

THE WINE PRESS

Gold Medal Wine Club Newsletter: Vol. 9 No. 9

Thornton Winery Edition

In This Issue

THORNTON WINERY
Page 1

THIS MONTH'S WINES
Page 2

SPOTLIGHT PROFILE
Page 5

WINE WIZARD
Page 4

FOOD FOR THOUGHT
Page 6

JUDGE-THE-WINES
Page 7

REORDERS
Page 8



"With Gold Medal Wine Club,
The Road to Great Wine
Begins at Your Door."

www.goldmedalwine.com

THORNTON WINERY SPARKLES WITH FABULOUS '92 BRUT RESERVE

Five years ago we featured Thornton Winery's (then called Culbertson) incredible 1989 Brut Reserve sparkling wine. And what a wine it was! It still stands today as the biggest selling wine in our history. And the only reason we didn't sell even more than we did was because the winery ran out of wine too! As the *big* celebration nears, we thought it was only fitting to revisit this great champagne house and welcome the new Millennium in style.

Some of you may be asking yourself, "If the wine is that good, how come I haven't heard of it before?" To be honest with you, we hadn't heard of the winery until 1995, even though the winery's beginnings started in the late 1970s. Perhaps it's because small wineries tend to get lost among the 1,000 or so located within California. Or maybe it's because Thornton Winery is located in the *southern*

California wine country instead up north where the high-profile wineries reside. And it could be because most of the winery's distribution stays in California. Obviously, it's all of those reasons. But the more we learned about this interesting winery, the more we realized what we didn't know.

The biggest surprise was finding out that the *Thornton/Culbertson sparkling wines have won more awards and medals than any other American*

producer. With that kind of reputation you'd think the winery would be selling tons of wine.

Not so. Owner John Thornton keeps the production level small and manageable, yet offers almost two dozen different wines. So each wine produced is truly a very limited bottling. "We're at a size that we can make small batches of many different wines and still make a little

Continued on page 4



Gold Medal Wine Club features two wines each month from only the best small wineries of California. Featured wines include those which have earned medals in the top wine-industry competitions or have been highly rated by a respected national wine publication. On occasion we feature a wine which is of high medal-quality, but due to its very limited availability or by preference of the wine producer, may not be submitted to these venues for review. Each and every selection is a superb wine made in small quantities and with limited distribution. There are over 1,000 wineries in California producing thousands of different wines. Only wines fitting the above criteria are considered in choosing the featured selections each month.



1992 BRUT RESERVE

From America's most honored champagne house, comes Thornton Winery's top-of-the-line sparkler, 1992 Brut Reserve. Their Brut Reserve comes from a long line of single, double, even triple Gold Medal winners as well as Best of Class and Best of Region honors. The best cuvées are selected to create Thornton's Brut Reserve in the traditional French méthode champenoise style. Bottled in 1993 and aged in the bottle for six years before disgorgement (the final stage of production) in 1999. This champagne is lean and lively with a fine mousse and lightly toasty nose. It is full, firm and frothy on the palate with light citrusy flavors and subtle highlights of creamy yeast. This polished wine stays bright and zesty from front to back. Winemaker Jon McPherson has crafted another beauty.

1997 CÔTE RED

Côte means literally slope or hill in French. The French growers are great believers in the viticultural merits of hillsides, which is why many French wines have Côte as part of their name or a derivation such as Coteau or Côtes. Winemaker Jon McPherson created his own tantalizing "hillside red wine" blend of five grape varietals with origins in the Rhône region of France. The grapes used to make this unique wine are all from rare 70—80 year-old vines. The blend has a beautiful, red, plum color with spicy fruit qualities in the nose. The five varietals meld to yield a richly complex wine: berries, rose petals, plums, a touch of tobacco and cedar. In addition to the subtle oak, soft mouth-filling tannins give way to the rich fruit flavors and long, lingering finish. Very enjoyable now and is sure to age and become more beguiling with time.

WINE CREDENTIAL HIGHLIGHTS

1992 VINTAGE: *Gold Medal Special Selection*—Sparkling wines are generally not reviewed or rated by the major wine publications until the November and December holiday season.

LEGACY: Thornton (formerly Culbertson) sparkling wines have won more awards in the 1990s than any other American producer.

1997 VINTAGE: *Double Gold Medal, Best of Region, Best of Class*—California State Fair.

LEGACY: 1996 vintage won 3 Gold Medals; formerly called Rosso Vecchio which has a long legacy of Gold Medals.

Just the facts:

pH	3.20
Total Acid85 g/100 mls
Alcohol	12.3%
Cases Produced	5,000
Aged en Tirage	6 Years
Drink Now or Up to Year	2004

Just the facts:

pH	3.69
Total Acid72 g/100 mls
Alcohol	13.8%
Cases Produced	1,700
Aged in French and American Oak	14 Months
Drink Now or Up to Year	2005

GOLD MEDAL SPOTLIGHT

John and Sally Thornton

John and Sally Thornton thought a winery would be an interesting investment and a fun diversion. "The opportunity came to us and we thought it was a good idea," states John. But what started as a more or less passive investment turned into a passion. The wine business does that to people. "We kept putting more and more money into the winery until we found ourselves owning 98% of it," continues John. "It was a situation that evolved and happened gradually," says Sally Thornton. "It progressively needed more time and attention."

John & Sally Thornton have developed one of the most successful and diverse wineries in California.



But don't let their modest remarks about how Thornton Winery came about fool you. Thornton Winery didn't just happen. Their involvement and ultimate success in the winery is a reflection of a strong *can-do* attitude the Thorntons both share. "If you're going to do something, why not do it the right way?" says Sally Thornton rhetorically. And the Thorntons are no strangers to success and achievement. Over the last thirty-five years they have been intimately involved with over two dozen successful business ventures as well as numerous civic organizations and community projects.

John Thornton was born and raised in Long Beach, California. He attended Pomona College where he earned a degree in Economics.

Out of school he entered the Navy, attaining the rank of lieutenant. After the Navy, he went back to school, this time earning an MBA from Harvard Business School.

His business career began in 1957 when he went to work at Rohr

Corporation, a southern California company that made parts for aircraft engines. For eight years, he worked in a variety of positions including sales, contract management and handling their computer systems. In 1965, John left Rohr Corp. to help a friend run what was then a small electronic instrument company, called Wavetek. For the next twenty years as president of Wavetek, he orchestrated their growth from under a half-million in sales to over eighty-five million. During that period, he invested in and helped direct a handful of other companies too. One of those companies was called Micom Systems, in which the Thorntons became majority stockholders in 1976. As Chairman of the Board he guided Micom over the next dozen years from \$400,000 in sales to \$240,000,000.

Sally Thornton has been an active participant in these extraordinary achievements too. She served on the board of Micom Systems as well as other companies in which the Thorntons have invested. She is currently serving on the board of both Mitek Systems (another Thornton investment) and Thornton Winery.

Sally's leadership and involvement in the San Diego community over the years has been nothing short of astounding. She has spearheaded numerous charitable fund raisers, advisory boards, committees etc., for

Continued on page 6

WINE WIZARD



- 1) According to the *Guinness Book of World Records*, the world's largest champagne bottle ever made held the equivalent of how many regular size bottles?
- 2) There are two principal methods to produce sparkling wines. Can you name the methods and explain the difference?
- 3) A wine's dryness or relative sweetness is measured by the amount of Residual Sugar it contains. Do you know which is drier, a champagne labeled *Brut* or one labeled *Extra Dry*?

Continued from page 1

money at it," says owner John Thornton. "Running out of wine is frustrating at times, but it's still more fun than making a huge amount of just three or four wines."

If you ever visit the Thornton Winery in the southern California wine country of Temecula, you will quickly see that having "fun" is an important objective. John Thornton and his wife Sally have created a

unique destination-winery that attracts visitors from all over California. The centerpiece on their 20-acre property is the winery production facilities where talented winemaker, Jon McPherson, crafts all of the Thornton wines. Naturally, tours and tastings are offered every day, throughout the day. They also run a contemporary-style, first-class restaurant called Café Champagne. The eatery has earned numerous restaurant industry awards and provides a venue for fabulous winemaker dinners. Another compelling reason to visit is to attend one of the winery's year-round special events. During the summer, the winery puts on a popular jazz concert series featuring major artists such as America, David Benoit and Hiroshima. Events in other seasons include dances, grape stomping parties and various theme dinners. Add to that a gift shop, champagne tasting lounge, banquet and wedding facilities, and you have a place that's *fun!*

Despite all the peripheral fun and festivities, Thornton Winery has made serious inroads with their still and sparkling wines. The winery's roots began in the late 1970s as a hobby of businessman John Culbertson. Culbertson owned a Houston-based company called Martech International that specialized in supplying diving and exploration services to the oil industry. Over a number of years, Culbertson fine-tuned his wine making hobby to the point where

the wine community finally began to take notice of his nicely crafted sparklers. He approached his friends and fellow wine enthusiasts, John and Sally Thornton of San Diego, with a plan to expand the operation by building a new showcase winery, restaurant and entertainment area. The Thorntons liked the concept and became major investors in Culbertson's new endeavor in 1987.

By the end of 1988, the new facilities were nearing completion, but the project was taking much more capital than originally expected. The Thorntons believed fully in the project, though, and continued to finance the expansion. By 1991, the new operation had still not begun to gel financially and required even more infusions of cash. Ultimately, the Thorntons acquired 100% interest in the winery and finished the transformation.



Thornton Winery is an impressive highlight on visits to the Temecula wine country.

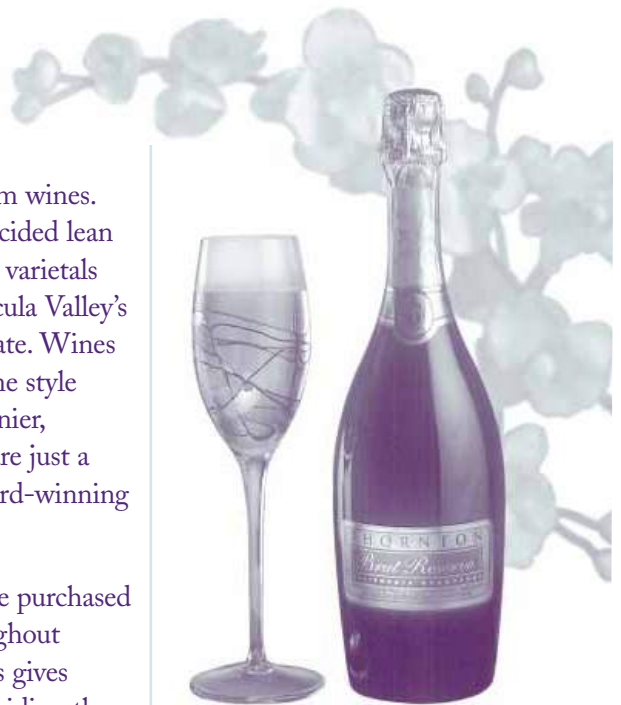
Throughout this period of expansion and uncertainty, the winery continued to build on their reputation for making outstanding wines. Jon McPherson took over the winemaking duties in 1987 and year after year was demonstrating his

exceptional talents. His expertise broadened in scope when, in 1992, Thornton Winery acquired Brindiamo Winery which provided an avenue for producing still wines to accompany the sparkling wines. Over the next few years, the label name phased from Culbertson over to Thornton. "The still wines have complimented our champagne," says John Thornton. "The majority of champagne sales happen during the last few months of the year. So not only do we have a more balanced revenue stream throughout the year, we also have a wider variety of offerings."

Today the winery produces six different styles of sparkling wine, ranging from Brut and Blanc de Noir, to Blanc de Blanc and Brut

Reserve. Thornton also produces ten to twelve non-sparkling, specialty wines each year. Special, because they are not mass-produced mainstream wines. Thornton wines take a decided lean toward Rhone and Italian varietals that emphasize the Temecula Valley's Mediterranean-style climate. Wines such as Côte Red (a Rhone style blend), Pinot Blanc, Viognier, Muscato and Carignane are just a few examples of their award-winning premium varietal wines.

Most of the grapes are purchased from other growers throughout California. "Buying grapes gives us a lot of flexibility in deciding the wines we want to produce," says John. "It's a big reason we can afford



to make a myriad of specialty wines in small quantities."

Continued on page 7

ANSWERS TO WINE WIZARD

1) Traditionally, the largest wine bottle produced is called a *Nebuchadnezzar*. It is large enough to hold a whopping 20 bottles. However, the world's largest was used by Lauren Bacall to christen the huge passenger ship **Monarch of the Seas**. The bottle was called a "sovereign" because the ship it was first used to christen was called **Sovereign of the Seas**. The bottle stands three feet high, weighs seventy-seven pounds, and holds about three cases (36 bottles) of regular size bottles! No chances were taken here: an elaborate system of pulleys and ropes was used to hoist up the bottle encased in a net so that Bacall could simply snip the cord. When she did, the bottle released, smashed against the ship, and broke.

2) The two principal methods of making sparkling wine are **Charmat** and **méthode champenoise**. Charmat is a bulk process that involves fermentation in a large tank (versus in the bottle) to make relatively simple and inexpensive sparkling wines. These wines generally have the young, fruity characteristics found in white and pink table wines just after they are released into the market. Yeast character is not emphasized and aging of the wine is not desired: the whole process can be completed in as little as two weeks. During the last two decades, tank-fermented sparkling wines have consistently accounted for around 75% of American sparkling wine consumption. Méthode champenoise is the traditional French process for making sparkling wine. It is an intricate and labor intensive procedure that involves a series of stringent regulations that bring the grape from the vine to the bottle—pressing, fermentation, blending, yeast aging, bottling, riddling, disgorging, dosage and finally, corking. Fermentation occurs in the bottle, not in a huge tank. Aging in the bottle is usually a 3 to 5 year period. Lots of hand labor is required to riddle, disgorge and finally apply the dosage. Only the best sparkling wines are made this way.

3) It may surprise you that a **Brut** is drier than **Extra Dry**. Drier still is one labeled **Extra Brut**. Residual sugar is measured in grams per liter. At one extreme is **Extra Brut** which is bone dry at less than 6 grams of sugar per liter (0.6% R.S.); **Brut** (dry) falls between 6 and 15 g/l (1.5% R.S.); **Extra Dry** (medium dry) is 12—20 g/l; **Sec** (noticeably sweet) is 17—35 g/l; **Demi-Sec** (very sweet) is 33—50 g/l; **Doux** (super sweet) is 50+ g/l.



Jon McPherson came to California from Texas in 1985. “At a very early age I knew I wanted to be in the wine business,” he recalls.

Jon’s dad, Clinton McPherson, was a chemistry professor at Texas Tech University. And being a wine enthusiast, he was naturally interested in wine chemistry. He researched and experimented with various types of grapes that were being grown in the university’s experimental vineyard. When the school plowed it under to make room for more buildings, Clinton started a vineyard of his own. As often happens with wine-enthusiast-turned-wine-professional, once you take the plunge there’s no turning back. In 1976, Clinton went on to start a full-fledged winery in Lubbock, Texas called Llano Estacado. He has since founded the Texas Grape Growers Association and been a driving force behind the growth of the Texas wine industry.

As a child, Jon grew up helping his father with various chores around the winery, helped plant the grapes

and even learned how to make the wines. This early exposure and influence set a clear path for the future. Jon attended Texas Tech and earned a degree in Food Science with a minor in Chemistry. In 1985, he



Winemaker extraordinaire, Jon McPherson, riddling a batch of sparkling wine.

was offered the job of assistant winemaker at Culbertson Winery, a small, new champagne winery in southern California. Two years after his arrival, he took over the head winemaking duties. Through the end of the

decade Jon turned out one medal winning sparkling wine after another. When ownership changed in the early 1990s Jon continued to dominate the sparkling wine scene without skipping a beat. And with the advent of the Thornton wines, he has broadened his expertise as “winemaker for all wines.” Jon himself sources all the grapes he uses in his wines. “I prefer the central coast areas for Pinot Noir and Chardonnay,” he points out. “And the area around the winery in Temecula is ideal for the Rhone and Italian style wines we’re making,” he adds. An increasing number of wineries are leaning toward the Rhone and Italian style wines as are consumers who are looking for alternatives to the mainstream every day Chardonnays, Cabernets and Merlots.

Jon’s efforts in both the sparkling and still wine arena has catapulted him to the top tier of winemakers. His winemaking expertise has resulted in a record number of awards and medals for Thornton wines. 🍷

Continued from page 5

a myriad of causes such as hospitals, museums, public broadcasting and various organizations that are fighting diseases like Arthritis, Cerebral Palsy and Epilepsy. Recently, Sally was named the San Diego Leukemia Society’s *Woman of the Year*. The list of achievements and contribution of time and effort is literally too voluminous to print.

Growing up in San Diego, both of Sally’s parents were also over-achievers. Her dad was a nationally known oral surgeon and her mom was an amateur golf champion. Both were very involved in the community and were also food and wine enthusiasts. “At a very early age I was exposed to an incredibly wide variety of foods,” recalls Sally. “It fueled a lifelong enjoyment of mine, that of

pairing food and wine.”

It is obvious that the pairing of the Thorntons and their winery has been the right combination too. With the winery, restaurant and entertainment events, they have created a fabulous venue for the enjoyment of food and wine. Let’s hope for other wineries to “just happen” the way Thornton Winery did! 🍷

JUDGE-THE-WINES RESULTS

In this section we publish the cumulative, on-going tallies of the Judge-the-Wines Scoresheets which are provided in each delivery of wine and mailed back in by Club members. We believe it is fun as well as educational to think about and record the different characteristics of the wines you sample. No matter how acute you think your palate is, the person next to you will probably have a different thought or opinion about a certain characteristic of the wine you are sampling. It can also prove beneficial to record your impressions of the wine for reference at a later date.

Below are the most recent tallies of the Scoresheets returned. Gold Medal Wine Club specializes in featuring small-sized wineries and small-production wines. Depending on availability from the winery, all members may not receive every wine that is listed below. The Scoresheet results which are printed in green indicate the wine selections that as of press time are still available for reorder.

Mazzocco — 1994 Cabernet Sauvignon

MEDALS:	GOLD	SILVER	BRONZE
RESULTS:	95%	4%	1%

Mazzocco — 1997 Chardonnay

MEDALS:	GOLD	SILVER	BRONZE
RESULTS:	92%	6%	2%

Russian River — 1997 Sauvignon Blanc

MEDALS:	GOLD	SILVER	BRONZE
RESULTS:	87%	9%	4%

Topolos — 1997 Charbono

MEDALS:	GOLD	SILVER	BRONZE
RESULTS:	89%	6%	5%

Monte Volpe — 1997 Pinot Bianco

MEDALS:	GOLD	SILVER	BRONZE
RESULTS:	90%	6%	4%

Monte Volpe — 1995 Nebbiolo

MEDALS:	GOLD	SILVER	BRONZE
RESULTS:	89%	8%	3%

Monte Volpe — 1996 Dolcetto

MEDALS:	GOLD	SILVER	BRONZE
RESULTS:	92%	5%	3%

Bommarito — 1997 Merlot

MEDALS:	GOLD	SILVER	BRONZE
RESULTS:	92%	5%	3%

The above wines were recently featured. Due to space limitations, the entire list of available wines is not listed—please call to inquire about other previous favorites.

■ *Indicates wine is still available*

Continued from page 5

A large percentage of the winery's total production is sold right there at the winery and its surrounding facilities. The growth rate ahead figures to be about 10%—15% per year. "We don't want to be as big as a Gallo or Mondavi," says John. "Our goal is to make the highest quality wines we can and make the business support itself," he continues. "We want to provide as delightful an experience as possible when people come to visit," adds Sally Thornton. "Attracting people to the winery helps the other wineries in the area, as well as the community." 🍷



"Because his wine collection puts him in a good mood, that's why I had it built."

THE GRAPEVINE

Comments from us and Club members

It's finally here!!! Champagne Month!! If you did not receive the sparkling wine selection in your shipment, it's because you requested to receive reds-*only*, with no exceptions; or you told us specifically "no champagne." However, if you would like to try this year's great sparkling wine feature, just give us a call and request a bottle to be included with next month's wine. Or if you're in a real hurry, we can send you a couple of bottles right away. If you've enjoyed the wine selections so far this year, wait 'til you taste what's coming up! We've got great surprises coming up that'll have you dancin' on the table (or at least in the aisle).

[The Mazzocco 1994 Cabernet Sauvignon was] A really good full bodied Cab. The aroma was fantastic. We decanted for about an hour!
—Glynn Springer, Score 47

[The Monte Volpe 1997 Pinot Bianco was] Lovely! Something a little different—we enjoyed it with salmon and cheese!
—Scot Hutto, Score 50

[The Mazzocco 1997 Chardonnay] Is a very well made balanced Chardonnay. Good varietal flavor, not over oaked. Great!
—James L. McCoy, Score 45

Extremely well balanced. We thoroughly enjoyed [the Topolos 1997 Charbono]!
—Greg Amestoy, Score 49

[The Mazzocco 1994 Cabernet Sauvignon had] Great flavor and aroma! The bottle was empty all too fast!
—Susan Hobbes, Score 46

[The Mazzocco 1994 Cabernet Sauvignon was] Very good. One of the best we've tasted!
—Bret Warner, Score 51

Maximum score is 55. Members who send in their wine ratings on the provided Scoresheets are eligible to receive a bonus half-case of any Gold Medal Series wine that is in stock if your name is drawn. Drawings are held 4 times a year at the end of each quarter. (Maximum of one Scoresheet per wine per membership)...GMWC

R E O R D E R

Two gems from Thornton Winery at incredible values. The Côte Red Rhone style wine is complex and huge on flavor. Winemaker, Jon McPherson makes one of America's best Brut sparkling wines. Now is the time to secure your holiday bubbly! Note the special 3-bottle reorder option for this year's fabulous sparkling wine selection.

THORNTON WINERY	Retail Price Winery-Direct	Club Price 2-Bottle Members	Club Price 4-Bottle Members
1992 Brut Reserve* Limited Bottling	Special 3-Pack \$72 Half Case-6 \$144 Full Case-12 \$288	\$51 (29% Off) \$93 (35% Off) \$172 (40% Off)	\$47 (35% Off) \$86 (40% Off) \$159 (45% Off)
1997 Côte Red* Limited Bottling	Half Case-6 \$90 Full Case-12 \$180	\$60 (33% Off) \$112 (38% Off)	\$55 (39% Off) \$99 (45% Off)

Reorder Hotline: 1-800-266-8888
Reorder Faxline: 1-800-266-8889

Note: Tax & shipping are not included in the above prices. Call for details. Due to weight, shipping cost for sparkling wine orders is \$1.00 higher.

**Availability is very limited.*