collect 433,971 valid signatures. A constitutional amendment needed only 694,354 signatures. (The same will hold true in 2009 and 2010 as they are based on the total votes for governor.) Got a \$1,000,000 you got a spot on the ballot (take note teens who want to legally go to a bar, my guess is if you all give up a few lattes and work together you to could change the law).

So, fellow Californians, its time to fix our state and the only way is through a Constitutional Convention.



February 10, 2009



The good news is that we are starting to prune in C Block. The guys are really focused, which is important. In C we are still training the vines, and even though we are cane pruning, meaning there are fewer cuts, the decisions, particularly with young vines, aren't easy, a serious mistake, like choosing the wrong shoot for a trunk, could affect the vine for its entire productive life of twenty-five plus/minus years.



The better news is that we are actually able to collect our own bud wood for Upper A, Lower A and Train B. We'll need about 16,000 buds or about 2,000 eight-bud sticks in three sizes, small, medium and large. Below, Daniel and Antonio are busy collecting and then cleaning the sticks.



The key is to first determine how we want the vine pruned, then, collect the bud wood in a way that won't negatively impact our pruning decisions (i.e. don't remove the best potential canes for 2009). The extra eight acres of Z clone are going to be great.

Drought

This is how most people are dealing with the continuing drought in Palm Springs...



They definitely aren't reading the headlines:

"We may be at the start of the worst California drought in modern history," said Lester Snow, director of the state Department of Water Resources." Fresno Bee, January 29, 2009.

"California teeters on the edge of the worst drought in the state's history, officials said Thursday after reporting that the Sierra Nevada snowpack - the backbone of the state's water supply - is only 61 percent of normal." San Francisco Chronicle, January 30, 2009.

"We will all suffer financial losses, as we did in the drought of 1976-77, said Pete Opatz, a Sonoma County Winegrape Commission member. The crops are going to be light." Santa Rosa Press Democrat February 3, 2009.

Sober yet? Ready, when showering, to wet body, turn off water, apply soap, and turn on water to rinse like all the nice sailors? If not, if you live in Northern California, you should be. Because the hard fact is that how much water we have available at any moment in time is entirely dependant on precipitation, rain and snow (mainly rain in Sonoma County, now that the diversion of water from the Eel River – which is fed from the Sierra Nevada snowpack – to the Russian River, has been reduced).

By way of elaboration, we have a number of sources of water at Iron Horse Vineyards: To fill and recharge our reservoir and ponds, about 45 acre feet at full capacity, we have the right to take water from the creek that runs through the property; we get, and pay for, advanced treated wastewater from Forestville and Graton; and we recycle as much 'grey water' from the winery as we can. We have three primary wells that can produce about 23 gallons per minute (or for the wonks, 1.2 acre-inches a day) and about 45,000 gallons of storage capacity (not including unused tanks in the winery). There is also the ground water that the grape vines, trees, shrubs and grasses (including cover crop) mainly live on. Finally there's the current year's rainfall (it seems only redwood trees can draw moisture from fog). No matter the source, ground water, creek, wells, even the amount of beer the fine burghers of Forestville and Graton consume at home, without sufficient rain to recharge the groundwater and start the creeks flowing to the river, over an extended period (like three years), we are in tough times, and we are better off than most. We at least have a relatively full reservoir.

The Perfect Storm

The above heading is a joke. The problem is no storms in January (as evidenced by how low the flow is in our creek, it shouldn't be this low in February), during a credit crunch and a really, really, really, really bad recession. Further, to make things worse, don't expect Sacramento to come close to helping. Hence, the 'perfect storm.'



The normal reaction to a continued drought is to plant less. Already Central Valley growers are cutting back on lettuces and melons. Absent some significant rains in February and March (and don't hold your breath) there won't be a lot of tomatoes either, so expect a smaller ketchup packs with your happy meal, and higher prices for tomato products, i.e. start hoarding your Ragu. Worse for many, in this market it is hard to raise prices. People simply do without condiments, etc. Meantime, business expenses don't go away, like interest payments and taxes and payrolls. Which in normal times wouldn't be a problem, as we have the best credit and banking system in the world. Well, had. Feeling worse than before you started to read this? My solution is to go and prune vines. A long run helps too.

Do I hear a protest? Grapes aren't tomatoes. We don't sow grapes annually. Grapes can be dry farmed. True, true and sometimes. My own experience is that without enough water, in the form of rainfall, we get fewer grapes. (Consider Lavoisier's axiom, "that in every operation an equal quantity of matter exists before and after the operation.") And make no mistake, fewer does not mean better, and if not better then don't even think about raising grape prices. Moreover, most growers can't raise prices because most grapes are under contract and in California you have to fix the price paid for grapes on the January 10 of the year following harvest, so the California Dept. of Food & Ag can prepare the Grape Crush Report, which comes out in preliminary form on February 10, so there is a year's lag in price information available for any index in a contract. To simplify, the price for grapes in 2009, for most Sonoma County growers, will most likely be determined based on the prices reported 2008 and not the facts of 2009. It gets worse, because only harvest costs go down in a lean year, all other farming costs stay the same, and may even go up, like fuel costs did during last year's frost season, by far longest the I have ever experienced. I liken the situation to that of disintermediation at S&L's in the early 80's.

Conclusion

To review, less rain, fewer grapes. Fewer grapes also means we don't need as many barrels, bottles, boxes, labels, corks, foils, sales commissions and hours; hours in the sense of employment. In normal times layoffs, although painful, are manageable. A good cellar worker could find work in construction, somewhere, maybe less stable but at least it was paid. In normal times you could get some additional working capital from a bank. These are not normal times. I know there are those who see a retraction of the wine industry as something good. Obviously this drought will help us reduce our carbon footprint. And yet, I see this 'perfect storm' as a near existential threat for a number of us – although obviously not Iron Horse Vineyards. But there is no denying the human cost, and that bothers me. Maybe, if the stimulus plan passes and starts to work in the next six months it will be okay, but that is a big if. There is no solution to this problem. All I can offer is awareness. Unless of course you all would be willing to just pay that much more for a really great bottle of our Estate Chardonnay.

January 23, 2009



The 20th of January was a great day (actually while it looked a lot like the above shot, as I suffer from excessive honesty, I confess, it wasn't taken on the 20th, the above photo was taken on the 13th), but more than rejoicing in our wisdom and good fortune in that we finally have a President the likes of Barack H. Obama, we need to heed his call for a "new era of responsibility." As President Obama put it so well:

"In affirming the greatness of our nation, we understand that greatness is never a given. It must be earned... It has never been the path of the faint hearted, for those who prefer leisure over work, or seek only the pleasures of riches and fame. Rather, it has been the risk-takers, the doers, the makers of things – some celebrated, but more often men and women obscure in their labor – who have carried us up the long path towards prosperity and freedom."

Now don't get me wrong, I have no problems with "those who prefer leisure over work, or seek only the pleasures of riches and fame," they are our customers, but, when he said "starting today, we must pick ourselves up, dust ourselves off, and begin again the work of remaking America," all I could think was how right he is and, more to the point, time to get to work. I waited until the helicopter with George W. Bush was well away from Washington, but after I didn't stick around to celebrate or watch the parade. Nope, I, a non-believer, obscure in his labor, rolled up my sleeves, grabbed my pruning clippers and went to work. During the course of the day I learned an important lesson, don't prune in a white shirt if you want to make a god impression later that day.

Even with Obama in the White House, they're those who fear that the warm weather we are 'enjoying' – imagine a high of 85.1F on January 12 – will lead to early bud break. However they are forgetting how cold it has been too – imagine a low of 24.3F on January 4. It has also been pretty windy. Just making it all that much drier.



Fact is, the weather is normal, insofar as abnormal is normal (although I question if there really ever was a normal other than our current abnormal normal). If anyone needs something more than the economy and two wars to worry about, then worry about drought.



As I mentioned in the last 'post' the goal is to get more crop, particularly in the younger blocks like G below. I know it's hard to see in the photo, but in G we are converting the vines from cane to cordon. The idea is to have as much fruit bearing wood on the fruit wire as possible, so as to get more grapes. Every gap between vines without a cordon or a cane is wasted space. The problem is that the vines in G are spaced five feet apart, which means we need two 2'6" canes per vine, which isn't happening, unless we're willing to sacrifice quality for quantity, which we aren't. The conversion process is slow. On the row I was working on (the 'decorated' one - when it comes to deer I'm willing to try a biodynamic approach), out of 30 vines there were six different pruning solutions ranging from cordons with extensions, cordons, two canes no return spur, two canes with a return spur, single cane with a return spur, and just spurs. We should be totally done with the conversion after about three more seasons.



The other factor when pruning for yield is the number of buds we leave on each position. Simply put, more buds more shoots. The idea is, if a position or shoot that is being pruned is weak, prune down to one bud, so only one shoot for that position, which means that many fewer clusters, and so on. After that it gets a lot more complex. But, to quote a recent research note in the ASEV journal it's a lot more complex than we thought:

"When studying crop loads per vine, it is commonplace to prune to differing numbers of buds per vine at dormant pruning...While dormant pruning level affects yield by establishing the potential cluster number per vine, it also determines shoot number and strongly affects the leaf area per weight of crop...Thus, there is a possibility that crop-loads are confounded by concomitant changes in leaf area."

Ah spit, I mean, we've got maybe two hundred thousand vines to prune and I have to deal with the Ravaz Index (the ratio of crop weight to dormant pruning weight) while also feeling guilty I'm not weighing leaves too? I mean, that kind of viticulture is so very pre meltdown. So my solution, ignore any research note obviously written with a thesaurus and prune based on the needs of each vine (as determined by actual observation of that vine), the needs of the neighboring vines, the row, the block, etc., i.e. precision viticulture - a more Zen-like approach to pruning.

January 5, 2009



Finally, some rain. In October we got a mere 1.43", November, 4.48" and December, 5.83" so the trend is looking good. Of course we still need an extra 40 plus inches to get back to normal and, unfortunately, in the South Pacific La Nina has taken hold, which means the storm track maybe too far north to do us any good. So, going forward we'll need to act as if the drought will continue and hope for normal. Right now we are pruning in L Block, we've finished F and N, and in all three blocks the idea has been to prune to encourage a larger crop but if the drought looks like it won't let up, then we'll adjust the crop 'down' during tying and/or suckering, which sounds hard but isn't. As can be seen from the before and after shots below, pruning is a lot easier this year:



The hard work, such as removing unwanted positions, was done in past years, so all I needed to do was to pick which spurs to leave (based on strength and position) and how many buds, hopefully two, meaning 18 shoots and if all goes well, 36 bunches of grapes. Further, the vine had been pre-pruned, and, more to the point, as I have written in the past, when we prune right, tying is easier, when we tie right suckering is easier, if we sucker right shoot positioning is easier, shoot position right and dropping leaves and/or clusters is easier, and then next year's

pruning is easier, etc., so after four seasons pruning is almost boring. The problem what you see above and below is that this is not how we want our vines to look, all those bends are just wrong.



What makes me proud, and confident for the future, is that we have a crew that understands the pruning process so well, we can now "fine tune" the vines to deal with the competing issues of two years of low (but delicious, but not delicious because low) yields and/or a possible second year of drought.

Meanwhile, we still have bobcats (sorry about the smaller picture, he was about forty meters away)...



And the geese are on the move...



Reminders that it would be a mistake on my part to assume I'm in any way in control here at Iron Horse.

An Aside

It's no use trying to act like there isn't a recession going on. Actually I think it is more a readjustment, bad things happen when bubbles pop, unless you have good bubbles like our 2004 Ultra Brut. (***** Refreshingly crisp, with a great complexity of flavors. Vibrant, high-toned fruit, with a note of green apple and lemon. Nutty and yeasty. Fine mousse." According to the Santa Rosa Press Democrat – 5 stars means it's a 'classic'). The question is what to do about it. One thought is to lobby for T.A.R.P. funds but somehow I doubt the wine industry has the clout. Fact is we are going to have to pay higher excise taxes. In California our taxes may go up from \$0.20 to \$1.00 a gallon (I might add I believe we need be good citizens for once and shouldn't fight the increase – as long as it isn't earmarked to specific programs.) Marketing can help, but to rely n marketing alone is so pre-melt down. So, that leaves only one other strategy, make the best wines we can while offering consumers the best values possible – i.e. accept that it's all about what's in the bottle, not what's on the bottle. Perhaps the best role model these days is the Cavanagh Company, the world's leading baker of communion bread. Apparently there aren't enough baking nuns to supply the faithful. According to general manager Andrew Cavanagh (as quoted in the New York Times) "The best thing we can do is make sure the bread is perfect in every possible way." And it works, according one satisfied customer, "it doesn't crumb, and I don't like fragments of our Lord scattering all over the floor." I think that says it all.



December 18, 2008



It has been dreary, foggy and/or cold (as low as 22 F) and when not, it's been raining (granted we need the rain). Winter has come early to Green Valley, just a little earlier than expected, which should have been expected, in that we should be used to expect the unexpected. Meanwhile, other than for a brave Iraqi shoe thrower (with good aim I might add - my guess is that after eight years with Cheney, Bush's reflexes just got better and better) the news is depressing. Even good news like the price of gas dropping below \$2.00, apparently, is bad news. The problem is, as President-Elect Obama has to keep on pointing out, there can only be one president at a time... so we might as well accept that there's no stopping Brittany Spears' comeback. My advice; put off the big decisions until February, enjoy Christmas and the New Year holiday season and purchase what you need to like food, fuel and Iron Horse Chardonnay and bubbles. And nothing raises the spirits like a good roaring fire.



Start with eight acres worth of 23 year old vines, a bottle of Ultra Brut and some popcorn, and all the sudden it makes sense, like how about the 1.7% drop in the Consumer Price Index isn't deflation, it's just reverse inflation? Okay, make that two bottles of Ultra Brut and really, it makes sense.

Meantime, time to focus away from the macro to the micro, i.e. what's happening in the vineyard. As you can see from the first photo, we've been pre-pruning. On the 15th we actually started pruning for real, in F Block. As is always the case, pruning starts with a visit from Daniel Roberts. This is our fifth season and we no longer need him to show us how to prune, but we still value his advice and insight. On the right he's pointing out a bad bend, while Victor is showing a good bend - or is it vice versa, I think it is, the one on the left is too high and sharp, so we may get a certain amount of necrosis over time (which is bad).



What is important is that we adapt our pruning to the needs of vines tempered by the needs of the business. Fact is we've had two lean (but otherwise delicious) years, so perhaps in certain blocks we need to try to increase yield (determined on a vine by vine basis and without risking quality of course). Daniel taught us a new system, "modified or cordon-cane pruning." The idea is, instead of just leaving a two-bud spur on each cordon position we allow three mini canes per cordon with spurs on the other positions, meaning more buds, meaning more shoots, so more grapes, but only on vines that are strong enough and in blocks targeted for sparkling (where we won't have ripeness or maturity issues).

Food Notes



Chef Ruben's about-to-be-fried crab cake, before it was coated in Panko (Japanese bread crumbs – has anyone ever had Japanese bread?) and fried, delicious.

I confess I eat well. More to the point, I eat better than many, and I do that guilt free because I set myself goals. For example on a weekend excursion to New York City I was able to try pig tail at Momofuku, then had snails and steak tartar at Lucien, roasted marrow then thymus at Prune, and at Saturday lunch, a life long ambition, I got to finally taste the best of all foods, Jamón Ibérico: "A type of jamón, a cured ham produced only in Spain and Portugal (when produced in Portugal it is known as presunto). It is at least 75% Black Iberian Pig, also called the *cerdo negro* or black pig, the only breed of pig that naturally seeks and eats mainly acorns." Wikipedia.



December 1, 2008



Still fall, time to rake up the leaves. A leaf blower would be faster and easier, but bad for the old carbon footprint. Another choice is to leave them be, i.e. become soil. With barer vines we can start 'pre-pruning' because it's hard to prune, pre or otherwise with leaves present, like below.



By pre-pruning I mean, all we'll do now is remove the 'brush,' leaving about a foot plus of a shoot to be pruned later down to one or two buds (a spur). Before that we need a few more storms to help wash off eutypa spores. And, there are other factors that also need to be considered before pruning, such as frost and shatter risk, later being better for blocks where frost and shatter are issues. Other considerations include how many acres need to be pruned (this year we've added 42), how many pruners (and skilled one's at that) are available and when do we need and/or have to be finished (usually before bud break, which are good reasons to start sooner rather than later. Hence, pre-pruning is an ideal compromise, enough of the shoot is left to avoid problems and when we do prune the blocks we'll be able to move lickety-split. Another method is to use astrology to decide when and where to start, but, while I'm willing to trust the planets and the moon, I don't trust the astrologers.

We picked all the olives, 2,543 pounds for about 35 gallons of oil. More than we've had in a long time (last year we made only 14.4 gallons). It is one of those ongoing ironies of farming that in a year in which we had our lowest grape yields, smallest pumpkins ever, only one pomegranate, no walnuts, a handful of persimmons, and so on, we've got tons of acorns (happy squirrels, although I think they stole all of the walnuts too) and a decent olive harvest. My guess is that's why good farmers diversify and why I need to plant some more olive trees.



Picking olives is hard work. I know because I actually helped. (Sometimes you have to get up on a ladder, which, as I lack a reliable center of gravity I don't.) Here are some of the olives I picked. I acknowledge it doesn't look like much, but it was all I was able to get from a single tree and it was a big bucket and the particular variety of olive, Leccino (a Tuscan cultivar), are pretty small.



Especially when compared to Mission (which means I have no idea what type they really are, when in doubt, in California, we call a thing 'Mission'), notice how much bigger they are (easier to fill up a bucket) and greener, meaning more flavor, less oleic acid, and, sadly, less oil.



Meantime, winemaker David Munksgard and I have also been hard at work - in addition to picking olives.



Dosage trials, almost every morning for a week plus, working hard to determine dosage for the 2003 Blanc de Blancs, 2005 Ultra Brut, 2005 Classic Vintage Brut and 2005 Russian Cuvée, and, I almost forgot, the 2005 Lark Creek Cuvée.

Among our Sparklings nothing excites me more than the new Ultra Brut, both the 2004 (get it while it's still available <http://www.ironhorsevineyards.com/wines/sparkling/ultra.html>), and the 2005, which will be released I don't know when. I'll leave to David to explain how it is possible that such a small difference, say 2.55 milliliters of Pinot Noir plus .55 milliliters of Chardonnay and 3 milliliters of sugar (the '05 Ultra Brut dosage), can taste different then if the dosage is made up of just 2.25 milliliters of Pinot Noir, 2.25 milliliters of Chardonnay and 4.5 milliliters of sugar (the '05 Classic Vintage Brut dosage), just accept that it does.

A correction: According to Daniel Roberts the photo of the leaf that opened the November 13 entry shows not Magnesium deficiency but a deficiency of P, Phosphorus, which is apparently rare, but not as rare in hillside vineyards, and H Block is a hillside vineyard. I have to admit I love the packaging for an organic solution...



My problem is the cost. The recommended application for established row plantings is to "use 2 - 3 cups per 10 sq. ft. of planting area... in early spring and once again in late fall or at first signs of bud set." The cost for 64 oz is \$10.75. H Block is about 740,500 sq. ft. Although, if I only have count area with vines maybe I'll only need enough for 25,000 sq. ft. So, assuming I'll need only 2 cups and two applications I'll just need 10,000 cups, or 1,250 boxes, i.e. just over \$14,512 unless I get a volume discount. It's not cheap being green.

November 13, 2008



The above photograph is not an example of beautiful fall foliage instead it's another great example of the benefits of "precision viticulture" (i.e. walk the vineyard). Actually, the baby vines in H are suffering from magnesium deficiency, apparently magnesium is an essential element in the chlorophyll molecule, which explains the red. We've already applied Epsom salts (a/k/a magnesium sulfate) and next spring we'll do a foliar application, so no worries.

The guys have been busy getting P & Q Blocks ready for winter. First the installed wattle, about 2,600 feet or \$2,000 worth of wattle.



Then sowed about 250lbs of dwarf barley- by hand on the steeper parts of Q.



Finally, covered all eight acres with straw.



And, it all had to be done by November 15. They finished on the 13th. Next summer (2009) we'll add soil amendments, rip, place pencil rods, highway posts and end posts and install the irrigation and frost protection. In 2010 plant the rootstock. In 2011 field graft Pinot Noir. Then, if all goes well a but delicious, if small, crop in 2011.



As I find patience to be overrated I shall focus on the now. It won't be long until we pick the olives.



The trick is to pick the olives at exactly the right moment. Finding the balance between to how much oil versus the level of oleic acid - to be extra virgin it has to be less than 1% - and flavor, is hard, as you can't, or at least shouldn't, taste uncured olives. The only cues are visual, such as color. The amount of oleic acid in an olive increases faster than the amount of available oil and phenolics also develop at a different rate. So, if we pick too soon, we'll get low acid (good) but very low yield (not so good) and maybe too much green pepper (good for some). Pick too late, the oleic acid content may be too high (bad), but a lot more oil from the press (good, if you don't mind just being 'virgin'), and possibly the oil will taste too buttery and lack pungency (no cough is bad). Therefore, after carefully walking through the trees, checking color and cutting into the flesh, I have decided that we will be picking on the 23rd and 24th of November and pressing on the 25th, which, in addition to being the day before Thanksgiving, is also the first day I was able reserve time at The Olive Press. Sometimes we make the decisions, and sometimes the decisions are made for us.

Meanwhile, below is a female and/or juvenile Kingfisher I found hanging around the reservoir. Not a great shot, but it was far away and it is rather small.



October 22, 2008

First posting for 2009



It is fall, which, given the downward direction of the stock markets, seems to be appropriate. What I don't understand is why the credit freeze couldn't wait until January.

In the meantime were busy, just not very busy. It has been a while since we finished harvest, and it will be weeks before we'll start 'pre-pruning.' so in the vineyard we've been mending the fences, removing milk cartons from the baby vines, pulling out P and Q...



(Note: mainly we use a bulldozer.) Needless to say the view from the top of Q is quite different than it has been since 1985.



Winemaker David Munksgard is going to miss P & Q. He's made some beautiful wines from the blocks. I, however, am pretty damn excited. First I won't have to deal with the weird quirkiness that was Q and the phylloxera that was destroying P. The final proof of the correctness of our decision to replant C and the way we did it, is of course in the wine, or as they said in Rome, "In Vino Veritas." David drew some samples of the 2008 Chardonnays and what we got from the new blocks, C and Z were great, as in knock your socks off great. Of course we've been able to great before, for example, recently, the Wine Enthusiast awarded the latest 'Joy!' a 97 (Cellar Selection, only don't wait, drink it) and the 2002 Blanc de Blancs a 95. The point is that we'll be able to do it, great that is, more often.

Meantime, we're also doing more soils work in M and N.



Notice how shallow the root zone is in M, maybe 16" to 18" deep. Also note how rocky the soil is mixed with fractured sandstone as compared to the weathered sandstone in N below.



It's quite obvious, just looking at the above two photos, that M shouldn't have been trained as a quad cordon, and it probably would be best if we had planted Pinot Noir and run the rows North-South, while N screams out Chardonnay, even though it's Pinot Noir.

Meanwhile, there are people who still haven't finished picking yet. I can't figure out the logic of keeping fruit on vines that are losing their leaves. Especially in light of a presentation by U.C. Davis graduate student (I assume) at the ASEV 59th Annual Meeting in Portland, Oregon. In 2006 and 2007 a group of Napa winemakers were asked to determine whether grapes from Paso Robles were ready to pick. Then they tasted the wines. Here's the conclusion: "[T]his study indicates that the winemakers judged the fruit as most ready for harvest when it was above 30 Brix, but awarded the highest quality scores to the fruit and resulting wines harvested between 24 and 26 Brix."

What do we learn, well for one read the American Journal of Enology and Viticulture and second, don't wait so long to pick. As for Mr. Grad Student, keep up the good work, but remember, no one likes a smartass, so don't expect a job in Napa in the near future (of course I could be wrong, after all how else can we explain Neocombs).

Finally, proof that summer is over, the last of the radishes.

