

THE WINE PRESS

Gold Medal Wine Club Newsletter: Vol. 16 No. 9

Abundance Vineyards Edition

In This Issue

ABUNDANCE VINEYARDS
Page 1

THIS MONTH'S WINES
Page 2

SPOTLIGHT PROFILES
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

"GOOD WINE, GOOD FOOD, GOOD FRIENDS" IS MANTRA FOR MENCARINI BROTHERS' ABUNDANCE VINEYARDS

The entity that is present day Abundance Vineyards resulted from a rather complex set of circumstances, revolving around the Benziger Family of Sonoma County. When the Benzigers sold their huge Glen Ellen Winery operation to wine industry giant Heublein (owners at the time of Beaulieu Vineyard and Inglenook, among others) in the Fall of 1993, a number of family members wound up splitting the proceeds.

Among this group was one Bruce Rector, the godson of Dino Mencarini. Rector wanted badly to stay in the wine business but a non-compete clause presented problems toward locating the new venture in or around Sonoma County.

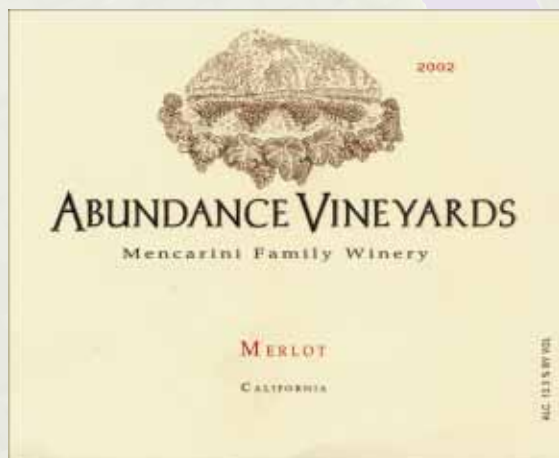
Rector consulted his godfather, who was also in Heublein's employ as a grape sourcer and was advised to attempt to

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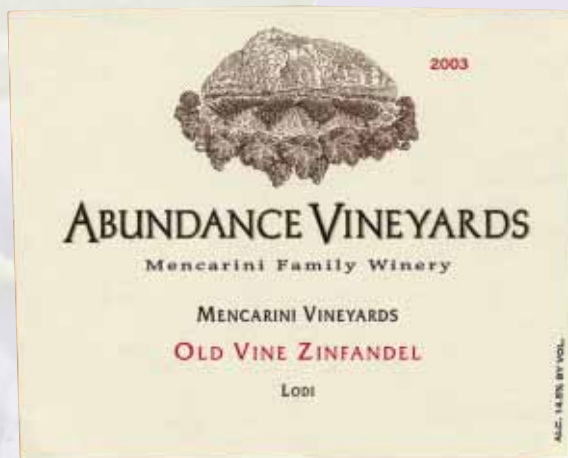
According to the Mencarinis, the 2006 harvest of the "60-100 year old" Zinfandel vines will be in late September this year.

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 1,800 wineries in California producing thousands of different wines. Only wines fitting the above criteria are considered in choosing the featured selections each month.



2002 MERLOT

The 2002 California Merlot is the first release of this varietal from Abundance Vineyards; they are very proud of their accomplishment, and rightfully so! With the results coming in from the national competitions, the 2002 California Merlot has received its first **Gold Medal** from the *Los Angeles County Fair Wine Competition*. A **Silver Medal** was awarded at the *Orange County Fair Wine Competition* and a second **Silver Medal** was won at the *Hilton Head Wine Competition*. A dark red hue with a ruby red edge, the 2002 California Merlot opens with an aroma of toasted-smoky oak and then a quick release of ripe Bing cherry and plum comes to the surface. As the wine continues to breathe, mineral notes and earthy nuances appear. The mouth is remarkably soft for being a young wine and the finish is medium to long with a mouth full of lingering fruit, vanilla and oak to the end. Aged 22 months in French oak. 82% Merlot and 18% Syrah. Enjoy now through 2009.



2003 OLD VINE ZINFANDEL

Lodi's Old Vine Zinfandels are highly sought after and recognized as one of California's classic varietals. The results are coming in for the 2003 Abundance Mencarini Vineyards Old Vine Zinfandel, and so far, the winery has won a **Silver Medal** at the *San Francisco Chronicle Wine Competition* and a **Silver Medal** at the *Orange County Fair Wine Competition*. The fruit of these 60-100 year old head-pruned vines is extremely rich and spicy and perfectly structured, which is prevalent in the bouquet and flavor of this delicious Old Vine Zin. A deep purple color with rich violet rim denotes the boldness of this wine. The juicy berry flavors, clove and mature oak tannins are framed with moderate alcohol which enhances the lengthy finish. A well balanced, sturdy wine to enjoy with fresh tomato sauces on pastas, your favorite Italian food, grilled meats or with any strong cheese. Aged for 18 months in French oak. 100% Estate Old Vine Zinfandel. Drink now through 2012.

WINE CREDENTIAL HIGHLIGHTS

2002 VINTAGE: **Gold Medal**— *Los Angeles County Fair Competition*; **Silver Medal**— *Orange County Fair Wine Competition* plus an additional **Silver Medal**— *Hilton Head Wine Competition*.

LEGACY: Talent and ambition coupled with desire and dedication best describes Abundance Vineyard's newest varietal.

Just the facts:

pH	3.63
Alcohol	13.3%
Total Acid	0.58 g/100 mls
Aged in Oak	22 Months
Cases Produced	3,600
Drink Now or Up to Year	2009

2003 VINTAGE: **Silver Medal**— *San Francisco Chronicle Wine Competition*; **Silver Medal**— *Orange County Fair Wine Competition*.

LEGACY: Mencarini Family's time tested 60-100 year old Zinfandel vines continue to produce award-winning wines year after year.

Just the facts:

pH	3.67
Alcohol	14.5%
Total Acid	0.631 g/100 mls
Aged in Oak	18 months
Cases Produced	3,953
Drink Now or Up to Year	2012

GOLD MEDAL SPOTLIGHT

Dino Mencarini

The fact that he couldn't speak English when he entered grammar school didn't phase Dino Mencarini one bit; he simply learned the language and set about living the rest of his life. His Italian-born grandparents spoke only Italian in their household, but Dino considers that fact a mixed blessing.

Mencarini, now 64, figures he actually benefited from the dichotomy of languages.

"First of all, that's just the way it was in my family and other Italian families I knew," Mencarini recalled. "It was the old, traditional way of doing things. When I entered school, I knew I had to learn to get ahead. It taught me a valuable lesson for later life."

Mencarini began working for his family when he was nine or ten, and has worked steadfastly ever since.

"My family were farmers in the Tuscany region of Italy and we became farmers here in California. At first our family were sharecroppers, but slowly began farming land that we were able to buy. Then my father decided he wanted to plant row crops, tomatoes, corn and alfalfa. By the mid-1950s, we owned somewhere between 400 and 500 acres, and most of it was planted in tomatoes that were used for canning," he added.

But Dino and his younger brother Ron eventually grew tired of row farming and developed an interest in planting grapes. The Mencarini family had always kept a small vineyard on their land and also made a small amount of wine for the family's personal use. Dino took notice of the increased attention grapes were



In his grandfather's vineyard, a much younger Dino Mencarini poses for his photograph.

receiving around his hometown of Lodi and made a decision to get him and his brother into the wine business.

"It was sometime in late 1959," Mencarini looked back. "We started acquiring small pieces of land that were suitable for growing grapes. For some reason I knew our future was associated with grapes."

By 1970, the Mencarini Brothers were the owners of nearly 250 acres around Lodi, planted in different varieties. Dino also became a much sought after sourcer of grapes for large companies, and still represents the massive Brown-Foreman wine conglomerate in securing grapes for some of their entities.

In the mid-1980s, he was sourcing grapes for Benziger Family of Sonoma when he finally got into the winery business on his own.


"I always knew I would be in the winery business," he confided. "When things didn't work out too well with Cuisine Cellars, I took everyone else out and decided to do it for myself and my brother."

And here is where Dino Mencarini's true talent is best personified in his attitude toward his new Abundance Vineyards.

"I'm a believer in the adage that you can't just take from something all the time. The grape business has been very good to all of us and now I think it's time to give something back. I truly want to provide our customers with a product that is both quality-oriented and comes at a price that is really realistic. In that way I show respect for the consumer and provide honesty in my product that is not always there in other wines."

Dino Mencarini is dedicated to making Abundance Vineyards a

Continued on page 6



**WINE
WIZARD**

- 1) Why should we toast Count Agoston Haraszthy?
- 2) What did the DNA testing on Zinfandel unfold?
- 3) What is the French expression for "on the lees"?

Continued from page 1

locate the new business in and around Lodi, in California's gigantic Central Valley. It was Mencarini's opinion that Lodi was an up and coming region that was just beginning to be known for its high quality grapes and wines.

Rector gathered a number of friends and investors and put together



Planning for the harvest, Ron and Dino walk the vineyards to check the grapes.

a winery operation that was called Cuisine Cellars and went about establishing the new business. The first vintages were released around 1994, and were initially well received.

But, as in most startup businesses, some of the investors who expected quick profits were disappointed and soon began to fail to support the venture. When additional cash inputs were necessary to continue the business, a number of owners balked at the needed contributions.

"When all this started to happen," remarked Dino Mencarini, "I stood back and listened for a while and then I decided it was too much to take. I talked to everyone involved and made an offer to buy everyone else out. After all, I had my own money at stake and the way we were heading just wasn't that productive."

Mencarini decided to completely revamp the existing winery in order to give it a fresh lease on life. "We gathered together a number of friends and family and bounced a number of ideas off the group. Sometime during the evening, one woman remarked that her evening had developed abundantly, so we asked her to explain. She told us that the combination of good wine, good food and great friends provided an abundantly good evening. Everyone loved the term and I immediately decided it would be a fitting name for the new winery."

The first Abundance Vineyards wines were released in 1997, a smallish 300 to 400 cases. Abundance has grown steadily during the past decade and now bottles between

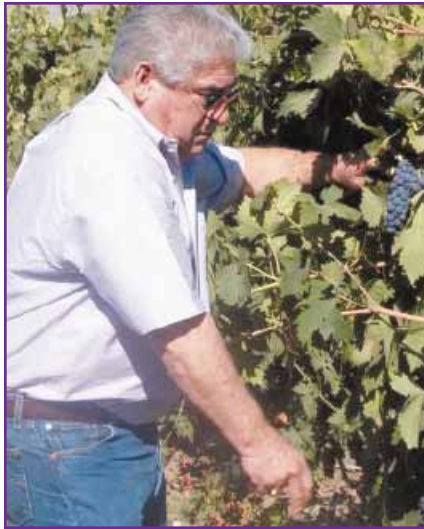


Amy proudly displays the first bottle "off the line" of the 2003 Old Vine Zinfandel.

8,500 and 8,600 cases. "What I really need to do is make the entire operation profitable," Mencarini added. "To do that we will have to nearly double our size. If we continue growing at our present rate, that shouldn't take too long."

Mencarini also wants to have the entire Abundance Vineyards production to be estate bottled, a specific that will start with the 2007 bottling. Since the winery owns more than six hundred acres around Lodi, there is ample fruit available for projected future growth.

At present Dino Mencarini shares the ownership responsibilities of abundance Vineyards with his younger brother Ron, 62. While Dino does most of the marketing, traveling and office decision-making, Ron stays closer to home and is responsible for the extensive vineyard operation that sets Abundance apart from many of its competitors.



Dino tests the sugar levels of the 2006 Estate Merlot crop.

Even though a number of offers to buy the vineyards and winery have been advanced, the Mencarinis

are adamant about not selling their still evolving winery.

“Having our name on the label is a little like having kids,” Dino Mencarini finalized. “We’ve finally seen it through its growing pains and now it’s time to be able to see just how its personality develops. After all, we even integrated a cornucopia into the design of our label. It certainly seems fitting that we should be able to enjoy the fruits of all our labors.”

Dino & Ron Mencarini are totally dedicated to the proposition that they will produce wonderfully refreshing wines that appeal to a wide section of today’s American

palate. When you consider that they also want to produce these wines at a truly reasonable price, you are reasonably sure they are onto something. Enjoy! 🍷



Amy, Loren and Courtney (“the pregnant one”) take care of the vineyard’s office work and winery customers.

ANSWERS TO WINE WIZARD

1) Count Agoston Haraszthy, a Hungarian Nobleman, came to the United States in 1840 and settled in San Diego. He was intrigued by the Mission grape and was surprised to learn of its European origin. It was in San Diego where he began to preach that good wine can only be made from good grapes. In 1852, he received six choice rooted vines and 160 cuttings from Hungary. In the shipment were two small bundles, one was the Muscat of Alexandria and the other was said to be the famous mystery grape, the Zinfandel. In 1857, he bought the Vineyard Farm planted in 1834 by Salvadore Vallejo in Sonoma. Among the first vines he planted was the Zinfandel. Haraszthy named his new domain Buena Vista. By the end of the year he planted 80,000 vines of varying varietals. Haraszthy’s role in the development fine wines and popularization of the Zin culture was great; Zinfandel was the most widely planted varietal in California from 1860 to the early 1990s.

2) Knowing the true origin of California’s Zinfandel has been an on-going controversy among growers, winemakers and historians for decades. In 2001, Carole Meredith, an expert in genetic mapping at the University of California Davis, proved through the use of DNA that Zinfandel and an indigenous Croatian grape called Crljenak are one and the same. She has also determined that Zinfandel and the Italian varietal Primitivo are different clones of the same variety. It has long been suspected that the origins of Zinfandel would be found around the Adriatic Sea.

3) The French term for “on the lees” is “sur lie” [sor LEE]. Lees is the coarse sediment, which consists of dead yeast cells and small grape particles that accumulate during fermentation. Winemakers believe that certain wines benefit from being aged sur lie. Chardonnay or Sauvignon Blanc wines are thought to gain complexity if aged this way for a time. Sur lie happens as a matter of course with sparkling wines made in the traditional Méthode Champenoise. Muscadet wines from France’s Loire region occasionally have the phrase “mis en bouteille sur lie” on the label, which means the wine was bottled from barrels where the lees were not drained or filtered. These wines have a creamy, yeasty flavor and a touch of carbon dioxide which gives a slight prickling sensation on the tongue.





FOOD FOR THOUGHT

LAMB CHOPS WITH ASPARAGUS AND PEARL ONION

Pair with 2002 Abundance Vineyards California Merlot.

Serves 4

8 double lamb chops (marinate in minced rosemary, olive oil and garlic)
8 ounces peeled pearl onions
1 pound asparagus, white stalks trimmed off
Olive oil as needed
2 tablespoons minced rosemary (reserve 4 sprigs for garnish)
1 cup Merlot
1 tablespoon minced shallots
Salt and pepper to taste
1 quart veal stock reduced to 1 cup over browned lamb trimmings

Brown the pearl onion in olive oil and cover. Roast in 375° F over for 15–20 minutes, toss every 5 minutes. Season the lamb with salt and pepper and brown in large sauté pan. Reserve pan for the sauce preparation to follow. Place the chops on a cooling rack on a sheet pan. Roast the chops at 425° F for 10–12 minutes or until they reach 130° F internal temperature. Lay the asparagus in one layer on baking dish, toss in olive oil, salt and pepper. Roast the asparagus for 7–8 minutes at 425° F. Using the pan the lamb was browned in, lightly sauté the shallots and minced rosemary. Add the Merlot and reduce to 2 tablespoons. Add the reduced lamb stock. Season with a pinch of salt and pepper and pour into a bowl.

Presentation: Place 2 chops at the bottom of the plate fan out 5 spears of asparagus in between and top the asparagus with roasted onions. Spoon the sauce over each chop and garnish with a rosemary sprig.

BLACK BEAN RELISH TOPPING FOR GRILLED STEAK

Pair with 2005 Abundance Vineyards Old Vine Zinfandel.

Serves 4

2 tablespoons olive oil
1 red onion, diced
2 jalapeños, chopped
1 tablespoon chopped garlic
2 red bell peppers, roasted, peeled, seeded and diced
1/4 cup balsamic vinegar
1/4 cup chopped fresh cilantro
1 tablespoon fresh chopped parsley
1 teaspoon ground cumin
1 teaspoon kosher salt
1-1/2 cups black beans, drained

Heat olive oil over high heat. Add the onion, jalapeño and garlic and cook 1-2 minutes. Add the red bell peppers and vinegar. Bring to a boil. Reduce the heat and add the cilantro, parsley, cumin and salt. Transfer to a medium bowl and add the black beans. Toss to mix well. Serve as dip with corn chips or as a topping for steaks or pork chops.



Some things never change in the Family's vineyard, even after three generations. It takes time to hand-tie the vines.

Continued from page 5

profitable and well-respected entity in the wine industry. He travels a great deal and wins over consumers with his direct approach.

“I try not to be dismal or self-important whenever I meet people,” he confided. “What comes out of my mouth seems to refresh people. I relate to the basics of my business and rarely use the dorky terms of winemaking that are

available. It goes back to the lesson I learned in grammar school when I had to learn English to survive.”

No matter what approach he has decided upon, the road for Dino Mencarini and Abundance Vineyards seems lined with roses and accolades. His wines are gaining critical approval and his production is also growing at a steady rate.

JUDGE-THE-WINES RESULTS

In this section we publish the cumulative, on-going tallies of the Judge-the-Wines Scorecards 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 Scorecards 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 Scorecard results which are printed in green indicate the wine selections that as of press time are still available for reorder.

2005 Taft Street Chardonnay

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

2005 Incognito Viognier

MEDALS:	GOLD	SILVER	BRONZE
RESULTS:	89%	7%	4%

2000 Arbios Cabernet Sauvignon

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

2001 Tulip Hill Sauvignon Blanc

MEDALS:	GOLD	SILVER	BRONZE
RESULTS:	88%	7%	5%

2002 Taft Street Merlot

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

2004 Incognito Rouge

MEDALS:	GOLD	SILVER	BRONZE
RESULTS:	94%	4%	2%

2005 Praxis Viognier

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

2004 Tulip Hill Mirage

MEDALS:	GOLD	SILVER	BRONZE
RESULTS:	89%	7%	4%

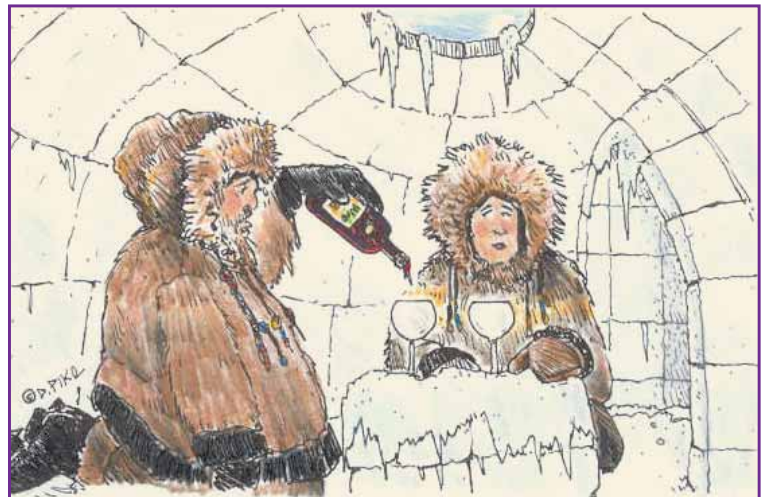
The above wines were recently featured. Due to space limitations, the entire list of available wines is not listed.

To see our entire inventory and reorder online, go to: www.goldmedalwine.com/member

■ Indicates wine is still available

For Dino Mencarini, his winery and employees are the most important aspects of his life. He even intends to allow his employees to participate in the ownership of Abundance Vineyards some time in the not too distant future, a rarity in the wine industry. Mencarini figures the staff has worked hard for Abundance's success and deserves a hand in its future.

For this we applaud Dino Mencarini and wish him and Abundance Vineyards the very best for the future. Enjoy! 🍷



"I don't get it. They told me to serve Merlot at room temperature."

©www.doubfulaccounts.com

THE GRAPEVINE

Comments from us and Club members

It's that time of the year again... September is California champagne month and this year we have the privilege of bringing you one of Napa Valley's finest sparkling champagnes—the Domaine Montreaux Brut produced by the Corley Family of Napa Valley. Throughout the year we search California's best (and smallest) producers of the finest selections available. This year we are proud to offer you our selection from the Monticello Vineyards. Enjoy this exquisite example of California champagne during your next special occasion—or any day! Save 45% off on a case of this incredibly delightful California champagne during our **Pre-Holiday Champagne Blowout Special**—just place your order before October 15th.

The Italian Adventure Get-Away winners, Ron and Sandy Harris, back from their trip, share their vacation pictures online at www.goldmedalwine.com/italy.

Dear Gold Medal Wine Club

We had a wonderful time. We enjoyed our stay in the B&B at Rivetto Winery. Enrico and his father were wonderful hosts. We toured the Piemonte region, visiting several historic castles in addition to sampling some great wines. We even hiked the cities of the Cinque Terre on the Italian Riviera. The food was outstanding. We were sorry to see it come to an end.

Sincerely— Ron and Sandy Harris

The drawing for The **Ultimate Napa-Get-Away Wine Cruise for Two** is scheduled for September 15th, 2006. The contest winners will be posted on our website www.goldmedalwine.com after their notification. We are currently planning our next Adventure-Get-Away, so watch for the announcement and a link to the entry form on our home page in the near future.

Members who send in their wine ratings on the provided Scorecards 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 each month. (Maximum of one Scorecard per wine per membership)...GMWC

R E O R D E R

Winery owners and brothers, Dino and Ron Mencarini are pioneers in the Lodi winegrowing region having farmed there since the early 1950s. Zinfandel is Abundance Vineyard's flagship wine, grown and produced in the Lodi area where Zin is King. Merlot is a new bottling for the winery and already a proven winner, earning a Gold Medal in the very first competition entered. Enjoy both wines and note the very aggressive reorder prices.

ABUNDANCE VINEYARDS	Retail Price		Club Price		Club Price	
	Winery-Direct		2-Bottle Members		4-Bottle Members	
2002 Merlot* California	Half Case-6	\$96	\$72	(25% Off)	\$68	(29% Off)
	Full Case-12	\$192	\$135	(30% Off)	\$125	(35% Off)
2003 Old Vine Zinfandel* Lodi — Mencarini Vineyards	Half Case-6	\$96	\$72	(25% Off)	\$68	(29% Off)
	Full Case-12	\$192	\$135	(30% Off)	\$125	(35% Off)

Reorder Hotline: 1-800-266-8888

Reorder Faxline: 1-800-266-8889

www.goldmedalwine.com/member

*Availability is very limited

Note: Shipping and tax (if applicable) not included in the above prices. Call for details.