

Davis Family Vineyards

2001 Zinfandel, Russian River Valley, Old Vine

Not just old vines...ancient vines. This vineyard at our home in Russian River Valley is made up of vines that are 107 years old! No, I am not that old! The vines were originally planted by the Vanucci family in 1896. The Italian families like the Vanuccis came to this area after the Gold Rush of 1849 to log fir and redwood trees for all the building that was taking place in San Francisco. These Italian families were used to having wine on the dinner table each night as part of their culture and heritage.

After long waits between shipments from the "old country", a few of the families found ways to bring cuttings from the vineyards back home, and begin making wine here in Sonoma County. Zinfandel is believed to be a derivative of the Primativo grape, native to Italy that has evolved to fit the California climate. Many of the old vineyards were destroyed in the 1920s during Prohibition, but a few, like this one survived. Most of the vineyards that escaped Prohibition did so by claiming to be wine for sacrament, and were saved on religious grounds. Praise the Lord!

We purchased the vineyard in 1996, at its 100th Birthday. The vineyard had been neglected for over 10 years and given up for dead. The brush and oak trees had grown over the small vines and completely covered the land. We had been looking for just the right spot in Russian River to plant Pinot Noir for over 7 years. Upon finding this sight we could see the beautiful hillsides with southern exposures; were delighted by the glowing results from the soil tests, but could see no signs of any existing vineyards. Once we were able to purchase the property (another story in itself) I began to clear the brush by hand to prepare the 10 acres for Pinot Noir and a small bit of Syrah. But as I cut and stacked the blackberry vines and oak saplings I noticed here and there that an old vine had sent one long arm up through all the tangled mess to the top of the canopy with just enough leaves to make just enough energy to stay alive! To make a long story short, out of the 10 acres I farm at our home in Russian River Valley we were able to save a 3-acre block of these old gentlemen!

They were not producing fruit and were in dire need of pruning and retraining. In 1998 they finally produced enough for 50 cases, in 99 – 75 cases and now around 200 cases per vintage. The vines are still "dry farmed" meaning they only get the water Mother Nature provides with her winter rains, which concentrates the flavors, and the vines are also farmed organically.

Because the vines are so old, they do not ripen evenly, so to make the best wine we make several passes through the vineyard at picking time choosing only the clusters that are ripe, starting a small fermentation, then making another pass a few days later, over and over until at the end of October the tiny vineyard is finally in. Is this economical? Absolutely not! *Is it worth it?* We think so... so please taste the results and you be the judge. The deep old roots lend a wonderful brown spice character to the brambly raspberry and boysenberry fruit so common in good Zinfandel; rich and full bodied but balanced to be perfect with food! Zinfandel is a great accompaniment to many of the dishes on your Thanksgiving table.

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